



P.O. Box 133  
Whiting, Kansas 66552  
(785) 873-3431  
FAX (785)- 873-3432  
E-mail: [ksrc@rainbowtel.net](mailto:ksrc@rainbowtel.net)  
Website: [www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 15, 2009

Contact: Mary Fund, 785-873-3431, [ksrc@rainbowtel.net](mailto:ksrc@rainbowtel.net)

## BUS TOUR HIGHLIGHTS WATERSHED PRACTICES AND PROJECTS

By Connie Pantle

Holton, Kansas—On a bright September day 35 people—including many area farmers and ranchers—boarded a bus for a tour of management practices and watershed projects throughout three northeast Kansas counties of Jackson, Nemaha and Brown counties. The tour visited two area lakes—Banner Creek and Mission Lake—as well as four area farms belonging to: LeRoy Rieschick, Ronald Bloom, Stephen Aberle and David Zeit.

“We chose these landowners for the tour because the projects on their farms were innovative and demonstrated how partnerships between landowners and natural resource organizations can make things happen,” Marlene Bosworth, Delaware WRAPS coordinator, said. “We were also trying to ‘showcase’ things that were relatively new for our area, and that demonstrated different ways to protect water resources.” The Delaware River WRAPS, Jackson County Conservation District, Meadowlark Extension District, and the Kansas Rural Center sponsored the tour.

The tour began at Banner Creek Reservoir, west of Holton. Just ten years ago, Banner Creek tested high for chlorophyll and phosphorus. Working with other local and state agencies, Jackson County and the Jackson County Conservation District led the way with educational efforts to inform landowners in the watershed of management practices to lower the amounts of chlorophyll and phosphorus. Because of these efforts, the lake was removed from the list of impaired waters set forth from Kansas Department Health and Environment (KDHE).

“This is one of our big successes,” Tom Stiles, chief, Watershed Planning Section, KDHE explained. According to Stiles, Banner Creek is touted on the Environmental Protection Agency’s website as an example of “how Kansas is doing it—in protecting water quality”.

“Banner Creek is an example of a water body protected when individual landowners in the watershed implement best management practices—or BMPs—all because local government translated their goals for water quality protection into an investment in their watershed. It’s a real success story that we don’t get to hear very often,” Bosworth said.

After leaving Banner Creek, the bus then traveled north of Soldier to the farm of Claude and Betty Rieschick, where the couple’s son, LeRoy Rieschick, participated in a riparian buffer grazing study conducted by Carol Blocksome, Kansas State University, with assistance from

Carl Jarboe, former Jackson County Conservation District buffer coordinator, and Melvin Steinlage, Nemaha County Conservation District buffer coordinator.

The purpose of the study examined buffer strips to determine if damage occurs during dormant season grazing. During the study on Rieschick's, 14 cow/calf pairs were allowed access to a portion of the grass buffer, while also grazing an adjacent field of corn stalks. Another portion of the buffer served as a control for the study—no grazing was allowed on this section. A total of six samples were taken—three from the grazed portion and three from the ungrazed portion—by clipping a 2 foot by 2 foot area. Each buffer was sampled before and after the study in exactly the same sites—GPS was used to return to the exact location. Water samples as well as manure samples (to determine what forages the cattle were eating) were also taken throughout the study.

Blocksome explained that permission to conduct this study on Rieschick's CP21 buffer strips was obtained prior to the study from NRCS—as otherwise it was in violation of the contract. Blocksome said that at the time of the tour, she hadn't written her final report on the study but said that in the case of Rieschick's farm "you could not tell cattle had been in there by the way the buffer looked". Blocksome attributed this to the farmer providing alternative water and shelter away from the creek and buffer strips, as other study sites without these accommodations did not fare as well.

Roberta Spencer, Jackson County Conservation District Manager, said "the Rieschicks are pioneers in the promotion of buffer strips in this county".

LeRoy Rieschick said the reason that he implemented the buffer strips was because "along Soldier Creek—as any stream—we saw ditches cutting back." He said since implementing the buffer strips "we've been surprised at how those ditches have filled in." "The soil slowly disappeared—a lot of soil left this farm—now there is a lot less leaving because of the filter strips," he said.

The next stop—just across the Nemaha County line-- was at the cattle lot of Ronald Bloom of Goff. Bloom worked with Jody Holthaus, K-State Extension Meadowlark District, to install geo-textile fabric pads around the bunks in his cattle lot. Holthaus said one of the biggest benefits is the cost. "The geo-textile is a third of the cost of concrete," she said. Bloom said he and his sons discussed concrete versus the geo-textile. "The boys said it wouldn't work and I wanted to try it. Because of the cost, we had nothing to lose."

