



Custer County Conservation District was established on November 2, 1940.

Special points of interest:

- New NRCS District Conservationist
- Pine loopers
- Student contests

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CUSTER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

Late Summer Pest: Insect Affects Ponderosa Pine Trees Near Pringle

An outbreak of pine loopers (*Phaeoura mexicanaria*) was documented this August in an area east and northeast of Pringle. The larvae (caterpillars) feed exclusively on pine needles and defoliated the majority of ponderosa pine trees near Beaver Creek Road and the surrounding area. The U.S.

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Defoliated ponderosa pine trees near Beaver Creek Road, east of Pringle (above). Trees were defoliated by the pine looper caterpillar (left). Caterpillars vary from brown (young larvae) to black/dark gray (last growth stage prior to pupating).

Forestry Conference Held in Custer

The Dakotas Society of American Foresters (DSAF) recently held their annual conference in Custer on October 12-13. The meeting focused on collaborative forest management and included a variety of speakers and field tours. Oonagh Wood, Board Supervisor with the Custer Conservation District, and her ranch manager, Brad Grill, spoke on multiagency forest stewardship practices utilized at the Wood Ranch. Dave Thom,

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New Cost-share Thinning Grant Available

Our District has cost-share funding available for landowners interested in thinning and slash disposal. In November, a \$90,000 resilient forest grant was awarded to the District by the South Dakota Conservation Commission. The project's goals are to improve forest conditions and wildlife habitat while also reducing wildfire hazards. Overstocked forests are more vulnerable to insect problems and wildfires.

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Summer Pest: Pine Loopers

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Forest Service estimated that approximately 7,000 acres were affected. The insects persisted until early September before “disappearing” from the landscape. Pine loopers are native to the Black Hills, but are rarely observed in appreciable numbers.

By late August / early September, the caterpillars had pupated and began overwintering in the forest floor. From the pupae stage, adult moths will emerge sometime next May or June and will begin laying eggs on needle clusters or branches of pine trees. Eggs hatch in early July.

On September 2, a landowner meeting was held in the effected area to discuss landowner concerns. Attendees included area residents and representatives from SDSU, US Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Custer County (Weed & Pest/Conservation District, Emergency Management), local fire departments, and Black Hills Electric Coop.

Dr. John Ball, Forestry Specialist and Forest Health Specialist with SDSU, expects the outbreak to be short-lived, lasting only one or two seasons. However, population levels will be monitored next season in case the outbreak continues. The pine trees that were defoliated can recover, but Dr. Ball emphasized the importance of a wet spring to improve their chances. Otherwise, the trees will be quite susceptible to attack from the Ips pine engraver beetle. In past pine looper eruptions, many experienced Ips beetle outbreaks.

For additional information on the pine loopers, see the August 17, 24, and 31 issues of the Tree Pest Alert, which can be found at <https://extension.sdstate.edu/tree-pest-alert>.



A group of ponderosa pine trees that were defoliated by the pine looper caterpillars (top photo). A pine looper caterpillar feeding on pine needles (above). A landowner meeting (pictured below) in early September was held to discuss property owners concerns. Speakers from various federal, state, and local agencies spoke on the issue.



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Forestry Conference

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Chair of the Conservation District, and Mike Baldwin, District Manager, spoke during the field tour about the District's collaborative projects and the benefits of partners working together to accomplish similar goals.

During the meeting, Dave Thom was honored by the Dakotas Society of American Foresters and the National Society of American Foresters with the 2022 Fellow Award. The Fellow Award is a prestigious award that recognizes a Society of American Foresters member for their long time commitment to local, state, and national levels of forestry projects and programs. Fellows are also recognized for their local community efforts of which Dave has been involved in many.



Dave Thom receives his award during the forestry conference. Pictured are left to right, Gene Kodama, South Carolina Forester, Fred McCartney, 2022 DSAF President, Tom Troxel a Fellow Award winner, and Thom.



Attendees on a field tour during the DSAF conference. This location is within the Jasper Fire burn area and speakers discussed details of the fire.

New NRCS District Conservationist in Rapid City Office



Joel Milos, pictured above, is the new District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Rapid City office.

Hello!

My name is Joel Milos, and in June of this year I started as the NRCS District Conservationist in the Rapid City Field Office. I will be working alongside the Pennington and Custer County Conservation Districts to assist private landowners with their conservation efforts.

I was born and raised in Bellevue, Nebraska just outside of Omaha. In 2018, I graduated from Chadron State College with my Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Wildlife Management. During my time in Chadron, I spent a lot of time exploring the

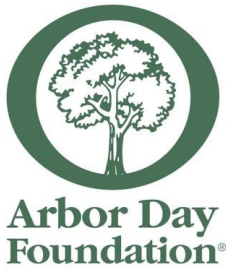
Pine Ridge and Black Hills, and I am excited to return to work in this part of the country.

