

# South Dakota Conservation History Timeline

*Developed April 2010*

**Westward Expansion "The Homestead Act of 1863"** - The U. S. Government gave free land to people who would move to the Plains states. Lured by the promise of rich, plentiful soil, thousands of settlers came to the Great Plains. They plowed up native grass and practiced intensive, non-rotational farming, the only method of farming that they knew at that time. "The Good Years" had above average rains that produced bountiful wheat crops and good prices. Prices soared from 1915 to the early 1920s; so millions of acres of grassland were plowed up. Between 1925 and 1930, the amount of land under cultivation more than tripled.

**1874** - The Gold Rush.

**1906** - The railroad moves west.

**1908** - President Theodore Roosevelt convenes a White House conservation conference of governors attended by scientists, specialists, industrialists, economists, politicians, and others. The first interest seemed to be in forestry and wildlife, then conservation of public lands and water conservation on reclamation projects.

**1910** - The census listed 77,644 farms in South Dakota. Two-thirds of those farms either had total acreage between 100 to 174 acres (28,396) or 260 to 499 acres (24,811). The average farm had 335.1 acres, valued at an average of \$34.69 per acre. Of those farms that reported, 91.2 percent had horses, 83.8 percent had cattle, and 61.1 percent had swine.

**1919** - The South Dakota Legislature appropriated \$10,000 for soil survey work.

**1920** - The first cooperative soil surveys were published in Beadle and McCook Counties.

**October 29, 1929** - The stock market crashed.

**Summer, 1931** - "The Dust Bowl" drought on the Plains began. South Dakota has 84,300 farms.

**September 19, 1933** - Hugh Hammond Bennett founded the Soil Erosion Service (SES) within the U.S. Department of Interior to demonstrate practical conservation methods.

**May 11, 1934** - A fierce windstorm from the Great Plains swept fine soil particles as far away as Washington, D.C., and 300 miles further east into the Atlantic Ocean. Congress decided action must be taken immediately.

**December, 1934** - "Black Blizzards" caused more than 100 million acres of cropland to lose most or all of its topsoil. Ninety percent of the crops surviving the drought were later destroyed by grasshoppers in an 11,000 square mile area.

**March, 1935** - Representative farmers from every county in South Dakota made a trip to Washington and presented their erosion problems to government officials.

**April 14, 1935** - Black Sunday: the Dust Bowl's worst storm.

**April 27, 1935** - Congress unanimously passed the Soil Conservation Act (Public Law 46) creating the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), formerly SES, within the USDA. This agency was established to help landowners carry out soil conservation practices. Hugh Hammond Bennett continued as Chief of the new agency.

**1935-1940** - The Soil Erosion Service employed Dr. J.G. Hutton, Head of the Soils Department at South Dakota State College, to conduct meetings over the state to explain to the people just what the soil is and what it means to man. Dr. Hutton's programs helped people to understand the problems and grew support for soil conservation districts.

**1935** - Wolsey-Shue Creek became the first erosion control demonstration project established in the state. With 28 percent of the area severely eroded and about 50 percent subject to severe wind erosion, the project provided assistance to farmers in the use of various methods and practices which would demonstrate the control of wind erosion.

**1935** - H. J. Clemer was State Conservationist. Don Williams becomes Superintendent at the Presho, SD CCC Camp under SCS supervision. Mr. Williams became a career

conservationist.

**June, 1935** - Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp SCS-3—2746th Company was established in Alcester. The enrollees constructed dams, sod waterways, grade stabilization structures, and terraces. They planted trees and renovated the old woodland areas. The camp was phased out in 1941.

**July, 1935** - CCC Camp SCS-1—4726th Company established in Chamberlain. The enrollees constructed earthen dams and installed conservation practices on farm and ranch lands in Brule, Buffalo, and Lyman counties. The camp closed out in 1940.

**Fall, 1935** - CCC Camp SCS-4--2770th Company established in Huron. The primary jobs were two rubble masonry dams constructed on the James River and conservation activities on Huron area farms. Men from the Huron Camp establish a side camp in Presho the fall of 1935. They constructed several large earth dam for flood control as well as recreational development.

