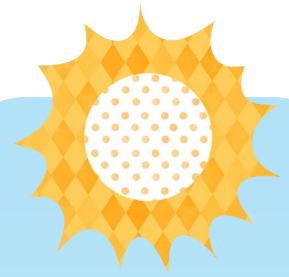


CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Official Newsletter of the Barber County Conservation District



Summer 2016

Volume 29, Issue 2

Board of Supervisors

Ted Alexander Chairman

Georgi Dawson, Vice-Chairman

Calvin Boyd, Treasurer

Matt Cantrell, Member

John Cook, Member

Sam Baier, Advisor

The Conservation District Board of Supervisors meets the first Tuesday of every month.

Inside this issue

Page 1 Meet The New Girl

Page 2 Two More Things to Think About After the Big Fire...

Page 3 Range Recovery From Wildfire

Page 4 2016 KS Range Schools

Page 5 On The Prairie, Wildfires Happen

Important Dates

6/14 Flag Day

6/19 Father's Day

7/4 Independence Day

7/28-31 Barber County Fair

9/5 Labor Day

Meet The New Girl

The Conservation District is proud to welcome the new NRCS Range Management Specialist, Kelsey Welter.

Kelsey is originally from Aurora, CO, a town just east of Denver. She became interested in plant science and ecology while riding her horse every evening and observing the different conditions of the "ranchettes" in the area. This interest in range science and her love of the outdoors drew her to the open prairie and beautiful mountains of Wyoming, where she attended college at the University of Wyoming in Laramie and worked in multiple small towns throughout the state.

She graduated from UWyo in May with a degree in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management and a minor in Reclamation and Restoration Ecology. She worked throughout the summers and school year as a range technician for the University, the county Weed and Pest District, and a private environmental consulting firm. She was active in the Range Club, and travelled to range-related conferences and competitions throughout her time at UWyo.

In her spare time, Kelsey loves to camp, swim, bake desserts and be around animals. She is looking forward to getting to know her new home and meet new people.

Stop by to meet Kelsey and welcome her to Barber County!





Picture courtesy of KSU Extension

Two more things to think about after the big fire—Old World Bluestem and stream flow recovery.

By Ken Brunson, Red Hills Project Coordinator for The Nature Conservancy

Those affected by the Anderson Creek Fire have plenty to deal with--new fences, recovering from some livestock losses, and finding suitable new forage for livestock. As fences and some herds get rebuilt and hopeful rains have brought good regrowth of grassland, keep in mind a couple of important resource concerns. One is to pay attention to possible expansion of Old World Bluestem which might have come in from some of the donated hay. Obviously, if the hay was straw or perhaps came from more northern sources, there may be less concern. But, if you think

Old World Bluestem is not preferred by cattle and will only be eaten when other more desirable native species are not available.

you received and used donated hay from more southern, roadside or prairie sources, just be aware of the possible introduction of OWB at the feeding sites. OWB is not a needed supplement to the good warm season grasses of our area and, in fact, have shown to out-compete more desirable native species. Old stands of OWB have shown to create “pedasteling” with resulting erosion between clumps of established stands. Since chemicals emitted from OWB reduce other species and even other plants of OWB from growing nearby, spaces of bare soil result and increase the threat of erosion. OWB is not preferred by cattle and will only be eaten when other more desirable native species are not available. So, in light of the initial concerns and recovery priorities after this huge wildfire, just become aware of this possible after effect and be ready to look for and treat any noticed introductions of this exotic species. Contact your area NRCS office for more information on how to recognize and treat for this invasive species.

And on another note of a positive resource interest is to watch for increased water supplies. Watch for canyon creeks and small tributaries which seem to have magically reappeared once all the cedars have been burned out. There are already observations being made of this interesting and not really surprising phenomenon. If you have observed this happening in a place on your ranch, we’d like to know about it. Please contact Ken Brunson (kbrunson@tnc.org 620-388-3768) or anyone in one of the area NRCS offices and report what, when and where you might have witnessed recovery of surface flows. This would be particularly significant for small creeks and canyon drainages which were known to have flows in decades past but seem to have lost flows even before the recent drought in the earlier part of this decade.

