

# Conservation Conversation



## RED HILLS CEDAR RODEO

Despite the near-record heat and strong Kansas wind, approximately 75 folks turned out for the Red Hills Cedar Rodeo on September 21.

A hamburger and hot dog lunch provided by Berry Tractor and Equipment, Wichita, was followed with an introduction to cedar removal, prairie and fire ecology and mechanical practices by Dusty Tacha, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist. Red Hills Prescribed Burn Association President, Tom Carr, spoke of his experience in working with a contractor to remove cedars on his land and the importance of ridding the countryside of this threat to healthy rangelands. Supervisory District Conservationist for the Medicine Lodge Management Unit, Wyatt Sperry, provided information on USDA programs to assist with the removal of cedars.

The rest of the afternoon was spent watching demonstrations as several contractors were on site to show the cedar-obliterating capabilities of their machinery.

Special thanks to the following for sponsoring and/or supporting the event:

- The Comanche Pool Prairie Resources Foundation
- Berry Tractor and Equipment Company, Wichita
- Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Red Hills Prescribed Burn Association
- Citizens Bank of Kansas, Medicine Lodge
- The Peoples Bank, Medicine Lodge
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



### Board of Supervisors

Georgi Dawson..... Chairman  
 Calvin Boyd..... Vice-Chairman  
 Matt Cantrell..... Treasurer  
 John Cook..... Member  
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*The Barber County Conservation District regular board meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month.*

### Office Closings:

October 9: Columbus Day  
 November 10: Veteran's Day  
 November 23: Thanksgiving Day  
 December 25: Christmas Day  
 January 1: New Year's Day

## Practice Maintenance By Martin Gugelman, Civil Engineer Technician Scott City, KS

Fall is that time of year when the fruits of the summer's labor will be harvested. When we are lucky enough to receive timely rains, those fruits can be somewhat larger than usual. Along with the rains that bring a larger harvest comes more maintenance for the harvest equipment due to the increased volume running through them. Your conservation practices are no different, they will need more maintenance as rainfall amounts increase, especially when large events happen.

When it comes to terraces and diversions, you will want to check for any overtopped or damaged areas and repair as needed. The constructed ridge height and block heights should be maintained. Any silt accumulations in the channel should be removed to maintain capacity and allow graded systems to drain as designed.

If pipe outlets are used in these systems, they should be inspected to ensure that they will still drain as planned and all inlets and outlets are intact. If your terraces and diversions drain into a waterway it should be inspected as well. Any eroded or silted areas should be regraded as needed to restore the original shape of the waterway. Areas that had to be disturbed for regrading should be reseeded to the same grass as was originally established in the waterway.

All of these practices should be inspected for rodent damage with repairs made as needed. Some of these practices can be inspected during harvest which will help save some time as well as figure out how much time to allow for repair.

So far we have discussed practices in cropland fields, but we should also think about any rangeland practices that have been installed. Some of the practices that come to mind are livestock pipelines and tanks.

Pipelines should be inspected for areas of backfill that have settled or washed out. These areas should be restored as needed to maintain the designed buried depth of pipeline to avoid freezing. All of the air vents and hydrants should be inspected for leaks, which should be repaired as needed. They also should not be washed out to expose critical parts to freezing. If you are done using the line for the season, this would be a good time to drain any components that could freeze.

The tanks should have fill added around the perimeter as needed to correct any erosion or cattle trails. The float valve and overflow should be inspected to insure that they are operating properly. The small animal escape ramp should be inspected that it is still attached and placed as planned.

All cross fences should be inspected and repaired as would be done with the perimeter fence.

Proper maintenance of conservation practices is critical, just as with maintenance of your farm machinery. Taking the time to evaluate and repair your conservation practices will keep your practices "running" for a long time. For more information, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site [www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) or your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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### Just So You Know...

Folks are always coming into the office asking if the high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe we sell is only for farmers, or for sale only within Barber County. The answer to both questions is "no". Our drainage pipe is available for sale to farmers, oil companies, townships, cities, - anyone who has a need and anywhere you want to take it.

We stock a large inventory of various pipe sizes in dual wall or single wall, and components; what we don't have, we can get. And we keep our prices as affordable as we possibly can.

The next time you are replacing metal pipe in a pond dam, a culvert, or if you are installing terrace pipe outlets in your field, stop by the conservation office and let us price our dual wall HDPE pipe.



## Dealing With Invasive Plant Species By Carl Jarboe, Soil Conservation Technician

Have you noticed changes in your pastures lately? Have you seen any new plants, ones you don't recognize?

