

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Little Sioux Structures Provide Big Benefits

Monona County farmer Dick Schleis was born within a few years after Congress approved the Little Sioux Watershed for flood and erosion control projects in 1944. As he grew up, so did the watershed project covering the landscape with various conservation practices to control flooding and save soil.

Schleis, who has farmed in the area for 45 years, built two dams in the Little Sioux watershed.

“The land around my farm is very hilly,” he says. “Slopes can reach 25 to 30 percent and hills often lie in a way terraces can’t be built. Streams can flash flood during rain storms cutting gullies and they can sometimes take out roads. My dams are helping to stop flooding, gully cutting and soil erosion on my land and on my neighbors’ farms.”

Thanks in part to funding through Congress, the Little Sioux has a long history of conservation accomplishments, but much work remains, said Kathy Schneider, district conservationist with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Onawa.

“Structures in the watershed were designed to stop or reduce gully erosion and provide flood control, but also offer other benefits as well” she said. Additionally, Schneider says



District Conservationist Kathy Schneider and farmer Dick Schleis look at the pool formed behind an NRCS-designed dam built on Schleis’ land.

these structures improve water quality; they can be used to water livestock and provide recreational opportunities.

Along with environmental benefits, these structures also provide economic and safety benefits. According to Schleis, the county was able to downsize one of its culverts because his structure helped detain water, which in the end, helps us all.

The structures, which were built in 1996 and 2002, are saving Schleis time and money. “The creeks are slowed. They are dropping sediment instead of cutting the bed,” he said. “We no longer have to fix fences after every heavy rain.”

Schleis has a 40 head cow-calf operation and farms 700 acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa and pasture, is also saving money after his switch to no-till. He made the change about six ago. But it took some convincing.

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“I didn’t think they’d be right they were,” said Schleis. Since switching to no-till, he’s saved soil, time and fuel while keeping good yields, he said. “The only down side is waiting for the soil to warm up.”

His local NRCS office discussed no-till to help him save soil and implement his conservation plan. “I am very happy I switched to no-till,” he said. “I love it.” Schleis has also installed terraces, field borders and waterways as part of his conservation plan.

*by NRCS Staff
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Schneider and Schleis stand in front of a dam built in 2002.