**October, 1935** - The Winner-Dixon project started to address wind and water erosion. In addition to the practices demonstrated at Wolsey-Shue, contouring and contour strip cropping with terracing were demonstrated.

**December, 1935** - Nationwide, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) reached peak numbers (498) of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps operated for conservation work in rural areas. Operated until 1942, several CCC camps in South Dakota were supervised by the SCS.

**1936** - A. D. Ellingson was State Conservationist.

**May, 1936** - The Huron Camp established a side camp at Miller for to construct Lake Dakotah, an earthen dam. The was used as a Boy Scout Camp and for other recreational activities.

**October, 1936** - CCC Camp SCS-6--2765th Company established in Ft. Meade. The enrollees performed all types of conservation work on farm land and private forested areas.

**February, 1937** - President Franklin D. Roosevelt urged state governors to enact conservation district law that allowed landowners to organize conservation districts; 21 states responded, including South Dakota.

*My dear Governor:*

*The dust storms and floods of the last few years have underscored the importance of programs to control soil erosion. I need not emphasize to you the seriousness of the problem and the desirability of our taking effective action, as a Nation and in the several States, to conserve the soil as our basic asset. The Nation that destroys its soil destroys itself.*

*In the Act of Congress approved April 27, 1935 (Public No. 46 of the 74th Congress), the Federal Government, through the Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture, initiated a broad program for the control of soil erosion. Demonstration work has been undertaken but much remains to be done. The conduct of isolated demonstration projects cannot control erosion adequately. Such work can only point the way.*

*The problem is further complicated by the fact that the failure to control erosion on some lands, particularly if such eroding lands are situated strategically at the heads of valleys or watersheds, can cause a washing and blowing of soil onto other lands, and make the control of erosion anywhere in the valley or watershed all the more difficult. We are confronted with the fact that, for the problem to be adequately dealt with, the erodible land in every watershed must be brought under some form of control.*

*To supplement the Federal programs, and safeguard their results, State legislation is needed. At the request of representatives from a number of States, and in cooperation with them, the Department of Agriculture has prepared a standard form of suitable State legislation for this purpose, generally referred to as the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law. The Act provides for the organization of "soil conservation districts" as governmental subdivisions of the State to carry on projects for erosion control, and to*

*enact into law land-use regulations concerning soil erosion after such regulations have been approved in a referendum. Such legislation is imperative to enable farmers to take the necessary cooperative action.*

*I am sending to you several copies of the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, with a memorandum summarizing its basic provisions. I hope that you will see fit to make the adoption of legislation along the lines of the Standard Act part of the agricultural program for your State.*

*Very sincerely yours, President Franklin D. Roosevelt*

**February 16, 1937** - South Dakota's House Agriculture Committee introduced HB 206 which is the enabling legislation for South Dakota's conservation districts and the Conservation Commission.

**February 23, 1937** - The House passed HB 206. Future governor George T. Mickelson was Speaker of the House.

**February 24, 1937** - HB 206 was sent to Senate Agriculture Committee.

**February 25, 1937** - Senate Agriculture Committee voted to recommend passage.

**February 27, 1937** - The Senate passed HB 206 and sent the bill to Governor Leslie Jensen for signature.

**March 7, 1937** - Governor Leslie Jensen of Hot Springs signed HB 206, which becomes law July 1, 1937.

**1937** - CCC (Alcester) side camp established at Vermillion on an 80-acre nursery project.

**1937** - Tri-County and Brown Marshall Conservation Districts created.

**1937** - SCS Chief Hugh Hammond Bennett insisted that a soil survey would provide the basis for conservation planning for farms and ranches.

