Kansas Highlights

April 2003

SPILLMAN CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT GOING "ON-LINE"

The Spillman Creek Watershed District (Site 14), located in Lincoln County, is starting construction on their 20th structure this April. Spillman Creek completed their first dam in September 1972. Since this time, 17 additional floodwater retarding dams and 2 grade stabilization structures have been completed through the PL-566 Small Watershed Program that NRCS administers.

In an effort to help educate the citizens of Lincoln County, and others around the world, about how the Spillman Site 14 projects are completed, pictures will be taken and posted weekly, if not daily, to the Lincoln County Conservation District's website throughout construction of Spillman Site 14.

A general overview picture will be taken from the same location so progress can be monitored from a distance. Also, some close-up pictures of specific activities such as concrete pours, pipe setting, core checkout, will be taken. In addition to pictures, there will be informational articles regarding the PL-566 Small Watershed Program and three watershed districts that are also located in Lincoln County.

The Lincoln County Conservation District web address is www.geocities.com/lincoln_co_cd. If you are interested in following the progress of the project, or wish to learn more about watershed districts in general, you are encouraged to visit this web site. *If you have any questions about what you see as you follow the progress of the project, or would like to make arrangements to make an on-site visit, please feel free to call the Lincoln NRCS Field Office or the Lincoln County Conservation District at 785-524-3231 or email patricia-winters@ks.nacdnet.org.*

CRP WILDLIFE HABITAT UPGRADES

The Anthony NRCS Field Office has been working in cooperation with Brad Odle, District Biologist, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP); Pheasants Forever; and Quail Unlimited to promote a Wildlife Enhancement Program (WEP) involving Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres. Pheasant and quail populations in Harper County remain lower than the long-term trends. Many factors contribute to this, but quality habitat is the driving force for improving bird numbers.

CRP land offers the best opportunity to improve habitat for upland game birds. Established CRP fields become less attractive to birds for nesting and brood-rearing purposes as native grasses begin to establish. Using management practices such as strip disking, legume interseeding, and wildlife food plots can return CRP productivity for upland game birds.

Producers willing to participate in WEP are given a sign-up bonus. Walk-In Hunting Areas (WIHA) participants qualify for $200 plus $2 for each acre enhanced. Non-WIHA landowners will receive $100 plus $1 for each acre enhanced. For strip disking, the producer is paid $15 per acre. Strip disking with a legume upgrade is $25 an acre. Food plots are $25 an acre. No-till inter-seeding with legumes is $10. All legume seed is provided by KDWP. If the producer is unable to do the habitat work, a contractor will be provided, and enhancement payments will be made to the contractor, the landowner keeps the sign-up bonus payment.

To date, Harper County has modified 25 CRP contracts, representing the enhancement of 2,500 acres of CRP land. Hopefully, this program sponsored by these agencies and organizations will improve the upland game bird populations in Harper County. *Submitted by Greg Bauer, District Conservationist, Anthony Field Office.*

WASTE OIL BEING RE-USED

Sunflower RC&D's oil trailer used to collect oil

For years, the disposal of waste oil has been a problem for farmers everywhere. In 2001, the Sunflower RC&D received a grant to construct a trailer designed to collect used oil and transport it to collecting locations.

The conservation office in Kingman wrote articles that were published in five area newspapers wanting farmers to call the office if they had any waste oil. As a result, 24 farmers contacted the office. Gene Albers and Tom Kostner, Kingman County Conservation District board members, volunteered to operate the trailer to pick up used oil on these farms. They collected over 4,100 gallons of oil and delivered it to six businesses that reused it for heating.

What better example could you think of where a potential pollutant was put to good use and saved in at least two ways? *For more information, contact the Sunflower RC&D, Harper at 620-896-7378.*

PARTNERSHIP FOR WILDLIFE FORMED

The Kansas Pioneer Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Thomas County Conservation District, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), and the NRCS office in Colby are working together to promote the improvement of wildlife habitat in Thomas County.

