

Bennett County Conservation District (No. 56)

History from 1969 publication:

Bennett County is located in the southwestern part of the state along the Nebraska line and about 100 miles east of the Wyoming line, in what is known as "Indian Country". The county was created in 1909 but was a part of the Pine Ridge Reservation until 1912. It was opened for white settlement in 1911. The area was occupied mostly by large cattle ranches until the more recent years. Presently it is one of the leading winter wheat counties.

The drainage of the entire county is into the White River; the south part through the Little White River and the north part through Pass Creek, Bear in the Lodge Creek, and Potato Creek. The topography ranges from undulating to steep, to rolling and nearly flat with excessive drainage, both internal and surface. The soils of the north third of the county are mostly silt loams and sandy loams; the middle part are of a darker colored silt loams and sandy loams; while those of the south part are sands, fine sands, and fine sandy loams. The soils of the north two-thirds of the county are suitable for livestock production and limited small grain cropping with protection against wind erosion.

The early settlers found a land with tremendous resources of grasses with areas of fertile soils but only 15 to 20 percent suited for farming because of light texture and sloping topography. They also found good water along the creeks and streams, but the distribution too limited for proper use of the grasses.

The primary area of exploitation was breaking up land not suited for cultivation. Large areas of land that was too sandy or too steep or too thin for safe cultivation was broken up. These areas were abandoned by the farmers when crops failed to thrive on this land. The land then reverted to a stand of invader plants of undesirable grasses and weeds.

Before the Conservation District was formed, there was some attempt to get conservation on the land, consisting of some tree planting and building of stock water dams. The trees were mostly Chinese elm and the dams placed on sites with soil too coarse to hold water throughout the season.

Soon the farmers and ranchers were hearing and reading about the conservation work being done in nearby conservation districts, and they became interested. And so, early in 1952, meetings were held at Martin, Tuthill, Swett, and Vetal at which the organization and operation was explained, and those present expressed a desire to organize. A hearing was held on July 11 and resulted in a referendum in September which carried by a vote of 194 to 53, and the organization was completed on September 5 of that year covering the entire county.

Soon thereafter, the five supervisors were selected and at this time they elected officers, prepared the program and plan of work, and prepared and signed the necessary agreements with cooperating agencies.

They specified the problems confronting the Conservation District as too much soil and water lost through runoff; land unfit for cultivation put into crop production; land grown up to undesirable plants; weeds; and grasshoppers.

They planned to meet these problems through the use of: terraces; contour strip cropping; waterways; stubble mulch farming; proper range use; regrassing pastures; controlling weeds; and, use of grasshopper control methods.

The following practices had been established by the close of 1957:

Terraces –	500	miles;
Contour strip cropping –	10,000	acres;
Waterways –	200	acres;
Stubble mulch farming –	57,000	acres;
Proper range use –	280,000	acres;
Range seeding –	1,000	acres;
Pasture re-seeding –	5,000	acres.

The local people who promoted the organization of the original Conservation District were: Harold Dobesh, Vetal; Lawrence Peterson, Martin; Harold Ireland, Martin; C.D. Dirks, Martin; and Kyle Phipps, Tuthill.

The 1969 supervisors were: Tom Jacquot, Martin, chairman; Zack Ward, Martin, vice-chairman; Danny Geersen, Martin, treasurer; Tim Konotopka, Martin, supervisor; Morris Karnes, Martin, supervisor; and Gary Nies, Martin, county agent, secretary.



Grass waterway in stripcropped field owned by Freddie Winter, Martin, S.D.

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 –	64,737.0	acres
Contour Strip Cropping –	6,237.0	acres
Wind Strip Cropping –	9,881.0	acres
Field Strip cropping –	807.0	acres
Stubble Mulching –	95,632.0	acres
Rotation Seedings –	2,714.0	acres
Waterway Development –	364.0	acres
Conservation Crop Rotation –	12,371.0	acres
Crop Residue Utilization –	211,225.0	acres
Pasture & Hay land Plantings –	20,747.6	acres

Deferred Grazing –	41,566.0	acres
Tree Plantings –	3,889.5	acres
Wildlife Area Improvement –	8,202.5	acres
Ponds, Dams & Dugout Construction –	41.0	structures
Terraces –	2,936,785.0	linear feet
Water Spreading –	971.0	acres
Diversions –	23,931.0	linear feet
Wells –	137	
Spring Improvement –	12.0	
Proper Range Use –	905,289.0	acres
Pipelines –	231,007.0	linear feet
Fencing –	119,643.5	linear feet
Tanks –	165.0	
Well Decommissionings -	12.0	
Stockwater Developments –	23.0	

Updated information provided in 2012:

The Conservation District has nominated several producers over the years for the Wildlife Habitat Award, sponsored by the South Dakota Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. Of these, 5 have been chosen as recipients of this award, 1954 – Harold Geersen; 1957 – Oscar Erickson; 2003 – Marty Vanderploeg; 2006 – Dan & Pam Petrik; and 2009 – KO Ranch/Richard Kovarik & Sons (Tom & Stephen).

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.

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, 3,889.5 acres have been planted by the Conservation District personnel, using over 1,696,544 trees and shrubs. In February, 1964, the Conservation District purchased land and, with the assistance of many local individuals and businesses who donated time, labor and materials, the supervisors and volunteers built a tree cellar for the storage of trees. This facility, with some updates, is still used today.

The Conservation District has also been involved in the seeding of cropland back to grassland, including seedings completed under the Conservation Reserve Program. Over the years, several drills were purchased by the Conservation District for use by area producers. In 1999, a John Deere no-till drill was purchased with funding from our Conservation Partners: SD Game, Fish & Parks; Cedar Creek Sportsman's Club; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, LaCreek Refuge; Monsanto; the Black Hills Chapter of Pheasants Forever; the National Wild Turkey Federation and Ducks Unlimited for use in the County. This has allowed producers the chance to try no-till without having to purchase their own drill. The drill has been used on over 15,000 acres since its purchase in May 1999. A Truax grass drill was purchased in 2007 to assist with the planting of native grasses. This drill has been used on over 2,034 acres.

Over the years, the Conservation District has 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's newsletter was the

winner of the National Newsletter contest for 8 consecutive years, 1963 – 1970. The contest was sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts. The Conservation District also sponsors the Arbor Day essay contest and the Resource Conservation Speech contest. The South Dakota Rangeland Days was held in Bennett County July 7 and 8, 2004, sponsored by the Bennett & Shannon County Conservation Districts, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and the South Dakota Extension Service. Approximately 114 students and adults participated in the event along with 23 educators from across the state. The Conservation District sponsored the Land, Range and Pasture judging contest for the local vo-ag class and also for the contest between the Bennett County and Shannon County Conservation District Supervisors.

Others who have served as supervisors are: Hal Chase, Harold Jacquot, Loren McMillan, Leland Jacobs, Frank Scharman, Jr., Edward Henschel, Robert Pich, Thomas Engels, Jack Knecht, George Groth, Kenneth Claussen, Wayne McCue, Leland Rayhill, Marion Kruse, Alan D. Rice, Frank Stanec, Charles Emley, William Chase, Kenny Sterkel, Glenn Shepardson, Roy Ireland, William Kocourek, James Slattery, William Donovan, Sharon Denison, and Mike Harris.

The 2011 supervisors are: Raymond Kocer, Martin, chairman; Gayle Kocer, Martin, vice-chairman; Kenneth (Buddy) Bolzer, Martin, treasurer; Gary Nies, Martin, supervisor; David Hauck, Martin, supervisor; Jim Good, Martin, advisor; Gary Rayhill, Martin, advisor; Sharon Denison, Tuthill, advisor; Lana Johnson, Martin, advisor; and Earl Simmons, Martin, advisor.