I started with the NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in the Floresville, Texas FO in 2019, before moving to a Soil Conservationist position in the Buffalo, Wyoming FO in 2020. In my free time, I enjoy nature/bird photography, traveling, and cooking.

I am looking forward to meeting more of you, and I encourage you to stop by our office in Rapid City or give us a call at (605) 342-0301, ext. 3

Declining green ash trees in windbreak due to emerald ash borer.

It is the mission of the Custer County Conservation District to promote conservation of soil, water, and natural resources for residents and visitors now and in the future.



Student Contests for 2023 Arbor Day and Conservation

Attention area students! Contestants are needed for the 2023 Arbor Day writing and poster contests and the 2023 Resource Conservation Speech Contest. Cash prizes and scholarships are awarded to the top 3 places. See details below.

Arbor Day Poster Contest:

The 2023 poster contest theme is “Trees are Terrific... and Forests are too!” South Dakota fifth grade students are eligible to compete in their schools’ poster contests. Each school may submit only one poster to the State Arbor Day Poster Contest. First, second, and third place will receive \$125, \$100, \$75 cash, respectfully. Additionally, 1st place entry will also receive \$175 for their teacher to purchase educational supplies.

More information about these contests and additional rules are available at danr.sd.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Education/ or by contacting the Conservation District office at 605-673-5680. Entry deadline is March 24, 2023.

Arbor Day Creative Writing Contest:

This contest is open to all 5th and 6th grade students from South Dakota. First Place: \$125 cash award and \$150 to the winner's school Second Place: \$100 cash award Third Place: \$75 cash award. The central theme of entries should be the importance of Arbor Day and trees. Students should concentrate on why we celebrate Arbor Day in South Dakota and why it is important to plant and care for trees across the state.

Students are encouraged to focus on personal experience, and to remember that originality and effectiveness are major factors in judging. Submissions are due to the Custer Conservation District by March 24, 2023. Additional information at danr.sd.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Education/.

Resource Conservation

Speech Contest: The 2023 Speech Contest theme is “Backyard Conservation: Don’t Water It Down.” Scholarships totaling \$2,500 will be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. All high school students can participate. For more information, contact the Custer Conservation District office or DANR at 605-773-3623. Entry deadline for local competition is March 1, 2023.

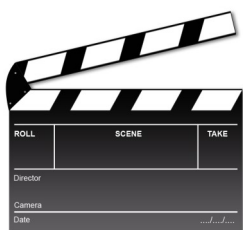
Video Highlighting Conservation District’s Activities

The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) is working with the Custer Conservation District to produce a 5-7 minute video that highlights the District’s cost-share projects and its partnerships with various agencies, organizations, and private landowners. The video is funded through SDACD’s Locally Led Project, which promotes locally-led conservation initiatives. The project’s goal is to “... build healthy soils, improve water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and improve the environmental and economic performance of working lands across South Dakota's 31,000 farms and

ranches .”

Participants in the video include: Patricia Weyrich (SD Dept. Agriculture and Natural Resources), Justin Boerboom (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Faryn Klebe (National Wild Turkey Federation), Penny Svenkeson (landowner), Mike Jarding (landowner), and Dave Thom and Mike Baldwin from the Custer Conservation District.

Release of the video is expected around December or January. Be on the look out! We will post a link on our website and on Facebook.





Stand of overcrowded ponderosa pine in the Black Hills. (above) This area is vulnerable to wildfire and insect outbreaks. The District's cost-share grant provides financial assistance to landowners with similar issues. Photo by USDA NRCS South Dakota.

Cost-share Thinning Grant

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The District will pay up to \$225/acre for thinning and up to \$100/acre for fuels treatment (e.g., slash disposal) to qualified applicants. Forests must meet certain criteria to be eligible for the grant. Payments will be made after work is completed and certified by a SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Forester.

Contact the office at 605-673-5680 for an application or for additional information.

Riparian Workshop

The Custer Conservation District participated at the recent riparian workshop hosted by the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) in Rapid City on October 13-14. Mike Baldwin, District Manager, spoke to participants about the Conservation District and the cost-share grants available. Other speakers included representatives from NWTf, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, and Pennington County Natural Resources.

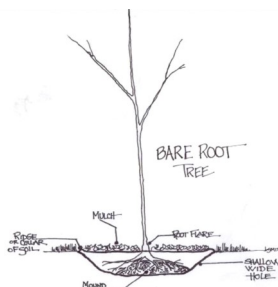


Participants of the NWTf riparian workshop participated in field tours of various riparian sites within grassland and forest sites. Pictured above, a group at one of the forest riparian sites.

