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Our New Fabric Product Installation & Maintenance

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If you have had fabric applied to your tree site, you need to keep up with the annual maintenance. Weeds still grow between the rows and along the edge of the fabric. It is your responsibility to have these taken care of. There are a few chemicals that work on tree sites for weed control. Check with your local extension office to get a list.

You also need to walk along your tree site to check for girdling. If the fabric is too close to the tree, girdling can occur. This can happen in 5-7 year old plantings. It will do harm and can affect the growth of the tree. A slit then needs to be made on each side of the tree to allow for tree growth. This should be checked each year until the fabric is no longer viable.

We need your feedback!

Natural resources are what we do. To help address the most important issues, we're looking for your thoughts on the environment in your surrounding area.

Scan the QR code or visit www.sdresourceconcerns.org to let us know which natural resource concerns are important to you!

How to scan QR code:

1. On your smartphone, launch your camera or download a free barcode scanner app.
2. Point your phone to scan the code.
3. Connect to the website.

Scan me!



www.sdresourceconcerns.org

If you are no longer interested in receiving this newsletter, please let us know. E-mail:hamlincd@sdconservation.net or phone (605) 783-3642 x4.

DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

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NRCS EMPLOYEES:

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Ryan Branigan, Soil Technician
Tyler Tran, Soil Conservationist
Ryan Ransom, Wetland Specialist
Eric Magedanz, Pheasants Forever

The mission of the Hamlin County Conservation District is to assist our county residents in protecting and conserving our natural resources through financial, technical, and educational means.

Equal Opportunity Employer



YOUR HELP IS NEEDED to guide the Conservation District's efforts in your local area. Locally-led conservation is based on the principle that local people make the best decisions for their own community. This process starts with evaluating the current conditions of local natural resources and dominant land uses, and then identifying which natural resource concerns should be a priority. The results of public input become the foundation on which future plans and projects will be based. It is important that the Conservation District receive community feedback to address issues that are important to the area around you. The Conservation District would like to hear your recommendations on prioritizing natural resource issues in your area. To submit your feedback, please visit www.sdresourceconcerns.org, or contact your local Conservation District by mail, email, or phone. Hamlin Conservation District hamlincd@sdconservation.net 605-783-3642 x 4 PO Box 165 Hayti, SD 57241



Conservation Comments

FALL 2020

Hamlin County Conservation District Newsletter

PO Box 165 • Hayti, SD 57241 • Telephone 605-783-3642

Understanding Grassland Soil Health

by: Jay Hermann, Area Rangeland Management Specialist



Take care of the land and the land will take care of you. *Hugh Hammond Bennett*

Soil Health has been talked about through workshops and articles in newspapers and magazines for some time now. Much of that talk is about adopting the five principles of soil health on cropland. But did you know that those same principles can be applied to your grasslands? Let's look at those principles as they apply to grasslands.

KEEP THE SOIL COVERED

Keeping the soil covered either by living vegetation or with litter will help keep that soil cooler and retain moisture. Many soil organisms are just like people and like the temperature to be around 70 degrees. If the soil dries out and gets hot quickly these beneficial organisms will either go dormant or die. Conversely, too much litter can be a signal that soil biological activity is low. So, it is critical to keep proper vegetation heights and litter amounts on the soil to keep the soil at optimal temperatures and have biological activity. Typically, no less than 50% of plant weight should be left standing after a grazing event. Also having that water in the soil profile acts as an insurance policy for times of drought. A good, diverse, healthy grassland will draw upon that water stored in the soil profile in times of drought. Part of good grazing management can include leaving good stubble heights after a grazing event.

KEEP A LIVING ROOT IN THE GROUND

This may sound easy, but it may not be that easy. Many soil organism's primary food source comes from the sugars that the living roots give off. In return, these same soils organisms will then travel out into the soil and bring back nutrients that plant needs. Many of South Dakota's grasslands are dominated by cool season grass species. This means that these species may go dormant during the hot dry part of the summer. Also having a stand of warm season grass species means that these plants

maybe dormant during the cool spring and fall. Having a good diversity of cool and warm season plants on your grasslands will not only benefit the organisms below the soil surface but also the livestock and wildlife above ground. A diverse plant community will allow for a living root in soil for a longer, if not all, of the growing season. Grazing management, prescribed fire, reduce or eliminating pesticides and herbicides, and seeding a diverse mix are tools that you can use to help with plant diversity and keeping a living root in the ground as much as possible.

