

Windbreak study crosses Kansas fields

MANHATTAN – The Dust Bowl may be long gone, but wind continues to steal an average 1.3 tons of topsoil each year from every one of Kansas' 1.8 million acres of cropland.

That's well beyond tolerable limits, according to the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service.

"Clearly, windbreaks continue to have important roles to play in the Great Plains," said Bob Atchison, rural forestry coordinator for the Kansas Forest Service. "They can affect everything from crop yields to rural home comfort.

Given what people like you and me can see from the road, however, this living resource has long been in a decline – perhaps for up to six decades.

Little "good science" has charted the changes since Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president, he said, but the forest service and Kansas State University Research and Extension will be conducting an inventory of the state's windbreaks this year from May 26 to Aug. 11. The U.S. Forest Service is helping pay for the project. The state agency is already contacting landowners to get permission for a research crew to access each property.

In Kansas, windbreaks are basically an artifact of the drought and dust storms that plagued the Great

Plains during the 1930s, Atchison said. In response to such farm-wrecking conditions, the government invested close to \$14 million between 1935 and 1942 to plant more than 200 million trees and shrubs in shelterbelts. It stopped short of FDR's dream of windbreaks from Canada to Mexico, but it's still a lot of trees.

"For best management from here on, Kansas needs an accurate assessment of the size and condition of the plantings we've got now," the forester said. "This summer's inventory will provide that. It also will help us assess the number of ash trees in the state that will be at risk if the emerald ash borer spreads further west."

The emerald ash borer is an exotic (nonnative), invasive Asian beetle, first discovered in the United States in 2002 near Detroit. It since has spread to infest and kill millions of ash trees in 10 states, reaching Missouri in July.

The two-person Kansas inventory crews will be measuring 189 randomly selected, one-sixth-acre plots throughout the state. Crews in Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota will be doing similar research. During their three- to four-hour examinations of each site, the crews will record tree species, diameter, height and age, as well as the overall windbreak's function, width and condition.

Windbreak benefits proven by time, research

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service lists some research- and time-proven benefits of well-maintained tree and shrub windbreaks:

- Reduce wind-caused soil erosion.
- Protect plants from wind-related damage.
- Alter the microenvironment to enhance plant growth.
- Manage snow deposits and drifting.
- Provide shelter for structures, animals and people.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

- Provide a noise screen.
- Provide a visual screen.
- Improve air quality by intercepting and reducing airborne dust, chemicals and odors.
- Delineate property and field boundaries.
- Improve irrigation efficiency.
- Increase carbon storage in biomass and soils.
- The Kansas Forest Service adds two others:
 - Decrease protected structures' heating and cooling costs.
 - Improve livestock's rate of gain.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE
Tuesday
 2:39 a.m. – Security check to Colby Ag.
 8:27 a.m. – Dogs at large at Fourth and Chick.
 11:39 a.m. – Accident at Colby Elementary.
 11:55 a.m. – Dog at large at Franklin and Eighth St. taken to Colby Animal Clinic.
 12:43 p.m. – Tree limb broke van window at B-Hive.
 4 p.m. – Cattle out on Kings Court. Made contact with owner.
 4:41 p.m. – Three juveniles canoeing under the bridge on Country Club.
 7:28 p.m. – Kids playing in the water on eighth and Lee.
 10:22 p.m. – Walk-through at Walmart.

Wednesday
 8:14 a.m. – Dog at large at Fourth St. and Lake.
 5:15 p.m. – Dog at large on W. Fifth.
 7:27 p.m. – Assisted court services.
 11:28 p.m. – Extra patrol requested due to receiving strange phone calls.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF
Tuesday
 9:04 a.m. – Vehicle in ditch at Country Club and Veteran's Memorial.

Wednesday
 10:54 a.m. – Criminal damage to property: report of damage to roadway, vehicles stuck in ditch.
 2:41 p.m. – Horse walking eastbound in westbound lane. Owner contacted.

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