



Kansas Highlights

August 2002

ONE-OF-A-KIND NINNESCAH RIVER PROJECT

A project, the first of its kind in the world, is being done in the Ninnescah River west of Kingman. The location is on the Dan Pace farm two miles south of Highway 54 on the Blueberry Hill Road. Here the river has been subjected to excessive bank erosion, that is damaging pastureland and could later damage a bridge which crosses the river.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State Conservation Commission (SCC) are working together to plan and install a series of bendway weirs designed to redirect the current away from the south bank of the river. They are using a continuous berm machine (CBM) to load sand into long sausage-like fabric rolls. The rolls, which may be cut to any desired length and closed with staples, are lifted and placed in the river.

An excavator is used to place and stack the rolls in pyramid fashion across the current next to the bank. Willow cuttings are then driven into the bank to aid in deflecting the current during high water.

When the project is finished later in the summer, there will be 10 to 12 bendway weirs in place.



A close-up of the sand-filled fabric rolls.



An excavator is used to lift sand-filled fabric rolls into the Ninnescah River.

Since this is a pilot project, it will be observed closely to determine if it can be successfully used on rivers throughout Kansas. The cost is being shared by the landowner, Corps of Engineers, and SCC. According to Phil Balch, Riparian and Wetland Coordinator, SCC, the total cost for this project was \$14,355 or roughly, \$5.74 per foot.

Approximately 30 people were involved in the first three days of work, that included trainees from the Corps of Engineers, State Conservation Commission, Kingman County Road and Bridge, several conservation districts, local construction companies, and NRCS employees. *Source: Kingman Leader Courier newspaper*

Submitted by Pam Stasa, Conservation District Manager, Kingman County Conservation District. More questions on this project may be referred to Phil Balch, SCC, at 785-296-3000.

A NEW CROP

Several Haskell County farmers have been looking for a drought tolerant crop. The answer for many is cotton. For three years, Stevens and Grant counties in southwest Kansas have been growing this crop. A surprising benefit of raising cotton is that it requires very little water. Other advantages, besides water conservation, include competitive crop insurance and government loan rates, and no extra equipment to buy. Cotton can be planted with a regular planter using a different seed plate than for corn. Another benefit for southwest Kansas is its northern location. This means no cotton weevil, which can add \$200 per acre for spraying.

Cotton is harvested with a picker and then put into a very large compactor to compress the cotton into modules. These modules are then shipped to a gin where they are ginned into a 500-pound bale of cotton. The original module can weigh as much as 25,000 to 30,000 pounds! It would benefit local farmers greatly if a cotton gin was available in their area. Then local dairies could use everything that was ginned off the cotton as protein. After the cotton has been ginned, it is graded and sold by the pound. The marketing of cotton can be complex and growers are encouraged to join a pool for help in marketing and selling of their crop. *Abbreviated article from the Haskell County Monitor-Chief newspaper. Submitted by Gary Headrick, District Conservationist, Sublette Field Office*

STUDENT TRAINEES TOUR SMOKY VALLEY RANCH

In July, five student trainees in the western half of Kansas were given the opportunity to tour the Smoky Valley Ranch in Logan County. This 16,800-acre predominately shortgrass prairie is the largest private land conservation acquisition ever for The Nature Conservancy in Kansas. Characterized by dramatic bluffs overlooking the Smoky Hill River, the ranch consists of large grassland areas, chalk bluffs, and rock ravines. The Smoky Valley Ranch preserve will function as a working model for shortgrass prairie conservation as The Nature Conservancy works in partnership with private landowners and other conservation groups.

Roger Tacha, District Conservationist, Oakley Field Office, spent the day with the trainees explaining the cultural history of the property and providing valuable range inventory training. Despite the fact that the ranch was extraordinarily dry, the tour proved to be a beneficial learning experience in the areas of transects, range sites, and geology for all trainees. The tour was the idea of student trainee, Brandon Wilson. *Article submitted by Jan Klaus, Office Assistant, Hays Area Office.*



Roger Tacha, District Conservationist, Oakley, explains the range inventory process to the student trainees.