The local chapter of Pheasants Forever and KDWP has given funds to the Thomas County Conservation District to establish a cost-share program to promote wildlife habitat. Several practices have been selected that are eligible for cost share. These practices include tree and shrub establishment, legume, forb, and native grass seeding, food plots, strip disking, wetland development or enhancement, and controlled burning of CRP. The program began in 2000 and so far, 20 producers have completed projects with the funds.

Pheasants and other wildlife species need both food and cover during the wintertime.

Mark Schmidt, District Conservationist, and Dick Weston, Thomas County Conservation District Buffer Coordinator, promoted the benefits of installing buffers on the land at a booth at the Kansas Pioneer Chapter of Pheasants Forever annual banquet. The conservation district donated red cedar trees for the auction.


Wildlife guzzler installed in established CRP

Because of the drought, Pheasants Forever decided to install wildlife guzzlers for interested producers. They are donating the labor and materials to install the guzzlers. NRCS and the conservation district assisted by contacting producers and developing a list of individuals who would like to have a wildlife guzzler. After meeting with producers to review potential sites, conservation plans are being written to install guzzlers on 26 sites that will be installed this spring. *Article submitted by Mark Schmidt, District Conservationist, Colby Field Office.*

LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKENS STUDIED IN GOVE COUNTY

Graduate Student, Tammy Fields, working under the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, and in partnership with Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, spent the spring and summer of 2002 in Gove County studying lesser prairie chicken habitat use. Lesser prairie chicken populations have drastically declined throughout their presettlement range since the 1800's. Deterioration of suitable habitats has been suggested as the primary cause of this decline.

This project was stimulated by the recent expansion of populations northward and westward in Kansas. The expansion is thought to be a response to the increase in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands. Therefore, this study was designed to determine the importance of CRP to lesser prairie chicken populations. In addition, the research aimed at determining what, if any, types of CRP may be beneficial to their reproductive success.

Female lesser and greater prairie chickens were radio-collared and their habitat observed on a daily basis during the breeding season of 2002. Results from the first of two field seasons suggested that hens select CRP with forbs more than CRP seeded with just grass, rangeland, or cropland. Nesting hens and hens with broods selected CRP interseeded with forbs and CRP seeded with just grass. Results suggested that nesting success was greater in native grass CRP, which was most likely due to the cover it provided. Brood-rearing success was greater in interseeded CRP and rested rangeland, which was most likely due to an increase in insect populations, in response to an increase in forbs and the adequate cover and mobility it provided. Findings suggest that CRP may be beneficial to lesser prairie chickens during the breeding season. Several additional research assistants were in Gove County again this March to gather more information to support these conclusions. *Article submitted by Leah Ricke, District Conservationist, Gove Field Office.*

KANSAS FORESTRY SERVICE HONORS NRCSer

Gary Long, Soil Conservation Technician, Stockton was recently honored with the 2002 Kansas Forestry Service Tree Award. Jim Strine, Forester, from the Kansas Forest Service, presented the award to Gary at the Rooks County Conservation District Annual meeting held in February. The Kansas Forest Service takes applications every spring for the award, and it is given to one person in the state that shows outstanding dedication to planting trees as a conservation practice.

Gary helps producers plan windbreaks for livestock and shrub plots for wildlife through the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP). In 2002, Rooks County planted 26,820 trees!! *Article submitted by Jennifer Braun, District Manager, Rooks County Conservation District.*

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE RANGE YOUTH CAMPS

Kansas Range Youth Camp scholarship applications are now being accepted at the conservation office from students who are juniors or seniors in high school and who have a serious interest in rangeland management.

The annual camp is held at Rock Springs Ranch, near Junction City. Vigorous field work, along with classroom activities give students a basic understanding of rangeland management including plant identification, range sites, and range condition.