**1938** - Ross Davies was State Conservationist.

**1938** - Brule-Buffalo, Clearfield-Keyapaha and American Creek Conservation Districts created.

**1939** - Sanborn and Emanuel Chateau Creek (to become BonHomme) Conservation Districts created.

**1940** - Clay, Sioux Brule (to become Union), Pennington, Custer and Haakon Conservation Districts created.

**February, 1941** - Representatives of the twelve existing soil conservation districts met to discuss common issues. They set up a temporary organization with E.B. Dwight, Springfield, as chairman and Horace Wagner, Reliance, as vice-chairman, and made plans to meet in 1942 to form a permanent organization.

**1941** - Carpenter (discontinued), Lawrence-Butte (to become Lawrence), Elk Creek, Lincoln, Rosebud (to become Todd), Roberts, and Scotland (merged with Emanuel Chateau Creek), Fall River, Spink, Minnehaha, Gregory, and Jackson-Washabaugh created.

**February 9, 1942** - The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) was established to promote conservation practices between conservation districts and assist with the exchange of information regarding the administration and operation of conservation districts.

**1942** - Codington, Day, Hamill, Elm Creek-Midland (to become Hand), Turner, and West Beadle (to become Beadle) Conservation Districts created.

**1943** - Jerauld and Academy (to become Charles Mix) Conservation Districts created.

**1944** - Yankton, Marshall, Moody and Brookings Conservation Districts created.

**December 22, 1944** - The Flood Control Act of 1944 authorized 11 flood prevention projects and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program to help protect lives and property following natural disasters.

**1945** - Hamlin Conservation District was created.

**1945** - Water conservation officially became a part of SCS's responsibility when water conservation and utilization programs were transferred from other agencies.

**1945** - The Rural Credit Department was removed as a member of the State Soil Conservation Committee and replaced with the State Secretary of Agriculture.

**1946** - The SDACD became a member of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

**1946** – Hanson and Eastern Pennington Conservation Districts created.

**1947** – Deuel, Kingsbury, Grant, Aurora, Campbell and Clark Conservation Districts created.

**1947** - The first cooperative soil surveys of entire counties (Spink and Brookings) were completed.

**1948** – McCook and Butte Conservation Districts created.

**1949** – South Brown and Harding Conservation Districts created.

**1949** - Soil monoliths were developed as a soil profile visual aid to study and identify soils.

**1949** - The Legislature established a special revenue loan fund and authorized the State Soil Conservation Committee to make loans from that fund.

**July, 1949** - E.J. Dyksterhuis introduced the first concepts of range sites and range condition. As the first State Range Extension Specialist in South Dakota, he worked closely with SCS.

**1950** - Number of farms in South Dakota: 67,100.

**1951** – East Corson (discontinued), Lake, West Corson (to become Corson), and Hughes Conservation Districts created.

**1952** - Steve Kortan was State Conservationist.

**1952** – Miner, Davison, Bennett and Dewey Conservation Districts created.

**April 1, 1953** - SCS was assigned all USDA flood control responsibility and river basin investigations.

**1953** – Hyde, Shannon and Ziebach Conservation Districts created.

**October 5, 1953** - During the 13th State Convention of Soil Conservation Districts in Mitchell, 32 wives of district supervisors and technicians organized the State Auxiliary. Mrs. Harry Martens presided.

**November 27, 1953** - South Dakotan Don Williams (b. Clark County) becomes the second administrator of SCS serving in Washington, D.C., through January 11, 1969.

**1954** – McPherson, Potter, Stanley, and Mellette Conservation Districts created.

**August 4, 1954** - The Small Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566) was enacted to help communities protect, improve, and develop watersheds.

**1955** – Perkins, Jones, and Edmunds Conservation Districts created

**1956** - The Agricultural Act passed with the conservation reserve and acreage reserve programs. It soon became known as the Soil Bank Act, which took 29 million acres out of production by offering farmers 3 to 10 year contracts; it also focused on increasing wildlife habitat.

**1956** – Walworth and Sully Conservation Districts created

**1957**- The State Soil Conservation Committee membership became the State Secretary of Agriculture and six farmer members appointed by the Governor. The Director of the State Extension Service, the Director of the State Agricultural Experiment Station, and the Commissioner of School and Public Lands became advisory members. The Committee was required to invite the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States as an advisory member.

