

History of South Dakota's Conservation Districts

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a severe drought hit most of North America. A prolonged period of no rainfall prevented the growth of sufficient cover to protect fields from wind and water erosion. Many years of cropping and overgrazing reduced the organic matter in the soil, making it even more susceptible to wind and water erosion. Then the winds came, again and again, blowing hard across the vulnerable soils. Clouds of dust rose from the west, rolling over the eastern cities and out to sea, where they sometimes engulfed ocean liners.

Disastrous erosion occurred over North America, including the entire state of South Dakota, and that brought economic disaster. Many farmers lost their farms and moved from the land in search of employment. Business in towns and cities suffered.

Hugh Hammond Bennett, a career soil scientist in the USDA, became convinced soil erosion was a national menace and that its solution lay in tailoring conservation practices to fit the capability of the land and the desires of landowners. Simple solutions for all situations would be fruitless. The crops, the land, and the climate were so diverse that specialists in agronomy, forestry, soil science, biology, engineering, and social sciences contributed to conservation methods. They worked with farmers to find solutions that benefitted the land and fulfilled the landowners' aspirations.

In 1933, the Soil Erosion Service, predecessor to the Soil Conservation Service and NRCS, began working with farmers in the Coon Creek watershed of southwestern Wisconsin to transform the square, eroding fields into what one sees today - a conservation showplace of contouring, strip cropping, terracing, and wise land use that benefits the soil, air, water, as well as the plant, animal, and human life of the whole watershed. Wolsey-Shue Creek and Winner-Dixon became the first erosion control demonstration projects established in South Dakota.

The carpeting of the land with soil conservation works nationwide was hastened with Congress' passage of the Soil Conservation District Model Law Act in 1936. The South Dakota legislature passed their Soil Conservation District Law in 1937. By September, two districts started to organize; Tri-County and Brown-Marshall completed their organization by the end of the 1937. By 1968, most of the state had organized into conservation districts. In 1982, the legislature officially included all towns within conservation district boundaries, thereby covering the entire state.

Conservation districts originally developed as "Soil Conservation Districts" and later expanded to "Soil & Water Conservation Districts," but the name changed in 1968 to "Conservation Districts" to represent the wide range of responsibilities of the conservation districts.

South Dakota's conservation districts took on a new role in the 1970s as they began implementing the Sediment & Erosion Control Act. With the passage of this Act, the conservation districts assumed regulatory authority. The Act was further amended in the 1980's to include the Blowing Dust Act.

About 1980, USDA-SCS state conservationist Robert Swenson and Auxiliary president Nora Anderson collaborated to develop the puppet Sammy Soil Saver and accompanying conservation lessons and puppet scripts. Loosely designed as an earthworm, Sammy Soil Saver became the official mascot of the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts.

With the passage of the 1985 Farm Bill, conservation districts involvement in federal program activities changed to include planning and implementation. By creating the Conservation Reserve Program among other conservation programs, the Farm Bill emphasized the link between natural resources conservation and general farming/ranching.

In 1992, the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts worked with the South Dakota legislature to create the Coordinated Soil & Water Conservation Grants Fund and appropriated up to \$1.5 million per year from the unclaimed portion of the eligible refunds for motor fuels tax on non-highway use. The annual amount available never reached the \$1.5 million level but declined to approximately \$300,000. The Fund was later changed to the Coordinated Natural Resources Conservation Fund and legislation amended to an annual appropriation of \$500,000. The South Dakota Coordinated Plan for Natural Resources Conservation identifies the goals and objectives of the Fund. Updated approximately every 5 years, the current plan targets reduction of soil erosion, improvement of rangelands, improvement of water quality and quantity, enhancement of wildlife habitat, increased public awareness of natural resources, funding and use of renewable energy.

Governor Janklow became deeply concerned when the state-owned Big Sioux Nursery was operating at a serious loss. In 1996, he considered closing the Nursery but worked with the Association of Conservation Districts and Conservation Commission to sell the Big Sioux Nursery to a non-profit formed by South Dakota's conservation districts. The Conservation Grants Fund was utilized to satisfy the Nursery's debt. Since coming under the conservation districts' control, the Nursery has increased their products and services to better meet the changing needs of the conservation districts' customers.

The Soil Conservation Award Program was created by the 2008 state legislature to recognize exceptional farming and ranching practices that conserve soil and other natural resources in South Dakota. Each year, conservation districts can recognize up to 5 producers in their district that meet the award qualifications.

**LIST OF SOUTH DAKOTA CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
AND APPROXIMATE START DATES**

American Creek	December 1938
Aurora	June 1947
Badlands	February 1954 (formerly Shannon)
Beadle	July 1942
Bennett	September 1952
Bon Homme	1973 (formerly Emanuel Chateau Creek 1939 & Scotland 1941)
Brookings	December 1944
Brown/Marshall	December 1937
Brule/Buffalo	March 1938
Butte	1948 (formerly Lawrence-Butte)
Campbell	June 1947
Charles Mix	November 1943 (formerly Academy)
Clark	November 1947
Clay	February 1940
Clearfield/Keyapaha	January 1938
Codington	February 1942
Corson	October 1951
Custer	November 1940
Davison	June 1952

Day	February 1942
Deuel	June 1947
Dewey	October 1952
Douglas	March 1965
East Pennington	June 1946
Edmunds	March 1955
Elk Creek	December 1941
Fall River	May 1941
Faulk	March 1967
Grant	September 1947
Gregory	November 1941
Haakon	1943
Hamill	November 1942
Hamlin	May 1945
Hand	1942 (formerly Elm Creek – Midland)
Hanson	January 1946
Harding	May 1949
Hughes	September 1951
Hutchinson	June 1961
Hyde	September 1953