Also available is the new Black Mesa Ecological Academy to be held in late July – early August at Black Mesa State Park in Oklahoma. This camp is a cooperative effort among Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Students will explore the rangelands in the five-state area around Black Mesa State Park and includes range and wildlife management, resource conservation, biology, plant

identification, conflict resolution, and leadership development. All of these subjects will be integrated using new technology such as global positioning systems and geographic information systems. *For more information, contact Dwayne Rice, Rangeland Management Specialist, Salina State Office, at 785-823-4582.*

NEW TECHNOLOGY IN USE

Using ArcView may look a little intimidating to some, but Miami County's Buffer Coordinator, Becky Hendrickson, has proven that it can be a valuable tool to inform landowners of acres they have eligible for the Continuous Conservation Reserve program (CCRP).

With the help of her District Manager Linda Prothe, Becky developed a project file with a buffer theme layer. In addition to the buffer layer, she has the basic photo (Ortho) layer, soils, common land unit, hydrography, and public land survey themes in her project. Using the common land unit layer, she can identify the farm number and the field boundaries. The hydrography layer shows the streams; and by using the buffer tool, she can give a quick estimate of the acres eligible. With the soil layer, she can identify the soils to give an estimate of the rental rate.

Landowners have been very receptive to her use of computer-generated maps. "We were able to give them a good perception of what the CCRP buffer program could do for them, while the crops were still growing in the field," Becky said. "Now we have our work cut out for us, getting these fields marked with the Precision Lightweight GPS (Global Positioning System) Receivers, and the contracts written on over 300 acres estimated to be enrolled in the program." *Submitted by Linda Prothe, Miami County District Manager.*

EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR NAMED

The Sherman County Conservation District, Goodland, chose Jim McDowell, NRCS Soil Scientist, Hays as *Educator of the Year* this past February. Jim was presented the award for teaching students the importance of soils. Over the last five years, Jim has been invited to participate in the "Jump-Start Your Mind Program" sponsored by the University Women in Goodland.

McDowell gives a "hands-on" demonstration by using sand and clay to build dams and showing kids which one holds water. Jim also talks to the students about materials that form soils. This includes, the types of rocks, windblown matter, and particles from water erosion. The students participate in several hands-on activities, and learning about soils was one of their favorites! *Article submitted by Sandy Rodgers, District Manager, Sherman County Conservation District*.

SDI – THE OTHER IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Subsurface Drip Irrigation, or SDI for short, has been used to irrigate high value cash crops, such as strawberries for over 30 years, and is now being used for water conservation in crops for livestock, i.e. feed and grain. Where other forms of irrigation (sprinkler and surface irrigation) experience evaporative water losses, properly operated SDI systems keep the applied water below the ground surface, and essentially all of the water is therefore available for plant use.

The design and operation of a SDI system is critical to its functioning properly. The water source needs to be analyzed for various chemicals and bacteria. This is needed so that an adequate filtration system and chemical treatment program can be determined. As with other irrigation systems, the system needs to be designed for uniform water distribution throughout the field.

Kansas State University (KSU) has been conducting studies for 14 years at the KSU Northwest Research-Extension Center, and found that SDI is a viable irrigation system option. The KSU economists have written papers comparing the cost effectiveness of center pivot (CP) and SDI systems. The SDI system, which costs between $900 and $1,200 per acre installed, needs to work properly for at least 15

years to be more cost effective than a CP system. The SDI system may also be an economic advantage when applied to irregular fields and where full circle CP irrigation is not feasible.

