



2001 South Dakota Report

Natural Resources Conservation Activities



Land, Water, and People

“Our employees are happy to have earned the trust of America’s agricultural landowners, and we will do everything we can to continue providing current, useful information with courtesy and professionalism.”
—NRCS Chief Pearlle S. Reed



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A Message from
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Conservation efforts between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and our partners throughout South Dakota during Fiscal Year 2001 were extremely successful. Conservation practices on privately-owned land and tribal lands achieved record results under NRCS programs.

Numbers tell the story when it comes to planning and implementing conservation practices in South Dakota. NRCS professionals, in concert with our partners, fielded nearly 5,500 applications requesting technical assistance, resulting in 4,226 contracts. Windbreak tree planting under the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) incentives allowed more than 8,000 acres to be planted with trees, surpassing the old mark by almost a 1,000 acres.

With the level of commitment displayed by our professional conservationists, land users, Earth Team volunteers, and our partners, I am convinced of our ability to maintain and continue to put conservation on the land.

NRCS Mission

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

NRCS Vision

A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment

Getting Conservation on the Land

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees work in close partnership with 69 Conservation Districts across South Dakota, assisting farmers and ranchers in applying conservation practices to the land. Approximately 200 NRCS members in 80 offices ensure all landowners have accessibility to services and programs offered by the agency. In addition to agency members and district employees, NRCS Earth Team volunteers assist in a wide-variety of conservation efforts statewide.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

NRCS employees deliver technical assistance by providing landowners with one-on-one conservation planning assistance to assure the sustainability of South Dakota's natural resources. With NRCS's help, farmers and ranchers are equipped with conservation practices that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance forestland, wetlands, grazing lands and wildlife habitat. Additional assistance helps individuals and communities restore natural resources after floods, fires, or other natural disasters.

In FY 2001, individuals and communities received one-on-one technical assistance from a multi-disciplinary staff, which includes soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, biologists, rangeland management specialists and agronomists. The staff worked together to ensure that the landuser received the latest science-based technology and up-to-date natural resource information available for conservation on private lands. In 2001, NRCS of South Dakota provided assistance in the form of 4,226 program contracts to agricultural producers who applied conservation practices on more than 650,000 acres.

NRCS conservationists present program options to landowners during the planning process. The outcome of

technical assistance is often measured by conservation practices applied to the land. However, the actual number of landowners receiving conservation planning is significantly higher than those receiving allocated cost-share funds. For example:

- Eastern South Dakota lies in the Prairie Pothole Region; within a single tract of land there can be more than 100 wetlands which NRCS provides technical assistance to help producers remain in compliance with the Wetland Conservation provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended.
- Agronomically, crop rotations emphasizing residue are a key component in conservation planning. Two out of three cropland acres in South Dakota are under a form of residue management, which contributes to healthier soil.
- NRCS is focusing nutrient management outreach efforts by strengthening state and private partnerships including statewide projects such as a phosphorus conference, joint exhibits for producers and the public, and increasing the transfer of technology.
- In FY 2001, the Nutrient Management Technical Assistance Team, developed 60 preliminary and follow-up comprehensive nutrient management plans, 12 engineering designs and 13 constructed and certified systems.

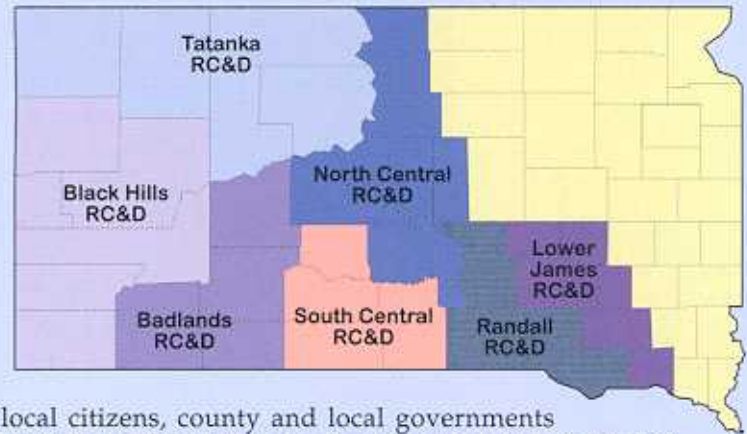
Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

In 2001, seven South Dakota RC&D's leveraged more than \$8 million worth of funding for natural resource enhancement and community development projects. The RC&D program in South Dakota works with a wide array of groups, agencies, and people on projects ranging from value-added agriculture to management intensive grazing programs.

Overall, the 2001 focus was grassland and wetland protection, enhancement and restoration; weed and seed programs that "weed" out crime and "seed" programs to improve communities. Other programs of significance included Missouri River sedimentation and bank erosion education campaigns; and landowners workshops that informed people about many issues facing ranchers, land developers, cattlemen, and grassland managers.

Each RC&D works with a Council comprised of local citizens, county and local governments representatives and other interested organizations. RC&D's successful actions are due in large part to nurturing partnerships with different agencies, groups, and individuals, such as the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, South Dakota Departments of Game, Fish and Parks, Tourism, and Environment and Natural Resources, and communities throughout the state.

South Dakota's RC&D Areas



Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

In 2001, NRCS of South Dakota received 34 applications for permanent easements and 26 applications for 30-year easements. Of these, 52 applications offering 4,685 acres were approved, obligating \$3,604,072. The easement value in South Dakota is based on soil productivity ratings to achieve the fair market agricultural value according to property taxation procedures.

