

Our Mission:

To provide water quality education and funding for cost effective clean water projects that improve the North Fork Ninescah Watershed which feeds Cheney Lake.

H2info

CHENEY LAKE WATERSHED, INC.

FALL 2009

Celebrating 15 years of Progress!

By Howard Miller

The City of Wichita Perspective

This is the second of a four part series looking back at 15 years of Watershed Management

Part Three - looks at where we are today

Part Four - is a look ahead

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Taste and odor complaints about Wichita's water in the early 1990's drove Jerry Blain and David Warren to look at the issues surrounding Cheney Lake. Blain, as Superintendent of Production and Pumping, and Warren, as Director of Wichita's Water and Sewer Department, began to look at blue green algae and the fact that it was the culprit for most of the taste and odor issues. They soon realized that the solution was complex and the road to recovery was long. As with anything in life, timing is everything. At the very time Blain and Warren were scratching

their heads a group of concerned farmers and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) personnel in Reno County were concerned about

phosphorus it was carrying into the lake were the primary cause of the algae blooms. Not using Cheney Lake water because of the taste and odor was not an option since well over 50% of the water used in Wichita came from Cheney Lake and their secondary source, the Equus Beds groundwater area, had its own set of problems. Now the question became where is the sediment and the phosphorus coming from, and how do you begin to decrease the amount coming into the reservoir? Blain and Warren soon learned that working with farmers in the watershed to address the causes would be much more effective than treating the symptoms in the lake. But Jerry



Jerry Blain with the City of Wichita, works alongside CMC members. From left, Sig Collins, Nathan Stillwell, Allan Grilliot, Jerry Blain, Budd Fountain and Derek Zongker.

Celebrating 15 Years of Progress!

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is quick to add, “We realized we could not force Best Management Practices (BMPs) to be done on farms in the Watershed,” and that leaving the choice to the farmers themselves was a much better way to create change. From the beginning Blain and Warren realized that leaving the control in the hands of the Citizens Management Committee (CMC) was the way to be effective in reaching the goals of adding an extra 100 years to the life of the lake and reducing nutrient loading. Wichita agreed to provide cost share funds for BMPs and left the CMC in charge of determining what BMPs would be effective in reaching the goals and also gave the CMC the responsibility to approve projects for payment. When asked how he was able to give the control over to the CMC Warren responds, “We had a good group of city council members at the time that saw the need of curing the disease not just treating the symptoms.”

Warren states that people within

the city of Wichita that use water and farmers in the watershed need to realize that “their fates are interrelated”. Every time someone in the city opens a faucet they affect the life of a farmer that could be well over 60 miles from the faucet they are using. When they use the water they are asking that farmer to put BMPs on his land to improve the water they are drinking. Likewise farmers need to realize the management of their farms has an effect on that person taking the drink; be it positive or negative.

When asked if water quality has improved over time both Blain and Warren respond that you need to look at what conditions would be if we had done nothing since 1992. Looking at the water quality from that perspective one realizes very quickly that indeed improvements have been made. Both Blain and Warren pointed out the partnership between the rural area and the city is an excel-

lent outcome of the effort to address water quality. Deb Ary, Superintendent of Production and Pumping since April 2009, notes that “the arrangement is ideal. The project is owned and run by the local people and the City benefits from its investment in the watershed.”

Warren continues that “the influence of the City goes far beyond it’s boundaries” and in the same way watershed leaders believe the influence of those living and farming in the watershed goes far beyond it’s boundaries and in this case it affects the life of someone over 20 miles down the pipe from Cheney Lake. To make continued improvements in water quality each partner must trust the other to do their part to reach the goal.

Next in our four part series we will look at what has been done so far to improve water quality and some of the research that has helped us learn what things best address the water quality issues.

Plan Ahead for New or Renovated Livestock Facilities

By
Lisa
French

Every few months I get a phone call from a producer who is wanting to build pens and feeding facilities for their

livestock. The producer wants to know before they start whether they have chosen the right location and what we can suggest to make the facility even better. I love these calls.

We can sometimes help these producers find cost share for watering facilities, filter strips around the pens, grass seeding, and sometimes even for part of the fence. Even if they don’t qualify for any cost

share funds, we can arrange for technical assistance to develop a good plan. In one instance the producer ended up developing an entirely different location based on planning assistance.

The calls we don’t enjoy are the ones from producers who have already made a substantial investment in a poor site from the standpoint of off-site impacts. These folks often are calling because of complaints from neighbors or even a visit from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.



Plan Ahead

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By this point, it may be too late to arrange for cost share funding. The producer may need to make changes that are difficult and/or expensive. And seldom can we come up with a plan that modifies the work they have already done to create a great facility for their livestock.

