

## **HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA**

The natural resource conservation movement began in earnest in South Dakota in the 1930's. Drought and high winds were devastating the entire Great Plains. At times dust from the Midwest could be seen in the air over Washington, D.C. Something had to be done. In 1933, Congress established the Soil Erosion Service under the Department of Interior.

Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, a pioneer in the conservation movement, was appointed to head the Service. He remained in this capacity when the Soil Erosion Service became the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 and continued to lead the nation's conservation efforts until his retirement in 1951.

In each state, erosion control projects were established to demonstrate how erosion could be controlled through the use of various conservation practices. The first such project in South Dakota was near Wolsey. Meanwhile, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) put thousands of young men to work on erosion projects. Four main camps in Alcester, Huron, Chamberlain and Sturgis and three side camps in Vermillion, Miller and Presho assisted many farmers and ranchers in South Dakota with the construction of conservation projects.

During April of 1937, each state received a letter from President Franklin Roosevelt urging them to pass laws allowing for the organization of soil conservation districts. Arkansas became the first state to do so, rapidly followed by 21 other states including South Dakota.

South Dakota district law became effective July 1, 1937. Within six months, the Tri-County and Brown-Marshall Districts were organized. There are 69 organized conservation districts in the state today.

In 1941, the twelve existing conservation districts met in Mitchell to consider forming a state organization. They elected E.B. Dwight of Springfield chairman and Horace Wagner of Reliance vice-chairman. Articles of Incorporation were prepared on February 9 and 10, 1942, in Pierre and adopted on September 23 and 24, 1943, in Chamberlain. This organization became known as the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD).

The SDACD membership includes all conservation districts in the state. Their purpose is to promote conservation between districts, to facilitate the exchange of information relating to the administration and operation of districts, to promote the interests and activities of other organizations in natural resource conservation, and to develop and carry out programs for controlling soil erosion and conserving natural resources.

In 1973, the South Dakota Association of Conservation District Employees (SDACDE) was formed. It is an affiliate of the SDACD designed to promote better cooperation and coordination of soil and water conservation activities through better-motivated and educated district employees.

The SDACDE has provided improved statewide district communication and coordination, employee training and development programs, and a voice through which the district employees may express their concerns and opinions.

Membership in the SDACDE is open to all conservation district employees. Conservation district employees may also become members of the Northern Plains Regional Association of Conservation District Employees.