



Custer County Conservation District was established in 1940.

Special points of interest:

- Beaver dam analogs
- Watershed protection
- Drought

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District cohosts Beaver Dam Analog Workshop

Custer Conservation District and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (SD GFP) co-hosted a landowner workshop on Beaver Dam Analog structures (BDAs) at the Meeker Ranch northeast of Custer this past August. BDAs are designed to mimic beaver dams by slowing water movement through the area, reducing soil erosion, increasing water availability, and providing wildlife habitat.

Biologists from SD GFP discussed BDA designs and construction techniques and then built a few BDAs with participants assistance. Participants were also able to view the roughly 50 BDAs already constructed in the area.

If you are wondering “Why not just reintroduce
(Continued on page 2)

Workshop participants gather at the start of the workshop (upper right). Examples of BDAs constructed in the project area (center right, lower right).

Upcoming events:

- **Burning Beetle Learning Event:**
On January 16, 6:30 PM, the District will co-sponsor a learning event at the Pine Room, Courthouse Annex, Custer. The event is titled “Living in Community in Our Forested Environment.” The Burning of the Beetle is scheduled on January 18 at Pageant Hill.
- **Landowner Forestry Workshop:**
Next spring, the District will host a landowner forestry workshop at the Argyle VFD fire hall. Join us to learn about managing your forests and protecting your property.



Custer Conservation District Newsletter

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Workshop

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beavers?”, a major obstacle is lack of deciduous trees and shrubs (e.g., willows, cottonwoods, birch, aspen) in the project area. Beavers depend on these plants for food and construction material for their dams and lodges. As can be observed in the site photos (right), the area is a large treeless meadow surrounded by conifer tree species. A goal of this project is to promote/reintroduce willows so that the area can eventually support beavers. Until then, the BDAs will continue to improve stream health and provide wildlife habitat.

Workshop participants driving wood posts into the stream bed (right). Posts create a solid foundation for the small tree branches, sod, and mud used for constructing the BDAs.



Attention Class of 2025: Scholarship notice!

The Custer Conservation District is excited to offer a \$1,000 scholarship to a high school graduate in the class of 2025. Eligible students are graduating high school students that reside in Custer County and plan on attending a post-secondary institution. Applications are available online at custercountysd.com/conservation-district/ and at our office. Applications are due by March 31. Any questions can be directed to our office at 605-673-5680 or email us at custercd@sdconservation.net.



Hills Area Conservation Districts host Legislative Forum

On October 23, the Hills Area Conservation Districts hosted a Legislative Forum in Rapid City to discuss issues dealing with conservation and topics affecting local and state government. Topics discussed included SD Initiated Measure 28, forestry management, watershed protection, solar energy, and primary roles of the area Conservation Districts. State political candidates from the Black Hills area in attendance included Representative Mike Derby,

Representative-Elect Heather Baxter, Senator-Elect John Carley, and Representative candidate Susan Scheirbeck. Others in attendance included representatives from SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, SD Association of Conservation Districts, SD Grasslands Initiative, SD Conservation Commission, Pennington County, and local Conservation Districts.





**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Farm Service Agency

Fall River – Custer Farm Service Agency Update Kari Sanders, County Executive Director

Custer County continues to be in the D3, extreme drought category, according to the US Drought Monitor. Assistance may be available for grazing losses and transportation of feed stuffs and livestock water due to drought.

Custer County producers are eligible to apply for 2024 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on grazing acres. LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land or fire on federally managed land. Producers must complete a CCC-853 application

and provide the required supporting documentation (livestock numbers and grazing acres) no later than January 30, 2025, for 2024 losses.

Also available is the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs. Eligible livestock losses include grazing losses not covered under the LFP program, loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water and feed because of an eligible drought. If you've suffered eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses during calendar year 2024, you must file a notice of loss and an application for payment by January 30, 2025.

