

CONSERVATION
ISSUE #11 Fall 2017

Connections



A quarterly publication of the Dickinson County Conservation District

CONSERVATION *Connections*

A quarterly publication of the Dickinson County Conservation District



USDA Service Center
328 NE 14th Street
Abilene, KS 67410

(785) 263-1351 (FSA)

(785) 263-2787 (Conservation District/NRCS)

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 Sandy Johnson.....Program Technician
 Deb Marston.....Program Technician
 Michele Snowball.....Program Technician

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 11—Regular Board Meeting
 December 25—OFFICE CLOSED—Christmas Day Holiday
 January 1—OFFICE CLOSED—New Year’s Day Holiday
 January 8—Regular Board Meeting 10 AM
 January 15—OFFICE CLOSED—Martin Luther King’s Birthday Holiday
 February 8—Regular Board Meeting 9 AM
 February 8—Annual Meeting 6 PM

Seeding Dates

Cool Season Grasses
(brome, fescue)
 August 1 to October 1
 December 1 to April 15

Warm Season Grasses
(native mix)
 December 1 to May 15

Prescribed Burn Dates

CRP: Feb. 1 - April 15
 Depending on soils, July 16
 - Aug. 31 (contact FSA/
 NRCS for more information)

Rangeland: April 1 - May 5



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Looking for a contractor?

Contact us for a list of contractors that will help achieve all your conservation goals: earthwork, brush cleaning, prescribed burning, well-drilling, fence building, and more!



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SAVE THE DATE!

Join us at our Annual Meeting and Board of Supervisors Election on Thursday, February 8 at 6:00 PM

619 N Rogers Abilene, KS 67410

Complimentay dinner provided by Ricky's Café and Marcon Pies

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Do you recognize the photo on the front cover?

This issue of Conservation Connections features a photo taken in Dickinson County. Be the first to contact us with the correct approximate location (nearest crossroads or legal description) of the photo and win a CoCoRaHS official rain gauge.

Contact your Legislators

Senators:

Jerry Moran
(202) 224-6521
(785) 628-6401

Pat Roberts
(202) 224-4774
(620) 227-2244

Representatives:

Tim Huelskamp, 1st District
(202) 225-2715
(785) 309-0572

Lynn Jenkins, 2nd District
(202) 225-6601
(785) 234-5966

Kevin Yoder, 3rd District
(202) 225-2865
(913) 621-0832

Office Updates

The Conservation District purchased a projector for use at our Annual Meeting, Local Work Group meetings, and regular Board meetings. We also upgraded our computer equipment to allow for electronic document storage, saving space and reducing use of paper products where possible.

Equipment Rental

Thirty-seven landowners rented equipment from the Conservation District in 2017. The Truax Grass Drill planted more than 112 acres in Dickinson County, while the Great Plains No-Till Drill was used on 243 acres. We are very lucky to have an amazing drill manager who keeps the equipment maintained and moving throughout the county.

State Cost-Share

The Dickinson County Conservation District administers cost-share funds provided by Kansas Department of Agriculture

Division of Conservation through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan. We participate in two separate programs: Water Resources Cost-Share Program and Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program. Our cost-share funding program year runs from July 1 through June 30 of each year with applications accepted throughout the year and a sign-up in early spring each year. From July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017, we facilitated the payment of \$15,072 to seven landowners for Water Resources conservation practices including gradient terraces and grassed waterways. During the same contract year, we facilitated the payment of eleven Non-Point Source Pollution Control contracts totaling \$15,300. Those cost-share funds were used to install or repair new or existing household wastewater systems for Dickinson County in conjunction with Dickinson County Environmental Services. From July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018, our cost share programs have allocated \$13,251 for Water Resources programs and \$11,610 for Non-Point Source Pollution Control programs. Cost-share funding is always utilized to implement conservation practices that improve and protect water quality in Dickinson County. State cost-share funding is never used for administrative expenses of the Conservation District.

2017 Kansas *Leopold Conservation Award*

Wichita, Kansas – (November 27) - Sand County Foundation, the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) and the Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK), are proud to announce Lazy VJ Farms as the recipient of the 2017 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award®, which honors Kansas landowner achievement in voluntary stewardship and management of natural resources.

Lazy VJ Farms is owned and managed by Rod Vorhees and his family. When Rod began taking on a leadership role at the farm and purchasing neighboring land in the 80s, he was eager to focus on improving land health. He converted all land with tillage history to permeant vegetative cover using cover crops, and established cool season plant communities that would complement the native prairie ecosystem and extend the time of available quality forage.

The pastures on the ranch are managed using rotational grazing. Cattle are moved from one paddock to another to allow for a period of rest and regrowth. The cattle are also rotated to different ecotypes throughout the year to help provide quality nutrition. Rod strives for optimum production rather than maximum production, and always does his best to also provide care for the often-forgotten components to land management such as nongame wildlife, pollinators and migrating species.

