

## Ripple Effect #35

### **WHAT IS A CONSERVATION DISTRICT?**

What do you know about Conservation Districts? They help plant trees? They work with the Conservation Reserve Program? Minnesota's Wilkin County Soil and Water Conservation District and North Dakota's Richland County Soil Conservation District compiled the following information about Conservation Districts in the U.S.

The 1930's brought an ecological disaster called the "Dust Bowl." Huge black dust storms blotted out the sun and swallowed the countryside. Testifying on Capitol Hill on April 2, 1935, soil scientist Hugh Bennett threw back the room's curtains to reveal a sky blackened by dust. Congress immediately declared soil and water conservation a national policy and priority. Since about three-fourths of U.S. land is privately owned, Congress realized that only active support from landowners would guarantee the success of conservation on private land. The idea for soil and water conservation districts was born.

Conservation districts are local governmental subdivisions established under state law to carry out a program for conservation, use and development of soil, water and related resources. Today, there are nearly 3,000 conservation districts – one in almost every county. Now expanded to serve all the conservation needs of our nation, districts educate and help local citizens conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and other natural resources.

Districts work with land managers, local government agencies and others interested in addressing a broad spectrum of resource concerns: erosion control, flood prevention, water conservation and use, wetlands, ground water, water quality and quantity, non-point source pollution, forest land protection, wildlife, recreation, waste water management and community development. Work varies according to the needs and resources of the districts.

Each district has a governing body of local people, elected or appointed. They share their talents, experience and knowledge of community needs and resources to guide districts in setting goals and priorities for carrying out resource programs. They work in cooperation with – and in some states, under the direction of – a state conservation agency through which state funding and other assistance is provided.

In the Province of Manitoba, the Conservation Districts Program operates under authority of *The Conservation Districts Act*. The objectives of the act are to provide for conservation, control and prudent use of resources through establishment of Conservation Districts and to protect the correlative rights of owners.

The act provides for creation of Conservation Districts (CDs) and requires establishment of a Commission to oversee activities of the Conservation Districts' Boards. Each Conservation District is required to prepare an integrated resource management plan.

Through this process, each District is able to establish a long-term vision, set goals and produce a 5-year program and operating budget.

For more information on specific programs, contact your local conservation district.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at [www.redriverbasincommission.org](http://www.redriverbasincommission.org).

