

CULLOPS AND CALDERWOODS/ WATER CONSERVATION AWARD

## Cullop installs SDI irrigation system



Jerry Cullop (left) and Bill Calderwood (right) stand with the new Subsurface Drip Irrigation system.

By RYAN CARLSON

Although watering a field via flood irrigation may be the surest way to get moisture to crops, sometimes a more modern approach works just as well and saves the environment.

Operator Jerry Cullop converted a field he has farmed for Bill and Betty Calderwood from a flood irrigation system

to something known as Subsurface Drip Irrigation (SDI). He installed the system in 2017 through the EQIP program, a funding mechanism to help farmers be more efficient with their irrigation methods. After the conversion, efficiency increased such that Cullop is now using 60 percent less water to irrigate the 54-acre plot.

Cullop offered some advice to other producers looking to do the same to their ground. He said the conservation district offers many programs to help producers be more efficient and conserve natural resources. “There’s a lot out there that allow us to be good stewards, and I think we need to utilize those,” said Cullop.

## Extreme Habitat management



Increased grass forage production helps in encouraging a healthy deer population.

By JESS CROCKFORD

The father of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold, once said the three tools of the wildlife manager were the axe, the plow and the match. In other words, wildlife thrives on disturbance, including that resulting from fire. Although often feared, if done correctly, fire can be an effective, safe and affordable habitat management tool. In most situations, prescribed fire is by far the single best management practice for creating and maintaining good deer habitat. Fire was a natural ecological phenomenon for most of the Great Plains prior to European settlement. As a result, native vegetation is well adapted to burning. Fire effectively suppresses most woody plants while encouraging desirable grass and forbs. And, it is totally natural!

Fire will control invasive species such as Eastern red-cedar. While Eastern Red Cedar can meet cover requirements, it should be avoided. Winters in Kansas are not severe enough to justify dense stands of cedars for thermal protec-

tion. Cedars have virtually no forage or mast value for deer. Also, a mature cedar can consume 35 gallons of water a day. Dense stands of cedars will have a devastating effect on natural springs and streams in an area, affecting the availability of water for wildlife. A 200-pound buck will typically drink 3 to 5 quarts of water per day. The decline in soil moisture will also negatively affect the establishment of the desirable mast trees such as oaks and walnuts. So while some biologists may recommend cedars for escape cover, this does not recognize the overall negative effect of the resulting cedar forest. Such a condition not only depletes water supplies but in effect makes those areas uninhabitable by deer. There is no forage for deer in a dense cedar forest. Prescribed fire can prevent this situation.

Habitat management objectives for deer that can be accomplished using prescribed fire include:

1. Increased production of grass forage (for grazing and fawning cover) and deer browse.
2. Suppression of most brush (to keep new growth

within reach of deer).

3. Control of selected forbs and/or grass species.
4. Improved herbaceous composition.
5. Improve grazing distribution of livestock and wildlife.
6. Increased available forage and browse.
7. Improved forage quality and/or palatability.
8. Increased animal production.
9. Removal of excess mulch, debris, and other organic matter.
10. Improved nutrient cycling.
11. The Kansas Prescribed Fire Council supports and promotes the use of prescribed fire to achieve all types of management goals. The Council was organized in 2008 and is an educational non-profit that promotes the safe and effective use of prescribed fire. If you are interested in learning more about prescribe fire or burn associations, contact your local Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Service office at 620-257-3645 ext 3, or the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council at 785-532-3316.

## 2018 district annual meeting

By RINA BILLINGTON

The Rice County Conservation District’s 74th Annual Meeting will be held on Monday evening, January 22, 2018 at the Dwight Lamson Post #258 American Legion in Little River, Kansas. Registration begins at 5:30 p.m. A complimentary meal catered by Oliver’s Beef & Brew will be served at 6:00 p.m. to those who have made reservations for the meal.

Awards will be presented to the winners of the Bankers Awards for their outstanding conservation and wildlife efforts.

Awards will also be presented to the winners of the 4th Grade Conservation Poster Contest. The purpose of the Poster Contest is to recognize

students whose artwork reflects their thoughts on soil, water, and related natural resource issues.

The terms of office for Ryan Barta and Clayton Wires will expire on the date of the district’s upcoming annual meeting. The election for the supervisor’s position will be conducted by secret ballot. Qualified electors at the meeting will elect two district supervisors for a three-year term.

