

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DAY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

NO. 25



1939 marks the year technicians of the Soil Conservation Service, now known as Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assisted the County Extension Agent, A. O'Connell in establishing several demonstration farms in Day County. Concerned citizens attended several meetings on the advantages of a conservation district. The land owners petitioned the State Soil Conservation Committee for the creation of the District. The Day County Land Use Planning committee initiated the definite steps that resulted in the organization of the district. On January 14th, 1942 the State Soil Conservation Committee created the Day County Soil Conservation District. Originally only 14 townships were involved. These land owners voted and 91% were in favor of the formation. The entire county became a part of the District in 1945. Original supervisors were J.J. Cowan, Mancel Peterson, John Reetz, John Denholm, and Edwin Lee. In 1996 Day County Conservation District became the official name.

The topography of Day County ranges from undulating to rolling in the northeast, and undulating to fairly level in the remaining portion of the county. The far western edge is level or occasional "washboard" topography. Day County was formed by stagnant glacial ice that was covered by a layer of outwash and windborne sediment. As this glacier melted, lakes and wetlands formed in surface depressions left by the melting stagnant ice, or behind glacial moraines that blocked melt water drainages. One of the states cleanest lakes is Enemy Swim found in Day County, and Pickerel Lake is noted as the states deepest natural lake. Although major stream networks are lacking in Day County, most lakes are located in chains connected by surface overflows of short duration and lengths that end in closed basins like Bitter Lake. The exception to this is Blue Dog Lake which is fed by Owens Creek. Western Day County on the other hand differs in the fact that there are tributaries of Mud Creek and Crow Creek which drain to the James River. Because of the large number and types of wetlands and lakes found in Day County, this area provides critical habitat for a variety of birds, aquatic species, and wildlife.

The precipitation average in 1968 was 18.50 inches which remained relatively standard through the 1990's with a slight increase to 20.4 inches. The climate change caused a precipitation increase for the last several years. An example of the change is 23.87 inches in 2009 and 25.35 inches in 2010. With the increase in precipitation our area lakes and wetlands have enlarged. Bitter Lake' surface area in 1984 was at 1,226 acres. In 2011 the area had increased to 19,056 acres. Waubay Lake's elevation in 1983 was recorded at 1780.9 ft. The elevation in 2011 was 1805.26 ft.

The trend toward increasingly larger units and fewer farms is proven by the history with Day County agriculture. Day County had 1,977 farms with an average size of 318 acres per farm in 1930 which changed significantly by 1975 when there were 967 farms in the county with an average 700 acres per farm. According to the 2007 census, the movement to larger units and fewer farms is steadfast with Day County recording 675 farms with average size of 840 acres. The average growing season in Day County is 135 days.

Agriculture continues to be the economic backbone in the county. Agricultural income recorded in 1975 Day County Conservation District long range plan of \$39,189,000 nearly tripled in 2009 cash receipt data of \$112,951,000 according to the *South Dakota Agriculture bulletin No. 71*.

The original plan of work was written in 1942 and continues to be revised as the District's conservation efforts evolve. Day County Conservation District annually reviews and updates the long range plan. The current long range goals of the Day County Conservation District are:

- 1). Protect and/or improve the waters to provide sufficient quantities of quality water for the beneficial uses.
- 2). Improve and maintain the productive quality of our soil.
- 3). Enhance recreation opportunities and wildlife habitats.
- 4). Increase public awareness of the benefits of natural resource management.
- 5). Maintain economic sustainability of the Day County Conservation District.

All long range goals are of equal importance. The District works to secure grants to assist local producers with conservation implementation.

The Day County Conservation District works jointly with many partners in order to carryout and implement conservation practices and apply them to the land in the most effective way possible.



In 1981 the Day County Conservation District initiated a study to determine the necessity for a project to retain the status of having some of the cleanest lakes in the state. Day County Conservation District has successfully acquired grants with the Dept. of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) and the State Conservation Commission to improve the water quality of the lakes in northeast South Dakota as well as promoting rotational grazing to enhance the grasslands. By implementing best management practices that reduce nutrient and sediment loading and prevent bacterial contamination in watershed acres, all the lakes of northeast South Dakota remain valued attractions in Day County. Our current watershed project entitled *Northeast Glacial Lakes Project*, works cooperatively with the conservation districts in Marshall, Roberts, and Grant counties.

Day County Conservation District strives to educate all ages about conservation through workshops, contests, and information. Arbor Day is the last Friday in April and celebrated with all schools in Day County. Students share their writing and drawing talents by entering the essay and poster contests. State winning essays earned by students in Day County include Ciarra Barnhardt---2006 and Heidi Oakland---2000. The District promotes many other educational events including Soil Stewardship Week, Eco Ed Day, water festivals in Brookings and Aberdeen, NESD Land and Range contest, youth scholarship, Resource Conservation speech contest, and Earth Day.

