



Custer County Conservation District was established in 1940.

CUSTER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

Special points of interest:

- Forestry Project
- Grassland Conservation
- Landowner Forestry Workshop
- Beaver Dam Analog Workshop

Inside this issue:

Burning beetle learning event	2
2024 scholarship winners	2
No-till drills—Is there a need to purchase a drill?	3
Arbor Day	3
Grassland conservation in South Dakota	4-6
Thinning grant	6
Notice of supervisor vacancies	7
Calendar of events	7

District and Forest Service collaborate to reduce wildfire risk in Custer Highlands

The U.S. Forest Service and the Custer Conservation District recently completed a collaborative project to reduce wildfire threats and improve forest resiliency near the Custer Highlands residential area. Using fuel reduction and pre-commercial thinning, 80 acres of forest on the Black Hills National Forest were treated adjacent to private land at the wildland-urban interface. The goals of the project were to protect private homes and structures from running crown wildfire, improve forest health, and improve wildlife and range forage.

In June, District Board members, Black Hills National Forest staff, and other interested parties toured the project area.

(Continued on page 6)

Participants in the project area tour (right). Tood Hoover and Chris Bennett (USFS-BHNF) present information on work completed and future management goals. Comparison of treated (bottom center) and untreated (lower right) sites in the area. The most obvious difference is the lack of understory vegetation in the untreated area.



Upcoming events:

- **Beaver Dam Analog Workshop:** Custer Conservation District will cosponsor an event with The Nature Conservancy and SD Game, Fish & Parks on Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) structures. BDAs mimic beaver dams by reducing erosion, increasing water availability, and providing wildlife habitat. Workshop is planned for this summer and will include a tour. Lunch will be provided.
- **Landowner Forestry Workshop:** The District will host a landowner forestry workshop September 7 at the Argyle VFD fire hall. Join us to learn about managing your forests and protecting your property. Includes field tour of a recently treated property. Lunch is provided.

Watch for additional details on our website in the coming weeks!



District Sponsors Burning Beetle Learning Event in Custer

The Custer Conservation District co-hosted an educational opportunity for both new and long-time residents of the Custer and the Black Hills area to learn more about “Living in Community in Our Forested Environment”. The event was part of the 11th annual Burning Beetle celebration in Custer.

On January 18, speakers from Custer State Park (Lilly DeLange), US Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest (Jason Virtue and Rob Hoelscher), and the National Weather Service (Keith Sherburn) spoke on topics relevant to living in the Black Hills. Topics included resilient forests and caring for private forestland, living with wildfire, preparing your home and property to reduce wildfire risks, understanding weather in the Black Hills, and an overview of the multiple uses/users of the Black Hills National Forest. A wealth of information was shared with attendees. The event was moderated by Hank Fridell, Chair of the Burning Beetle Committee, and Dave Thom, Chair of the Custer Conservation District.

The event was also featured in the February issue of Forestry Notes, a publication from the National Association of Conservation Districts. The article highlighted the learning event as well as the annual burning beetle celebration in Custer. The issue and other issues of NACD’s Forestry Notes are available at <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/publications/forestry-notes/>.



Attendees listen to introductory remarks by Hank Fridell, Chair of the Burning Beetle Committee, during the Burning Beetle Learning Event.

2024 Recipients of the Custer Conservation District Annual Scholarship

The Custer Conservation District is pleased to announce the recipients of our 2024 scholarship: Drew Lehman and Abigail Studt.

Each will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to further their education. Drew plans on attending Black Hills State University or SDSU majoring in either conservation law enforcement, wildlife management, or forestry. Abigail will attend Black Hills State and major in music education. Congratulations to these new graduates and best of luck to you both!



Interested in renting a no-till drill? We want to hear from you!

Are you interested in renting a no-till drill from the Custer Conservation District? If so, please contact us at 673-5680. The Board of Supervisors is considering purchasing a drill for Custer County. If purchased, the Board would like to gauge how much potential use it would receive.

No-till drills are a useful tool for interseeding pastures, planting food plots, restoring native grasslands, and planting cover crops. Compared to conventional tillage, no-till farming reduces soil erosion, soil compaction, and soil moisture loss, and improves water infiltration, soil fertility and overall soil health. Additionally, no-till farming can save on fuel costs and time.



