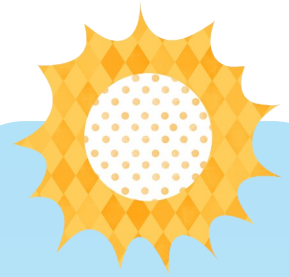


CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Official Newsletter of the Barber County Conservation District



Meet The New Guy

The Conservation District is proud to welcome the new NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist, Wyatt Sperry.

Wyatt is originally from Pattonsburg, MO, a small town in the northwest part of the state. He grew up on a farm that raised mostly corn and beans, with some milo and sunflowers being added in recently. They also raised cattle and have had sheep and goats as well.



After graduating from Northwest Missouri State University in 2005 with a degree in Agriculture Business, Wyatt went to work for NRCS as a soil conservationist in Centerville, Iowa until 2009. He then moved to Grant City, MO where he held the same position until the beginning of September 2015. Wyatt has worked with wildlife, grazing, and cropland practices and enjoys getting out to see those practices being implemented.

In his spare time, Wyatt enjoys taking his dog, Molly, for walks, grilling, and golfing when he gets the chance. He also likes doing DIY work and landscaping around the house.

"I look forward to getting out and seeing the diversity that the county has to offer, and meeting the many new faces", says Wyatt.

Stop by to meet Wyatt and welcome him to Barber County!

Summer 2015

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Board of Supervisors

Matt Cantrell, Chairman
Ted Alexander, Vice-Chairman
Sam Baier, Treasurer
Georgi Dawson, Member
Calvin Boyd, Member

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Important Dates

10/6 Board Meeting 9 AM
10/12 Columbus Day
11/3 Board Meeting 9 AM
11/11 Veteran's Day
11/26 Thanksgiving Day



“My health is always better in the fall”. By Jess Crockford

"My health is always better in the fall", as my wife's grandfather used to tell me. You see, he was a hunter and so am I. With fall coming on, it gets me to thinking about hunting and all of the relaxation I receive from it. I, also, worry about the future of hunting and how it is being impacted by the spread and invasion of eastern red-cedars into our native rangeland. Eastern red-cedars are a native evergreen tree whose natural existence was restricted to rocky bluffs, deep canyons and other areas where fire historically did not occur. With the advent of European settlement prairie fires have been suppressed, enabling cedars to expand outside of those protected areas.

In a study by M. J. Briggs, aerial photographs from 1956 to 1996 showed that in northeast Kansas a healthy native tall-grass prairie was converted to a closed canopy of eastern red-cedar in less than 40 years. Cedars are able to expand their range because of the lack of fire and the transplanting of trees into new areas. Cedars are now found in every county in Kansas and every state in the Great Plains.

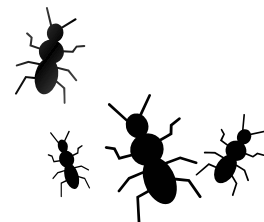
Many people are under the misconception that trees equal wildlife habitat. This is not necessarily true. These silent trespassers into our native rangelands change the composition and structure of the plant community. This reduces the habitat available to those species that evolved in a grassland environment. Grassland plants and animals must adapt, leave the area, or perish. Most grassland birds have a negative reaction to cedar tree invasion. Deer make limited use of cedars for thermal, screening and escape cover but prefer other habitat types for loafing and browsing. Because of the cedars tendency to dominate the landscape they create areas that are virtual wildlife deserts.

Cedars also have a significant impact on the forage available for grazing animals. T. G. Bidwell (OSU) found that soils capable of producing 3,000 pounds of forage per acre can have yields reduced by 50% with 250 6-foot-crown-diameter eastern red-cedars per acre. This can be a significant economic loss for ranchers.

Fire is nature's way of controlling eastern red-cedar. Cedars are a non-sprouting species that will not re-sprout after the top has been killed. Kill the top, kill the plant. With adequate fuel and proper prescribed burning conditions, fire kills most eastern red-cedars less than 4 feet tall.

