

About Us

Last Updated Sunday, 28 September 2008

What We Are

We are an independent state agency which is responsible for carrying out a variety of natural resource stewardship programs here in Seminole County.

The Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District serves all of Seminole County in the area of the conservation and stewardship of our natural resources. We use our resources to help both the residents and the community leaders in the county and in each city to use the natural resources wisely.

What We Do

The Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District helps:

- Implement farm, ranch community and forestland conservation practices to protect soil productivity, water quality and quantity and wildlife habitat.
- Aid land owners in their efforts to secure financial assistance to implement conservation practices.
- Assist communities and homeowners in planting trees and other land owners to address impacts of too much or too little water.
- Reach out to schools and communities to teach the value of protecting our natural resources.
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Organize waterway cleanups

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Offer educational programs on water conservation and pollution.

Seminole's Soil and Water Conservation District works with community groups, homeowners associations and even local governments to help educate them in the areas of conservation and in the best practices for the preservation of our natural resources.

We offer educational programs and materials that help people conserve the natural resources that make Seminole County the beautiful location that drew so many of us to this area. We offer advice and can provide materials that help residents make good choices in landscaping that are both Water-Wise and beautiful. We can also offer information about ways to conserve water inside and outside the home.

Please enjoy the informational videos about the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District on our Video page.

The Soil and Water Conservation District also remains dedicated to assisting the agricultural producers and ranchers who have been the backbone of Seminole County throughout our history. We are able to help farmers, growers and ranchers comply with state and federal regulations and to assist them in finding financial resources to implement conservation practices. In addition, we offer soil monitoring programs which control soil erosion.

We lead community clean-ups of public lands and waterways.

Perhaps most importantly, the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District reaches out to the schools to teach the value of protecting our natural resources. We offer programs such as the Envir-o-thon as well as a speech competition and a poster contest. These programs allow young people to learn both the science of conservation and the importance of proper stewardship and of seeking a better way of using our resources.

Historical Need

Conservation Districts were born out of the necessity in the 1930 Dust Bowl when America's topsoil rapidly eroded. At that time, congress declared soil and water conservation a national policy priority, leading to the birth of the conservation district.

It had taken a thousand years for Nature to build an inch of topsoil on the Southern Plains, but it took only minutes for one good blow to sweep it all away. The water level of lakes dropped by five feet or more. The wind picked up the dry soil that had nothing to hold it down. Great black clouds of dust began to blot out the sun. In some places, the dust drifted like snow, darkening the sky for days, covering even well-sealed homes with a thick layer of dust on everything. Dust storms engulfed entire towns.

The primary impact area of the Dust Bowl, as it came to be known, was on the Southern Plains. The Northern Plains weren't so badly affected, but the drought, dust, and agricultural decline were felt there as well. The agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Great Depression, whose effects were felt worldwide.

One hundred million acres of the Southern Plains were turning into a wasteland. Large sections of five states were affected — Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico.

In 1932, the national weather bureau reported 14 dust storms. The next year, they were up to 38. The dust was so thick that people scooped up bucketsful while cleaning house. Dust blocked exterior doors; to get outside, people had to climb out their windows and shovel the dust away. Dust coated everything.

Nevertheless, farmers kept on plowing, hopeful that the rains would return in a matter of days, or perhaps months. In the spring of 1934, the massive drought impacted 27 states severely and affected more than 75 percent of the country. It was the worst drought in U.S. history.

A meager existence

Families survived on cornbread, beans, and milk. People were beginning to give up hope, and a mass exodus — the largest migration in American history — ensued from the plains. Many families packed their belongings, piled them on their cars and moved westward, fleeing the dust and desert of the Midwest for Washington, Oregon and

California. They were willing to work for any wage at all, planting and harvesting other people's lands.

When those families reached the borders of those western states, they were not well received — too many people already there were out of work. Many California farms were corporate owned, meaning they were larger and more modernized than what the farmers were used to. Families often lived in tar-paper shacks with no floor or plumbing. By 1940, 2.5 million people had moved out of the Plains states toward the Pacific states.

In the fall of 1934, with cattle feed depleted, the government began to buy and destroy thousands of starving livestock. Of all the government programs during that time, the cattle slaughter was the most wrenching for farmers. Although it was difficult for farmers to give up their herds, the cattle slaughter helped many of them avoid bankruptcy.

In the spring of 1935, the wind blew 27 days and nights without stopping. People and animals began to die of suffocation and "dust pneumonia."

Soil Conservation Begins

The government began to offer relief to farmers through President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt believed it was the federal government's duty to help the American people get through the bad times. During the first three months of his presidency, a steady stream of bills were passed to relieve poverty, reduce unemployment and speed economic recovery. While these experimental programs did not end the Depression, the New Deal helped the American people immeasurably by taking care of their basic needs and giving them the dignity of work, and hope during trying times.

Hugh Hammond Bennett, who came to be known as "the father of soil conservation," had been leading a campaign to reform farming practices well before Roosevelt became president. Bennett called for "...a tremendous national awakening to the need for action in bettering our agricultural practices." He urged a new approach to farming in order to avoid similar catastrophes.

In April 1935, Bennett was on his way to testify before a Congressional committee about his soil conservation campaign when he learned of a dust storm blowing into the capitol from the western plains. At last, he believed that he would have tangible evidence of the results of bad farming practices. As the dust settled over Washington and blotted out the midday sun, Bennett exclaimed, "This, gentlemen, is what I have been talking about." Congress responded by passing the Soil Conservation Act of 1935. In addition, the Roosevelt administration put its full weight and authority behind the improvement of farming techniques.

President Roosevelt ordered that the Civilian Conservation Corps plant a huge belt of more than 200 million trees from Canada to Abilene, Texas, to break the wind, hold water in the soil, and hold the soil itself in place. The administration also began to educate farmers on soil conservation and anti-erosion techniques, including crop rotation, strip farming, contour plowing, terracing and other beneficial farming practices.

In 1937, the federal government began an aggressive campaign to encourage Dust Bowlers to adopt planting and plowing methods that conserve the soil. The government paid the reluctant farmers a dollar an acre to practice one of the new methods. By 1938, the massive conservation effort had reduced the amount of blowing soil by 65 percent. Nevertheless, the land failed to yield a decent living.

In the fall of 1939, after nearly a decade of dirt and dust, the skies finally opened. With the rain's return, dry fields soon yielded their golden wheat once more, and just as quickly as it had begun, the Dust Bowl was, thankfully, over.