District celebrates Arbor Day

The Custer Conservation District continued its annual celebration of Arbor Day by planting trees and giving out tree seedlings to Custer County students. At both Custer Elementary and Hermosa Elementary schools, first graders were given a demonstration on the proper method for tree planting by Josh Larson, community forester with SD-DANR-RCF. Each 1st grade student was given a bare-root tree seedling to take home and plant (hopefully the trees made it safely out of the kid's backpacks). Additionally, all students at Elk Mountain school received seedlings to take home.

Thanks to Joe Ulrich and Kevin Metzger, Custer School District, and Josh for helping with the tree plantings.



Grasslands: A Conservation Concern at the Forefront in South Dakota

South Dakota's grasslands are an integral component to the economy, culture, and scenic beauty of our state. Their importance to our livestock industry, wildlife, and rural way of life cannot be overstated. However, grasslands have been in decline for decades, largely due to cropland conversion. The Great Plains witnessed a loss of 32 million acres of prairie to the plow between 2016 and 2021. Tallgrass prairie being the hardest hit with as little as 1–4% of its historical extent remaining in North America.

In South Dakota, grassland loss was estimated at 1.8 million acres between 2006 to 2012 according to a SDSU study. Current estimates are that the state loses up to 100,000 acres annually. The issue has not gone unnoticed and efforts have sprung up to inform the public of the issues and help to combat grassland loss. Over the next few pages we illustrate some of these efforts.



Photo by NRCS



Photo by NRCS



Photo by Valeree DeVine, NRCS



Photo by NRCS



GRASSLAND
COALITION

South Dakota Grassland Coalition

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition is an organization led and managed by agricultural producers. The nine-member volunteer board emphasizes proper management on private land. They work with a number of partners to bring up-to-date, science-based, production proven educational opportunities and information to grassland managers and to the general public in South Dakota.

The goals of the Coalition are to 1) promote ranching practices that are sustainable and increase profitability, 2)

enhance water quality and reduce runoff into streams and lakes, 3) preserve South Dakota's small towns and the ranching economy, and 4) increase the abundance of wildlife.

The Coalition offers various resources to producers to better manage their rangeland. These include a range consulting program, a mentoring network, grazing schools, informational videos, and much more. For more information about the SD Grassland Coalition, visit their webpage at <https://sdgrass.org/>.



South Dakota GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

South Dakota Grasslands Initiative

The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative is a collaborative network of diverse organizations, agencies, and individuals who support grasslands as a means of retaining prairie ecosystems, both native and restored, while sustaining rural economies and healthy communities. South Dakota Grasslands Initiative welcomes partners from all facets of South Dakota, including those with a focus on our agricultural, environmental, economic, and social components.

The mission of the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative (SDGI) is to promote South Dakota grasslands, through elevating public awareness and supporting those who want to make an impact, for the benefit of current and future generations.

The core values of SDGI are: 1) Retention of South Dakota's native prairie ecosystems, 2) Science-based education and decision making, 3) Acknowledgement of traditional knowledge, 4) Discussion that honors opposing viewpoints and perspectives, 5) Support for producers & landowners who want to improve grasslands, and 6) Recognition that diversified income streams are essential to sustainable agricultural operations for the benefit of all South Dakotans .

For more information visit <https://sdgrassinitiative.org/>.



Photo by USDA NRCS SD

2024 South Dakota Grassland Summit

On March 18 & 19, the very first grassland summit was held in Oacoma, SD. The inaugural summit was hosted by the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative. This event took a comprehensive look at the status and role of grasslands in South Dakota. Individuals from around the region were brought together to focus on the future of our grasslands and the sustainability of our rural communities that depend on them. Attendees were given the opportunity to both listen and to participate in developing a plan for action through partnerships. Speaker topics included the status of grasslands in the state, grassland economics and profitability, economics of invasive species, and collaborative solutions to halt grassland loss.

A recording of the speakers from the first day of presentations is available for public viewing (www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSgW7oWW4daA2t6I02w3dCpgoK10Li_n). For additional information about the grassland summit, visit <https://sdgrassinitiative.org/summit/>.

Attendees at the SD Grassland Summit held in Oacoma this past March (pictured below).





Dakota Grasslands: Where Good Things Grow

Where Good Things Grow is a public service awareness and education campaign that aims to educate the public about the value of grasslands and soil health and to illuminate the threats to our grasslands. The campaign has produced television ads, radio spots, educational material, and even a music video.