I'm lucky enough to help many area ranchers, which includes field visits. While on the ranch I'm often asked about plants they are seeing. Many times it's a simple, "do you know what this plant is" question. Followed by "will it become a problem" or "why is it so abundant this year?" Usually the answer is that the plant you are seeing is a native forb, or weed depending on your background. Rarely will a native plant get out of bounds to the point they would require a control measure like spraying.

All plants have good years and bad years. Due to management or weather we sometimes see a particular native plant express itself in great numbers. This year it was many flowered scurf pea or wild alfalfa that seemed to be everywhere. The first identifying question is usually easy; the second question, "will it become a problem" is a little harder to answer. Seldom do we need to spray a native species to try and control it. This year there may seem to be thousands of one plant while next year and you may see only a few. It's all about growing conditions and range management.

Some plants are considered invasive; few of those are native. Often they are brought in the area for home landscaping or flower beds. Sometimes they are plants used in wind breaks. Grassy species are sometimes planted for grazing and escape into native range.

Your management can encourage or discourage plants of all types. Weather too can give a plant an opportunity to express its self in a way that is unusual; maybe greater numbers of larger plants or perhaps you don't see any at all. Nature really knows how to take advantage to produce itself when need be.

What is a range manager to do? The first step to address the issue is to properly identify the plant you are concerned about. Dig one up, pull it up or bring in a portion to the office. Place your sample in a plastic bag, jar or some sort of container and keep cool if possible. A sample that has leaves and stems is good but a sample with leaves, stems and flowers is even better. Add a few seedpods and identification just got easier. Information about where on the ranch it is growing helps as well.

Once the plant is identified the "why am I seeing so many this year" can be addressed. Grazing information will help determine if it has a lasting effect. For example if you rotate your cattle in the same rotation every year you will start seeing plants taking advantage of opportunity to take over. Livestock graze kind of like people eat. At different times of year they are getting their needed nutrients from different plants. Just like apples are in season now so we tend to eat more in the fall. If every year cattle are grazing in pasture A in May and June, they will select the plants they like and really work them over. Add drought to the mix and now you may have some species of grasses and forbs selected to the point their numbers decrease in the pasture. Something has to fill the void, usually weedy plants but sometimes a more dominate forb that is less palatable at that time of year. Maybe even an invasive species will show up because of opportunity.

By changing your rotation each year (start in pasture B this year) we can give pasture A a break early in the season allowing the native species to perform at their best and help keep the ground covered to discourage weedy plants and some dominate species. If possible start in pasture C next year and so forth with your grazing system.

If you just turn cattle out and let them pick what they want to eat and hang around the stock water tank they will be like a 5 year old allowed to eat only ice cream and drink soda pop. The calves will learn to eat like mom which will lead to more heavy-hitting on the best plants that you have. Before you know it you have a range site that consists of poor quality plants in some areas and underutilized species in other areas. Changing your rotation and leaving the livestock in the pasture long enough to utilize what the native range can grow and then rotating them to another pasture (giving pasture A rest) is a good way to help prevent invasion by invasive species. This will save you time and money you might have otherwise used instead of spraying to eliminate invasive weeds and woody plants.

We humans have changed the playing field from how the range managed itself 200 years ago. Removing fire from the equation was one major change. Fencing was another. Bison would move in large numbers across the prairie often following fire, giving some areas rest. Rotational grazing along with prescribed fire can bring your ranch to a more natural condition.

I will follow up with a series of articles about some of the invasive species commonly found and some new ones that are just now coming into our neck of the woods. Hopefully this information will help you know what to look for and provide information that will help manage your ranch in a way that is sustainable and profitable at the same time.

## Invasive Species Are Here To Stay By Car Jarboe, Soil Conservation Technician

Yes, the unfortunate truth is, invasive species are here to stay. However you can help prevent or at least slow down their spread.

Old World Bluestems (OWB) is invading our native prairie. OWB was planted in the 50's for grazing before it was known to spread like crazy. OWB is easy to establish (easier than our native grasses) and is still planted today for pasture grass by some. This plant is a vigorous grower and produces large volumes of forage. The forage quality is poor as it matures when compared to native grass. When burned and fertilized and a heavy stocking rate is used, it can work for some producers.

Unfortunately Old World Bluestems escapes, its seed blows in the wind or catches a ride on trucks and equipment that run through it while in seed. It's common to see OWB in road ditches, and patches also show up in our native range pastures.

