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SOIL CONSERVATION



DES MOINES COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS: Front row: Gary Wagner and Leonard Lane. Back row: Charles Nealey, Sherman Smith and Lloyd Schmelsler.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR PLAN

By Doug Ensminger, Soil Conservationist
Do you know where your conservation plans are? If the answer to this question is no, then I recommend you get in contact with your local Soil Conservation Service. Since the late 80s the plans and rules governing these plans have changed quite a bit. Therefore, it would be a good idea to find those plans and see where you are. You may be surprised to find that a field border or grassed waterway will need to be installed this coming growing season. Also if you feel that the plan you now have doesn't quite fit your operation, you should make an appointment with your local Soil Conservation Service to review and make any changes possible to fine tune the plan.

This past winter we (Des Moines County SCS) have been busy revising plans. Our goal is to get out in the county and discuss the plans on a field by field or farm by farm basis. Sometimes it isn't done in this manner, but if you would like someone to visit your farm let us know. Also on a yearly basis, we have a random 5% spot-check where we get in contact with those selected and discuss their plans. In previous years we sent a postcard asking you to contact us if you were interested in going with us. This did not work at all. Very few of you made the effort. This year we will be more persistent in getting in contact with you. Please don't feel as though you will be thrown in jail if something isn't perfectly in line with your conservation plan. The reason for the 5% spot-check is to get in contact with farm operators, go over the plans and to solve any problems that may arise in the future.

Our office has an open door policy, so if you have any questions please feel free to call or stop in to discuss any questions or problems you may encounter.

DISTRICT ACTIVITIES AND REPORTS

By Dorothy E. Davis, Secretary

Welcome Center. District donated \$500 to the Extension office to help in financing an agricultural display at the Port of Burlington.

Road Ditches. There are counties in Iowa where landowners are responsible for cleaning the silt from road ditches when excessive erosion has come from their fields. District voted to contact the local supervisors to consider possible implementation in Des Moines County.

Bonus for Trees Program. Des Moines County was allocated \$12,000 for the water quality project in the Flint River watershed. Cost-sharing to the landowners was available at a rate between 80% to 95% based on the number of acres in the program.

Soil Loss Complaints. Several excessive soil loss complaints were brought to the attention of the commissioners. A new construction project and intensive farming on D and E slopes were the causes of excessive soil loss.

No-Till Tour. District sponsored a tour to the Jim Kinssela farm near Lexington, Illinois. About 30 persons participated in the tour to view the no-till operation.

Election. Sherman Smith and Gary Wagner were elected in the general election to be district soil and water conservation district commissioners for a term of six years.

Resource Conservation Plan. Three public hearings were held at Southeastern Community College in order to organize and prioritize a plan of action for the district. The final plan has been approved and is on file at the district office.

Memorandum of Understanding with the Des Moines County ASC Committee was approved.

Cost-Share Approval. Projects will be approved according to the following priority: No Till, Terrace, Water and Sediment Control Basin, then Grassed Waterways. Low priority will be given to Grade Stabilization Structures (ponds). Less than \$350 per acre of land benefited will be required for terrace approval; less than \$300, for water and sediment control basins.

Truax Drill. District donated \$3000 toward a no-till drill purchased by the Des Moines County Conservation Board for native grass seeding.

HABITAT IS THE KEY TO WILDLIFE SURVIVAL

All species of wildlife have certain basic habitat needs such as safe winter cover, undisturbed nesting cover, food and water. Most of our wildlife is produced on private lands so a cooperative effort must be made to improve habitat on private lands.

The Des Moines County Conservation Board (DCCB) has revitalized its "Acres for Wildlife" program with assistance from our local Pheasants Forever chapter. Money made by Pheasants Forever through memberships and fundraisers will be donated to the Des Moines County Conservation Board and made available to private landowners wishing to improve wildlife habitat on their land. The DCCB will provide the planning and development according to the application and maintenance agreement.

The projects eligible include any farmland that is developed to provide permanent wildlife cover. The projects could be one or a combination of the following examples:

1. Native grass establishment, no-till or conventional.
2. Cool season grass establishment, no-till or conventional.
3. Shelter belts.
4. Field borders - edges.
5. Food plot establishment.

Most of these projects will be established by use of a Truax no-till drill that was purchased by Pheasants Forever, Des Moines County Engineer's Department, Des Moines County Conservation Board and Des Moines County Soil and Water District.

Project priority will be given to establishment of safe winter cover consisting of foraging and roosting areas, and undisturbed nesting cover. Native warm season grasses will satisfy all of these requirements if managed properly. Habitat needs will vary according to wildlife species and to the particular area involved.

