

Shannon County Conservation District (No. 59)

History from 1969 publication:

The Shannon County Conservation District follows the boundaries of Shannon County. It covers an area of roughly 1,300,000 acres. It has some level cropland and about 47,000 acres of badlands and just about every kind of soil in between. Shannon County is located in the southwest part of the state, bordering Nebraska on the south and Fall River County on the west, and is entirely within the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The county is not organized. Most of the people do some farming, but cattle raising is the most important. Several ranchers have large leases in the area.

The drainage of the county is into the White River through Wounded Knee Creek and several other creeks. The topography of the area is generally undulating to steep, and with poor internal and rapid surface drainage. The north part of the county is a rough, broken badland area with a sparse cover of grass. The western side of the county west of the White River is an area that ranges from fairly level to rough, of mostly a clay soil best suited for ranching and some cash grain. In the southeast corner is an area that varies from nearly level to steep and contains silt loams and sandy loams that is suitable for ranching and some farming but needs protection from wind and water erosion. The area covering most of the county east of the White River, except the southeast corner, is undulating to steep and is comprised of silt loam, sandy loam, and silty clay soils where some farming is done along with livestock raising.

In all areas where farming is done, careful attention needs to be given to the control of wind and water erosion. Total amount of farmed land is probably no more than 17 percent of the county.

The only water resources found by settlers were some lakes and running streams. This natural supply of water would not supply more than 5% of the water needed to make economic use of soil resources. The settlers found large areas of soil resources high in natural fertility. About 5% of the total area was suited to farming but about 8% has been broken for cultivation. The rest of the land supported a tremendous resource of grasses of the climax species.

The primary area of adverse exploitation was in breaking up land not suited to cultivation. Large areas of land that was too sandy or too steep or too thin for safe cultivation was broken up. Some of this land is still in cultivation and is eroding at an alarmingly rapid rate. Other areas were abandoned as cropland which reverted to a stand of undesirable grasses and weeds. The Conservation District encourages the conversion of this land to productive soil-saving grasses. The Conservation District has bought, and made available to farmers and ranchers, the necessary seeding equipment to accomplish these needed conversions. There has been a tremendous loss of valuable top soil through poor management of conservation resources.

The first interest developed due to farmers and ranchers reading and hearing about the activities of soil conservation districts that were already established. The interest apparently started during 1952 and the Shannon County Soil and Water Conservation District was officially organized February 16, 1954, with very little opposition. The first election of Conservation District supervisors was held April 9, 1954.

Individuals or groups most responsible for creating interest and making the necessary steps for the formation of a Conservation District included: Leonard Schultz, Batesland; Raleigh Swick, Pine Ridge; Stanley Kruse, Batesland; and Raleigh Barker, Denby.

Probably the most dominant conservation problems in the county were from erosion and loss of moisture due to run-off from rain and snow melt. A secondary problem has been lack of land tenure. Due to uncertain length of leasing arrangements, many ranches do not install an adequate number of stock water developments.

Great strides have been made in meeting the soil and moisture loss problem. About 57,000 acres of cropland are under proper cropping system, over 5,000 acres have been strip cropped, about 250 miles of level terraces have been constructed, 200 acres of grass waterways have been installed, and over 800 stock water facilities have been installed at about the same intensity of rate. For example, about 500,000 acres of rangeland is properly used and more than 3,000 acres of range seeding has been completed. This combination of structural and vegetative practices is very effective. About 30 to 40 percent of the needed practices have been completed.

Shannon County farmers installed 43 miles of terraces during the period of July 1, 1959 to June 30, 1960. This was the greatest number of miles of terraces installed in any county in the State of South Dakota during this period with the exception of Sully County, whose farmers also installed 43 miles of terraces.

Other activities the Conservation District has participated in are the GSDA Contest, the Goodyear program, publication of annual reports and newsletters and makes effective use of the local newspapers in getting information to the public. Each year the Conservation District recognized the person who was outstanding in supporting the cause of conservation for that year. Conservation Field Days were held to show the results of applied conservation. The Bennett and Shannon supervisors each year conduct a Soil-Grass-Stubble Mulch judging contest to improve their knowledge of the technical phase of the work.