Fire is an important element of the Great Plains grassland environment that was significantly stifled after European settlement. Prescribed burns safely mimic the natural fire cycle and maintain a fire-resistant landscape. It is important that modern day ranches reintroduce fire back into the ecosystem in a safe and economical way where ever feasible. Fire is Mother Nature's way of maintaining a healthy ecosystem on the Great Plains.

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.



Are Your Livestock Water Tanks in Good Shape? By Carl Jarboe

Water has proven to be one of the most precious resources you have on the ranch. We often have fixtures, like livestock water tanks, that we use all of the time but seldom take time to look them over until they fail. They start leaking or you go by one day and notice the tank is only half full of water. Further investigation shows that the float valve is hung up by debris in the tank or the overflow has a leak at ground level or the solar panels are so dirty they are producing half of the power needed to produce your daily water needs.

I've pulled up to tanks on several occasions to see wet areas that are actually mud holes around the tank because they are overflowing or wind action is blowing water over the side. Another issue that is common is erosion around tanks to the point that they are no longer level.

Can you relate to any of these observations? I'm sure a few of you are nodding your heads thinking, was he on my ranch recently? These are just very common issues that I see on a regular basis. Watering facilities should have a life of at least 20 years with a little care.

Floats and overflows should be cleaned up at least annually. I see tanks with so much moss growing around the float valve that I'm sure they are leaking at least a little. This can have an effect on the rest of your water system. If it's a pressure system it relies on floats shutting totally off to produce enough water at the next tank.

If you can find the time to clean your tanks once a year you would find that you will have a system that works as designed. Drain the tank and clean excess material from the bottom of the tank and all moss. This will help keep your capacity where it should be. Clean float valves and overflows. Is your overflow pipe draining properly? Check this out. Has it been broken off by cattle leaving a sharp piece of PVC sticking out that could injure livestock or yourself? I always suggest slipping a piece of steel pipe over the end of overflow pipes to protect them from breakage. Usually a 10' piece two sizes larger works well.

Add a little rock around the tank if needed. Cattle love to stand around in the mud on a hot day but around your tank is not the place for this to happen. We hope they drink water and move on and start grazing, making you money. If you have a panel in the tank to help prevent livestock from getting into the tank make sure it is sound and not hung up in the float valve or overflow area.

Yes, one more item for your list to check out. Take time to clean things up annually and you may spend less time next year fixing problems that could have been prevented.

Let's take a few steps to protect and save that precious resource, water.

The Conservation District carries Wildlife Escape Ramps for your convenience.

No-Till On The Plains Winter Conference

The world's leading experts in continuous no-till will honor the history of soil health and share their roadmaps for the future at the 20th annual [No-till on the Plains Winter Conference](#) Jan. 26--27, 2016, in Salina, Kan. The [Agriculture's Innovative Minds \(AIM\) Symposium](#) will follow the conference on Jan. 28.

This special anniversary celebration features a new format, starting with pre-conference events Tuesday morning. Beginning no-till producers can exchange ideas and ask questions during a special session with experienced no-tillers. A rainfall simulator will demonstrate water infiltration and raindrop impact on soil samples from no-till and conventional tillage fields. Industry Morning Marketplace will include refreshments and presentations on the latest no-till innovations and technology from exhibitors.

Keynote speakers will take the stage Tuesday afternoon, followed by the popular Beer and Bull networking event where attendees can exchange ideas with speakers, exhibitors and producers.

On Wednesday, attendees can choose from 22 breakout sessions from forward-thinking no-till producers and leading no-till researchers. The conference concludes with keynote speaker Dwayne Beck, research manager at Dakota Lakes Research Farm.

"For less than the cost of a bag of seed, you can get up to three days of intensive training, discussion and networking," said Steve Swaffar, executive director for No-till on the Plains. "This year's speaker lineup is the best you'll find in one place. It's well worth the investment considering the volume of expert insight you'll receive and the impact on your bottom line once you apply these concepts."