GRAZING LAND FOR ELK

Elk are becoming an alternative to cattle for two Gray County landowners. Mike and Ryan Brady have converted 40 acres of previously enrolled Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to grazing land for elk with plans to convert more. "The old CRP grass is perfect for grazing," Mike Brady stated. "Many times I'll come out here and can't see the elk, because they are laying in the tall grass and are hidden." The local elk ranchers applied for state cost-share for a livestock pipeline to take water to the center of the quarter.

Currently, the Brady's are raising the elk for the velvet antler production. But they hope to one day move into the meat market. "Elk are efficient converters of food. Three elk will have the same feed intakes as one cow," said Ryan. "Usually, you need one acre of grass per elk. You also have to feed supplemental rations, like minerals, to produce better velvet."

"Velvet antler is the elk's antler just before it begins to calcify." When the antlers are in this stage, the Brady's cut the antlers and freeze them. "When we cut the velvet antler, it is basically blood vessels," said Ryan. After the velvet harvest, the antlers are transported to a market in Wichita. Elk bulls produce velvet every year and the average two-year-old bull will produce nine pounds of velvet a year. As the bulls mature, the amount of velvet produced, increases to approximately 15 pounds. Market price for velvet can range from \$25 to over \$100 per pound. The velvet is used as a holistic medicine. It helps relieve symptoms of arthritis, back, and other joint pains, increases muscle development, strength, and the blood's capacity to carry oxygen. *Submitted by Delores Eberle, Soil Conservation Technician, Cimarron Field Office*

PRAIRIE IN THE CITY

The Shawnee County Conservation District in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the City of Topeka has established an Urban Native Grass/Wildflower Demonstration Plot located near the wastewater treatment plant. The idea is to have a convenient place for park officials and the public to view native plants.

The demonstration area features plantings of 17 different species of native grasses and plants. Some plots are pure stands of one variety while others are mixtures. The difference is how some of the mixes are put together. At times in urban settings or maybe around a pond where frequent access is desired, some do not want "poke-you-in-the-eye" tall native grasses. So sideoat grama, little bluestem, and western wheatgrass were used in a blend to show an example of a medium height mixture of native grasses. The blackeyed susan and clasping coneflower are exceptionally showy. *Submitted by Dennis Brinkman, District Conservationist, Topeka Field Office*



Urban Native Grass/Wildflower Demonstration Plot located near the south entrance of the North Topeka WasteWater Treatment Plant

TEACHER EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM

During the first two weeks of June, Sherri Holland, a teacher from Unified School District 368 in Paola, worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Miami County Conservation District personnel at the USDA Service Center in Paola. It was part of the Miami County School-to-Careers Teacher Externship Program. This program creates opportunities in the community each summer for educators from kindergarten through high school to learn more about the connection between school and careers. It helps educators update their knowledge of the workplace and helps them devise strategies and projects that better prepare students for exploring careers and developing workplace skills.

NRCS participation in the program was voluntary but essential to the ongoing growth and development of school-to-career connections for educators in the community. It gave field office personnel a chance to work directly with a teacher from the area in order to share with them the unique information and services we have to offer as well as careers that are available for future conservationists. *Submitted by Gary Bruner, District Conservationist, Paola Field Office*

COMANCHE POOL TOUR

In July, the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation hosted a meeting and tour for several partnering organizations to discuss the Foundation's activities and future plans. Kent Jarnagin and Ted Alexander, Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation Trustees, gave a presentation on the Pool's many projects. Some of the activities included: educational events, research with Fort Hays State University, a remote sensing project, the lesser prairie chicken project, the rangeland management specialist position funded through a partnership effort, the Prairie States Coalition of which the Foundation is a sponsor, and the peer-to-peer mentoring program.

The group then toured the Alexander Ranch in Barber County where proper grass management during drought conditions was discussed. Other topics included, methods-to-control cedar trees (prescribed burning and mechanical clipping), soil health, water quality and quantity, threatened and endangered species, and the concept of grass "banks".

Participants at the meeting included personnel from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks and aides from Senator Pat Robert's office and Senator Sam Brownback's office. Many new ideas and concepts were shared about range management. "It was a great opportunity for people to network with others," said Harold L. Klaege, Kansas NRCS State Conservationist. *Submitted by Loren Graff, District Conservationist, Coldwater Field Office*

EARTH TEAM STUDENT EARNS SCHOLARSHIP

A 2002 Oskaloosa High School graduate is completing a paid University of Kansas (KU) internship at the Jefferson County Conservation District Office. Tara Ala worked on the volunteer "Earth Team" in 2001 to accumulate needed volunteer hours for a President's Service Challenge Scholarship. She helped survey land for the district and helped with other district projects on the team. This year, she got a chance to do some more work for the district through the University of Kansas' Kansas Community Leadership Corps Program.