Recognizing worthy producers for their excellent management practices have been noted state wide. Day County's state winning recipients of the SD Society Range Management "Excellence in Range Management" award were Harlan Storley family, 1991; Delbert Fischer family, 1999; and Eugene and Kathy Ausland, 2007.



Conservation awareness continues to vary as the environment and residents progress; Day County Conservation District provides information to residents of all ages. Grazing tours, cover crop tours, bird watching tours, tree care workshops, lake and stream ecology workshops, land and range contests, farm show booths, and pasture walks offer producers and owners the opportunity to learn from others and share ideas that have enhanced their operation. The District has a quarterly newsletter "District Dispatch" and promotes conservation with news articles to area newspapers. With the progression of technology the Day County Conservation District and the Northeast Glacial Lakes Project have created websites to inform, update, and provide residents and visitors valuable resource on trees, history, lakes, and educational activities.

The Day County Conservation District with assistance from the Jolly Worker's 4H Club and members of the Webster FFA Chapter constructed a Native Plant Demonstration Plot and Arboretum. The demonstration is located behind the USDA Service Center office building in Webster. Small plots of native grasses and forbs were planted in April 2002. Eight varieties of shrubs and trees were also planted that spring and we have continued to add to the arboretum every year. During the fall of 2002, walking paths were constructed, and additional landscaping for a butterfly garden and pond were completed. The butterfly garden and pond were planted with several species of perennial flowers and aquatic plants in 2003. Today the public can view species of native cool and warm season grasses, native forbs, trees and shrubs, and a butterfly garden and backyard pond demonstration with a variety of perennial and annual flowers. In addition to the demonstration plot and arboretum, the public can also observe some new technologies available for pasture watering systems. A solar power unit, that operates the filtration system for the district's backyard pond, demonstrates how the sun can supply power to remote pasture wells.



Services offered by the District have evolved as the conservation efforts advance. Currently, services provided by the district include machine planting trees, tree cultivation, mowing, fabric installation, no-till drill rental, weed roller rental, auger rental, other tree care products, perennials, native grasses, and conservation and large

size tree hand plants. The District continues to research options beneficial to the conservation efforts of the county. Annually a survey is distributed to find the needs of area producers and a locally led workgroup provides an additional avenue for producers to share their resource concerns.



Day County Conservation District has machine planted 7,086 acres of trees since 1943. The total number of trees machine planted is 3,936,596 on 3,238 sites. Tree planting acres continue to provide residents options for field windbreaks, farmstead windbreaks, wildlife plantings, and recently we have increased plantings on renovations of previously viable belts to restore them to once again provide the protection to farm sites and fields. Wind and ice storms increased the deterioration of the belts established. The Day County Conservation District was awarded a grant in 2008 to assist residents to reestablish the great loss of trees within the communities in Day County.

Over the years the district office has been located in various places throughout Webster including: the Extension office in the Day County court house, above the old theater, above Cornwell Drug, in the back of the Kading building, in the building torn down for the Security bank, and with ASCS office since 1966 which was previously located at 710 Main Street until October 1996 when the USDA offices and Day County Conservation District office relocated to its present location at 600 E Hwy 12.

A recent addition to the county is the development of wind energy. Day County Wind Farm was established with 66 turbines in southwestern Day County in 2009. Other projects are in the early stages of development as the wind energy technology advances.

The current mission statement of the Day County Conservation District is as follows:

The Day County Conservation District serves the residents and visitors of Day County by promoting and educating wise management of natural resources for the benefit of all society. We offer conservation services needed to properly address natural resource management.



Pictured are the 2011 Day County Conservation District Supervisors from left to right: Marvin Bury, Joel Butler, Bill Simonson, Bonnie Headley, and Mark Brandlee.

List of supervisors and assistant supervisors that have and are serving on the Day County Conservation District Board

JJ Cowan	1942-1955	Roger Chamberlain	1969-1972
John Reetz	1942-1974	Don Thomas	1973-1980
John Denholm	1942-1955	Paul Wagner	1975-1982
Edwin Lee	1942-1950	Marvin Bury	1981-present
Mancel Peterson	1942-1964	LaVerne Storley	1983-1990
Ray Parks	1944-1955	Rodney Tobin	1985-1996
Conrad Henning	1945-1950	Robert Duerre	1989-1996
C.C. Hutchinson	1947-1949	Alden Hanson	1991-2010
Art Lundeen	1947-1966	William Bisgard	1995-2007
William Peterson	1948-1988	Torre Raap	1997-2000
Roman Kettler	1950-1967	Robert Witt	1997-2000
Harvey Oxtan	1950-1962	Elmer Dulitz	2001-2007
Frank Roberts	1950-1951	Larry Herr	2001-2007
Orion Parks	1959-1968	Mark Brandlee	2007-present
Melvin Nygaard	1951-1984	Bonnie Headley	2007-present
Claire Bierschbach	1963-1994	Joel Butler	2007-present
Art Schinkel	1964-1968	Bill Simonson	2011-present