



# **Kansas Conservation Districts**

***“History of Conservation Districts”***

**Module XIII**

# WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS MODULE

The Dust Bowl

Congress acts

The need for local leadership

Soil & water conservation district legislation considered by states

Conservation District Law

Chronological history highlights

# THE DUST BOWL



- During the 1930's, the Dust Bowl made the need to conserve natural resources, particularly soil, very clear.



# CONGRESS ACTS

- On Capitol Hill, while testifying about the erosion problem, soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett drew back the curtains to reveal a sky blackened by dust.
- Congress immediately declared soil and water conservation a national policy and priority.
- Eventually the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was created under the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, to develop and implement soil erosion control programs.

- It was soon clear that local leadership was needed to coordinate efforts of conservation agencies and tie them into local conditions and priorities. As a consequence, the U.S. Congress developed a model Conservation District Law, for consideration by state governments.



## THE NEED FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP

# SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT LEGISLATION CONSIDERED BY STATES

- National leaders realized that implementing conservation on private land would require the active participation of private landowners.
- The idea of soil and water conservation districts was born.
- President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote all state governors recommending states pass legislation to form soil and water conservation districts.

# CONSERVATION DISTRICT LAW

- In 1937 the State Conservation Committee was established by the Kansas Legislature with the enactment of the Kansas Conservation Districts Law.



# CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **1937** - President urges all states to pass legislation authorizing a soil conservation program.
- **1937** - Kansas legislature passes the Kansas Conservation Districts Law.
- **1937** - The State Conservation Committee was established by the Kansas Legislature to promote soil and water conservation.
- **1938** - The first Kansas conservation district is formed in Labette County.
- **1943** - An employee of the State Extension Service, Mr. Reuben Lind, was instrumental in organizing and developing conservation districts serving as Committee Secretary.
- **1944** - Kansas Association of Conservation Districts organized.



# CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

- **1946** - National Association of Conservation Districts formed.
- **1954** - The last of the 105 Kansas Soil Conservation Districts formed.
- **1972** - The State Soil Conservation Committee's name was changed to State Conservation Commission.
- **1989** - The State Water Plan Special Revenue Fund was established providing funds to allow Kansas to address natural resource needs in a timely and effective manner.
- **2007** – State Aid to Conservation districts limit was raised to \$25,000 annually

# REVIEW QUESTION

1. What was the name of the soil scientist that testified before the congress urging them to pass a soil conservation policy?

# REVIEW ANSWER

1. What was the name of the soil scientist that testified before the congress urging them to pass a soil conservation policy?

*Hugh Hammond Bennett*

# REVIEW QUESTION

2. What year was the Kansas Conservation District law enacted?

# REVIEW ANSWER

2. What year was the Kansas Conservation District law enacted?

*1937*

# REVIEW QUESTION

3. The first Kansas conservation district was formed in Shawnee County?

*True or False?*

# REVIEW ANSWER

3. The first Kansas conservation district was formed in Shawnee County?

*False. Labette County*

# SUMMARY

Today there are 105 local Conservation Districts in Kansas and more than 3000 across the nation.

The elected Conservation District Supervisors have assisted in the implementation of more than \$235 million in state cost share funds.

Kansas Conservation Districts are strong as evidenced by the passage in 2007 of an increase to State Aid from \$10,000 to \$25,000.



# RESOURCES AVAILABLE & WHERE TO FIND THEM

## **Kansas Conservation Districts Supervisors Handbook**

*Location:*

Conservation  
district office &  
CSIMS

## **“A History of Natural Resource Conservation in Kansas”**

**John Spurling**

## **“History of Conservation in Kansas”**

[www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/abent/Kansas\\_history.html](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/abent/Kansas_history.html)