RANGE RECOVERY FROM WILDFIRE

By Carl Jarboe

Range recovery from the wildfire has been great so far however it has raised a few questions. Is it a weed, wildflower or a forb? Do I need to try and control the plants I'm seeing? A weed by definition is a plant growing out of place.

Many producers are seeing the same thing—what appears to be a weedy pasture. In places, you have to really look hard to find the grass.

Is this a big problem? The answer is that it depends (I really dislike that answer but it's true). In 99% of the pastures I've looked at it's not a problem, actually it's very good. The first thing I notice is how the plants are re-vegetating areas that were bare right after the fire. This is good, helping slow down erosion and giving the other native plants a chance at getting going. In a very few places the recovery has included some not so good plants. Let's look at the good ones first.

Many flower scurf-pea is one that is everywhere. Sometimes called *wild alfalfa* this forb is good for pastures. Its nitrogen fixing ability is taking nitrogen from the air and putting it into the ground to feed your grasses and other forbs. While this year it seems to be taking over, it really isn't. Next year you will see more grass and less scurf-pea. This is a native plant that definitely is not a weed.

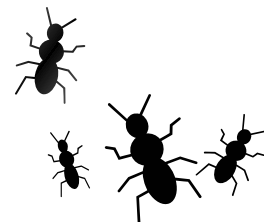
Western ragweed is another forb. Yes, it is a forb that is actually grazed by livestock certain times of the year. Can there be too much rag weed? Yes, most of the information I have read on the subject suggests that you need to have over 30% of your pasture infested with ragweed before it's worth trying to do something with. I haven't seen a pasture that infested yet except in heavy use areas, and in those areas at least it is helping prevent erosion. A side note, quail love ragweed seeds.

Let's look at a plant that has me concerned.

Smooth Sumac is coming on strong. It is very aggressive and can take over an area very quickly. I have already seen this plant showing up where I have not seen it before. Often it is found in the burned out areas where cedar trees were thick. This is a woody plant that will most likely need some sort of control measure taken. Spraying at the right time with the right product can be very effective. An ATV with a sprayer on the back may be just the ticket. See your local County Extension Agent for information about controlling this woody plant.

We consider 10 to 12% forbs normal in this area on most sites. We are definitely seeing a higher percentage in the burned areas this year. I do not think they will be of a concern as the next few years pass by. It is normal to see this large numbers of forbs in the recovery period after a wildfire. In 2 to 3 years you will see a grass dominated pasture again. This of course is dependent upon your careful management and proper grazing.

If you have concerns or questions feel free to contact us at the USDA office. For information on controlling woody and herbaceous species that are an issue contact your local County Extension Agent for recommendations. Maybe you are unsure what type of "weed" is growing in your pasture. Cut a sample of a branch or stem with foliage and flowers if possible. Place it in a plastic bag with a few drops of water. Try to keep it in a cool place (not the dash of your pickup) and bring it into the office. We'll see if we can help identify it and let you know if you should be concerned or not.



The 2016 KS Range Schools Are Only 6 Weeks Away!

It is time to stop *thinking* about attending this year and register to attend. Learn more about rangeland management in a friendly setting with other ranchers, land managers, range management students and natural resource professionals. You can register at KGLC.org for the schools which cost \$350 per student which covers room, board and tuition for the 2 ½ day schools. Scholarships of \$175 are available for most ranchers and eligible college students while scholarships of \$125 are available for most natural resource agency personnel.

The West or Mid & Short Grass School is scheduled for August 2-4 at Camp Lakeside at Scott County State Lake and at The Nature Conservancy's Smoky Valley Ranch. The East or Tallgrass School is scheduled for August 16-18 at Camp Wood YMCA near Elmdale, KS.

The theme for both schools this year is "Be Prepared, Using Adaptive Management To Be Ready". There will be rancher panels that will talk about how they prepare and adapt depending upon what the challenges are that they meet during the year, both good and bad.