DIVERSITY

Ecosystems are made up of a diversity of plants and animals. Our grasslands are no different. Native prairies have many different types of plants that live and grow on them. Some plants like wet cooler conditions and some plants like warm dry conditions in which to grow. Some plants have deep tap roots, and some have shallow fibrous roots with everything in between. So, having a diverse plant community not only allows for livestock and wildlife to balance their diets, so does the soil biology. A mixture of warm and cool season grasses and broadleaves on the prairie is very beneficial for not only the livestock and wildlife above ground but also for the biology below ground. If you find yourself having grasslands that are dominated by either cool seasons or warm seasons species, there are things you can do to help change the diversity of the grassland. This can include grazing management techniques such as changing the season of use and/or intensity of grazing, elimination or reduction in herbicides and pesticides use, applying timely fire, and if needed, seeding more species into the grasslands. You may find yourself using a combination of these management tools to help increase diversity.

LESS DISTURBANCE TO THE SOIL SURFACE

Grasslands have natural disturbances such

as fire, herbivory, extreme climate events and trampling by animals. These disturbances help keep the grasslands in a grass dominated state. The removal of these disturbances could result in a less desirable state. The soil biology has evolved to adapt to these disturbances. So too should the management of the grasslands. Allowing for disturbances within your grazing management will help mimic the natural disturbances. Managing livestock so that grazing events are followed by long rest periods is a good start. Other things to consider would be using less or no herbicides and pesticides on the grasslands. Along with a consideration of using a timely prescribed fire plan. Fire can help facilitate nutrient cycling and accelerate decomposition rates in the soil.

INTRODUCE LIVESTOCK INTO THE SYSTEM

You might think that this principle is a given in a grassland environment. But the management of livestock is critical to the overall health of the grassland. Careful management of the grasslands is needed to keep a healthy diverse grassland and in turn, a healthy and diverse soil biology community. Having a good grazing management plan that includes maintaining adequate residual heights after grazing, adequate rest periods in between grazing events and maintaining a diverse plant community can increase soil health of the grasslands. As mentioned before, a prescribed fire management plan may be part of your overall management plan.

Now that the principals of soil health are reviewed. How can you start to get a healthy soil on your grasslands?

1. First start by looking at the grasslands in a different way. Look at how you can grow a more diverse and healthy plant community. Ask yourself, am I raising livestock or am I raising grass and my livestock are my harvesters?

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A YEAR IN REVIEW; THE 2020 HAMLIN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

What a difference a year makes! Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, this year was different than any other. While our district was still able to complete all services; changes had to be made to keep everyone safe. We moved schedules around and planted with less employees. The fabric crew was transported to the sites in numerous vehicles. Hand plant pick up days were a bit more work. We ensured the customer remained in their vehicle when picking up orders. We placed the orders in their trunks, and received their payments through the window. The office was moved to my home in April, and has remained there since. I am beginning to feel like I am in a time warp. 😊

We planted 34 acres of trees, and applied 15 miles of fabric for 18 producers. My tree crew consisted of myself, one driver, and one field man. Very thankful my tractor driver enjoyed the job last year, and returned! We sold \$23,000 in hand plants and perennial stock. We also sold tree tubes and stakes.

To date; our two land rollers were rented by thirty one producers to cover 8,500 acres. This was up from 4,700 last year. We have two John Deere No Till drills that were rented for 1300 acres to plant alfalfa, grasses, cover crops, and beans. The Great Plains drill was used to plant grasses and various crops on 570 acres for eleven producers. It is getting close to the end of the season for equipment; however the drills will continue to be used for cover crops.