In late summer OWB stems start turning yellow and are often called yellow grass. It is found in large patches that are a solid stand, out competing the native grasses and forbs. It also displaces wildlife. Young birds such as quail chicks cannot navigate through dense stands of OWB.

OWB is a warm season grass as are most of our native species. For that reason it's hard to remove from a pasture or a native range site. Glyphosate and Arsenal are two herbicides that have shown some promise in helping eradicate this invasive grass. Neither herbicide is selective so they may kill everything they are sprayed on. There are several ongoing studies on how to remove OWB from range settings.

With any luck one of the studies may produce a miracle cure. It is recommended that you spray with the products listed above to keep the OWB from going to seed, which will help stop or at least slow the spread of this very invasive species. For more information on Old World Bluestem control check out K-State University website or contact your local extension agent for their recommendations.



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## KIDS AND CONSERVATION

At the beginning of each new school year the conservation district delivers poster paper and teacher information packets to Barber County schools, giving kids the opportunity to show what they know about conservation through their artwork.

The poster contest is sponsored through the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). Posters are judged at the local level; the top three posters in each age category are sent to the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) Education & Youth Committee where they are judged at the state level and displayed at the KACD Annual Meeting in November. First place winners are then sent on to the NACD Annual Meeting and judged with a chance to compete at the national level.

This year's theme is "Healthy Soils Are Full Of Life", and we are excited to see what the kids learn while doing their research to create drawings based on this theme.

District staff will pick up the posters from the schools on October 11 and decorate the conference room walls at the USDA Service Center with all entries. Posters will be judged at the local level the next day. Feel free to stop by the conservation office October 12—19 to take a look at the posters in support of the kids and the hard work they put into their art.



## Extreme Habitat Management Techniques for Whitetail Deer by Jess Crockford

The father of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold, once said the three tools of the wildlife manager were the axe, the plow and the match. In other words, wildlife thrives on disturbance, including that resulting from fire. Although often feared, if done correctly, fire can be an **effective, safe and affordable** habitat management tool. In most situations, prescribed fire is by far the single best management practice for creating and maintaining good deer habitat. Fire was a natural ecological phenomenon for most of the Great Plains prior to European settlement. As a result, native vegetation is well adapted to burning. Fire effectively suppresses most woody plants while encouraging desirable grass and forbs. And, it is **totally natural!**

Fire will control invasive species such as Eastern Red Cedar. While Eastern Red Cedar can meet cover requirements, it should be avoided. Winters in Kansas are not severe enough to justify dense stands of cedars for thermal protection. Cedars have virtually no forage or mast value for deer. Also, a mature cedar can consume 30 gallons of water a day. Dense stands of cedars will have a devastating effect on natural springs and streams in an area, affecting the availability of water for wildlife. A 200-pound buck will typically drink 3—5 quarts of water per day. The decline in soil moisture will also negatively affect the establishment of the desirable mast trees such as oaks and walnuts. So while some biologists may recommend cedars for escape cover, this does not recognize the overall negative effect of the resulting cedar forest. Such a condition not only depletes water supplies but in effect makes those areas uninhabitable by deer. There is no forage for deer in a dense cedar forest. Prescribed fire can prevent this situation.

Habitat management objectives for deer that can be accomplished using prescribed fire include:

- Increased production of grass forage (for grazing and fawning cover) and deer browse.
- Suppression of most brush (to keep new growth within reach of deer).
- Control of selected forbs and/or grass species.
- Improved herbaceous composition.
- Improved grazing distribution of livestock and wildlife.
- Increased available forage and browse.
- Improved forage quality and/or palatability.
- Increased animal production.
- Removal of excess mulch, debris, and other organic matter.
- Improved nutrient cycling.

The Kansas Prescribed Fire Council supports and promotes the use of prescribed fire to achieve all types of management goals. The Council was organized in 2008 and is an educational non-profit that promotes the safe and effective use of prescribed fire. If you are interested in learning more about prescribe fire or burn associations, contact your local Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Service office at 620-886-5311, or the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council at 785-532-3316.

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### Seeking Nominations For 2017 Banker's Awards

The care and good stewardship of our natural resources is a life's work that many landowners take seriously and with great pride. They seek no personal accolades, but are content with the knowledge that they are protecting that which has been entrusted to them.

In an effort to stimulate a greater interest in the conservation of agricultural resources in Barber County, the Barber County Bankers' Association, Barber County Extension, and Barber County Conservation District are seeking nominations for the 2017 Banker's Conservation Award Program for soil conservation, and a windbreak award.