The abundant plant diversity on the ranch provides excellent wildlife habitat. The property has 2,000 continuous acres that includes cool and warm season varieties of native and introduced grasses, forbs, legumes, native timberland and riparian areas. Although Rod accommodates a small number of hunters on his land, he does not need to plant food plots to make the land an attractive place to hunt due to the plant diversity that brings in the game.



The Ranchland Trust of Kansas (www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org) is a private, non-profit organization founded by members of the Kansas Livestock Association in 2003. The organization was created to provide assistance to ranchers and landowners who desire to conserve their land with conservation easements. Guided by their mission to preserve Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces for future generations through the conservation of working landscapes, the Ranchland Trust of Kansas values a commitment to conservation, respect for private

landownership, integrity, organizational excellence and collaboration with those who share their values. The Ranchland Trust of Kansas remains an affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association.

ACEP Application *Deadline*



Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

The goal of ACEP is to protect land devoted to food production and wildlife habitat from being converted to non-agricultural uses and to restore wetlands. ACEP is a voluntary program for landowners or tribal governments that allow them to leave a conservation heritage for their family and community.

Applications can be submitted at any time, but to be considered for 2018 funding opportunities, applications in Kansas must be received by December 22, 2017 for the first application and ranking date. Additional application and ranking cutoff dates are February 9, 2018 and April 6, 2018. Applications are currently being accepted for both agricultural land and wetlands reserve easements.

There are two programs under ACEP, each with a different application process. It is very important that applicants contact their local NRCS office or conservation district office for specific information for your county to ensure the applicant receives guidance on the correct application process.

Landowners have several options to consider applying for ACEP. NRCS is partnering with Ducks Unlimited through the Regional Conservation Program Partnership (RCPP) to implement a Kansas Wetland Easements project under the umbrella of ACEP.

Targeted wetland complexes for this RCPP project include, but are not limited to, the playa region in western Kansas, Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira, Jamestown, and McPherson Valley Wetlands, Marais des Cygnes River Valley, and the Neosho River Valley. Additional high priority wetlands outside of these areas will also be considered.

Applications that are marked RCPP ACEP-WRE will be ranked separately from general sign-up ACEP-WRE using a ranking worksheet developed for RCPP ACEP-WRE. Special boxes for RCPP are to be marked if a landowner is wanting to make an ACEP application under the RCPP Kansas Wetland Easements project. Kansas has approved a Wetland Reserve Easement Reservation of Grazing Rights Option under ACEPWRE for fiscal year 2018. This option is for selected counties in central and western Kansas. Landowners should check with their local USDA Service Center to see if this enrollment option is available for their county.

Landowners in these counties can select an enrollment option for length of time as well as for Reservation of Grazing Rights. The selection for a Reservation of Grazing Rights will result in a 25 per-

cent reduction in the easement payment, in addition to any other reductions to the easement payment per enrollment option as applicable.

Landowners can choose between the ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) or ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) enrollments options. ALE protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive croplands and grasslands to non-agricultural uses. The WRE component restores wetlands to provide habitat for wildlife, including threatened and endangered species; improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reduce flooding; recharge groundwater; and protect biological diversity.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private and tribal landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of conservation easements. Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. Tribal landowners also have the option of enrolling in 30-year contracts.

NRCS staff and partners will work with applicants to help them through the application process for WRE. Land trusts and other eligible entities in Kansas will work with landowners to help them through the application process for ALE and provide one-on-one assistance to create the conservation easement that works best for their farming or ranching operation.

All WRE applications will be ranked according to the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish, and other wildlife. Eligible applicants will be compensated with a payment rate based on an individual land appraisal, established Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC), or landowner offer, whichever is less. When available, the GARC rates are posted on the Kansas NRCS Web site. ALE payments are determined by an appraisal process completed on the property. Kansas acting state conservationist Sheldon L. Hightower said, "Conservation easements provide many public benefits to Kansas, including protection of open spaces, wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration and protection. We encourage private landowners, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations to contact their local NRCS office to apply."

It is important that applicants provide accurate records of ownership and ensure they have established a record of ownership with USDA's Farm Service Agency. Application information is available at your local USDA Service Center and at www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted.

For more information, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs or your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center. To find a service center near you, check on the Internet at offices.usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Lippert *Bur Oak*

Mark Janzen, Natural Resource Specialist

Lippert bur oak, *Quercus macrocarpa* (Michx.), is a seed-propagated cultivar recommended for conservation use in multi-row windbreaks, reforestation for watershed protection, and wildlife habitat plantings. Lippert's deeply furrowed bark and bright green foliage make it an attractive tree for farmstead and field windbreak plantings.

