

## Roberts County Conservation District (No. 17)

History from 1969 publication:

Roberts County, in which the soil conservation district by that name is located, is situated in the extreme northeast corner of state. A treaty with the Indians in 1851 ceded the southeast portion of the county to the government and was opened for settlement in 1868. In 1867, the government brought some more of the Reservation land in the county from the Indians and opened it for homesteading in 1892.

Flax was the first crop to be grown after the sod was broken and was followed by wheat. About the turn of the century, corn was being planted and the acreage increased after 1910, but wheat remained the leading crop until 1925.

The topography divides the county into two distinct areas. The Prairie Coteau or Sisseton Hills occupy the west and southwest parts of the county. The terrain is rough and hilly with steep slopes and some undulating lands. In the area are my lakes, sloughs, potholes and marshes, with many drainage ways leading into larger drainages. Lying to the east of the hill is the Minnesota Valley, which covers the eastern and northern parts of the Conservation District. Here the land ranges from undulating to flat with swamps, potholes and sloughs. Along the east side of the county is a deep trench about 100 feet below the Minnesota Valley. Here are Lake Traverse and Big Stone Lake. The drainage of the area is mostly toward the Minnesota Valley through the Whetstone and many short creeks, into the lakes and the Minnesota River to the south, and the Red River to the north. These streams, lakes, sloughs, and many springs have been a good source of water from the early days to present time. Soon the settlers began to supplement the water supply by digging wells, both shallow and deep wells.

Early settlers found excellent native grasses growth that not only furnished feed, but at times were used for fuel. The warm season grasses were big bluestem, Indian grass, switch grass, cord grass, blue grama, little bluestem, side oats grama, and such cool season grasses as western wheat, green needle, needle and thread, blue grass and others.

The soils are extremely variable. The Soil Conservation Service divides them into twelve groups or an association based on origin and composition of the soils, and specifies the uses to which they are more suitable. These are described in a very detailed way in a long range conservation program for the Conservation District. A very general classification groups the soils into three areas. In the southwest is a fairly small area of nearly level to undulating land suitable for general farming, with water erosion as a problem. A second area would be the Coteau hills where the terrain is quite steep or rolling and is best suited for grazing, with cropping limited to small fairly level areas. Rapid run-off is a problem making it difficult to hold the soil on areas that are cropped. The third area would be the eastern two-thirds of the county where the land is nearly level to rolling, with well to poorly drained dark soils ranging from clay loam to loams. The soils are very productive and should be suitable for both grain and cultivated crops. Drainage is a problem in some areas. Maintenance of fertility and the conservation of soil and water is a must in all areas. Water erosion, wet lands, and wind erosion were problems that had plagued the farmers from time to time for many years.

A group visited the Brown-Marshall Conservation District to learn how they were handling their problems. As a result, they started a program to inform the people about a soil conservation district, what help it could give the farmers and how to organize. Petitions were circulated in early 1941. A hearing held March 25 showed that the people wanted a soil conservation district

covering the northern half of Roberts County. The referendum was held on May 14 with 90 percent favorable vote,. The Conservation District was officially organized May 23 1941.

The organizational meeting was held May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1941. The first supervisors were: Wilhelm Nelson, Rosholt, chairman; O. K. Sather, Sisseton, vice chairman; Ed Balvin, Claire City, treasurer; Clifford Meland, Sisseton and Peterson Anderson, White Rock.

In October, 1942, farmers in the southern part of Roberts County petitioned to be included in the Conservation District. A referendum was held and approved by an 86 percent favorable vote. A certificate of inclusion was issued on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945, so the southern half of Roberts of Roberts County became a part of the Conservation District, which now covered the entire county.

As soon as the first part of the Conservation District was organized in 1941, the supervisors developed a program and a plan of work in which they specified the problems as: wind and water erosions and gullies; excess runoff from uplands and bottom lands silted; pastures overgrazed and weedy; crop land gullied and weedy.