The Agriculture's Innovative Minds (AIM) Symposium will follow the conference on Jan. 28 with the theme, "Plants, Bugs, and Microbes: Do You Hear What I Hear?" This advanced workshop will examine how plants, insects and the soil communicate by releasing chemicals to send messages. This communication can benefit plants in need of resources or protection. Speakers include Jill Clapperton, principal scientist and co-founder of Rhizoterra Inc.; Jonathan Lundgren, research entomologist for USDA ARS; and Jack Schultz, director of the University of Missouri's Bond Life Sciences Center. The trio will offer an in-depth look at what communication means for soils, crop production and bottom lines.

The list of topics and speakers is being updated regularly at notill.org.

Early bird pricing ends Sept. 30 and offers up to \$150 in savings with the winter conference priced at \$275, AIM is \$250 and the combination is \$450. Prices are per person. To register, visit notill.org. No-till farming systems offer several advantages to producers willing to implement the system.

Fewer trips across fields without tillage passes will reduce fuel costs. Increasing crops in rotations breaks weed and insect pest cycles. Increased crop residue and root systems will increase soil organic matter and microbiological activity, thereby increasing the productiveness and fertility of the soil. Implemented in a site-specific systems approach, no-till will, over time, outperform conventional tillage.

No-till on the Plains offers field events, networking opportunities and the annual Winter Conference to provide crop producers with valuable no-till information. For more information, visit notill.org.

Landowners and operators who are first time attendees to the No-Till on the Plains Winter Conference are eligible for payment of their registration fees to the conference. Contact the conservation office by September 30 to receive the lowest registration rate.



BARBER COUNTY BUS TOUR

Nate Harts and Russell Blew share their perspectives on prescribed burning during the Gyp Hills Prescribed Burn Association bus tour. Participants were there to see the results of this past spring's applied burning success on several area ranches.

The Gyp Hills Prescribed Burn Association and the Barber County Conservation District cosponsored a bus tour of some of this past spring's prescribed burns. They toured six burns that involved eight different ranches. The event was held on August 1 and was attended by area ranchers and agency partners. Other sponsors for the event included the Comanche Pool Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, K-State Research and Extension, Great Plains Fire Exchange, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants and Quail Forever, and the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council.

Participants were able to view the results of prescribed burning on 5,131 acres of native rangeland in Barber County. The pastures have responded well to the burns and the subsequent moisture. The major goal of these burns was to control the invasion of Eastern Red Cedar. It was pointed out that fuel load and weather conditions the day of the burn had a major impact on the success of the burn. The pastures that were rested prior to the burn had a greater kill of the cedar trees. The high relative humidity that occurred frequently this spring had the opposite effect on prescribed burns, reducing the effectiveness. But, the landowner that conducted his burn on a high humidity day said "it was still well worth the effort".

Participants at the tour engaged in discussions with land operators Russell Blew, Brian and Ted Alexander, Nate Harts and Ed Bricker concerning their ranches' goals, objectives and management techniques. Agency personnel from the NRCS and USFWS provided information and discussion on grazing management, effects of fire on the grasslands and programs that are available to help land owners achieve their goals.

The group, also, discussed the need to expand the burning season in an effort to get more acres covered and to address safety concerns. Historically, the Great Plains burnt anytime of the year. It burned when the conditions were right, fuel was present and an ignition source was applied. During the tour, it was brought out that July and August are actually some of the better months to burn. The burning conditions are more conducive and there are more favorable days to potentially apply and complete a burn. Weather patterns and conditions tend to be more stable during these months. Burning during the growing season is often easier and safer than spring burns. The flame length of the fire is decreased and the rate of spread is reduced. Summer fires are not necessarily hotter than spring burns but produce a much longer duration of heat. The longer period of high temperature helps to control unwanted species that are susceptible to fire.

All the ranchers were quick to point out that they could not have carried out the prescribed burn without the assistance of their neighbors and friends from across the area. Prescribed burning is a labor-intensive event and requires significant inputs of equipment, planning and preparation. The ranchers credit the local Gyp Hills Prescribed Burn Association and their neighbors for their valuable assistance and expertise in applying fire.

If you are interested in learning more about prescribed fire or burn associations, contact Tom Carr, chairman of the Gyp Hills Prescribed Burn Association at 620-501-2552, your local Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Service office at 620-886-3830, or the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council at 785-532-3300.