The initial accession was collected in Stillwater, Oklahoma, in 1970, by Robert D. Lippert from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service. Lippert was selected for superior growth rate, plant vigor, excellent form, seedling vigor, and known seed source. Lippert was released in 1994 by the NRCS Manhattan Plant Materials Center (PMC) in cooperation with Kansas State University and the Kansas Forest Service.

Lippert is a broad-leaf, deciduous, medium-to-tall tree reaching a potential mature height of 100 feet. It is characterized by a broad, round, open crown, corky twigs, and thick, ridged, deeply furrowed bark. Leaves are bright green above, pale

beneath with a close, fine, stellate pubescence, five to nine rounded lobes, deeply incised in the middle, almost in two, with the basal portion being smaller than the outer leaf. The fruit is an acorn up to 2 inches long, half enclosed in a distinctive fringed cup.

The full area of adaptation of Lippert remains unknown. Initial adaptation was thought to be the Panhandle of Texas to central Oklahoma to Manhattan, Kansas. However, field study plantings of Lippert since the initial release supports the use of Lippert westward to the Kansas/Colorado state line. Plantings in a 16-inch rainfall climate have performed very well demonstrating excellent plant growth and vigor along with nut production for wildlife bene-



Poster, Essay, and Limerick *Contest*

The Dickinson County Conservation District invites Dickinson County students to participate in the annual youth poster contest – **“Watersheds Our Water Our Home.”**

The poster contest is open to public, private, or home school students in Dickinson County. Students will compete in poster categories by grade: K-1; 2-3; 4-6; 7-9; 10-12. One winner from each of the grade categories will be selected and honored at the Dickinson County Conservation District Annual Meeting on February 8, 2018.

The winning poster in each grade category will be entered into the statewide poster contest. Winning entries in the state contest in each category will be entered into the national contest and will be eligible for cash prizes.

Ask your child's teacher if the class is participating in the contest, download complete rules and the entry form on our website: www.dkcoconservation.com, or stop in at the Dickinson County Conservation District office, 328 NE 14th Street in Abilene for more information. All students are eligible to participate in the contest, even if their school is not participating. For more information, contact Cindy Dooley, 263-2787 extension 332.



All About *Watersheds*



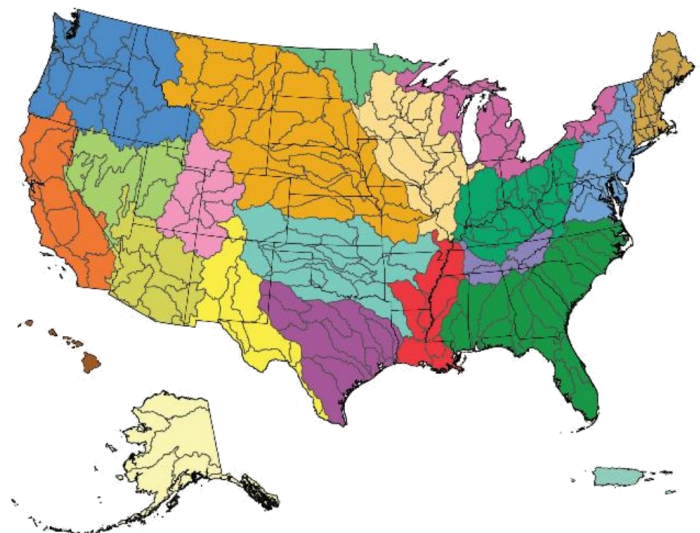
Some of the water you drink comes from your watershed! Water from the watershed drains into lakes, rivers, and streams or through the soil into groundwater. The world's fresh water supply is not new. Our water is being constantly recycled through the earth's water cycle. A drink of water, whether from a fountain, faucet, or bottle, could be thousands of years old and may have travelled around the world a few times.



A watershed is land that sheds water. Water from rain or snow can flow over the land it falls on. The water can flow to a river, lake, stream or ocean. All of the water under or draining off of a particular watershed goes into the same place. Watersheds come in all shapes and sizes. They cross county, state and national boundaries. Some are millions of square miles, others are just a few acres.

Watersheds are everywhere!

Remember, every piece of land on the planet is part of a watershed. In the continental US, there are 2,100 watersheds. If Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico are included, the count rises to 2,267 watersheds.