The campaign is produced by the SD Grassland Coalition in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, SD Association of Conservation Districts, and SD Soil Health Coalition. For more information about Where Good Things Grow or to view their promotional material, visit their webpage at <https://wherewoodthingsgrow.org/>.



Instruments of the public service awareness and education campaign "Where Good Things Grow". These include a popular children's coloring book "Space Explorers" (left), an award winning music video (above), and television and radio advertisements (right).



SD grassland video series

"Our Amazing Grasslands" is a monthly video series that highlights what South Dakota producers are doing to protect and enhance their grasslands. Videos include testimonials from producers and professionals. A few videos have highlighted Custer County producers including the 777 Bison Ranch, Rittberger Ranch, and the Sander family.

Project partners of the videos include The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, South Dakota State University, Audubon Dakota, Ducks Unlimited, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, SD Game, Fish and Parks, SD Soil Health Coalition, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and SD Grassland Coalition.

Videos are available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLg6Jx7lcOmB2YcAWtowbjWSVTRBICt17o>

Collaborative forestry project

(Continued from page 1)

This project was awarded to the Custer Conservation District by the Black Hills Resource Advisory Committee in 2021 with work being completed over the previous two winters by Forest Service staff.

Although this project has wrapped, Forest Service staff continue working in the area as part of an ongoing effort to reduce wildfire risks in the area.



Notice of Board Vacancies

The following offices will become vacant on December 31, 2024 due to the expiration of the present term of office or due to resignation of the following board supervisors: Dave Thom, Oonagh Wood, and Paul Nettinga. Term length is four years.

All parties interested in election to the board may begin circulation of nominating petitions on January 1, 2024. Petitions must be filed in the office of the county auditor located in the Custer County Courthouse during regular business hours.

The deadline for filing nomination petitions is July 1, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. If a petition is mailed by registered mail by July 1, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., it shall be considered filed.

Contact our office for questions about obtaining and circulating a petition.

Calendar of Events

June 25-27—SD Range Management Workshop, Belle Fourche, SD. For more information, contact Krista Ehlert @ 605-394-2236.

June 26-27—West River Soil Health School by the SD Soil Health Coalition, Caputa, SD. For more information, visit www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/

July 8-10—Women on the Range Grazing Workshop, Wedge Tent Ranch, Faith, SD. For more information, contact Krista Ehlert @ 605-394-2236.

July 11—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

August—no Board meeting

Summer-Beaver dam analog workshop

September 7—Landowner Forestry Workshop, Argyle Volunteer Fire Department, Argyle, SD. For more information contact Mike Baldwin @ 605-673-5680.

September 12—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

Calendar continued

September 12-14—Grazing School by the SD Grassland Coalition, Oacoma, SD. For more information, contact Judge Jessop @ 605-280-0127.

September 25—Pennington Conservation District Soil Health Conference, Rapid City, SD. For more information, contact Lindsay Mader @ 605-342-0301 x3.

October 10—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

October 16—Legislative meeting with local political candidates, Rapid City, SD. More details to come.

November 14—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

Future newsletter article of interest - Beaver Dam Analogs



In our next newsletter, we will spend some time talking about beaver dam analog structures. Also known as BDAs, these devices mimic beaver activity and can provide similar habitat benefits as real beaver dams. Stay tuned.

Newsletter Mailing List

We are always interested in expanding our audience. Let us know if you would like to be added to our newsletter distribution list. Just give us a call @ 605-673-5680 or send an email to custercd@sdconservation.net.





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www.custercountysd.com/conservation
-district/

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publication to multiple recipients.

Newsletter of the Custer County Conservation District

District Board

Dave Thom - Chair
Paul Nettinga - Vice-Chair
Oonagh Wood - Treasurer
Tamarah Caster - Supervisor
Greg Neugebauer - Supervisor
Advisors: Stuart Adrian, Stephenie Rittberger,
and Gladwin Paulsen
Mike Baldwin - District Manager
Mike Linde - County Commission Liaison

NRCS Staff

Vacant - District Conservationist, Rapid City
Brad Humbracht - District Conservationist, Hot
Springs

Partners

SD Dept. of Agriculture and Natural Resources,
Resource Conservation and Forestry Division
SD Game, Fish & Parks
National Wild Turkey Federation
USFS, Buffalo Gap National Grassland
USFS, Black Hills National Forest



*The mission of the Custer County
Conservation District is to promote
conservation of soil, water, and
natural resources for residents
and visitors now and in the future.*



Established in 1940