

Edmunds County Conservation District (No. 67)

History from 1969 publication:

Edmunds County is located in the north central part of South Dakota, at the western edge of the James River basin. With the advance of the railroad west from Aberdeen in 1883, settlers moved quickly into the area and it soon became a primary wheat producing area, and has developed into an important area of general farming and livestock production.

The drainage, in general, is good and ordinarily is not excess. The principal drainages in the county are found in the eastern one-third and flow south into the Nixon River.

The topography of the county, with the exception of the west and a small spot in the north side, is undulating. The west end of the county in an area about one mile wide at the north end and

nine miles wide at the south end has a rolling topography. The slopes are steep enough here to discourage cultivation on all but the most level parts of the area. An area which is about five

miles wide and four miles long and extends into the north edge of the county has the same type of rolling topography.

The dividing line between two great soil groups runs through Edmunds county. The western two-thirds of the county is in the Chestnut group. The Chernozem great soil group is found in the eastern one-third.

The county divides itself into three parts on the basis of types of landscapes and soil types associated with them. The western end of the county is part of a terminal moraine, or a place at which a glacier stopped or melted back, leaving a high accumulation of mixed sand, gravel, silt, and clay. Stones and steep slopes make most of the land difficult for cultivation. The western two-thirds (excluding the western end) has more gentle slopes and is only moderately stony. The soils in the eastern one-third are formed from the same parent material as that found in the western part of the county. The principal difference has been a slightly higher rainfall.

The principal soils are: a) Williams -loams over limy clay, clay loam glacial till, undulating and moderately deep; b) Barnes -forms over limy clay loam glacial till, undulating and moderately deep; and c) Beadle -loams with a moderate clay pan over limy glacial till. Other types are: a) Zahl -steep and shallow; b) Buse -steep and shallow; c) Turton -slight clay pan over hard shaly glacial till; and d) Estevan -level or in basins and have compact subsoils.

Certain areas of the county are over sources of ground water. Some of these areas are quite extensive. Before artesian wells were drilled, early settlers had to depend upon surface wells or sloughs for their water supply.

Several artificial lakes have been formed in the county by constructing dams. Probably the largest and most known of these is Lake Mina. This has been developed into a recreational area of considerable importance and extent for boating, camping, and fishing.

Prior to organization of a district, conservation work was done, but mostly construction of dugouts and drainage. There was a feeling that more conservation work was badly needed. West-side operators were concerned about water erosion. The flat-land operators' concern was wind erosion. Other conservation needs not so spectacular were apparent to many. Full-time assistance by trained and capable technicians was apparently needed.

Early in 1954 there was an educational meeting conducted by the ACP at Bowdle. Art Loeck, office manager for ACP, Matt Bachman, Bowdle, and Wilbert Blumhardt, Bowdle, discussed circulating a petition to organize a soil conservation district to obtain SCS technical assistance. Others elsewhere in the county, particularly Arnold Peterson and Harris Swanson of Ipswich territory, had been having similar thoughts and promoting the idea of organizing a conservation district.

Local ACP officials evidently encouraged such organization. County agent Brestegard continued to spread the doctrine of soil conservation being needed. People observed what was being done in other counties where organized conservation districts were at work. Desire to have their own conservation district was born; formalities of organizing a conservation district were started.

Petitions for formation of a conservation district were circulated for signatures and filed November 28, 1955. The hearing was held on December 3 and the referendum on March 14, 1956, with a vote of 575 for and 213 against.

Wilbert Blumhardt, Bowdle, and Arnold Peterson, Ipswich, were appointed by the state to complete the organization procedure. Three additional supervisors were elected on May 10th: Melvin Borkirchert, Roscoe; Mervin Goehring, Roscoe; and Stanley Lester, Loyalton.

These men met on May 12, 1955, and elected officers, prepared and signed the necessary agreements with cooperating agencies.

The supervisors then stated the problems confronting the conservation district as: gullies on crop and pasture lands; sheet erosion on cropland; wind erosion on cropland; soils have lost a part of their original organic matter content, which has resulted in the breakdown of soil structure. This reduced the water absorption and holding capacity of the soil; declining soil fertility; ranges and pastures of reduced carrying capacity.

