

American Creek Conservation District (No. 05)

History from 1969 publication:

The American Creek Soil and Water Conservation District was first organized in 1938, covering an area of about seven townships. Several additions have since been made to include the entire county.

Lyman County was opened for homestead in 1890 by an Act of Congress, but not many settlers came until 1905 after the Milwaukee Railroad was built. There are three different types of topography with the fairly level bottom lands, steep river breaks, and the more undulating uplands, each with its characteristic soil. The breaks are mostly shale, the uplands are largely Pierre clay with silty clay areas, and the bottom land is more silty, but containing a lot of clay.

The north part of the County drains into the Missouri River through Medicine and American Creeks and their tributaries while the south part drains into the White River. These creeks and rivers are important sources of water.

The land was covered with good western range type grasses, such as buffalo, grama, and western wheat grasses and some blue stem.

This is a rather low rainfall area with an annual average of about 17.5 inches. This is sufficient to produce good native grasses and with good management, produces good wheat. In fact, it is one of the leading winter wheat counties in the state and also leads in wild hay production.

The new settlers soon learned that the land produced good wheat, which gave them an immediate income. That encouraged plowing out a lot of sod for wheat. The demand for wheat during and following World War I encouraged a continuation of growing wheat, with the eventual disastrous wind erosion problems that developed in the 30's along with the grasshoppers.

With the continuation of the drought, it was impossible to get a cover on the land or to stop the erosion. The erosion became progressively worse. The fences were covered with blown dirt.

The following series of events started to take place and lead toward the organization of a Conservation District.

In 1934, the U.S. Forest Service had a summer C.C.C. Camp at Presho and started building two dams. In 1935, the Soil Conservation Service took over the camp at Presho and worked on the dams that had been started. During the winter of 1935-36, the Huron C.C.C. Camp retained 35 men at Presho to work on the Husman Dam. In the meantime, the drought and erosion were becoming more serious. The County Agent wrote the Soil Conservation Service at Huron for help.

In April 1936, the farmers held a mass meeting and organized a voluntary Soil Conservation Association, known as the Medicine Creek Association, covering all of Lyman County. In May a C.C.C. Camp was located in Presho, but moved out in the fall. In the meantime, sixteen cooperative agreements were signed and quite a lot of conservation work was planned and serviced by the group at Winner. Some of the farmers visited the Winner-Dixon project to observe the work being done there.

Some of the members of the Medicine Creek Voluntary Association formed a temporary committee in December 1937, to work for the organization of a district. They held meetings to explain the organization and operation of a soil conservation district and circulated petitions for a

hearing, covering 21 townships along and south of Medicine Creek. The hearing was held on February 4, 1938, at the court house in Kennebec. Most of those present were opposed so the committee rejected the referendum.

Those who wanted a conservation district went to work in a small area in the eastern part of Lyman County, covering all of seven townships and parts of six others. The hearing was held on November 23, 1938, at Reliance. The sentiment was favorable, and so the referendum was held on December 29, 1938, with an 80 per cent favorable vote. The State Committee approved the organization of the American Creek Conservation District and appointed Fred Pilker, Oacoma, and Fred Nissen, Reliance, as supervisors. Then on January 18, 1939, Arthur Eymer, Reliance; George McManus, Lyman; and Horace R. Wagner, Reliance, were elected as the other supervisors.

On January 20-21, 1939, the supervisors met and organized. They were: Fred Nissen, Reliance, Chairman; Fred Pilker, Oacoma, Vice-Chairman; R.L. Miller, Kennebec, County Agent, Secretary; Arthur Eymer, Reliance, supervisor; George McManus, Lyman, supervisor; and Horace R. Wagner, Reliance, supervisor.

The original Conservation District covered 180,375 acres. On August 2, 1939, six townships were added to the Conservation District; February 28, 1940, ten townships were added; and in 1943, three more townships joined. On June 7, 1956, the remainder of the county came into the Conservation District.