For additional information about LFP and ELAP contact the Fall River – Custer County USDA Service Center at 605-745-5716 ext 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

U.S. Drought Monitor South Dakota

November 19, 2024
(Released Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024)
Valid 7 a.m. EST

Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

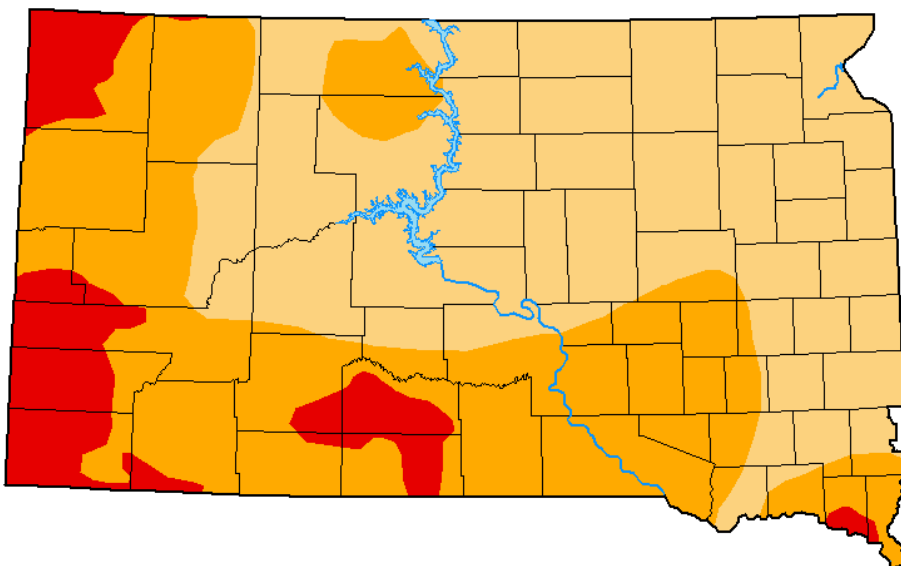
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Richard Tinker
CPC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP



droughtmonitor.unl.edu





Watershed Protection in South Dakota

Watershed protection is a critical component of maintaining the state's clean water supplies. South Dakota's Watershed Protection Program (WPP) within the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, is tasked with this effort. This article discusses some of the efforts of the WPP including the Riparian Buffer Initiative and opportunities to volunteers to monitor water quality in their local waterbodies. For more information on what the WPP does, visit danr.sd.gov/Conservation/WatershedProtection/.

South Dakota Riparian Buffer Initiative by Nathan Andersen

The Riparian Buffer Initiative (RBI) is a South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) conservation program designed to help producers improve the water quality of the states' lakes and streams. A riparian area is a strip of land running along the edge of a waterbody which is usually dense with wetland vegetation. The vegetation within this riparian zone provides a buffer filtering the surface water runoff that may be carrying pollutants such as E. coli bacteria, sediment, and excess nutrients. It also provides erosion control.

Producers who enroll in the initiative will be required to buffer either existing pastureland or revegetate cropland with a minimum width of 50 feet to a maximum width of 120 feet. The buffer may not be harvested May 1st

Volunteer Monitoring by Jordan Fostvedt

The South Dakota Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program is a lake and stream water quality monitoring effort managed by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) and the South Dakota Discovery Center. Together, both organizations provide assistance, including project design, sample collection oversight, funding, outreach, and training to support members of the public interested in water quality issues. Volunteers are trained to collect high quality, unbiased data which is



Aerial view of a riparian buffer along a waterway surrounded by agriculture. Photo taken in Iowa by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

through August 1st nor grazed between May 1st through September 30th. Outside of these months the buffer can be harvested or grazed if a minimum of 4 to 6 inches of grass vegetation remains on the ground. Producers will be compensated up to 250% of the county crop, pastureland, and irrigated crop lease rates for each acre excluded within the buffer. Additional cost share is available for exclusion fencing, alternative water sources, and cover crop seeding. For more information, please contact Nathan Andersen at 605-394-6830 or DANRMail@state.sd.us.

used by DANR to monitor the water quality of South Dakota's lakes, rivers, and streams. All volunteer data is publicly available on DANR's Water Quality Monitoring Access Portal (WQMAP) at <https://apps.sd.gov/NR92WQMAP>. Currently, there are 10 volunteer groups or individuals collecting water quality samples at 53 different locations across the state. For more information or to inquire about participating in the South Dakota Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program, please contact Jordan Fostvedt at DANRMail@state.sd.us or call at 605-394-6653.