Conservation Puzzles

Conservation Cryptogram

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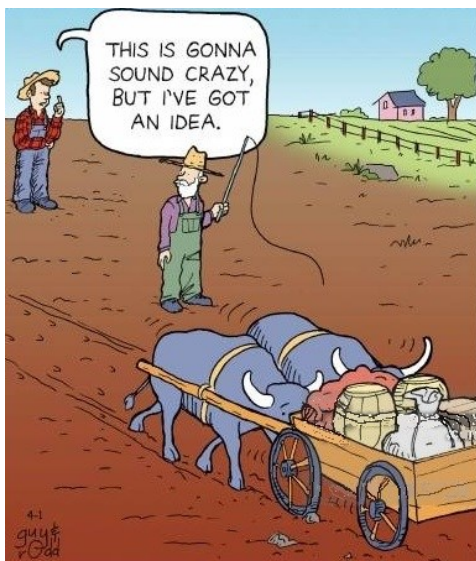
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Unscramble the tiles to reveal a message.



Conservation *Puzzles*



DOUBLE PUZZLE

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HINT: A CONSERVATION HERO

Options for *Expiring CRP*

Jason Wagner, Area Biologist, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) recently celebrated its 30th year of reducing erosion, improving water quality, increasing wildlife habitat, and conserving millions of acres throughout the United States. Currently there are 2.1 million acres of land enrolled in CRP in Kansas. However, about 124,000 acres expired at the end of September 2016. Another 127,000 acres will expire at the end of September 2017. A general sign-up for CRP was offered in 2016, and there were a record number of acres offered, 212,393 acres in Kansas alone. However, just 44,156 of those acres were accepted in Kansas. The 2014 Farm Bill set the CRP national cap at 24 million acres, and at this point, the nation is very close to the cap.

So what options do landowners have with expired CRP? Probably the best option for expired CRP is to try and get the land re-enrolled in CRP. As CRP expires over the next few years, acres will become available to enroll in the program. Depending on available acres, a general signup will occur again sometime in the future. However there is no guarantee as to when the next general signup will happen. Expired CRP should be left in conservation cover to make it easier to re-enroll the property, but during the lapse in contracts the land can be hayed or grazed. CRP Grasslands is a new working lands option in CRP where grasslands, including expired CRP, are eligible for an annual rental rate payment and haying and grazing are allowed. There are also several continuous signup CRP options that allow at least a portion of the field to be re-enrolled in CRP. Areas such as pivot corners, buffers around fields, filter strips, wetlands, playas, odd areas, pollinator habitat, and unproductive ground can be enrolled through continuous CRP.

In parts of western Kansas, whole fields can be enrolled in CRP through the lesser prairie chicken State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). In wetland areas, such as playas, a Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) can be put in place on the land. WREs can be either permanent or for 30 years, and landowners can

choose a reserved rights grazing option. Most playas in CRP or expired CRP would be eligible for a wetland easement.

Another option is to leave the field in grass for livestock production. Expired CRP is excellent for haying and grazing. NRCS offers financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for fences, pipelines, and watering facilities to leave the expired CRP in grass and turn it into working lands for livestock production. Another option is to simply manage it for wildlife habitat. This would allow for maximum flexibility for improving the land for wildlife. Although this option may not provide as much income as CRP rental rates, livestock, or cash crops, income could still be generated from hunting and other outdoor recreational opportunities. Financial assistance is available for developing expired CRP for wildlife through EQIP and the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Habitat First Program.

Many producers consider breaking out and farming their expired CRP. However, breaking out expired CRP may not be the best option financially with low grain prices and most of the land generally being less productive. If converting to cropland, producers should consider just farming the most productive areas and leaving sensitive and low productivity areas in conservation cover. Before deciding to break out any CRP, check with NRCS or the Farm Service Agency to determine if the land is considered highly erodible and what conservation measures need to take place prior to breaking the land out.

For more information, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site

www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs or your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center. To find a service center near you, check on the Internet at offices.usda.gov.

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Conservation District *Services*

Equipment Rental and Sales

The Dickinson County Conservation District provides conservation equipment rental service to area land-owners. Contact Cindy Dooley at 785-263-2787 extension 332 to schedule your rental.

Great Plains No Till Drill

Delivered: \$50 Delivery Fee + \$15/Acre
First 1/2 Acre Free
Customer Pickup: \$15/Acre
\$80 Minimum

Truax Grass Seed Drill

Delivered: \$40 Delivery Fee + \$11/Acre
First 1 Acre Free
Customer Pickup: \$11/Acre
\$40 Minimum

Drip Torch

\$100 Deposit
\$5/Day 1st 3 Days
\$25/Day After 3 Days

CoCoRaHS Rain Gauge—\$32

30" Wire Stem Marking Flags—Fluorescent Pink
100 for \$10.00 or 1000 for \$100.00 (\$10 minimum)

NOTARY PUBLIC SERVICE AVAILABLE

Funding to produce this newsletter is provided in part by the Division of Conservation through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan.

The Dickinson County Conservation District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

Dickinson County Conservation District
328 NE 14th Street
Abilene, KS 67410