For more information about SDI, KSU has a web site dedicated to SDI, www.oznet.ksu.edu/sdi/, where their detailed articles are available for system design, operation, and maintenance. *Submitted by Martin Soffran, Hydraulic Engineer, Salina State Office Engineering Staff, Dodge City Area Office.*

NEW ASSISTANT STATE CONSERVATIONIST FOR AREA 2

Jim Wright spent his formative years in the Texas Panhandle and South Central New Mexico. He graduated from New Mexico State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture, majoring in Range Science with minors in Biology and Wildlife Science. After graduation, he spent the next 14 years working for New Mexico State University as a Research Assistant on the college ranch at Fort Stanton, New Mexico. His primary duties were range and wildlife research along with assistance in the day-to-day operation of the ranch. Jim accepted an appointment as a Soil Conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS), in June 1990. He reported to the Clayton Field Office and was later transferred to the Las Cruces Field Office. In October 1993, Jim moved to Moro, Oregon, as a District Conservationist and in January 1995, was promoted to the position of Basin Team Leader whose area comprised six counties in North Central Oregon. He accepted an offer to become the Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations) in Dodge City in January 2003.

Jim's hobbies include three grandsons, a very supportive wife, hunting, fishing, and generally spending time in the outdoors. His passions include his wife, conservation, and elk hunting, especially with a bow and arrow. Jim has an open door policy and welcomes anyone to his office or to contact him at any time. *Submitted by Loretta Cecil, Office Automation Clerk, Dodge City Area Office.*

NEW ASSISTANT STATE CONSERVATIONIST FOR AREA 5

Bill Gilliam is a native of Coahoma County, Mississippi, where he graduated from Agricultural High School in 1971. He attended Alcorn State University earning a degree in General Agriculture. He joined NRCS in 1974 as a student trainee in Holdrege, Nebraska. After graduating from Alcorn in May 1975, he accepted the position as a Soil Conservationist in Holdrege, O'Neill, and Omaha field offices. Bill became a District Conservationist in York Field Office in January 1980. In October 1993, Bill was promoted to Liaison District Conservationist for the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District where he supervised five counties. While serving in that capacity he earned his Master of Public Administration Degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He accepted the position of Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations) in Emporia in February 2003. Bill claims to enjoy the simple pleasures of life and likes "hanging out" with extroverts. *Submitted by Barbara Jasper, Office Assistant, Emporia Area Office.*

Safety & Health Article
EXPLOSIVE MICROWAVE DANGER

The story tells of a woman putting water in the microwave and waiting three minutes for it to boil, but something seemed wrong: no bubbles. So she heated the water a little longer. When she took it out, the water exploded like a bullet up into her face. It hit the ceiling too. She was rushed to the emergency room, where she was treated with first-and second-degree burns to her face. Even worse, the corneas of her eyes had been scalded.

Experts say that what caused this injury is known as "superheating," which is one of the most potentially hazardous problems that can occur when heating water or other liquids in a microwave oven. According to Louis Bloomfield, physics professor at the University of Virginia, the scientific definition of superheating is that water can go above boiling temperature without any bubbles forming. In a process called nucleation, the energy that's already in the water, can be triggered by a granule – such as a tea bag, instant coffee, or a utensil, which can then cause the water to erupt.

Preventing Microwave Hazards:

Put your teabag or instant coffee in the water prior to heating water in the microwave.
Always stir liquids before heating
Stir food midway through cooking to distribute heat
Allow standing time before touching
Lift a lid or plastic wrap AWAY from your face
DON'T microwave in Styrofoam

Source: ABC News. Story idea submitted by Grace McGrath, Chairperson, Safety & Health Committee, Salina State Office.

UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS

April 21 – **27** - National Wildlife Week
April 22 - Earth Day
April 27 – **May 3** - National Volunteer Week
April 27 – May 4 - Soil Stewardship Week
May – American Wetlands Month
May 10 – Barber County Spring Wildflower Tour – *For more information, call 620-886-3721*
June 7 – Wilson County Wildflower Tour – *For more information, call 620 378-2866*
June 11 – SCS/NRCS Retirees Annual Meeting, Wichita (Best Western, Red Coach Inn)
Contact Granville Davidson at 785-273-5637
June 12 – 13 – SWCS, Kansas Council of Chapters Annual Meeting, Wichita (Best Western, Red Coach Inn) Theme: "High Plains, Dry Plains, Water Conservation,"
Contact Harold Blume at 785-823-4536

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