For more information and applications, contact the DCCB office at 512 north Main, Burlington, IA 52601, (319) 753-8260.

Annual Report of Des Moines County Soil & Water Conservation District

Fiscal Year July 1, 1990-June 30, 1991

Expenditures of funds provided by State of Iowa for District Commissioners' Expenses, Office Supplies and Expenses, Office Equipment, Financial Incentive Programs and Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP).

1-M FUNDS- TRAVEL, OFFICE SUPPLIES, EXPENSES & EQUIPMENT
Commissioners' Travel\$1,043.49
Office Supplies & Expenses1,658.47
Released to State of Iowa438.04
Total Allocation\$3,200.00

1991-92 STATE FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FUNDS
Obligated (projects not completed)\$24,713.40
Unobligated (reserved for no till)3,539.60
Total Allocation\$28,253.00

1990-92 STATE FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FUNDS
Terraces-5905 lin. ft. completed\$10,608.65
Water & Sediment Control Basins-4 completed1,586.14
No Till 537.42 acres5,374.20
Obligated (projects not completed)639.63
Unobligated Balance135.38
Total Allocation\$18,394.00

1989-90 STATE FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FUNDS
Terraces-6700 lin. ft. completed\$8,734.46
Water & Sediment Control Basins, 950 ft. completed1,325.63
No Till 414 acres4,141.34
Total Allocation\$14,201.43

1989-90 STATE FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FUNDS
(mandatory)
Critical Area Seeding-4 ac.\$1,700.69

1991-92 REAP- Forestry
Obligated (projects not completed)\$1,634.00
Total Allocation\$1,634.00

1991-92 REAP-Practices
Obligated (projects not completed)\$6,342.00
Total Allocation\$6,342.00

1990-91 REAP-Forestry
Tree Planting 59.2 acres\$13,644.70
Obligated (project not completed)7,162.50
Total Allocation\$20,807.20

1990-92 REAP-Practices
Tree Planting 39.3 acres\$13,637.29
Timber Stand Improvement 32.7 Ac.1,936.81
Total Allocation\$15,574.10

1989-90 REAP Forestry Practices
Timber Stand Improvement
286.1 ac. completed\$20,496.08
Tree Planting 53.8 ac. completed19,914.00
Obligated (Practice not completed)12,575.25
Allocation held by Div. Soil Conservation

1989-90 REAP Practices
Timber Stand Improvement 105.1 acres\$7,082.09
Tree Planting 4.0 acres1,458.00
Unobligated Balance346.66
Total Allocation\$8,886.75

BONUS FOR TREES PROJECT
Tree Planting 19.75 ac.\$7,152.90
Obligated (project not completed)4,704.00
Unobligated Balance143.10
Total Allocation\$12,000.00

REVOLVING FUND ACCOUNT
July 1, 1990-June 30, 1991
Balance, July 1, 1990\$836.48
Receipts:
Sales of Flags & Scales\$142.05
No Till Tour72.00
Interest4.80
State Reimbursement5,408.47
Total Receipts\$5,627.32
Total\$6,463.80

Expenses:
Extension Display Board\$750.00
Extension Farm Safety Prog. 250.00
Safety Deposit Box9.00
Office Supplies313.80
Car Rental & Expense132.84
Hawk Eye ad13.22
Legal Notices15.58
Postage329.36
Sales Tax4.58
Bank Service Charge29.95
Scholarship25.00
NACD Dues500.00
ASCD Dues300.00
Horace Sutton (to be repaid) 3,000.00
Total Expenses\$5,673.33
Total\$6,463.80

Balance, June 30, 1991\$790.47
CD Value, June 30, 1991\$6,248.58
CD Value, June 30, 1991\$3,943.80

DISTRICT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

October 1, 1990 - September 30, 1991

Item/Practice	Number Acres/Fee
New Cooperators	450 51,006 ac.
Individuals Assisted	1,026
Conservation Practices Applied	138
Conservation Plans	4,989 ac.
Land Use & Treatment	
Site Plan Review	25
Governmental Agencies Assisted	6
Tracts with No Highly Erodible Land	19
Tracts with Highly Erodible Land	492 ac.
Tracts with Conservation System	
Applied	80
Tracts w/Approved FSA Conservation Plan	105
Contour Farming	52 ac.
Grade Stabilization Structure	2
Grassed Waterway	7 ac.
Terrace	17,500 ft.
Water & Sediment Control Basin	19
Cropland Treated/Protected	7,716 ac.
Pasture & Hayland Treated	4 ac.
Woodland Treated	17 ac.