Trees for Sale

'Tis the season to purchase trees for next planting season. Custer Conservation District does not operate a tree program; however, anyone interested in purchasing trees for next year can place an order with either the Fall River or Pennington Conservation Districts. A list of trees available and order form for Fall River can be found at www.sdconservation.org/fallrivercd. Their orders are due by December 31. For Pennington, their tree list and order form can be

found at www.penningtonconservation.com/ services. They will accept orders until April 1, but supplies may be limited so get your order in as soon as possible.



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Grant Update - Black Hills Resource Advisory Committee

Work is set to begin the fall of 2022 for a grant the Conservation District received in 2021. The \$30,000 grant was awarded by the Black Hills National Forest Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) for a resilient forest landscapes project.

The purpose of the RAC, as defined by the US Forest Service, is to "... represent the individual and collective interests of Custer, Lawrence, and Pennington Counties, functioning under the

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000 (Public Law 110-343).

The Secure Rural Schools Act authorizes the use of RACs as a mechanism for local community collaboration with federal land managers in reviewing and recommending Title II projects that will benefit resources on federal lands."

The funding Custer Conservation District received will pay for forest thinning and

fuel reduction work on the Black Hills National Forest adjacent to the Custer Highlands.

The project goal is to reduce the threat of wildfire to private homes, structures, and resources and to restore forest resiliency on National Forest lands. Funding will treat approximately 60-80 acres of forest land in the vicinity of the Custer Highlands area adjacent to private property that has or will be treated.

Calendar of Events

December 8—Custer Conservation District Board meeting.

January 12—Custer Conservation District Board meeting.

January 24-25—2023 Soil Health Conference, Sioux Falls, SD. For more info., www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference.

February 9—Custer Conservation District Board meeting.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Black Hills National Forest Initiates Forest Plan Revision

The U.S. Forest Service recently began the process of revising the Forest Plan for the Black Hills National Forest. The Forest Plan serves as a land management guide for the Forest Service and is required to be renewed at least every 15 years. The Forest Service is currently in the first of three primary phases: assessment, plan development, and monitoring. The public comment period for the draft assessments was this past summer, but the Conservation District encourages the public to look for additional public comment periods and to be engaged during this process.

Grant Updates - the District's Conservation Implementation Strategy Projects

Custer Conservation District currently has two projects funded through the Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS), a program operated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). CIS projects provide cost-share funding to landowners to implement conservation practices on their property. The District's two projects are titled "Rangeland and Riparian Health in the Eastern Grasslands of Custer County, SD" and "Resilient Forest Landscapes - Custer County, SD."

The rangeland and riparian health project is in its first year of funding. The primary objectives are to improve plant and soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat, while reducing soil erosion on rangeland and riparian areas. One project was funding in 2022, but more than \$500,000 will be available over the next two years to fund additional work. The anticipated 2023 application deadline is early spring.

The resilient forest project is in its second



year. To date, four projects have been funded with approximately \$100,000 still available to landowners over the next two years. The anticipated 2023 application deadline is spring.

Landowners interested in either project should contact the Rapid City NRCS Field Office at 605-343-1643 Ext. 3.



Examples of pastures affected by overgrazing and drought (above). The rangeland and riparian health CIS project is designed to provide cost-share funding to landowners with similar issues. Overcrowded ponderosa pine forest stands (pictured left) are the target of the resilient forest CIS project. In this example, the stand is vulnerable to wildfire and more prone to beetle infestations. Limited understory vegetation also limits usefulness to wildlife and livestock. Photos by USDA NRCS South Dakota.

It is the mission of the Custer County Conservation District to promote conservation of soil, water, and natural resources for residents and visitors now and in the future.

Share Your Email with Us!

Help us save printing and mailing costs by sharing your email address with us. Send an email to custercd@sdconservation.net.



Also, we are always interested in expanding our audience. Please contact us if we missed you and would like to be included on future newsletter mailings.



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Newsletter of the Custer County Conservation District

District Board

Dave Thom - Chair
Paul Nettinga - Vice-Chair
Oonagh Wood - Treasurer
Tamarah Caster - Supervisor
Greg Neugebauer - Supervisor
Advisors: Stuart Adrian, Stephenie Rittberger, and Gladwin Paulsen
Mike Baldwin - District Manager
Mike Linde - County Commissioner Liaison

NRCS Staff

Joel Milos - District Conservationist
Justin Boerboom - Resource Unit Conservationist

Partners

Patricia Weyrich - Acting Forester, SD DANR-RCF
Faryn Klebe - National Wild Turkey Federation

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Est. Nov. 2, 1940