These operators have served as supervisors since the formation of the Conservation District. Those * have served as officers: *Stanley Kruse, Batesland; Raleigh Swick, Pine Ridge; *Leonard Schultz, Batesland; William Wegner, Denby; *Raleigh Barker, Denby; Robert Tystad, Kyle; *William Rust, Batesland; Wayman Wild, Chadron, Neb.; Dale Witte, Porcupine; Glenn Shepardson, Porcupine; Lester Goranson, Batesland; Wallace Kruse, Batesland; *Clyde Ballard, Pine Ridge.

Supervisors in office as of September 1969 were: Leonard Schultz, chairman; Glenn Shepardson, vice chairman; William Rust, treasurer; Larry Kehn, secretary; and Sam Sears, member.

Updated information provided in 2012:

By the end of 2010 the following practices had been established with assistance from the Conservation District and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service): Contour Farming – 30,988.0 acres, Contour Strip Cropping – 4,408.0 acres, Wind Strip Cropping – 3,778.0, Field Stripcropping – 328.0 acres, Stubble Mulching – 183,558.0 acres, Waterway Development – 200.1 acres, Pasture & Hayland Plantings – 11,978.2 acres, Tree Plantings – 881.7 acres, Pond Construction/Dams/Dugouts – 217, Terracing – 2,330,383 linear feet (441.4 miles), Water Spreading – 389.0 acres, Diversions – 59,102.0 linear feet, Wells – 128, Spring Developments – 37, Proper Range Use – 2,836,636.0 acres, Conservation Cropping Systems – 45,153.0 acres, Pipelines – 300,737.0 linear feet (57 miles), Fencing – 92,991.0 linear feet, Tanks – 119, Well Decommissionings – 12, Stock Water Developments – 306, and Temporary Tanks – 26

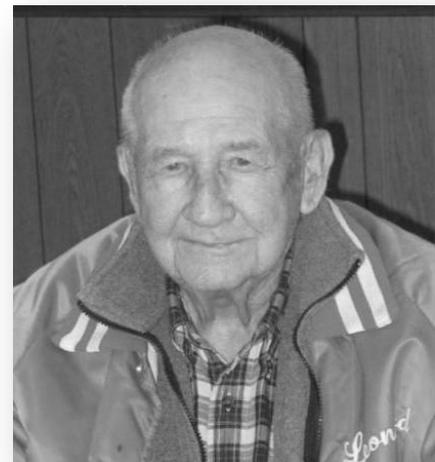
The aim of the Conservation District has been and continues to be to assist cooperators in planning and applying conservation on their farms and ranches. The goal of the Conservation District is to use each acre of agricultural land within its capabilities and to treat it according to its needs. In 1979, the Shannon County Conservation District developed and put into effect the approved Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance for Shannon County.

Tree plantings have been one of the biggest practices in the Conservation District's program during the years it has been in operation. Over this time, 881.7 acres have been planted by the Conservation District's personnel, using over 395,854 trees and shrubs.

The Conservation District has also been involved in the seeding of cropland back to grassland, including seedings completed under the Conservation Reserve Program. The Conservation District has purchased a variety of drills over the years to carry out this program.

Since the beginning of the formation of the Conservation District, the supervisors have felt that a strong information and education program was essential for carrying out its objectives. As part of this, newsletters have been published and sent out to area producers. The Conservation District also sponsors the annual Arbor Day essay contest and the Resource Conservation Speech contest. The Conservation District co-sponsored the 2004 SD Rangeland Days held in Bennett County. The Conservation District held yearly Land, Range and Pasture judging contests with the Bennett County Conservation District supervisors. This contest alternated between Bennett and Shannon Counties.

Leonard Schultz has been an active member with the Shannon County Conservation District since its formation. He has also served on the SDACD Board of Directors (including as president), the South Dakota State Conservation Commission, and on the National Association of Conservation Districts Board.



Others who have served as supervisors are: Clifford Case, James Larabee, Leo Kratovil, Troy Roth, Norman Davis, Virgil Rust, Wm. Hanneman, Jr., and Sam Smith.

The 2011 Conservation District supervisors were: Larry Kehn, Batesland, chairman; Leonard Schultz, Batesland, vice-chairman; Virgil Rust, Batesland, treasurer; Wm. Hanneman, Jr., Batesland, supervisor, Sam Smith, Batesland, supervisor; Marion Schultz, Batesland, advisor.