Her main project in the internship was work on the Soil, Water, Air, Plants, and Animal (SWAPA) Walk. She ordered and placed signs for the event, as well as helped plant and water trees at the trail site. She was also responsible for publicizing the event. Ala who is undecided on a major will enter KU this fall.

Source: Valley Falls Vindicator and Oskaloosa Independent newspaper

SLOUGH CREEK EDUCATIONAL CENTER AND TRAIL

The idea of enjoying a hike in the woods would not even be thinkable for someone physically challenged. But now folks can at the Slough Creek Educational Trail located on the eastern edge of Perry Lake because it is completely handicapped accessible. The trail is a two-mile stretch of five-foot wide asphalt that wanders in and out of Black Willow groves, a seasonal wetland, pit ponds, and a riparian forest planting. The trail has rest stops every few hundred feet and 25 educational and interpretive signs along the way.

Planning for the trail began two years ago when the Jefferson County Conservation District received a grant from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Most of the construction of the trail was completed during the past year. "Access to natural resources and the chance to participate in outdoor recreational opportunities, such as fishing, hiking, and observing wildlife, are something many of us take for granted," said Dottie Harris, district manager for the conservation district. Future funds will help create fishing piers on the lake and on the new pond, two wildlife viewing stations to accommodate students and educators, and lookout decks, all handicap accessible according to Harris.



Slough Creek Point Educational Trail is a five-foot asphalt covered, completely handicap trail. Rest stops are located every few hundred feet. Photo Courtesy: The Capital Journal

To increase awareness of the area, the conservation district sponsored a SWAPA (Soil, Water, Air, Plants, and Animals) Youth Walk in July. Several parents and children hiked the trail and viewed the educational displays set up along the way. *For more information, contact the Jefferson County Conservation District, Oskaloosa at 785-863-2201.*

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Jamie Clover Adams, Kansas Secretary of Agriculture, came way out west from Topeka to meet southwest Kansas Women in Agriculture. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, Clark County Conservation District, and the Clark County Farm Bureau sponsored the luncheon where Adams spoke.

Adams touched on several elements of agricultural change and how women can help shape and influence these changes. She discussed the increased meat demand, both in beef and pork, due to the population growth and meat demand shifts. We, as a global culture, are demanding more and better food, along with Asian populations consuming meat in their diets for the first time. Americans have the most disposable income, coupled with the cheapest food as well. These new demands on food production are driving the food system into a global structure both in marketing and food enhancement.

Adams also discussed the effect of technology on agriculture and the pressure to keep up with technological advancements for agriculture producers. The face of agriculture is changing rapidly due to innovations in technology not only in production, but also in information flow and record keeping. She noted that 43 percent of corn and 83 percent of beans planted recently are biotech varieties. Adams also discussed how much of our supplies are being offered and purchased on-line, and the pressure for producers to keep up with the enormous amounts of information available for decision making.

As women, Adams challenged; we need to always be looking for new ideas and to continually learn. We should be constantly looking forward and not backward to help industries survive and burgeon in this new frontier. We are not facing anything different than our pioneer predecessors have at times – drought, depressed prices, divisive politics, etc. “And what helped them survive?” Adam asked. “Perseverance through hardship.” This is the simple answer and what we must model for the next generation of agriculture. *Submitted by Renee Jones, Soil Conservationist, Ashland Field Office*

NEWSLETTER NOTE

With the demands of the 2002 Farm Bill, Kansas Highlights will be issued three times a year. December will be the next issue.

UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS

September 6-15 – Kansas State Fair – Hutchinson

November 25-27 – Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) Annual Meeting – Wichita

♦ Kansas Highlights is issued three times per year. For more information on how to submit a story, and comments about Kansas Highlights, contact Sheila Forrester, NRCS Visual Information Specialist, at 785-823-4572, or at sheila.forrester@ks.nrcs.usda.gov.

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