Since 1997, more than 23,000 acres in South Dakota have been enrolled in WRP through 164 permanent and 30-year contracts.

South Dakota makes WRP funding decisions at least twice a year. The interest in easements remains high, averaging almost 80 applications per year.



The majority of WRP and EWP floodplain easements are from a 25-county area in eastern South Dakota known as the "Prairie Pothole Region." As a result of these programs, waterfowl and nesting habitat cover has been greatly enhanced. Additional benefits to landowners and society include reduced flooding and improved water quality.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP made a successful return to South Dakota in 2001 after receiving zero funding in 2000. NRCS received 143 applications in 2001, resulting in 49 funded contracts worth \$250,658, while enrolling 36,215 acres.

Wildlife is one of South Dakota's natural resource treasures. To date, 313 WHIP contracts have been funded in South Dakota, encompassing 121,177 acres.

WHIP is a voluntary program that helps landowners in South Dakota develop and improve wildlife habitat on private lands. Interested landowners seek help from NRCS and other federal, state and private organizations to develop conservation plans that improve wildlife habitat. The program was authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill and helps landowners develop habitat for upland wildlife, wetland wildlife, threatened and endangered species, fish, and other wildlife in South Dakota.

Floodplain Easements - Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

South Dakota offers floodplain easements to landowners as a way to provide a more permanent solution to repetitive disaster areas, while achieving environmental benefits. In 2001, NRCS received 139 applications, which resulted in 76 active contracts, involving 5,110 acres and \$3 million.

Producers in South Dakota have received more than \$20 million for perfected easements. Under EWP-FPE programs in South Dakota, almost 80,000 acres have been enrolled since 1993.

Because of the extent of the flooding in northeastern South Dakota, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) has been popular with landowners. Many areas have been underwater since 1993. Basically, there has not been crop production on this area and EWP is a way to protect the resource and generate some income for the landowner.

Getting Help with Conservation is a Satisfying Experience

A national survey of customer satisfaction shows that farmers and ranchers are pleased with the service they get in their communities when it comes to learning how to conserve the natural resources on their lands. Landowners who had recently received conservation technical assistance gave this service a satisfaction index of 81 out of a possible 100. Participants in the survey rated their satisfaction with conservation technical assistance 10 points higher than the index for Federal government services. They also feel they can rely on technical assistance they get, giving conservation technical assistance a trust index of 90 out of a possible 100.

Wetlands Grant Money Announced for South Dakota RC&D

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission will fund \$1.7 million in Wetlands Conservation Act grants for the North Central RC&D Council of South Dakota in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The grant money is allocated for wetland and grassland development and restoration. The \$1.7 million federal grant money will be matched by state and private conservation funds, and landowner cost shares, bringing the total to more than \$3.7 million for conservation efforts in South Dakota.

2001 Tree Plantings in South Dakota Break State Record

Windbreak tree planting under continuous Conservation Reserve Program incentives allowed a



record, 8,479 acres of trees and shrubs to be planted in South Dakota this fiscal year. The previous mark of planting 7,634 acres of trees and shrubs in one year was established in 1967. Since 1944, NRCS in South Dakota has assisted in planting a total of 189,514,097 trees and shrubs on 336,780 acres.

Soil and Water Conservation Assistance (SWCA)

The one-time program in 2001 offered landowners in western South Dakota cost-share assistance to apply conservation efforts which positively impact soil and water quality, wildlife habitat and rangeland health.

NRCS in South Dakota received 89 applications, of which, 20 contracts worth \$450,750 impacted 40,376 acres.

NRCS Assists in Supplying Water to Rural Community

Thanks to NRCS and the Fall River Conservation District, the Fall River Water Users District (FRWUD) in Fall River County recently completed the initial phase of a rural water system and is selling water. This was good news for the city of Oelrichs, which due to high nitrate levels in the water supply found itself unable to meet state drinking water standards. The city was instructed to provide bottled water to pregnant women and infants under the age of one. Through its locally-led conservation efforts, technical assistance, and high-priority EQIP contracts addressing water quality and quantity problems and grazing distribution concerns, NRCS was instrumental in the formation of the FRWUD. Three years after reaching the maximum contaminate levels of nitrates; Oelrichs is now receiving clean, drinkable water that easily complies with South Dakota standards for drinking water.

2001 Land Judging Program Digs Deep in South Dakota

As a result of the Active Land Judging program in South Dakota, more than 1,000 high school students were trained this year in soil properties, slope percents, conservation practices and fertility treatments. NRCS soil scientists taught the students how to identify important soil properties, such as texture, depth, erosion, stoniness, runoff, permeability and water table. This training equips students with the knowledge and understanding to judge "land capability units" of soil. Local conservation districts assisted with the competitions, providing trophies to the top individuals and teams.



Buffalo Benefit from PL-566

A NRCS Tribal Liaison serves the Lake Traverse Reservation of Sisseton. Working under the PL-566 program, NRCS assisted producers who raise buffalo to install spring development systems. Gary and Jim Nielan of Sisseton received planning assistance from NRCS and cost-sharing through the PL-566 program to install cross fencing and a spring development consisting of the clean, reliable water for the Nielan's buffalo herd. The herd is now able to drink more water throughout the grazing season without fighting their way in and out of the mud that surrounded the original watering hole.

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