When the supervisors developed their program of work they specified their problems as:

- Wind erosion and fences drifted
- Sheet erosion and silting—rapid runoff—lose one-third of the rain by run-off
- Water erosion and gullying
- Flood damage
- Pastures and ranges over-grazed and grass killed out
- Too many cattle for the amount of range

They proposed to use the following practices to correct the above problems:

- Grassed waterways
 - Terraces, all kinds
 - Cropping systems, with crop rotations
 - Stock water developments
 - Wildlife habitat with development and watering facilities
 - Pasture and range seedings
 - Contour farming
 - Strip cropping, including wind strip cropping
 - Stubble mulch
 - Deferred grazing, proper grazing
 - Feedlot and farmstead windbreaks
 - Field windbreaks
 - Irrigation systems, both gravity flow and sprinkler
 - Land leveling
 - Diversion ditches and dams, waterspreading
 - Erosion dams, pipelines
 - Recreation area improvement
 - Wells—shallow and artesian

Some of the Conservation District accomplishments have been:

- Garden irrigation
- The building of trench silos for storage of silage
- Contouring, contour strip cropping
- Controlled grazing on 29,941 acres
- Removing and leveling dirt from fences
- In 1949, 17 dams were built
- Proper stocking of the range is observed
- Deferred grazing is a common practice
- Some contour pasture furrowing has been done

Other Conservation District supervisors have been: Leslie E. Mellegard; Harvey E. Walters; A.A. Reumann; James F. Bukacek; Harry Eymmer; Oscar Byre; Gilbert Wagner; Art Gilman; Glenn Hutchinson; Lester Bower; George Christensen.

The 1969 supervisors were: Richard Rever, Relince, Chairman; Clifford P. Taylor, Presho, Vice-Chairman; Glenn Hutchinson, Vivian, Secretary; Lester Bower, Presho, Treasurer; George Christensen, Kennebec, Supervisor; Gilbert Wagner, Reliance, Assistant Supervisor; Art Gilman, Presho, Assistant Supervisor.

Soil Conservation Service personnel who have served the Conservation District are: Clyde A. Turner; I.R. Trumbower; Lloyd L. Bovee; H. Leo Wilson; Joseph T. Paulson; Robert M. Meyers; and William F. Kimm.

Updated information provided in 2012:

Supervisors since 1969: Kim Shade, Will Reis, Brenda Reis, Steve Schelske, Earl Christensen, Jim Fulwider, Steve Kubik, M.E. (Red) Hullinger, Jim Anderson, R. Kim Halverson, Cliff Halverson, Terry Moore, Cliff Taylor, Ed Cox, Don Miller, Vern Miller, Russ Stone, Merle Aamot, Angela Ehlers, Bob Hills

American Creek Conservation District expanded their tree program to include site preparation and after-planting care. They were one of the first in the state to offer drip irrigation. Installation of weed control fabric improved the survivability of area windbreaks. The Conservation District conducted tree research at a demonstration site north of the Lyman County fairgrounds in Kennebec. For a few years, the Conservation District held the "Tree Mile Run" whereby youth running a mile were rewarded with monetary prizes and trees.

Beginning with the conservation provisions included in the 1985 Farm Bill, producers enrolled up to 25% of the Conservation District's cropland in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). In addition to significantly reducing soil erosion, pheasant populations exploded and generated economic opportunities for hunting operations.

As an additional income-generating enterprise and to meet the needs of the producers, the Conservation District began offering trenching and pipeline services. For a decade, the service was successful by several measures. With a change in staff and manpower, the Conservation District sold their equipment to Kennebec Telephone Company.

Water quality issues, especially sediment and fecal coliform impacts, became of increasing importance. The Conservation District, in partnership with Stanley, Haakon, Jones and Jackson County Conservation Districts implemented the Bad River Watershed Project. At that time

(1990's), the Bad River did not meet its Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), especially for sediment. Excessive sediment at the mouth of the Bad River affected winter water releases from Oahe Dam and flooding of low-lying homes in Pierre. In order for the Bad River to meet its TMDL sediment allowance, one of the Project's goals was to reduce by 30% sediment loading into the Missouri River. The Project succeeded in meeting this goal.

The Medicine Creek watershed begins in Jones County and flows through Lyman County to join the Missouri River west of Lower Brule. Along the way, it crosses Vivian, Presho, and Kennebec city limits. TMDL issues for the Medicine Creek included sediment and nutrient (fecal coliform) loading. The Conservation District invited Jones County Conservation District to partner in the Medicine Creek Watershed Project, a multi-year project during the 2000's. Producers received technical and financial assistance in moving several animal feeding operations away from the floodplain and installing ag nutrient management systems. Other activities included promoting conservation tillage and range management techniques.