Trees for Sale

Trees are once again for sale through area Conservation Districts. Now is the time to place those orders for next year's tree plantings. Although Custer Conservation District does not have a tree program, both Fall River and Pennington Conservation Districts have trees for sale. Most bareroot seedlings are being sold at \$3.00 per tree or \$50 for a bundle of 25 trees. Potted plants, 4-5 foot specialty fruit trees, and perennials are also available at various prices.

Fall River CD tree order forms can be found at www.fallriverconservation.com/. Their orders are due by January 31. Pennington CD order forms are available at www.penningtonconservation.com/services. They will accept orders until April 1. However, supplies are limited for both districts so get those orders in soon before trees are sold out.

If you are not sure which trees to plant in your area, there are a few sources of information that may help. The SD

Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources published a list of common trees in the state (danr.sd.gov/Conservation/Forestry/TreesofSouthDakota/SouthDakotaTreeList/). The list includes a general description of each species and recommended planting region of the state.

If you live near the City of Custer there is a more refined tree list for your area. The list can be found using the QR code below or by visiting the City's website.

Remember that our county is quite variable in soils, temperature, precipitation, and elevation. Some species will do well in certain areas, but not in others. Doing a little homework ahead of time will pay dividends.



New District Conservationist in the NRCS Rapid City Field Office

Hello!

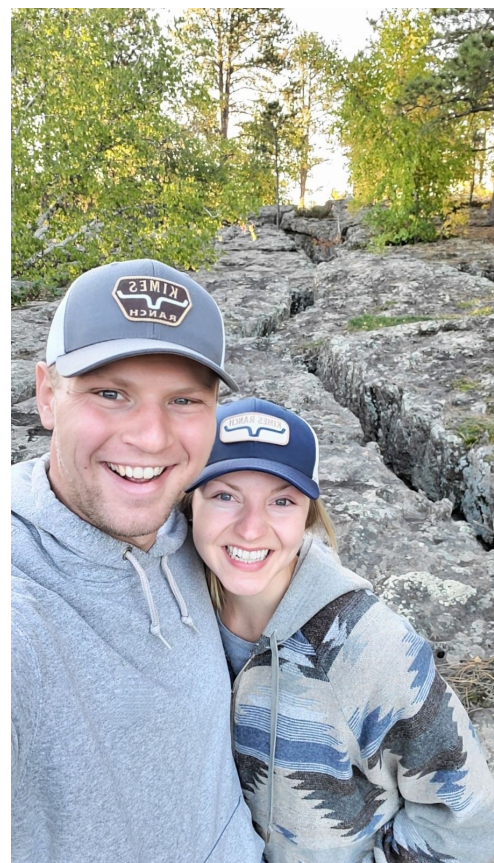
My name is Paige Uher, and I started as the NRCS District Conservationist in the Rapid City Field Office in July. I will be working alongside the Pennington and Custer County Conservation Districts to assist landowners with their conservation efforts.

I'm from the Rockerville area, so it's great to be working in the area I grew up in. In 2021, I graduated from University of Wisconsin – River Falls with my Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Studies with minors in Crop Science and Ag Business. Before

joining the NRCS, I worked in retail ag near Chamberlain. My career with NRCS started in 2022 when I became a Soil Conservationist in the Plankinton Field Office. In my free time, I enjoy exploring the Black Hills, spending time with my husband, and traveling.

I look 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.

Paige Uher, pictured right, is the new District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Rapid City field office.





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.

Cost-Share Thinning Grant Awarded to District

The District was recently awarded a \$61,200 grant from the South Dakota Conservation Commission to be used for forest improvement projects in the county. Funds will be made available as cost-share to private landowners who wish to improve their forest health.

The cost share is a minimum of a 50/50 split, with the Conservation District paying 50% of the cost up to a maximum of \$750/acre (50% of \$1,500/acre total cost) for thinning only. If the landowner also does slash disposal concurrent with thinning, the grant will additionally pay up to \$150/acre (50% of \$300/acre cost). Total payment to landowners for thinning and slash removal can be a maximum of \$900/acre (50% of \$1,800/acre total cost).