Winners of the soil conservation award will be selected on the following criteria: (1) use of land according to its capabilities; (2) completeness of an applied farm plan; (3) balance of farm enterprise; (4) quality of conservation work and maintenance of practices; and (5) special practices unique to the farming operation.

Considerations for the windbreak award include windbreak design, management, location, density and length. The windbreak needs to be at least three years old.

If you know of a Barber County landowner who you think should be recognized for his/her outstanding conservation efforts, contact K-State Research and Extension at 620-886-3971, or the conservation office at 620-886-5311.

## **Kansas NRCS Announces Deadline for EQIP Funding**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced November 17, 2017, as the first cut-off date to apply for fiscal year 2018 funds through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

NRCS accepts applications for EQIP on a continuous basis, but applications must be filed for these programs by November 17 to be eligible for the next round of funding. Producers interested in EQIP should submit a signed application to the local NRCS field office.

"EQIP is the cornerstone program of NRCS, providing financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers put proven and practical conservation practices on the ground," said State Conservationist Eric B. Banks. "For 2017, Kansas NRCS obligated over 35 million dollars in financial assistance contracts to Kansas producers."

The EQIP program provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers implement conservation practices to improve natural resources on working agricultural lands. Payment is provided for a variety of practices to address resource concerns such as water quality, grazing land health and productivity, soil erosion and soil quality, and wildlife habitat development.

Applications can be received in the following general EQIP ranking categories:

- ◆ Forest Land Health: To assist producers to implement forestry practices to address plant productivity, energy, soil erosion, and water quality resource concerns.
- ◆ Grazing Lands Health: To assist producers to implement grazing lands practices to address plant productivity, livestock water, and invasive plant pest resource concerns.
- ◆ Livestock Waste: To assist producers to implement conservation practices to address resource concerns associated with animal feeding operations.
- ◆ Sedimentation Above Federal Reservoirs: To assist producers with land located in watersheds above federal reservoirs to implement conservation practices to address water quality resource concerns.
- ◆ Soil Health: To assist producers to implement conservation practices that address soil organic matter, compaction, and moisture resource concerns.
- ◆ Tribal: To provide assistance to Tribal producers to implement conservation practices to address resource concerns on Tribal lands.
- ◆ Water Quality: To assist producers to implement conservation practices to address water quality and soil erosion resource concerns.

- ◆ **Water Quantity:** To assist producers to implement water saving conservation practices that address water quantity resource concerns on irrigated land.
- ◆ **Wildlife Habitat:** To assist producers to implement conservation practices that address wildlife habitat resource concerns for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife species.

The November 17 application deadline also applies to the following special EQIP initiatives:

- ◆ **Anderson Creek Wildfire Initiative:** To assist producers in remediating resource concerns resulting from the effects of a wildfire that occurred in Barber and Comanche Counties in March 2016.
- ◆ **High Tunnel System Initiative:** To help producers implement high tunnels that extend growing seasons for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner.
- ◆ **Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative:** To assist producers to implement conservation practices specifically targeted to improve the lesser prairie-chicken habitat while promoting the overall health of grazing lands.
- ◆ **Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project:** To assist landowners to establish milkweed and other plants critical to the iconic Monarch Butterfly.
- ◆ **Ogallala Aquifer Initiative:** To assist producers to reduce aquifer water use, improve water quality, and enhance the economic viability of croplands and rangelands.
- ◆ **On-Farm Energy Initiative:** Producers work with an NRCS-approved Technical Service Provider to develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an agricultural operation.
- ◆ **Organic Initiative:** To assist producers with installation of conservation practices on agricultural operations related to organic production. Producers currently certified as organic, transitioning to organic, or producers who are exempt based on the National Organic Program will have access to a broad set of conservation practices to assist in treating their resource concerns.
- ◆ **National Water Quality Initiative:** NRCS will work in priority watersheds to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners improve water quality and aquatic habitats in impaired streams. NRCS will help producers implement conservation and management practices through a systems approach to control and trap nutrient and manure runoff.

“EQIP also helps address the unique circumstances of socially disadvantaged, veteran, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers, who have natural resource concerns that need to be addressed on their land,” said Banks. “Qualifying Kansas producers compete separately and receive higher payment rates.”

Visit the Kansas NRCS Web site at [www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) or your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center for more information. To find a service center near you, check on the Internet at <https://offices.usda.gov>. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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