

Nebraska NRCS 2008 Commitment to Conservation

Hugh Hammond Bennett, the founder of the Soil Conservation Service - now the Natural Resources Conservation Service - would be ecstatic that private lands conservation is growing. This year our Nebraska NRCS employees have obligated over \$60 million in new conservation improvement contracts. Our nation's commitment to private lands conservation will be even stronger in the 2008 Farm Bill, which increases funding to over \$4 billion.

Bennett recognized the niche for NRCS was to work directly with farmers and ranchers. He would be pleased that 80% of our highly-skilled 300 permanent employees in Nebraska are field-based and working on the land with producers.

By 1937 Bennett determined that NRCS needed a local conduit through which we could provide technical and financial assistance. Therefore he wrote the standard soil conservation district law, which allowed states to create conservation districts. Bennett would be thrilled today to see NRCS providing assistance in partnership with 3,000 local conservation districts. He would be especially excited about our watershed-based Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) in Nebraska, and even more pleased to see that NRDs leverage Federal conservation efforts by providing secretaries in each NRCS office, and in many cases, additional technical assistance personnel.

Finally, Bennett sought partnerships. He would be pleased to see how NRCS in Nebraska has over 20 partnership agreements resulting in over 60 other agencies' employees working in our field offices. He would strongly endorse our efforts to focus on the most critical natural resources needs (*see page 2*).

Hugh Hammond Bennett would be filled with pride to see that what he established in 1935 has grown to an exceptional Federal, State and local partnership. There is no doubt that he would hold Nebraska high as the very best example of a commitment to conservation. In the spirit of Hugh Hammond Bennett we can celebrate the accomplishments of the 2002 Farm Bill as we look forward to even greater opportunities in the new Farm Bill.



Stephen K. Chick
Nebraska NRCS State Conservationist

Nebraska NRCS FY2008 Accomplishments

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** - 1,330 new contracts for \$25.5 million, including 44 new manure management systems. The Ground & Surface Water Conservation Program had 151 new contracts for \$4 million.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** - 75 new contracts totaling 7,212 acres for \$1.2 million.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** - 40 projects have had \$6.3 million obligated to new easements or cost share agreements. Thirty-two easements have been filed this year protecting 2,235 acres of wetland. Across the state 3,511 acres of wetlands will be restored.
- **Conservation Security Program (CSP)** - Nebraska led the nation with 202 new contracts totaling \$3.1 million, and covering 251,232 acres.
- **Watershed Rehabilitation** - Obligated \$1.5 million for the renovation of two aging PL-566 dams.

Lower Missouri River Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)

The Lower Missouri River Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program project in Nebraska enhances the state's wetland restoration efforts by maximizing environmental benefits in a cost-effective manner with the aid of multiple partners. To date, over 10,000 acres in 100 contracts have been enrolled in the WREP project area. Over the life of the project NRCS funding has been \$19.2 million.

Missouri River Futures (MRF)

In FY08, Missouri River Futures coordinated conservation efforts along the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) by meeting with landowners, attending public and interagency meetings, creating semi-annual newsletters, addressing special conservation needs and promoting natural resource programs. The MRF held its 1st Annual Missouri River Landowner Conservation Workshop in March, which was attended by several MNRR stakeholders and agencies. More information about MRF is available at www.missouririverfutures.com.

Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group

The Shell Creek Watershed in northeast Nebraska had 32 contracts totaling over \$120,000 to provide assistance with no-till implementation, no-till crop consultation, non-invasive nitrogen application, sediment basins, septic system upgrades, nutrient management, dams and well decommissioning. The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group secured grants from the Neb. Environmental Trust and the Dept. of Environmental Quality to offer land treatment practices. Over \$330,000 was available for best management practices in 2008.

No-Till Promotion

No-till expos and field days presented by the No-Till Cadre have been well attended by producers across the state. The NRCS Rainfall Simulator is used to demonstrate the degrading effect of rainfall on bare soils compared to residue-covered soils and long term no-till soils. Producers remark that this is one of the most eye-opening presentations they have seen. Continuous no-till systems continue to grow across Nebraska. Preliminary results from the 2008 Conservation Technology Information Center's survey shows a 20% increase in Madison County's corn no-tilled into soybean stubble, and a 10% increase in soybeans no-tilled into corn stubble. The NRCS expects similar increases in continuous no-till across the state.

Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC)

Tamara Beardsley-Choat was hired as NGLC coordinator cooperatively through funds from a Neb. Environmental Trust grant, NGLC, Sandhills Taskforce, NRCS and other entities. The Cowboy Logic Rancher Stewardship Program of the NGLC promotes the training and sharing of resources between ranchers and farmers. The objective is to improve rangeland resources through a network where ranchers help ranchers solve resource problems and identify new opportunities in grazing land conservation. Other key activities included the range forum and the Nebraska Grazing Lands Conference held in Kearney, Neb.

Technical Service Providers (TSP)

Several agreements have leveraged NRCS funds to place TSP employees in NRCS field offices to provide technical assistance to landowners. These agreements include grazing specialists in the Twin Platte and Lower Loup NRDs, an agronomist and forester in the Lower Elkhorn NRD, biologists through partnerships with Neb. Game & Parks Commission, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, foresters through the Neb. Forest Service, and an agreement with the NGLC to provide grazing lands technical assistance to ranchers across the state. Another agreement for two technicians with the Nemaha NRD has just been signed. Through these agreements NRCS and partners fund over 20 TSP employees in NRCS field offices. These partnerships help NRCS increase the amount of assistance that can be provided to producers across the state.

Sandhills Taskforce

The Sandhills Taskforce coordinates the efforts of many agencies and private landowners in the Sandhills, including; U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Neb. Game & Parks, private ranchers, NRDs, NRCS and local groups. Through this collective effort the Taskforce is able to balance ranching with the needs of wildlife and wetland conservation.

Rainwater Basin Joint Venture (RWBJV)

The RWBJV serves as a focal point to coordinate wetland conservation activities within south central Nebraska. The RWBJV works directly with landowners, organizations and agencies involved with wetland conservation. Through this partnership wetland conservation is more effective than one group working alone. The RWBJV is coordinating efforts to provide Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), which is a system used to collect topographic data. This data will be used to plan wetland restoration and conservation needs.