Example 1: if contractor charges \$700/acre for both thinning and slash disposal, then cost-share payment to landowner will equal \$350/acre (50%).

Example 2: if contractor charges \$2,000/acre for thinning only, cost-share payment will equal \$750/acre (maximum payment amount for thinning).

Example 3: if contractor charges \$2,000/acre for thinning and slash disposal, cost-share payment will equal \$900/acre (maximum payment amount).

Note: If the landowner does the work without a contractor, cost-share is determined by hourly labor rates set by the SD Conservation Commission. Contact the office for additional details or to request an application.

Tis the Season: Selecting the right Christmas tree

- from Dr. John Ball, Professor, SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist & South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Forest Health Specialist

Each species has its good points, but the Fraser fir is one of the top favorites. The tree has a very pleasant fragrance, excellent needle retention - they will last the entire holiday season - and the branches are stiff enough to hold most ornaments (however, if heavy ornaments are to be placed on the tree go with a spruce). The bright green needles are white on the underside, and this makes a very attractive display.

Balsam fir is another good choice though the needles do not last quite as long, and the branches are not as stiff. Canaan fir is like Fraser fir, and it is another popular Christmas tree.

Pines are very common Christmas trees with Scotch pine the most popular Christmas tree in the country. It has a pleasant fragrance;



Christmas trees

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excellent needle retention and the branches are stiff enough to hold heavy ornaments.

Eastern white pine is another pine commonly sold at Christmas tree lots. The needle retention is not as good as Scotch pine, and the branches are very flexible, meaning heavy ornaments may fall off. White pines do have very soft needles. If you are going to run into the Christmas tree in the middle of the night, this is the softest one!

Spruces are not as popular as Christmas trees due to their poor needle retention. If you want to have a Colorado blue spruce as your Christmas tree, you should wait until a couple of weeks before Christmas cutting one and setting it up. The needles may only last that long. Once the needles begin to fall, blue spruce are about the worst tree in the house as the fallen needles are sharp and seem to find their way into socks and slippers. The branches are very stiff, however, and can support the heaviest ornaments. On a positive note – cats do not seem to like to climb blue spruce trees!

White spruce, or Black Hills spruce is not a commonly available Christmas tree at lots though it can be cut from the National Forest (with a permit). It does make a nice tree, particularly when cut fresh, though needle retention is poor. The tree also does not have much of a fragrance and occasionally Black Hills spruce trees can produce a slight musky odor when the foliage is bruised. *Taken from the November 8-15, 2023 Tree Pest Alert. Article titled "Which is the best Christmas tree?"*.

Newsletter Mailing List

We are always interested in expanding our audience. Let us know if you would like to be added to our newsletter distribution list. Just give us a call @ 605 -673-5680 or send an email to custercd@sdconservation.net.



Calendar of Events

December 5—SD Grassland Coalition Annual Meeting, at the Holiday Inn, Rapid City, SD. To register, visit sdgrass.org/grassland-coalition-annual-conference/.

December 12—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

January 9—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

January 15-16—2025 Soil Health Conference of the SD Soil Health Coalition, Watertown, SD. For more information, visit sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference.

January 16—Burning Beetle educational event at the Pine Room, Custer, SD. More details to come.

January 18—The 12th Burning Beetle, Custer, SD. For more information, visit the Burning Beetle Facebook page.

February 13—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

March 13—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

Spring '25—Landowner Forestry Workshop, Argyle, SD. More details to come.

April 10—Custer Conservation District Board meeting, Custer Co. Courthouse, Custer, SD.

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



Custer County Conservation District
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www.custercountysd.com/conservation-district/

Type address here or use Mail Merge
to automatically address this
publication to multiple recipients.

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 and Gladwin Paulsen
Mike Baldwin - District Manager
Mike Linde - County Commission Liaison

NRCS Staff

Paige Uher - District Conservationist, Rapid City
Brad Humbracht - District Conservationist, Hot Springs

Partners

SD Dept. of Agriculture and Natural Resources
SD Game, Fish & Parks
National Wild Turkey Federation
USFS, Buffalo Gap National Grassland
USFS, Black Hills National Forest



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