Your investment in livestock facilities – whether as simple as clearing a spot to feed round bales or as capital intensive as pipe pens and concrete bunks – deserves some careful thought ahead of time to avoid impacting your neighbors downstream. Do yourself a favor before you renovate old facilities or build new ones by talking with our office or your local NRCS personnel about your plans.

Making Good Decisions with Expired CRP

By Lisa French

Although there is hope for another general CRP sign-up in the coming year to re-enroll expiring contracts, there is no guarantee that we will not see a lot of acres coming out of the program within the next few years. Twenty percent of the Cheney Lake Watershed is currently in CRP grass but those contracts were accepted at a time when the entire watershed was considered a Priority Area by FSA. With fewer priority acres, we are bound to see fewer contracts in our watershed.

So now is the time for landowners and farm operators to sharpen their pencils and consider their farm goals in the event they find themselves out of the CRP business. Options for these acres include grazing with Wichita cost share available for perimeter fence and

water sources. Hay production or seed harvest are possibilities. Lease or sale to someone with an interest in hunting might be another option. If the soils are suitable, the landowner may want to return the acres to crop production. It is often possible to return part of the acres to production with the most sensitive acres remaining in grass under the Continuous CRP program.

Whichever option is favored, the landowner should look carefully at the potential costs and be realistic about potential returns. There may be costs associated with adding required conservation practices on HEL (Highly Erodible Land) acres. If the field was not worth farming ten or twenty years ago, it is probably no better today. Contact your local NRCS office or the watershed office for information specific to your land.

off the mark by Mark Parisi
www.offthemark.com



Range Management Field Day

Thursday September 10, 2009 6:30 PM
Sandwich meal @ 6:30 followed by a hands-on evaluation

Larry Davisson's Pasture, Sylvia, KS

From US Hwy 50 & Netherland Rd east of Sylvia

Go ¾ mile north on Netherland Rd & ¾ mile west on Mills Ave
(Follow the yellow Field Day signs)

Featured speaker Dale Kirkham, rancher from Greenwood County & field coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center will help us learn how to evaluate range conditions.

Recent NRCS Personnel Change

Jeremiah Schutz is the new soil technician in Reno County. He grew up in Plattsmouth, Nebraska and graduated from Colorado State University with a B.S degree in Natural Resources and Rangeland Ecology.

Jeremiah worked as a biological technician for Nebraska Game and Parks for 2 years then joined the Natural Resources Conservation Service as a Conservation Technician in Weeping Water, NB in 2006. He began work in Reno County on May 26th.

His hobbies include fishing and hunting. He also enjoys working with the public and is looking forward to serving in Reno County.

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The Case for No-till When Converting CRP acres to Cropland

By Lisa French

Over the past 10 or 20 years, the soils under your CRP sod have gained some valuable soil quality attributes that will be lost with tillage. The use of no-till methods allows you to capture those soil quality benefits even if you have made the decision to return the land to crop production.

In essence, your land has been in no-till production for the length of the CRP contract. Although the soil improvements might not be as great as they would be if they had been managed under an intensive no-till cropping system, you have been building organic matter and developing a stable soil structure that increases the

ability of your soil to capture and hold rainfall.

Soils with well-defined structure, stable aggregates, more pores, and higher organic matter content are better able to conduct water through the soil. Tillage breaks down the soil structure and decreases organic matter resulting in reduced water infiltration rates throughout the soil profile.

About 20% of the Cheney watershed is in CRP. Since many of these fields have a high potential for soil erosion, there is concern about their return to crop production using intensive tillage. Use of no-till methods has its own set of challenges but the benefits to water quality,

your soil, and your bottom line make it worth investigating.

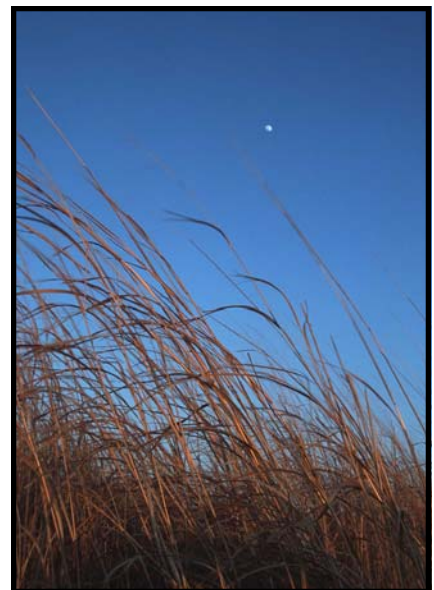


Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS