

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.

SUMMER 2009

Celebrating 15 years of Progress!

By Howard Miller

**This is the first of a four part series looking back at 15 years of Watershed Management
Part Two - looks at the City of Wichita perspective
Part Three - looks at where we are today
Part Four - is a look ahead**

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In the early 1990's Lyle Newby and Marion Krehbiel, fellow members of the Reno County Conservation District board, began to talk about their concerns with sediment in Cheney Lake and what could be done to slow the trend. Marion's involvement with the reservoir began years before when the Ninescah River was dammed in the early 1960's to provide flood control and a water supply source for Wichita. Marion's father was one of the farmers that would be displaced by the reservoir construction. Rather than get bitter and lose the battle, Marion's father chose to campaign for fair prices for the land and buildings of those who were being displaced. Fast forward to the early 90's

and Marion heard that fisherman were saying that they could talk to Wilmer Freund, an engineer in Wichita. Lyle had the lake as it filled with sediment at the mouth of the lake. Like his father Marion chose to

Lyle suggested they talk to Wilmer Freund, an engineer in Wichita. Lyle had worked with Wilmer through the Mt. Hope watershed district. Lyle quips that he and Marion



Marion Krehbiel, left, and Lyle Newby visit while standing at the Ninescah Bridge on Centennial Rd.

were just a couple of country boys who had no idea what they were starting when they went to visit with Wilmer. After some discussion and a phone call Lyle and Marion had their first meeting with officials from the City of Wichita. After several years of planning with a task force composed of farmers and agency representatives, the Citizens Management Committee (CMC) was formed in 1994. The CMC served as a subcommittee of the Conservation District and had the responsibility of informing fellow farmers and ranchers that Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be

be proactive and look at where the sediment was coming from and find a way to address it. Marion asked Lyle how they could contact someone in Wichita to talk about the sediment

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needed on their farms in order to reach water quality goals in the North Fork Ninnescah River. From the beginning the plan was to hold small group meetings where farmers could hear about the programs that are available to help pay for BMPs. Marion was happy to hear that the City of Wichita was willing to put additional dollars out to farmers to help pay for conservation work with no strings attached. Lyle thinks those additional dollars helped but he is still amazed at how many farmers and ranchers had such a positive attitude and got on board to participate. To date, well over 2,000 BMPs have been installed in the Watershed. It wasn't just the response of the water-

shed residents that surprised Lyle but the agency response was also very positive. Several agencies either had data that could be used or were willing to do sampling, testing and modeling and then share that information with other agencies. Those agencies included the Soil Conservation Service (now Natural Resources Conservation Service - NRCS), Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (now Farm Service Agency - FSA), United States Geological Survey (USGS), Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The agen-

cies agreed to work together adding their part to increase the knowledge of the water quality issues in the watershed. Today many of those same agencies continue to do research or help farmers implement conservation practices in the Watershed. The CMC and staff of the Watershed are committed to sharing information with those living and farming in the Watershed so that we all understand the issues and work together to improve water quality in the reservoir.

Next time, we'll look at the project from the perspective of the City of Wichita.

OPTIONS FOR EXPIRING CRP

There are many questions surrounding the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and what will happen to CRP contracts expiring in the next few years. In the 2008 Farm Bill, a cap of 32 million acres was set for CRP enrollment. The current levels of enrolled CRP are approximately 3 million acres over that cap. The reduction of acres will most likely come from current CRP contracts that will be expiring in the next few years.

It is important to be ahead of the game when determining what you can do with CRP acres if you are not able to renew your contract. You should begin now researching your options for the best use of the land.

First of all, if the land is broken out and placed back into cultivation will it make a long term profit? Are parts of the field more fertile than other areas?

With today's high production costs, every acre has to pay its own way. Perhaps farming only a portion of the land is the best decision. There may be other options for the less productive acres that will net you a positive return instead of a loss on those acres.

While reenrolling entire fields back into CRP may not be an option, it may be possible to leave portions of the field in grass under Continuous CRP (CCRP). Drainage areas may remain in grass to prevent gully erosion or you might leave grass buffers around the edge of fields or along streams to provide both wildlife habitat and a buffer for ag chemicals and nutrients. There are also practices under CCRP which would allow for "wet" areas that seldom produce a crop to remain in grass under a CRP contract. A little advanced

planning can provide you a good picture of the options available for your current CRP field.

If your plans are to use the grass for grazing or haying, planning needs to start now. In many cases there are management practices that can be applied before contract expiration that will enhance the grazing quality. There are also cost share opportunities to establish water sources, cross fencing, and even perimeter fencing around expired CRP acres in the Cheney Lake watershed. Planning assistance is available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to aid you in your decision making process.