Bloom said the pads, made of layers of rock and lime on top of geo-textile fabric, allow him to scrape manure easily and apply it to fields instead of allowing the manure to build up that area. Not only is Bloom satisfied with the cost-effectiveness of the pads, he has been happy with the durability as well. "It has really held up good—and it has had heavy use for the past year," he said.

Traveling north, the bus stopped next at the Stephen Aberle Farm near Sabetha, to see his field trial of cover crops. Working with Ed Reznicek, Clean Water Farms field organizer with the Kansas Rural Center, Aberle completed the River Friendly Farms (RFFP) environmental assessment of his farm. He was then approved for cost-share through KRC's CWFP to offset his costs to conduct the cover crop study, which consisted of plots 15 to 30 feet wide and 330 feet long. Aberle said his main goal was to determine which cover crops will work best in his no-till rotation of soybeans, corn and wheat.

Cover crops included in Aberle's trial included the following legumes: forage soybeans, sun hemp, mung beans and cow peas; the following sorghums: millet, milo, sudan and sorghum silage; as well as mixtures including mung beans, cow peas and milo. He also interseeded sweet clover and red clover into growing wheat in the spring.

David Hallauer, K-State Extension Meadowlark District said that cover crops provide an intrinsic value. "There are benefits you many not see for a number of years," he said. Those may include boosted nitrogen levels as well as a benefit to water quality.

In addition to determining which cover crops work best in his operation, Aberle plans to use the study to track the benefit to the crop following the cover crop in the rotation. He plans to plant corn on this site in the spring of 2010 and track the corn's performance based on the cover crop plots.

During lunch at the Fairview Community Center, the group heard comments from area Kansas Representatives Steve Lukert and Rocky Fund, both of whom commented that the stops on the tour emphasized what we can do to protect water quality—which is an important issue in the State of Kansas.

The last farm stop was at the Brown County farm of David Zeit. To reduce runoff into a nearby tributary to Plum Creek (which drains into the Delaware River just a few miles downstream), Zeit relocated his wintering and weaning facility further up the hill. Zeit also worked with KRC's Reznicek to complete the RFFP and received CWFP cost-share to relocate the facilities. There are now four pens made of pipe fence—a long-term facility is how Zeit referred to the pens. To filter runoff from the lots, Zeit planted 3 ½ acres of cropland below the pens to a switchgrass buffer. He is now able to harvest the nutrients from this area through the hay he bales.

To protect the cows against harsh winter winds, Zeit constructed a mechanical windbreak and plans to plant additional cedar trees this fall. Zeit said without the windbreak it is like "calving on a parking lot" for the cows. KRC, as well as Brown County Conservation District and K-State Research and Extension water quality funds, assisted Zeit with cost-share for the project.

Mission Lake, near Horton, was the final stop. Mission Lake is currently undergoing a restoration project, with the end goal of returning the volume of the lake to its original volume when it was constructed in 1924. Until the late 90s, Mission Lake provided water for the City of Horton as well as the City of Willis. Due to the deposition of sediment in the lake over nearly 80 years, the lake failed to meet water quality standards, according to Horton City Administrator Jim Whisenant. Construction of a Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) is currently underway a mile north of the lake along Highway 73. As the lake is dredged, a slurry of sediment is pumped to the CDF. There, the sediment settles to the bottom of the CDF and the "clean" water then returns to the lake through the natural channel of Mission Creek.

"It's exciting to be able to watch it all unfold right before our eyes," Bosworth said. She added that in addition to the excitement, "the Mission Lake dredging project may reveal things that can (or can't) be done with other water resources that are suffering from sedimentation and water quality issues in our area".

Bosworth said Mission Lake is an example of local people and city government coming together for a common goal. "They agreed that their water was worth a substantial investment," she said referring to the \$4 million bond issue passed by the residents of the City of Horton. In turn, a

\$2.6 million Clean Drinking Water Fee Fund was received for the project. “Their leadership sought help from the state of Kansas and this is making a very large project possible,” she said.

The project is expected to last a year and Whisenant said he is hopeful that the City of Horton will resume pumping city drinking water from the lake soon after the project completion, pending water treatment plant updates.

Bosworth said some stops involved not just a landowner doing an innovative project, but also research and information-gathering (such as the cover crop and the incidental CRP grazing study—and even with the Mission Lake as a pilot project for the state). “Each stop on the tour highlighted partnerships that made each project unique and successful,” she said.

—30—

*Connie Pantle is the Information and Education Coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center.*