Our most current count for pasture pipe is that we have sold 13,500 feet. This is up from 8,500' last year. The grazing management projects are on the rise due to the drought conditions.

We continue to mow approximately 14 acres, four times a season and have utilized our rototiller this year. We tilled six sites prior to tree plantings.

Although our district continues to be involved in the Arbor Day Essay contest in three of our area schools, this year we were not able to meet in the schools. The students sent in their essays and we mailed the top prizes. We are typically involved in the Big Sioux Water Festival, and the SDWF Conservation Camp, however, those were both cancelled. The Hamlin CD also has a scholarship available to students continuing their education in the conservation field. The Karst Memorial Scholarship, Arbor Day Poster Contest, and the Speech Contest are all actively promoted. The Hamlin District is also involved in a Legislative Dinner each fall, with the Coteau Area Districts, (again...cancelled).

The Conservation District works closely with the NRCS office using Contribution Agreements; which allow the district to aid in the work and receive payment. We have had the opportunity to work with CSP, CRP and the Easement Monitoring process. These Agreements are a great addition to our annual income. We completed a 2019-2020 Tree Planting grant on 6/30/2020. This project helped to plant 7 acres to field windbreaks and shelterbelt renovations. The total project cost was \$15061. Hamlin CD administered the 2020 SDACDE Conservation Promotion grant. Total funding for that project was \$12,400. The 2018 Prairie Coteau Watershed Enhancement Project is a \$152,500 project with USFWS and SDGFP, which is currently scheduled to end 12/31/2020. This project funds grazing management plans, to include wells, pumps, pasture pipe, tanks, and rural water. We currently have one application in for a 2021 Tree Planting grant. The Hamlin CD is the

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Busy Election Year: ALL District Supervisors Terms will expire!

This is a busy election year! The Hamlin Conservation District Supervisors terms are all to expire on December 31, 2020. The two year terms were unopposed; James Anderson, Hayti and Danny Limmer, Lake Norden will continue to serve in those positions. There are three terms, which are four years each. Those incumbents are: Larry Brusse, Dorene Lemme, and Jared Namken. And the candidates are: Sterling Gehrke, and Eli Little, both of Castlewood.

Due to an amendment made to SDCL-38-3-9; the South Dakota Conservation District Board supervisor positions are no longer elected by landowner/ occupier, taxpayer of real property, or urban. The qualifications were changed to be a U.S. citizen and registered voter residing within the conservation district. A registered voter in Hamlin County may then vote for three of the five open positions.

Understanding Grassland Soil Health cont.

2. Consider getting a good inventory of your grasslands and discuss it with experts. Discuss what is missing in your operation and what seems to be problems with the current state of your grasslands

3. Set up some short term and long-term goals for yourself and how you will achieve those goals. Find your balance between livestock to forage base. Set up a grazing system that will work for you, the livestock, and the land. Continually monitor the grasslands to make sure your goals are being met.

4. Be open to new ideas and consider adopting new technologies and ideas that may help your operation. Be flexible. There are many factors that will be out of your control to a certain extent. Weather and markets can be two factors that are out of your control. But you can minimize those factors if you are flexible and have a healthy grassland ecosystem.

5. Lastly, but arguably the most important, educate yourself. Ask questions of local experts and attend workshops, schools and training on grasslands and grazing management. Many of these will help you look at your operation in a different way and help you make decisions based on science and experience. This is also a good way of building a network of people that are starting to do the same thing you are doing and going through or have gone through it. Many of these people are willing to share their experiences and are happy to help others.

DISTRICT SERVICES UPDATES

SOUTH DAKOTA HEALTHY SOILS HANDBOOK NOW AVAILABLE

If you want to learn more about soil and find advice on how to implement good soil health practices, the new South Dakota Healthy Soils Handbook is just what you need.

The book covers the five principles of soil health: Soil cover, limited disturbance, diversity, living roots, and integrating livestock. The book dives deep on each principle, explaining concepts and offering details on how to integrate each principle into your operation.