They proposed to meet these problems by using: conservation cropping systems to maintain and improve fertility, texture, and permeability; crop residue management and stubble mulching to keep residue on the surface; contour farming, terracing, and grassed waterways to prevent runoff and erosion; wind strip cropping to reduce wind erosion; proper use of range and pastures to obtain better grass production, water intake, and reduce erosion; range and pasture plantings to provide more and better grazing; water developments for livestock and wildlife; farmstead and field tree plantings; weed control watershed developments; use land according to its capabilities, recreation and wildlife developments; use home grown feed to finish cattle on the farms; increase fertilizer uses as needed; encourage management and coordination of soil and water resources; and cooperate with Bureau of Indian Affairs to increase use of conservation practices on Tribal Lands.

Another program in which the Conservation District has been active was the development of watersheds. Some areas of the county suffered from excess runoff and siltation from land upstream. The supervisors took the lead and developed information necessary to help people to better understand these water problems and what could be done to reduce damage. As a result, watershed organizations were established on the Upper Little Minnesota in Roberts and Marshall counties; North Fork of the Whetstone in Roberts and Grant counties; West Tributary Bois-de-Sioux in Roberts county and North Dakota; Veblen Watershed District in Grant County.

The practices and amounts established as of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1964 are:

Conservation cropping systems	135,000	acres	
Crop residue use	133,500	acres	
Terracing		5	miles
Contour strip cropping		460	acres
Contour farming	498	acres	
Wind strip cropping	13,473	acres	
Waterways	968	acres	
Stubble mulch farming		2380	acres
Wildlife area improvement	3516	acres	
Range and pasture planting	30,673	acres	
Range and pasture proper use	12,700	acres	
Pond construction	424	ponds	
Spring development	95	springs	

Tree plantings	2,605	acres
Noxious weed control	48,986	acres

From the time the Conservation District was organized through 1965, only thirteen served as supervisors: Ed Balvin, 1941-1964; Peter Anderson, 1941-1960; Wilhelm Nelson, 1941-1960; O. K. Sather, 1941-1944; Clifford Meland, 1941-1944; J. J. Thyne, 1944-1952; A. S. Anderson, 1944-1948; Martin Overberg, 1948-1973; Elmer Greseth, 1952-1965; Sherman Dorsett, 1960-1968; Milton Peterson 1960-1965; Gordon Stapleton 1965-1990 Eugene Sebek March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964-2009 and then became advisor starting 2010 and is presently serving on the board .

The 1969 supervisors were Martin Overberg, Wilmot, chairman; Gordon Stapleton, Sisseton, vice chairman; Eugene Sebek, Claire City, treasurer; Ralph Wieser, Rosholt, supervisor; Kenneth Tedin, Rosholt, supervisor replaced Sherman Dorsett, and Joe Schuch, Sisseton, county agent secretary.

Updated information provided in 2012:

Others who have served as Conservation District supervisors are: Martin Overberg, Wilmot; Kenneth Tedin, Rosholt; Ralph Wieser, Rosholt; Eugene Sebek, Claire City; Gordon Stapleton, Sisseton; Alden Johnson, Rosholt; Gordon Ziemer, Browns Valley; Leon Palmer, Sisseton; Ken Foss, Wilmot; Roger Wieser, Rosholt; Duane Schneider, Sisseton; Calvin Thompson, Sisseton; Cody Hanson, Sisseton; Robert Osborne, Wilmot; Lynn Nigg, Sisseton. Tim Gleason served as assistant supervisor.

In 1986, the Roberts Conservation District sponsored the Big Stone Lake Watershed Project. Though an assessment program, Big Stone Lake was identified as having impaired water quality. The project was based on implementing best management practices (BMP's) to prevent sediment and nutrients from entering the surface waters associated with Big Stone Lake.

Areas of concentration were agricultural waste management systems (AWMS), ponds and dams, grassed waterways, buffer strips, stream bank stabilizations, and tree plantings, nutrient management plans, range management, and no till farming. Through partnerships with Natural Resource Conservation Service, Roberts County, Farm Service Agency, SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Conservation Commission, Ducks Unlimited, SD Department of Game, Fish, and Parks, and North American Wetlands, cost share was made available to assist producers with implementation of these practices. The practices implemented have made a marked reduction of sediment and pollutants entering the watershed, resulting in a reduced algae bloom in Big Stone Lake. While Big Stone Lake will never become a clear lake, the severity and duration of the blooms has, and will continue to improve, enhancing its recreational and esthetic qualities.

Lake Traverse is listed as a water body impaired by algae caused by nutrient enrichment. Through water quality and land use analysis, the sources of impairment to the lake were documented. The watershed covers 729,005 acres and is primarily located in Minnesota. Nutrient sources are all non-point and mostly come from agricultural activities. The implementation phase focus was on soil/water conservation practices and included manure management, no till farming, wetland restorations, and crop buffer zones.

Lake Project Coordinator was from 1986-Curt Hanssen, and Water Analysis was Lori Moen. Lorne Aadland, Jason Rehn, were also coordinators and then Mike Jensen from July 2001-Nov 2003 Interim-Joe Angerhoffer, Tom Vergeldt, and then Mike Jensen finished the project from March 2005-2007. For more information go to website: <http://neglwatersheds.org>

	Field Windbreak (mile)	Field Windbreak (acre)	Farm Feedlot Windbreak (acre)	Renovations (acre)	Wildlife Plantings (acre)	Other Plantings (acre)	Total (acre)	Farms Planted
2011	0.0	5.6	9.2	0.0	5.6	5.7	26.1	20
2010	0.0	8.4	6.4	4.6	0.0	0.0	19.4	16
2009	0.0	1.0	8.9	1.0	5.0	0.5	16.4	18
2008	2.1	20.8	18.1	6.4	8.6	0.0	53.9	33
2007	1.4	9.3	14.8	7.5	11.3	6.5	49.4	37
2006	1.25	10.0	10.1	11.8	17.0	0.0	48.9	39
2005	5.4	49.7	15.2	7.3	1.7	0.0	73.9	34
2004	1.4	11.5	25.4	4.8	4.8	13.8	60.3	41
2003	2.5	19.4	24.2	20.1	10.8	0.7	75.2	63
2002	1.6	10.1	24.1	6.3	21.5	0.4	62.4	44
2001	3.8	30.4	24.8	4.5	53.9	0.0	113.6	64
2000	4.5	18.1	5.0	5.0	64.0	6.0	98.1	43
1999	3.4	30.8	9.1	0.0	6.4	2.3	48.6	30
1998	4.8	54.3	0.0	6.6	11.3	0.0	72.2	33
1997	4.1	28.4	0.7	2.5	0.0	0.3	31.9	14
1996	2.2	4.5	3.7	6.0	6.4	23.8	44.4	43
1995	4.0	8.0	2.0	5.0	0.0	25.0	40.0	28
1994	5.0	10.0	7.0	9.0	2.0	22.0	50.0	44
1993	15.5	31.0	12.5	2.6	23.9	45.4	115.4	68
1992	6.0	17.7	21.9	5.1	50.6	29.2	124.5	58
1991	11.0	21.6	9.1	12.9	3.8	25.9	73.3	61
1990	14.0	28.6	4.0	25.0	30.4	42.9	130.9	87
1989	13.5	36.2	7.7	21.4	7.9	46.3	119.5	70
1988	16.0	46.2	17.2	15.0	1.1	29.1	108.6	57
1987	10.8	35.3	7.8	4.1	0.0	44.9	92.1	49
1986	12.4	44.2	25.7	1.8	0.0	33.2	104.9	48
1985	15.8	55.8	19.9	14.3	0.0	4.1	94.1	61
1984	22.5	69.8	41.3	0.0	0.0	0.8	111.9	90
1983	27.5	35.2	25.8	18.1	0.0	10.5	89.6	59
1982	17.0	52.0	42.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	96.0	73
1981	12.0	49.0	56.0	11.0	0.0	0.0	116.0	74
1980	10.5	37.1	53.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	90.6	68
1979	12.9	43.5	35.6	1.6	0.0	25.3	106.0	76
1978	14.8	46.0	6.3	0.0	0.0	57.9	110.2	90
1977	18.6	60.7	29.8	0.0	0.0	36.9	127.4	95
1976	20.7	67.3	69.3	0.0	0.0	9.4	146.0	80
1975	31.1	106.9	39.9	0.0	0.0	23.1	169.9	84
1974	20.8	70.2	69.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	140.0	90
1973	23.3	78.0	31.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	109.6	68
1972	24.0	74.0	51.9	0.0	0.0	4.4	130.3	109
1971	33.2	102.1	82.8	0.0	0.0	0.2	185.1	103
1970	21.3	66.2	75.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	141.7	85
1969	35.0	122.0	76.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	198.0	105