DES MOINES COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS
Lloyd F. Schmelsler, Chairman
Sherman A. Smith, Vice Chairman
Leonard L. Lane - Charles T. Nealey - Gary Wagner

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONERS
Horace Sutton, Treasurer
Arlyn Musselman - Jeff Bergman - William Walker

OFFICE STAFF
Terry J. Cosby, SCS District Conservationist
Doug Ensminger, SCS Soil Conservationist
John Horan, SCS Soil Conservation Technician
John F. Quilling, SCS Soil Conservation Aide
Dorothy E. Davis, State & District Secretary

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ANNUAL REPORT

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MAINTENANCE OF SOIL CONSERVATION STRUCTURES

EMPLOYEES: Left to right: Terry Cosby, District Conservationist; John Fruehling, Conservation Aide; Doug Ensminger, Soil Conservationist; John Horan, Soil Conservation Technician; Dorothy Davis, Secretary. Not pictured: Darrell Belzer, Volunteer; Julie Musselman, Conservation Aide; Shrice Wimley, Stay-In-School Program.

John Horan, Soil Conservation Technician
The care or maintenance of an erosion control practice, such as terraces, ponds and dams, rassed waterways, etc., is very important.

Just as a tractor, truck, auto or any other piece of machinery needs to have maintenance done on it, so does an erosion control structure.

Some things that should be done to increase the serviceable life of these practices are:

For terraces and sediment control basins--

1. Remove sediment build-up in the terrace channel to maintain the required storage capacity of that terrace.

2. Repair or replace any damaged or broken tile to prevent it from becoming obstructed by residue or animals.

3. Repair or replace any damaged intakes.

4. Remove sediment build-up from around the intake so that the water can drain towards the intakes.

5. Remove trash and debris from around and in the intake so that full flow capacity can be maintained.

6. Keep non-farmable terraces free of weeds, brush, trees, etc.

7. Keep a good sod forming grass established on non-farmed terraces.

For the maintenance of ponds--

1. Keep a good sod forming grass established on dam by fertilizing, liming and seeding.

2. Keep an area of sod forming grass around perimeter of pond to act as a filter strip and to impede the rate of siltation of the pond.

3. Install some type of fence around pond and dam to limit the access of livestock into a predetermined watering area.

4. Prevent trees and brush from becoming established on or in the dam and emergency spillway area.

5. Remove any unsecured debris from pond to prevent overflow pipe from becoming obstructed.

6. Keep emergency spillway in good repair by repairing any areas of erosion, fertilizing and reseeding these areas.

7. Keep the anti-vortex device installed and in good repair on the primary overflow pipe. This will prevent the water from swirling and eroding the dam.

For the maintenance of grassed waterways--

1. Reseed areas that have been damaged by herbicides, machinery, livestock, etc.

2. Remove sediment from waterways to eliminate the concentration of water flow into a restricted channel.

3. Repair any minor rills or gullies that may develop because of livestock, etc.

4. Maintain a proper grass height by mowing, so that the flow of water is even and not retarded.

5. Fertilize waterways if necessary to maintain good plant growth in all areas.

6. Do not plant crop end rows along waterways.

7. Do not allow weeds, brush or trees to become established on the waterways.

8. Maintain outlet structures, where installed, to prevent waterways from eroding back.

9. Do not use a waterway as a driveway, especially with heavy loads.

When required, repair all structures promptly, to keep the condition from becoming worse, or in some cases such as an overflow pipe becoming obstructed, to eliminate a total failure of the structure.

And just as with a truck, tractor, auto, etc., it will be much more economical to repair as soon as practical.

ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT WITH PRAIRIE

By Don Dahl, Roadside Biologist

The late 1980s has brought a significant change, in controlling weeds growing profusely along county rights-of-way.

Des Moines County is one of 37 counties across the state of Iowa to institute a professional program of natural weed control. The "new" approach called for the establishment and/or enhancement of native prairie vegetation.

Establishment of native prairie vegetation is exactly what it might seem to be. Any time a roadside (ditch) has to have its vegetation removed for any reason, any time a road is regraded, or any time a new grade is constructed, native prairie grasses and flowers are being used to revegetate the soil.

The process seems relatively slow, but the results are very rewarding.

Seed bed preparation is a must. A firm seed bed will give best results, therefore cultipacking the soil is recommended both before and after seeding.

Due to the light, fluffy nature of many prairie seeds, a special planting drill is necessary. Des Moines County has two seed drills available for use (contact Des Moines County Conservation Board). Optimal planting conditions occur from mid-May to July 1.