Want to know what's living beneath your soil and how it is affecting your crops and pasture? Want to know how the diversity of life above ground affects life below ground? Want to know how much residue should be left on your fields? Want practical advice for seeding a cover crop mix? This handbook is an excellent resource to get answers to your soil health questions.

To get your copy of the book, contact any South Dakota Soil Health Coalition staff member or director or contact your local NRCS office.

The book is also available for viewing and downloading online at www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/sd-healthy-soils-handbook/le

WATER QUALITY PROJECTS

With the drought conditions we have been experiencing, the pasture pipe sales have increased. The Hamlin Conservation District continues to sell pasture pipe and fittings for your livestock watering projects. The Pasture pipe is 160 psi, 1" pipe and is sold in both 500' and 1000' rolls. Contact our office for pricing at (605)783-3642.



ORDER CONIFERS EARLY! NOW TAKING ORDERS!

Potted Conifers:

1 gallon size 15"-18" tall \$13.00

Techy Arborvitae – Austrian Pine – Ponderosa Pine
Black Hills Spruce – Norway Spruce

2 gallon size 18"-24" tall \$20.00

Ponderosa Pine – Scotch Pine – Black Hills Spruce
Colorado Blue Spruce - Norway Spruce – White Spruce

5 gallon size 24"-30" tall \$40.00

Techy Arborvitae - Meyers Spruce – Ponderosa Pine

5 gallon size 30"-36" tall \$40.00

Black Hills Spruce – Colorado Blue Spruce – Norway Spruce
White Pine .

NEW FABRIC PRODUCT

A new fabric product has been tested and now purchased by our district. If you were questioning whether to install fabric or not; check out this new "Tree Save" material. This fabric has a 12" center which is more susceptible to break down by the sun. This will allow a maturing tree to break through the fabric instead of being girdled by the fabric. Which would then save the producer the time and labor of cutting it back.

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Tree stock is not guaranteed. Trees may not be returned after they have been taken out of the tree cooler, or off of the district lot.

MEET KELSEY RAMERTH

Hello Hamlin County! My name is Kelsey Ramerth, and I am overjoyed to be here in the Hayti Field Office, working as the District Conservationist.

I developed an interest in prairie/soil science, ecology and biology in high school after noticing the degraded condition of ecosystems on ranches near where I grew up in Colorado, on the short grass prairie east of Denver. I obtained my degree in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management, with a minor in Reclamation and Restoration Ecology, from the University of Wyoming.

I started my career with the NRCS in south central Kansas as a Rangeland Management Specialist, where most of my experience on the job was with large cow-calf operations, plant biology, invasive species management and soil health. A large portion of my time in Kansas was spent working with EQIP and disaster recovery on ranches following years of drought and extreme wildfires.

After that, I moved to northern Maine to see a new part of the country and to keep learning through my time with the NRCS in Fort Kent. I had a completely different experience there, working with large potato farms as well as small, diverse family farms. It was a remote area with challenging markets and was also a food desert, so managing production with the short growing season was crucial to both the farmers and the community.

My husband, Eric, also works for the NRCS, and we are happy to be here in South Dakota, closer to our families and the prairie. We love to soak up all the outdoors has to offer, and we are getting ready to welcome our first child in November. I know this is a strange time for everyone, but I hope to be able to meet more of our USDA customers and partners soon. May you all have a safe and successful fall and harvest season!

A Year in Review: cont from page 2

administrator on the new Contribution Agreement between NRCS and SDACDE. This agreement is helping to facilitate trainings to every CD; with the funding opportunity for hotel, travel and expenses.

Our district newsletter is sent out twice yearly. The district has a website and is continually active on a Facebook page. Our District Board Supervisors are completing their Conservation Conversations, which briefly describes why their personal goals for conservation. These articles have routinely been in our local newspapers. We had recently completed the planting of the perennial site; showcasing the plants we offer. And we had the opportunity to be interviewed for a UTube video, by Kingsbury CD. This series of videos will showcase the conservation districts of South Dakota. It is a great promotional tool that will be viewed by many through social media.

CLEAN CLEAR CONSERVATION