Conservation District Organization and Operation

Organization: The South Dakota Conservation Districts Law was enacted by the 1937 Legislature and became effective July 1, 1937. By September, activity started to organize a conservation district and two conservation districts were organized before the year ended. By the close of 1968, the entire state was within conservation districts, except one county, one-half of another county, and a portion of a third. The final portions were added in 1972 to achieve complete statewide coverage by conservation districts.

Below is a list of the districts by number and the year in which they were organized:

1937
01. Tri-County District
02. Brown Marshall

1938
03. Brule Buffalo
04. Clearfield-Kayapaha
05. American Creek

The legislators which passed the South Dakota Soil Conservation Districts Enabling Act of 1937 were guests of the State Association on the 1957 twentieth anniversary of the Act’s Passage.

Front row (left-right): Leo C. Weier, Yankton; Oscar C. Johnson, Oldham; Bernard E. Berg, Stockholm; Alfred Olson, Clark; John P. Kleinsasser, Freeman; Roy S. Glover, Frederick; Clarence H. Johnson, Beresford; F.G. Haven, Mellette; Harry Blair, Sturgis; H.J. Christianson, Wilmot; Loyal F. Hufferman, Huron; and F.L. Messner, Brookings.

Back row (left-right): Nathaniel S. Tiede, Tripp; M.E. Hafner, Newell; J.B. Painter, Long Beach Calif.; George Alt, Faith; A.C. Miller, Kennebec; Gus L. Scherer, Winner; Paul W. Opsahl, Aberdeen; George T. Mickelson, Sioux Falls; Guy Harding, Pierre, George M. Bradshaw, Lennox; K.J. Morgan, Sioux Falls.; W.G. Douglas, Clark; Henry W. Seide, Twin Brooks; J.E. Lehman, Scotland; Ben Howe, Salem; and, A.W. Odell, Montrose.
1939  06.  Sanborn County (formerly Silver Creek)
       07.  BonHomme County (formerly Emanuel Chateau Creek)
1940  08.  Clay County
       09.  Union County (formerly Sioux Brule)
       10.  Pennington
       13.  Custer County
       30.  Haakon County
1941  11.  Carpenter (later discontinued and parts went to Beadle, Clark and Spink Counties)
       12.  Lawrence County (formerly Lawrence-Butte, but divided in 1948)
       14.  Elk Creek (later part of Meade County joined)
       15.  Lincoln County
       16.  Todd County (formerly Rosebud District)
       17.  Roberts County
       18.  Scotland (merged with Emanuel Chateau Creek to become BonHomme)
       19.  Fall River County
       20.  Spink County (including part of old Carpenter District)
       21.  Minnehaha County
       22.  Gregory County
       23.  Jackson-Washabaugh
1942  24.  Codington County County
       25.  Day County
       26.  Hamill
       27.  Hand County (formerly Elm Creek-Midland)
       28.  Turner County
       29.  Beadle County (formerly West Beadle)
1943  31.  Jerauld County
       32.  Charles Mix County (formerly Academy)
1944  33.  Yankton County
       34.  Marshall County
       35.  Moody County
       36.  Brookings County
1945  37.  Hamlin County
1946  38.  Hanson County
       39.  Eastern Pennington
1947  40.  Deuel County
       41.  Kingsbury County
       42.  Grant County
       43.  Aurora County
       44.  Campbell County
       45.  Clark County
1948  46.  McCook County
       47.  Butte County (formerly Lawrence-Butte)
1949  48.  South Brown
       49.  Harding County
1951 50. East Corson (later discontinued and merged with West Corson)
      51. Lake County
      52. Corson County (formerly West Corson)
      53. Hughes County
1952 54. Miner County
      55. Davison County
      56. Bennett County
      57. Dewey County
1953 58. Hyde County
      59. Shannon County
      60. Ziebach County
1954 61. McPherson County
      62. Potter County
      63. Stanley County
      64. Mellette County
1955 65. Perkins County
      66. Jones County
      67. Edmunds County
1956 68. Walworth County
      69. Sully County
1961 70. Hutchinson County
1965 71. Douglas County
1967 72. Faulk County

Operations: During the early years, the conservation district supervisors had to look for assistance from the State Conservation Committee, the Soil Conservation Service, Extension Service, the State College, the Federal and State Experiment Stations, and the AAA (later ASC) Committees. With the cooperation of one or more of these agencies, the conservation districts were able to show the effectiveness of different conservation practices and other practices that had been established such as land leveling, tree plantings, different types of tillage, contouring and terracing, erosion control dams, strip cropping, grass seedings on pastures and ranges.

Many conservation districts set up demonstration farms where one or more practices were established on entire fields. The State and Federal Experiment Stations had established plots using crop rotations on several different types of tillage. All of these were instrumental in helping to tell the people what assistance was available to the operators in a district if and when they were ready to request it.

The practices named above are only a few of those that are being used by the operators in the conservation districts. Other practices include conservation crop rotations; the use of grass and legumes in rotations; weed control, dams, dugouts, and spring development for livestock water; diversion dams and ditches, grassed waterways; the use of irrigation and water spreading systems; controlled grazing; crop residue management; grassed waterways; wildlife plantings; water spreading; and many others.