**1961** – Hutchinson Conservation District created.

**1961**- The State Soil Conservation Committee' name changed to the Soil and Water Conservation Committee. The Soil and Water Conservation Committee would perform certain functions and duties with respect to watershed projects.

**1961**- Thomas Boylan, McPherson County, showed mulch (grass left in the pasture) that resulted from conservation grazing practices. Only 3.5 inches rain fell that year; and the county was declared a disaster area. Now it is the Nature Conservancy Ranch.

**1962** - The Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) was created to

advance community development and environmental protection in multi-county areas.

**1965** – Douglas Conservation District created.

**1966** - Vince Shally was State Conservationist.

**September, 1966** - SCS provided or began providing soil surveys and interpretations to assist states and other private agencies in community and resource planning.

**February 7, 1967** - The National Association of State Conservation Agencies was officially organized.

**1967** – Faulk Conservation District created.

**June, 1967** - SCS assisted more than 3,000 conservation districts, which covered 95 percent of the nation's privately-owned farmland. Now, 69 districts serve South Dakota.

**December 14, 1967**- South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. officially incorporated as a South Dakota nonprofit corporation.

**1968** - The expanding roles of the districts is reflected by subsequent name changes from soil conservation districts to soil and water conservation districts and finally simply to conservation districts. The latter name change represents the versatile role districts currently play in implementing conservation practices with producers.

**1971**- The Conservation Commission implemented the Range Resource Program to improve SD's 25 million acres of grassland.

**1972** – All lands within South Dakota are encompassed within conservation districts when the City of Freeman joins the Hutchinson County Conservation District.

**1973** - The State Conservation Commission was transferred to the Department of Environmental Protection.

**1973** - Conservation district employees formed the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts Employees Association, one of the first in the nation to be formed.

**1974** - The state legislature added two State Conservation Commission members, bringing the membership to nine; the new members represented the surface mining industry. The legislature added SDCL 38-8 (Conservation Districts) and 45-6A (Mining Land Reclamation) as functions performed by the State Conservation Commission.

**1975** - The Division of Conservation was created within the South Dakota Department of Agriculture. The legislature transferred the State Conservation Commission to the Department of Agriculture.

**1975** - R. D. Swenson was State Conservationist.

**1976** - The legislature passed the "Sediment and Erosion Control Act," requiring each conservation district to develop and implement comprehensive sediment and erosion control guidelines.

**1977** - The first National Resources Inventory (NRI) was conducted, and, until 1997, was done on a five-year cycle. The Rural Development Act of 1972 and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 directed SCS to assess the status, condition, and trends of soil, water, and related resources on non-federal lands.

**November 18, 1977** - Congress passed the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) to conserve, protect, and enhance the nation's natural resources for future uses.

**1978** - Number of farms in South Dakota: 40,000.

**1979** - Number of farms in South Dakota: 39,000.

**1980s** - The first computer systems appeared in the USDA-SCS Huron State Office and were primarily used for data entry and storage of information such as hydraulic computations consisting of surface water profiles and other hydrologic analyses.

**1983** - Number of farms in South Dakota: 37,000.

**1984** – South Dakota legislature passed the Blowing Dust & Fragile Lands Act, incorporating additional standards in the Soil Erosion & Sediment Damage Control Law.

**1985** - SCS was permitted to use volunteers as Congress passed the Food and Agriculture

Act. Earth Team volunteers assisted with the increased workload of SCS primarily due to the Farm Bill. Since its inception, almost 482,000 Earth Team volunteers have donated more than 14 million hours.

**1985** - The legislature established the soil and water compatibility program with the State Conservation Commission being responsible for approving or disapproving applications for irrigation permits. This program was repealed in 1994.

**December 23, 1985** - The Food Security Act established highly erodible land (HEL) protection, reduction of wetland conversion (Swampbuster), and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This Farm Bill also required a soil map on all land considered highly erodible, so that conservation plans could be implemented by December 31, 1989. Landowners are required to carry out their plans to receive USDA conservation program benefits.

