

County started conservation early

Thomas County took only two years to get on board and start promoting soil conservation after the Soil Conservation Act was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935.

Thomas County began with Project No. 5, which covered two legal townships 10 miles south of Colby. The primary project programs were terracing, contour farming, cropping systems and pasture management.

Many of the terraces constructed during the demonstration project in 1937 are still functioning and are still in use today, said Debbie Potter, manager of the Thomas County Conservation District.

The story of conservation doesn't necessarily begin with the early use and misuse of land by man.

Soil erosion and siltation have always been a part of the natural environment.

Because of demands put on the soil and water, the need to conserve grew. In the 1930s, though, during the Dust Bowl era, soil erosion became a severe problem.

Poor farming practices and extreme drought caused the soil to blow away in western Kansas as well as throughout the Great Plains. The erosion affected the country as far as the East Coast.

History records that one particular storm was so severe, it scattered dust onto the decks of ships 200 miles out to sea and blotted out the sun in Washington.

As a result, during the 1930s, over a million acres of farmland were destroyed.

The Kansas Legislature provided for establishing soil conservation districts according to county boundaries, and Thomas County became the 22nd district to be approved in the state.

In 1972, Soil Conservation changed its name to include all natural resources.

Soil Conservation districts became Conservation districts, and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service became the Natural Resources Conservation Service.



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Ponds at the Carpenter Cattle Co. north of Brewster catch runoff from the feed yard to keep the operation within state water quality regulations. The water is used to water and fertilize an alfalfa field, returning nutrients to the ground — and keeping them out of the water supply.

Earth's life depends on soil

Soil scientists have discovered there are more living creatures in a shovel full of soil than human beings on the planet.

Soil supports nearly every form of life on earth.

It takes 500 years to form an inch of soil on top of the ground, and the size of the particles is an important characteristic of soil.

Smaller particles, found in clay

soil, will not let water pass through as easily as larger particles, such as sand.

Soil that allows water to drain and not pond is best from growing gardens, building buildings and many other uses.

Soils that hold water are good for fish, water fowl and recreational uses but not for roads and buildings.

More is known about the dark

side of the moon, than about soil.

The Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History has produced a program about soil called "Dig It."

The museum is hoping to send "Dig It" on a four-year journey around the country to show people some of the secrets of the soil.

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