The first season following seeding appears to have produced only weeds. Closer inspection, however, reveals the small grass seedlings whose development is underground the first one or two seasons. Weed control at this stage is desirable and can be safely accomplished by mowing six to eight inches off the ground. This is done so as not to damage the seedlings, but still prevent weed seed maturation.

Existing stands of native vegetation have been located throughout the county. Proper management of these areas is underway to help them spread and stiffen weed resistance on an increasing scale.

By abandoning fence-to-fence mowing and indiscriminate spray methods, more and more prairie indicators are emerging annually. The most successful method of bringing back quality vegetation has been the use of fire. Timely burning (April and early May) has helped us convert a greater percentage of native vegetation than all our planting methods.

Working with landowners will be a top priority in the future. What better way to fight noxious weeds than by restoring native prairie species as an alternative?

NO-TILL CAN BE REWARDING

By Charlie Nealey, Soil Commissioner

When over five inches of rain fell within a seven hour period, Purdue University took advantage of this opportunity to compile some interesting statistics. They determined that on a clean tilled field with 7% slope, 80% of the rain water ran off and 22.65 tons of soil was lost per acre. However, during this same rainstorm it was determined that only 49% of the rain ran off and that only 0.03 tons of soil was lost per acre when this field was no-tilled on the contour. This, plus several similar statistics have caused the Des Moines County Soil Commissioners to feel that no-til should be given a high priority.

Besides the obvious economic benefit of avoiding ownership of expensive tillage equipment there are many more strong points no-til offers. Experts agree that no-til fields have more surface organic matter and surface mulch which will thicken and become biologically active. Increased organic matter increases the amount and rate of pesticide degradation and this allows less pesticide residue to escape in water runoff.

Most no-til fields have been found to have a higher population of earthworms. This is thought to happen because residue in the earthworms food supply, and it is left undisturbed. Also the earthworm holes are not disturbed by tillage. Earthworms create several large pores in the soil profile that improve water infiltration.

In the case of fertilizer, there is considerable evidence that no-til significantly reduces sediment attached nutrients such as phosphorus and potassium from runoff. These nutrients stay on the field where they can be used by the growing crop.

These are some of the reasons why no-til is usually cited as a best management practice in water quality improvement programs.

Anytime the subject of no-til is brought up one question always seems to be asked: "how much yield loss should I expect if I no-til?" Several years ago when we had the no-til, no management attitude, the answer would have been "a significant yield reduction." However, today that answer would be quite different. Maybe the best answer could come from data gathered by the Model Farm project. This project checked yields on several side by side comparisons on farms in Des Moines County in 1990 and 1991 on both corn and soybeans. So far no significant yield difference has been found.

No-til might not be the answer for everyone. However, for those who are willing to pay close attention to details such as proper equipment calibration, equipment adjustment and take the time to scout their fields to insure field operations get completed on a timely schedule, the benefits from no-til can be quite rewarding.

OVERCOMING NO-TILL PROBLEMS

By Dean Pettit, Area Resource Conservationist

Points to consider for fields to be no-tilled the first time include compaction, drainage, fertility and residue management. Greg Brenneman and Jim Fawcett of the Cedar Rapids Area extension office have prepared a summary of problems that can be prevented by planning ahead to eliminate them.

No-til is usually more successful on soils that are well drained. Crop residue left on the surface will cause the soil to stay damp and cool longer. Therefore adequate drainage is important for successful no-tiling. If tilling or surface drainage is necessary, be certain to contact your SCS office regarding "wetland" designations. Usually, fields that are sloping enough to require crop residue management to stay in farm programs will have adequate drainage.

Compaction may be a problem left over from previous years if the soil had been worked when wet, or harvesting was completed during wet periods. Overworking the soil has also been known to cause compaction. Compacted soil will restrict root growth which in turn affects the vigor of the plant. If

this is a problem it may be necessary to use a deep tillage tool in the fall to break up the compacted layer. If needed, a harrow or leveling tool could be pulled behind to leave the field ready to plant.

Another problem is the concentration of crop residue. It should be spread evenly over the field. For wide combines in soybean field, consider using a chaff spreader along with the normal straw spreader. This will also provide the best protection for erosion. Most of the time chopping or shredding cornstalks will not be necessary.

Before starting a no-til system, it is desirable to have medium or higher phosphorus levels. Also lime should be added if pH is below 6.0. If soil tests show lower levels these should be incorporated the previous fall with any trip needed to break up compaction. Moderate amounts of fertilizer can be applied with planter attachments.

Even though the field may not be perfect for no-tiling, most problems can be avoided with proper management and preparation beforehand.

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