Besides learning plant identification, how to figure stocking rates, how to monitor vegetation response and the rest of basics needed to manage your rangeland, there will be ranchers and natural resource professionals talking with you about how to plan ahead for whatever nature or market forces bring to your ranching enterprise and how to respond to keep your rangeland health high and your livestock productive.

Learn more at our website, KGLC.org or email barth.crouch@gmail.com or call 785-452-0780 **but please register before July 22nd**.

Do make this the year you attend the Kansas Range School near you! And bring your neighbor along!

The Conservation District offers a scholarship each year to attend the KS Range School. Call us for details!

See You In "Fairadise"

"FAIRADISE" - the theme for the 96th Barber County Fair, to be held in Hardtner, KS July 28-31, 2016. Once again, the conservation office staff will be there with conservation related information and, of course, cotton candy for your sweet tooth.

There's something for everyone at the county fair—starting with a hamburger feed, 6:00 PM July 28, rodeo Friday and Saturday nights—and of course, livestock and building exhibits. Come on out for some good old fashioned fun and support the 4-H kids, your neighbors, and all those who work so hard to keep our county fair going.

and don't forget...

The Conservation District is a registered seed dealer in the state of Kansas. We custom order grass and forb seed as well as cover crop mixes—no order too big or small!

We also have a large inventory of Advanced Drainage System HDPE corrugated pipe and components for your drainage needs.

Got some cross-fencing to do? Try our 19-strand lite cable—easy to work with, no slinky effect.

We have freshly painted wildlife escape ramps for your livestock tanks.

On the Prairie, Wildfires Happen By Jess Crockford

Fire is a part of everyone's life. It heats our homes, provides light, and even propels our cars. These fires are beneficial because they are contained and under control. It is when fire gets out of control that it can be damaging, dangerous and disastrous. The recent events of the wildfires in Oklahoma and Kansas certainly highlight the destructive aspects of uncontained prairie fire.

Historically, fire has always been a part of the Great Plains ecology. These fires came about through lightning strikes and native man. The Anderson Creek fire was reportedly the eleventh largest wildfire covering approximately 367,620 acres. In today's world, even when people are careful, prairie fires are a fact of life on the Plains. They are difficult to stop and can be quite catastrophic. Yet the experience of fighting fire brings people together just as the Anderson Creek fire did. It is a communal experience shared by all who live on the Plains. It is important to note that the Great Plains (including Oklahoma and Kansas) would not be the vast prairie region that it is without fire.

In order to lessen the possibility of wildfires and speed containment, it is important to reduce the hazard which is the fuel build up. In the case of the Anderson Creek fire, large Eastern Red Cedar trees combined with heavy grass litter provided the fuel that drove the fire and made it difficult to contain. Fire can be an effective and economical technique for managing the fuel accumulation that leads to potential wildfires. The regular application of prescribed fire can control cedars and reduce the accumulation of grass litter. It can also be a communal experience with neighbors helping neighbors to carry out a burn plan in a safe and effective manner. Prescribed Burn Associations are forming across the state where neighbors are helping neighbors to safely and effectively apply prescribed fire. Prescribed fire can be applied for a variety of reasons but due to recent events, wildfire reduction should be a strong consideration. Although it was the native people that first put the torch to the grass, the current inhabitants should continue the practice in order to maintain our prairie ecosystem and reduce the wildfire potential.

At the end of the day, in the Great Plains, it is generally not a question of will the prairie burn, but when will it burn and how much (or little) control over the fire land managers can exert when fire occurs.

If you are interested in learning more about prescribe fire, burn associations, getting assistance in developing a prescribed burn plan, 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.

Cost Share Available for Septic System Repair

The Conservation District has received \$30, 539. to administer two cost-share programs. Although most of these funds will be allocated to applications received during our April sign-up period, a portion is held back for a short time specifically for repair of failed septic systems. If you are having issues with your system and it is at least 10 years old, you may be eligible for cost-share assistance to get that system repaired and running properly. Contact the conservation office at (620) 886-5311 for more information. Funding provided by the Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan Fund .