Contact your local NRCS, conservation district office, or the Cheney Lake watershed office to begin discussing your options for expiring CRP acres before they actually expire.

**By
Robert
Wimer**

**Reno
County
District
Conservationist**

New Program Pays \$100/Acre for Grass Plantings

By Lisa French

Like most farmers, David Friesen has a few acres of cropland that are always difficult to farm. In David's case, his field near the Ninnescah River has a tendency to stay wet. Getting a crop planted and harvesting the crop are both a challenge. With a new program offered by the Cheney Lake Watershed, David is going to be paid \$100/acre to seed a little more than 5 acres to Eastern gamagrass for hay or grazing. As David says, "It looks like it's a no-brainer."

The Cheney Lake Watershed is now offering one-time incentive payments of \$100/acre, funded by the City of Wichita, for crop acres seeded to permanent vegetation. The species used depend on the producer's goals, soil types, and site condition. Eligible land must have five years of cropping history and must be located within the watershed east of Highway 14. Land in this area is more likely to contribute sediment to Cheney Reservoir than other areas of the watershed.

The watershed staff will work with landowners to locate additional cost share funds to cover the cost of seeding and a water source for livestock, if needed. In return for the incentive payment the landowner is asked to develop a ten year management plan for establishment and maintenance of the grass.

These grass plantings may be one of the most effective practices to reduce soil losses in key areas of the watershed. And at the same time the program presents an economical option for landowners who want to convert cropland to grazing or hay production. For more information, contact the Watershed office at 620-665-0231.

What's The Carrying Capacity of Your Pasture?

By Lisa French

The goal of every working farm or ranch should be to market a valuable product while maintaining or improving the productivity of the land base. Too often we push for a few more pounds of beef at the expense of the grass. Over the long term the productivity of the operation suffers.

So how do we know the optimum carrying capacity of any given pasture? Many livestock operations run the same number of cows that Grandpa put in that pasture – even though their cow size has increased by 20% since Grandpa had the herd. Some people look at what the neighbors are doing – even though the neighbor has a very different pasture and different management. For some folks, the stocking rate is determined by financial pressure to get the most return in the short term from a particular pasture. These folks are sacrificing their future productivity and long term viability in order to pay the bills in the short term. Some folks just take a guess at the best stocking rate. They might hit the optimum stocking rate but it's not likely.

So, how should you figure a stocking rate for your pasture? Basically you want to match the amount of forage that your pasture will produce with the right number of animals to harvest that forage while leaving enough to maintain the health and vigor of the plants. One rule of thumb is that 25% of the forage can be grazed, 25% will be lost to trampling, insects or other loss, and 50% should be left for plant maintenance. Another rule of thumb is "Take half – Leave half". These two guidelines are similar if you assume that at least part of the "take half" will be lost to insects or trampling.

Forage production potential will vary between pastures depending on many factors that include soil characteristics, past grazing history, the existing plant species, and rainfall. With practice and close observation producers can be quite good at predicting available forage. Our watershed office encourages ranchers to work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assess their grass resources and determine the potential forage production for the coming year.

NRCS has developed a system of range site descriptions that are based on soil type and slope. Different range sites have different production potentials and differing plant communities. Using the range sites that can be identified in your pasture and additional information including type and size of livestock you use, length of the grazing season, the condition of the grass, precipitation in the past year or two we can estimate the forage available and work with you to develop a management plan that will make the best use of the forage while maintaining the grass in good condition. And that's just the starting point. Any management plan must be flexible with the potential to change if drought sets in or the cows suddenly can't keep up with the grass.

So if you automatically haul the cows to grass without much thought about the capacity of the pasture, spend a little time looking at your grass and visiting with NRCS regarding carrying capacity. The long term health of your operation may depend on it.

Cost-Share Sign-Up

Reno County May 18 - June 19

Stafford County

septic systems - July 1 thru July 31
all other practices - July 1 thru Dec. 4

Pratt County - closed

Kingman County - closed

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All Reno County Conservation District programs and services are provided to anyone regardless of race, sex, color, national origin, ancestry, age or physical or mental handicap.

Funding for Conservation Work

State cost share programs are available in your county to help you install conservation practices. Within the Cheney Lake watershed, the City of Wichita will provide additional funds for these same practices so that your out-of-pocket cost is minimized. If you have ideas about improving your farm operation in ways that will benefit water quality, call your local conservation district and ask about the potential for cost share funds.

Practices that may be eligible for funding include:

- Relocation or redesign of livestock feeding areas
- Brush management
- Terraces
- Grass waterways
- Fence to keep livestock out of streams, ponds, or wet areas
- Well plugging
- Watering systems for livestock
- Grass and tree plantings
- Replacement of failed household septic systems
- Wetland development
- Other practices that address field erosion

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by Mark Parisi