They suggested the following practices to help solve these problems:

- Establish grassed waterways on cropland and some pasture land;
- Develop water spreading systems wherever practicable;
- Build water diversions where needed;
- Use terracing and contouring where conditions warrant;
- Use stubble mulch and return crop residues to maintain organic matter content and furnish a protective cover;
- Rotate crops with grass and legumes;
- Properly distribute water and salt for even grazing;
- Use supplemental pastures;
- Plant trees for farmstead and field protection.

Other district activities:

- The district won one first and one second in the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company Award;
- Pioneered the work in pre-emergence spraying for the control of weeds in trees;
- Sponsored awards for winners of conservation contests;
- Purchased and operated a grass seeder and tree sprayer;
- Publish the annual report and monthly newsletter.

SCS personnel who have assisted the district are: Edwin G. Artz; Lyle Ranney. Gary Coplan; Adrian Parmeter; and Glenwood F. Hill.

Among those who have served as supervisors are: Mervin Goehring, Hosmer; Jake Baer, Roscoe; Robert Wendt, Wetonka; and Herbert Brandner, Ipswich. county agent, secretary.

The 1969 supervisors were: Wilbert Blumhardt, Bowdle, chairman; Jake Baer, Loyalton, vice chairman; Irene Buechler, Ipswich, treasurer; Duane Halsing, Cresbard, supervisor; Helmer Leno, Bowdle. supervisor; Vernon Walth, Hosmer, supervisor; Jake Volk, Ipswich, assistant supervisor; Morris Ernst, Roscoe, assistant supervisor; Arvin Shuh, Bowdle, assistant agent; and Herbert Brandner, Ipswich, county agent, secretary.

Updated information provided in 2012:

In the early '70's, the Conservation District moved into a new location along Highway 12. Dave Karst of Bowdle was hired as District Manager and remained in that position until 1992. Irene Buechler served as secretary for the Conservation District for many years. When she was hired in 1960, her starting wage was \$1.00 per hour. Land owners were encouraged to participate in the local Conservation District conservation voluntary programs with an emphasis to stop wind erosion. Producers were encouraged to seek technical assistance in developing and applying conservation plans that fit individual land needs from the SCS and cost-sharing assistance from the ASCS office.

The Conservation District was named South Dakota Grand Award winner in 1972 in the annual Goodyear Conservation awards program. This entitled the board chairman Duane Holsing and Outstanding Cooperator Stanley Lester to an all expense paid trip to a conservation workshop in Florida sponsored by Goodyear.

In 1976, Merle Kost was named District Conservationist for the SCS and remained in that position until 1980. Max Marquette also transferred to Edmunds County as the new Soil Conservation Technician.

For several years, the Conservation District newsletter placed first or second in the newsletter contest sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts. Supervisors in the 70's were: Duane Holsing, Jake Baer, John Beyers, Dwayne Leboldus, Arnold Petersen, Darwin Ulmer, Dwayn Blomster, Wilbert Blumhardt, Helmer Leno, Frank Carlson, and Gideon Schuh.

In 1978, the Edmunds County soils book was published and meetings were held to distribute the book and explain the use and value of the soil information contained in the book. These books were useful for many years to come. The information then became available through the internet in 2005 and the books were no longer needed as they had been in the past. On November 1, 1979, the Conservation District, the SCS, the ASCS, and the FmHA offices collocated into a new building at our current location on Main Street in Ipswich.

Some of the major practices utilized in the 70's were strip cropping, pasture and hayland plantings, tree planting, farm ponds, proper grazing use, crop residue management, grass waterways, pipelines, ag-waste management systems and range seedings.

Wayne VanderVorste began the position of District Conservationist for SCS in 1980, replacing Merle Kost. A new tree planter was purchased which is still in use today. Conservation tillage and strip cropping were promoted to prevent soil loss from wind erosion. The Mina Lake Restoration project began and Dave Karst, District Manager, was designated project

coordinator. Major problems concerning the lake were high nutrient levels and organic waste in the water. Objectives of the project were to get an overall view of pollution sources within the watershed, identify possible solutions to improving water quality, and how to apply them.

No-till farming started in Edmunds County in 1982. A workshop was held in Ipswich with over 300 attending. Two no-till drills were purchased by the Conservation District in cooperation with two local producers and were available for rent through the Conservation District office. In 1984 the South Dakota No-Till Association was started with Wilbert Blumhardt, a Conservation District supervisor, Dave Karst, District Manager and SCS personnel doing the background work. The first state wide SD No-till Association meeting was held November 8th in Ipswich with about 40 members. The first directors from Edmunds County were; Fred Harner, Glenn Blumhardt, Rick Heintzman, Bruce Gauer, Dean Hodson, and Pat Dewald.

In 1984, Kevin Kehrwald was named District Conservationist for the SCS replacing Wayne VanderVorste for SCS. Supervisors in the 80's were: Duane Holsing, Dwayne Leboldus, Rick Heintzman, Arnold Petersen, Tom Weigel, Arnold Wiederrich, Dwayn Blomster, Jerald Braun, Wilbert Blumhardt, and Bob Drake.

The Conservation District's nominee, John Rist, Bowdle Ag instructor, was selected a first place winner of the Teacher of the Year in the Northern Plains Region in 1988 & 1989. In 1988 Kevin Kehrwald was named Outstanding District Conservationist and Karen Gauer, Edmunds County Conservation District Administrative Secretary from 1983 to 1992, was named the Outstanding Conservation District Employee, both state wide awards. The Conservation District also received the Environmental Conservation Education Award. Edmunds County took applications for 16,123 acres of CRP which was the largest amount in an eleven county area.

A technical team began identifying all the wetlands in the county in 1989. As part of the new USDA Farm Bill, all land operators had to be notified of all wetlands on cropland they owned or operated.

In the '90's, the Mina Lake Water Quality Project was well under way. Coordinators for the project were Don Heier and when he resigned, Bob Braun. Spillway and dam repair work was completed, two ag-waste systems were completed and rip-rapping was used to stabilize many areas of the shoreline. The Conservation District had a new tree shed constructed and a much needed larger cooler installed. In 1992 the Conservation District purchased a fabric weed barrier machine and began applying fabric to newly planted trees.

Gary Bachman of Bowdle was named State and Regional Conservation Northern Plains Secondary Teacher of the year and was also named in the top five to compete for the national title in 1993. Elaine Kub, Ipswich sixth grader won the state Arbor Day Essay Contest in 1995

Supervisors in the '90's were: Rick Heintzman, Anita Weisser, Arnold Weiderrich, Jerald Braun, Wilbert Blumhardt (an original member of the board who retired in 1996), Wade Eisenbeisz, Bob Drake, and Tina Feyereisen.

The Upper Snake Creek Water Quality Project began in 2005, focusing on improving water quality through implementation of best management practices. The project encompassed five counties within the watershed and was completed in August of 2010.

In 2006, the Conservation District celebrated their 50th Anniversary with an Open House held at the tree shed. A banquet honoring past supervisors, advisors, Conservation District and NRCS

personnel was also held. Two of the original board members, Wilbert Blumhardt and Mervin Goehring were able to attend the event.

Tina Feyereisen was a member of the State Natural Resource Stewardship Committee and in '07 was elected the representative for the North Missouri Area. Anita Weisser was elected treasurer for the Area as well.

For many years the Conservation District held an annual Recognition Banquet. Those recognized were local Soil and Moisture Achievement Award winners as well as local winners of various area and state awards. Also highlighted was any state or national honors the Conservation District had received throughout the year. Keynote speakers were invited to discuss current conservation issues and the banquet location was rotated through the different towns in the county from year to year.

The Edmunds County Conservation District originated an annual Legislative Dinner Meeting held each fall at which local, state, and national congressional representatives were invited to discuss current conservation issues. Dave Karst, District Manager, was instrumental in organizing this event. Eventually the other SDACD areas in the state began utilizing legislative meetings within their respective areas.

The tree planting program is a very instrumental part of the Edmunds County Conservation District. From the beginning of the Conservation District through the year 2010, a total of 3,398,699 total trees have been planted. Approximately 20% of the trees planted are conifers and 80% are deciduous trees. Since 1956, these trees have been planted on 2,509 total farms for a total of 7,236.4 acres.

In October of 2010, Kevin Kehrwald retired from the NRCS and was replaced by Valeree DeVine as District Conservationist. The Board of Supervisors for 2011 are: Chairman, Tina Feyereisen, Hosmer; Vice Chairman, Bryce Nash, Cresbard; Supervisors Anita Weisser, Roscoe; Wade Eisenbeisz, Bowdle; & Flynt Schack, Tolstoy. Advisors are Diane Allbee, Loyalton; Tim Braun, Mina; Ray Kub, Roscoe; and Kenny Kilber, Ipswich. Administrative Secretary is Kitty Hauck. NRCS Personnel are Valeree DeVine, District Conservationist, and Amy Engels, Soil Conservationist.