**1986** - C. Budd Fountain was State Conservationist.

**1988** - Billy Milliken was State Conservationist.

**1990** - The South Dakota Legislature named Houdek as South Dakota state soil.

**1990 Farm Bill** - The Food Agriculture and Conservation Trade Act continued HEL and Swampbuster provisions and CRP and authorized the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

**1991** - Ronald E. Hendricks was State Conservationist.

**1991** - The State Conservation Commission, the Division of Conservation and its partners created the "State Conservation Plan" for coordinating the conservation of South Dakota's natural resources.

**1991** – South Dakota legislature enacted legislation to address “severe and persistent wind or water erosion” damage on county and township roads.

**October 8, 1991** - The South Dakota Soil Survey First Edition was completed.

**1992** - A Crop Residue Management Alliance was established to assist producers with the implementation of their conservation plans as a result of the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills.

**1992** - The state legislature created a special fund known as the "conservation commission grant fund" dedicated for conservation districts for cropland, grassland and water quality improvement projects.

**1993** - Number of farms in South Dakota: 34,500.

**October 20, 1994** - To better reflect its efforts to conserve all resources, the Soil Conservation Service received a new name: the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

**1994** - The legislature established the coordinated soil and water conservation program and fund (previously known as the "conservation commission grant fund"). The legislature also removed the dedicated projects list, instead referencing the purposes "identified in the South Dakota coordinated soil and water conservation plan".

**1995** - Governor Janklow established the Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry, combining the Division of Conservation with the Division of Forestry.

**1996** - Dean Fisher was State Conservationist.

**1996** - Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act created the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and continued WRP and CRP. These programs were designed to enhance wildlife, improve wetlands, and address specific resource concerns on farms.

**1997** - The first South Dakota NRCS Tribal Liaison position was established.

**1999** - The Oglala Sioux Tribal Conservation District (Pine Ridge) was formed.

**July 13, 2001** - The first Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) contract with a Native American tribe in SD (and in the nation) was recorded in Moody County.

**2001** - Janet L. Oertly became State Conservationist.

**2002** - The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (Farm Bill) authorized two new programs. The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was created to reward farmers for

practicing excellent conservation on their lands; and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) offered protection, restoration, and enhancement of grasslands to private landowners.

**2003** - The first Tribal Advisory Meeting was held in Spearfish.

**March, 2003** - USDA unveiled a web-based registry of technical service providers, TechReg, to make it easier for landowners to meet conservation goals.

**2005** - The nation's first Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement on trust tribal land was placed with the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe.

**2005** - The first Conservation Security Program (CSP) contracts were signed.

**August, 2005** - The web soil survey was launched for public use, which made the most current soils information more accessible. To date, more than 5 million customers and USDA staff have used the web soil survey, averaging over 110,000 uses per month or about 4,200 per day.

**2007** - The legislature approved the revision of the South Dakota Coordinated Plan for Natural Resources Conservation.

**2007** - The SD NRCS developed recruitment material with translations in Lakota. The translations were kindly made by Mr. Ben Black Bear of Rosebud.

**2008** - Under the initiative of Representative Maggie Gillespie (Yankton County), the legislature created the Soil Conservation Award program.

**2008** - The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (2008 Farm Bill) increased funding for conservation programs, focused on agricultural and forestry working lands, expanded EQIP, and continued WHIP; the Conservation Stewardship Program replaced the Conservation Security Program (CSP) for more enhancement.

**February, 2009** - NRCS received funding through The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for projects for public safety, flood protection, and economic and environmental benefits.

**2009** - The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reported 31,500 farms in South Dakota with an average acreage of 1,387.

**2009** - During 2009, NRCS helped over 5,000 South Dakotans implement conservation, which improved the health of nearly 1.2 million acres of cropland, rangeland, pastureland, and forestland.

**1944-2009** - Since conservation district tree planting records were kept, reports show 167,485,107 trees and shrubs planted on 342,246 acres.