Duties and responsibilities of a supervisor include such things as participating in conservation district policy and program development, financial direction, and personnel management. Supervisors attend board meetings, and on occasion, meetings and training sessions outside

the county. Conservation districts work closely with a number of local, state, and federal agencies, as well as with local groups and organizations to assist the district in identifying local conservation needs, set goals and implement plans to protect soil, water, wildlife and other natural resources. In particular, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Conservation have close ties. Payment for this position doesn’t come in monetary form, but in satisfaction of knowing that you are among many others helping your county conserve its natural resources for our children and future generations.

## 2017 Poster Award winners

By RINA BILLINGTON

One of the district’s highest priorities is educating students about the need to protect and use our natural resources wisely. The Conservation District incorporates the poster award program with the 4th grade Conservation Education Field Day. This year we had 58 participants from 3 schools enter the poster contest. Posters were evaluated on the basis of conservation message, visual effectiveness, originality, and overall appeal.

The first place poster in the local contest was also eligible to compete in the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) poster award program. This program teaches the 4th grade students in the county how valuable our natural resources are.

Winners will be recognized at the Rice County Conservation District’s Annual Meeting that will be held on January 22, 2018 at the Dwight Lamson Post #258 American Legion in Little River. First place winner this year is Julia Wohler, Sterling Grade School; Second place winner is Havana Olander, Windom Elementary; and Third place winner is Evie Look, Windom Elementary.



Adding food plots and cover crops is an excellent way to increase wildlife habitat on an acreage.

(photo by Ryan Carlson)

## Soil monitoring assistance

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is partnering with the Groundwater Management Districts (GMD) in the state to provide a unique opportunity for producers who are interested in improving their irrigation efficiency. Our newest program, the Regional Conserva-

tion Partnership Program (RCPP) is offering financial assistance to farmers to install and utilize soil moisture probes. This new technology is available to help monitor the soil moisture levels and more accurately apply water. To be eligible, the well must be located in a GMD (GMD #5 includes approximately the southern half of Rice County). The

applications are funded on a first-come, first-serve basis. If you are interested in applying or want to learn more, feel free to call me at (620) 257-3645 ext. 3, or stop by the office and we can discuss the program requirements. Follow us on Twitter @ NRCS\_Kansas. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## Conservation stewardship programs are now available

By ASHLEY VISOCKY

Rice county farmers and ranchers have a great opportunity to receive technical support, cost-share, and incentive payments through the USDA. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has numerous different programs available to assist producers, but in this edition I’m going to focus on the Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP.

CSP is an incentive payment program for producers that have already met a high level of conservation and are interested in implementing practices or specific “enhancements” to increase their conservation extent. Producers who sign up for CSP must enroll all land they are listed as the operator with FSA, and must get any landowners to sign a permission form stating they may enroll their land. Like all USDA programs, certain eligibility requirements must be met to be eligible for any Farm Bill payments. The contracts are 5 year commitments during which all the enhancements that were chosen are continually implemented.

The first step is to come into the office and fill out an application. The deadline to apply for the 2018 program year will be in February, so the sooner the better!

The second step is interview and program details. There are a series of questions that the producer must answer about their current operation,

and the office staff will make field visits to all the farms being enrolled. This is considered the “baseline data” and is used to determine initial eligibility. The information gathered from the producer interview and the field visits are entered into the computer system, the applications are ranked and funded (in ranking order) until the budget is spent. The payment amount is also based on the baseline data and what practices and enhancements the participant chooses. The payment you’ll be receiving and what’s expected of you will be clearly laid out before you ever sign an official contract with us.

CSP participation is completely voluntary, and you are not tied-down to anything by just submitting an application. Of course there are a few hoops to jump through,

but the benefits offered may be enough to help you finally get a head start on positive changes you’d like to see in your operation. We also have additional opportunities for producers who belong to socially disadvantaged groups, beginning farmers/ranchers, and limited resource farmers/ranchers. If you have a certain project in mind or have any questions, feel free to call me or stop by and we can discuss any assistance that may be available. And, as always, if being involved in a program doesn’t interest you, our technical assistance is always available as a service to tax-payers. Check out our website at [www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov). Follow us on Twitter @ NRCS\_Kansas. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

### Congratulations to all of the Rice County Soil Conservation Award Winners

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