

CHAPTER I

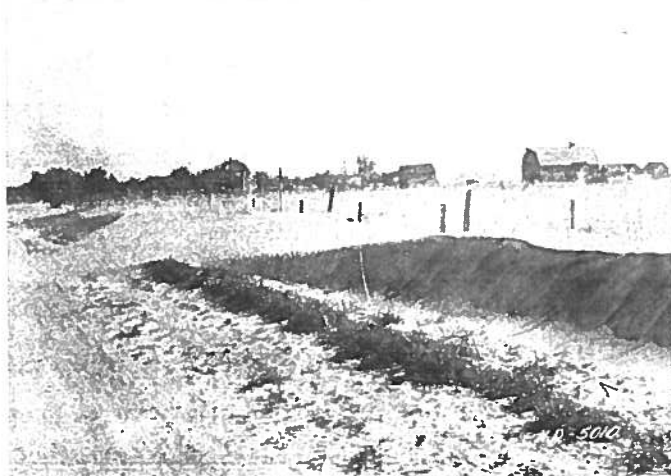
PREHISTORY LEADING TO SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Soil Conservation Districts were a new approach to our erosion problems. As a nation, the people of the United States did not concern themselves until recent years about the costliness or the extent of our erosion problems.

Soil conservation districts were an outgrowth of a difficult period in our nation's history. A few early leaders recognized the destructiveness of soil erosion and undertook to control it. History shows George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison used the simple methods of crop rotations, application of muck to eroded areas, hillside ditching, and contouring. Despite these early warnings and practical examples of these and other early Americans, only a few farmers adopted any kind of soil conservation practices.

District growth was hastened by a public awakening to the dust storms of the "dirty thirties" - - storms which covered the United States from coast to coast.

The year 1928 marked the real beginning of the conservation movement that has since spread across our land. Two events of major importance to agriculture, and unique in our history, are recorded as belonging to that year. A special educational effort was made by the United States Department of Agriculture to stimulate interest in the problems of soil waste. The bulletin, *SOIL EROSION A NATIONAL MENACE*, by Hugh H. Bennett and W. R. Chapline, gave the first comprehensive appraisal of the problem throughout the century. This publication aroused considerable public interest, and virtually for the first time the press began to take notice. Dr. Bennett dramatized the problem and brought it to the attention of the public. It was not only the farmers' problem - - it was the nation's problem.



Damage done by wind erosion on a well developed farm in North Dakota.

- SCS Photo

In December of the same year, Congress adopted the Buchanan Amendment to the Agricultural Appropriations Bill and, as it turned out, launched a nationwide program to save America's agricultural land from slow impoverishment. The amendment provided federal funds to: (1) Set up ten regional experiment stations for measuring the rate of soil and water losses, (2) make surveys to determine the extent of damage by erosion and location of the principal areas affected, and (3) work out methods of control and prevention. The first appropriation for the work was \$160,000. Two years later an additional appropriation of \$330,000 was made to enlarge the activities of the erosion research stations. Research established the fact the severe soil losses were occurring and something needed to be done to correct this waste.

Thus our national soil conservation program was launched - - back at the beginning of our greatest economic depression. The Soil Erosion Service was set up in 1933 on a temporary basis in the Department of the Interior to allow the work to start while more permanent plans were made. In 1934 a national erosion survey was started. Civilian Conservation Corps' crews were assigned to erosion control work to help with the job of establishing soil conservation demonstrations on farmlands where farmers could see and study methods for protecting the soil.

In 1936 the "Soil Conservation Act" passed Congress without a dissenting vote and it set up the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) as a permanent agency of the Department of Agriculture.

Soil conservation districts were an outgrowth of the erosion control demonstration projects set up under the Soil Conservation Service and its predecessor. These projects proved that erosion could be controlled and soil productivity maintained. They were designed to be showcases of wise land use treatment.

These demonstration projects averaged about 25,000 acres in size, although in some western areas they were considerably larger. In these demonstration areas, the government entered into five year contracts with landowners and operators. The technical services were provided by the Soil Erosion Service and Soil Conservation Service. The Civilian Conservation Corps also provided most of the labor and materials necessary to establish a complete conservation program on the project area. The owner or operator agreed to provide some labor and materials and also to maintain the program for the duration of the contract.

The idea was that these demonstration farms would be a place for other farmers to visit and see good conservation practices with the hope they would carry the idea back to their own units for application.

For a number of reasons, practices did not "catch on" as most desired. First, most farmers were impressed with the conservation work but found it too complicated for them to apply without technical help such as the SCS gave to the demonstration farms.

It was also apparent early after the completion of the project on the demonstration farms that most farmers did not realize the value of the program; had no personal understanding of why land adjustments were made; and most importantly, they had little or no financial stake in the work. For these reasons many farmers abandoned the program when their contracts expired.

From these lessons evolved the idea of the district movement. It was apparent that some way needed to be devised whereby landowners could play a major role in establishing their own conservation program with the help of the government, rather than the government doing it for them.

Credit is to be given to USDA Assistant Solicitor Philip M. Glich, for drafting of a standard Soil Conservation Districts Law. When this was finally put into final form, President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1937 sent the draft of the proposed law to the governors of all the states with the suggestion that farmers and ranchers be given the authority to organize districts specifically to deal with conservation of our soil and water resources.

Arkansas passed the first districts law on March 3, 1937. The first district chartered was the Brown Creek Soil Conservation District. It was chartered on August 4, 1937.

North Dakota also adopted the Soil Conservation Districts Law which became effective March 16, 1937. This act established the State Soil Conservation Committee and provided for the creation of soil conservation districts. The first soil conservation districts (Kidder, Slope-Hettinger and Arnegard-Alexander) were organized in the fall of 1937. There has been many a friendly argument among these three soil conservation districts as to which was first. Actually, all three came into being about the same time.

History of LCSCD

The East LaMoure County Soil Conservation District was voted in by landowners and operators in 1946, with the combined efforts of Charlie Roth, Lynn Peterson, Leonard Long, and County Agent, Alfred Ballweg.

The West LaMoure County Soil Conservation District was also organized in 1946. The following spring the board of supervisors were elected: Glenn Bennett, John Henne, and Charley Hanson, and that fall the district began to function. The districts were set up to bring assistance to farmers in planning and carrying out needed soil conservation practices.

In 1990, the directors of the districts encouraged their respective memberships to support a move to merge the two districts into one. The primary reason for the proposed merger was to allow the two offices to work together, utilizing their combined federal, state and county funds. The West District received no federal funds and was financed by state and local money. The East District was federally funded and by merging the two offices had the advantage of sharing the funding sources and expertise to benefit residents all over the county rather than just in their respective districts. In the primary election on June 12, 1990 the LaMoure County residents voted to merge the two districts.