Jackson	August 1941
Jerauld	September 1943
Jones	July 1955
Kingsbury	June 1947
Lake	1951
Lawrence	July 1941 (formerly Lawrence-Butte, divided in 1948)
Lincoln	March 1941
Marshall	May 1944
McCook	June 1948
McPherson	April 1954
Mellette	June 1954
Miner	May 1952
Minnehaha	November 1941
Moody	August 1944
Pennington	July 1940
Perkins	January 1955
Potter	May 1954
Roberts	May 1941
Sanborn	September 1939 (formerly Silver Creek)
South Brown	April 1949
Spink	October 1941

Stanley	1954
Sully	November 1956
Todd	February 1941
Tri-County	October 1937
Turner	June 1942
Union	June 1940 (formerly Sioux Brule)
Walworth	November 1956
Yankton	March 1944
Ziebach	December 1953

South Dakota Conservation Districts and SDACCD Areas

**Bonnie Schmidt

NORTHWEST AREA

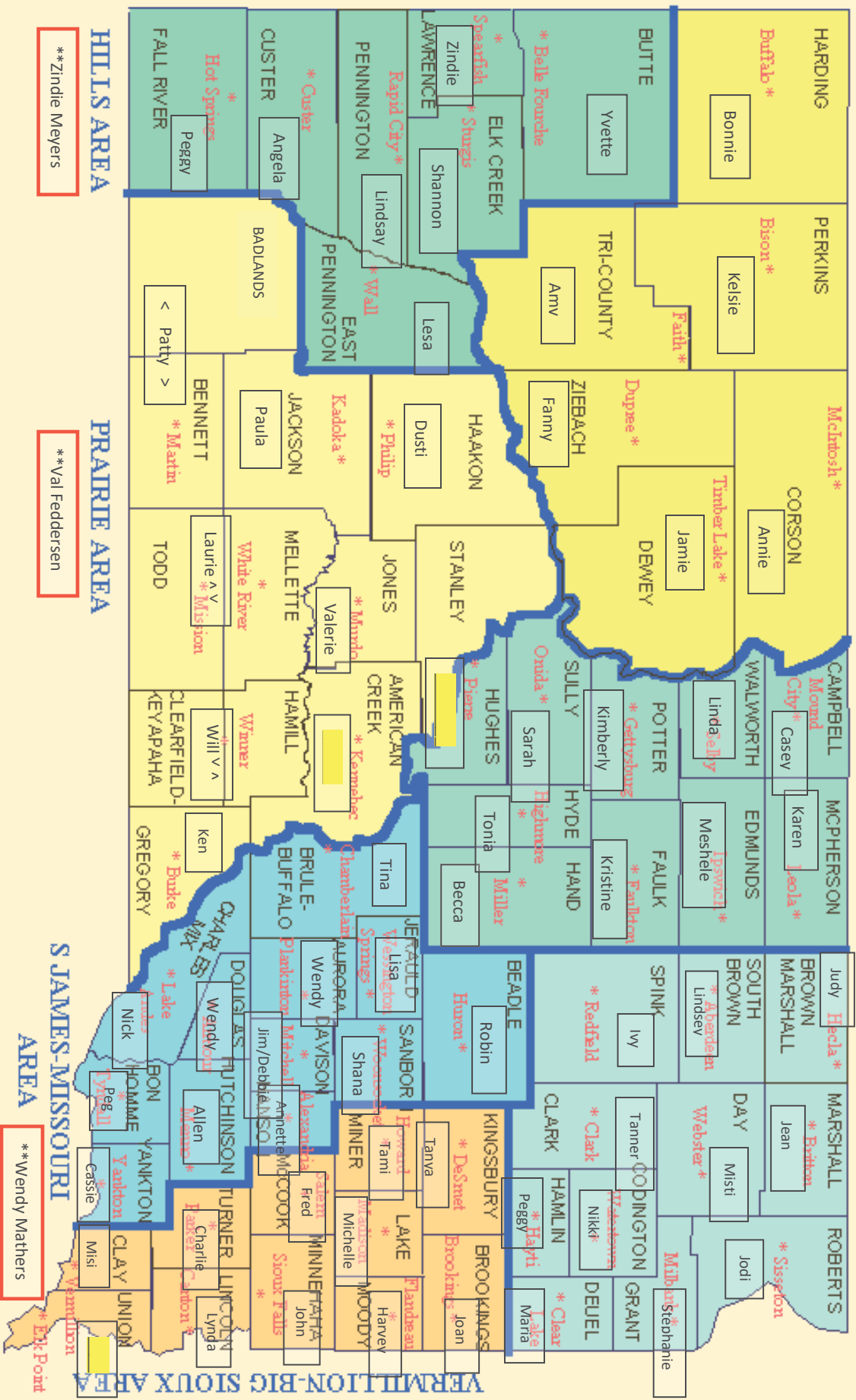
NORTH

**Tonja Jessen

MISSOURI AREA

COTEAU AREA

** Jodi Hook



HILLS AREA

**Zindie Meyers

PRAIRIE AREA

**Val Feddersen

S JAMES-MISSOURI AREA

**Wendy Mathers

VERMILION-BIG SIOUX AREA

**John Parker

** SDACDE Board of Directors

HISTORY OF _____ CONSERVATION DISTRICT

(Insert your history here)