

Our Mission:

To provide water quality education and funding for cost effective clean water projects that improve the North Fork Ninescah Watershed which feeds Cheney Lake.

H2info

CHENEY LAKE WATERSHED, INC.

SUMMER 2008

Gerald Healzer - A Living Legend

By Howard Miller

Gerald Healzer's farm stretches along the banks of the North Fork Ninescah River and its tributaries for several miles south and east of Arlington. Gerald has spent over 65 years farming and ranching amongst the streams in the area and over the years he has seen lots of changes in how people farm and ranch.

But Gerald has not always lived close to the North Fork Ninescah River. He was born in Rush County, one of 5 children growing up on the farm his family had near LaCrosse, Kansas where Gerald remembers walking to the school on the other side of the section. He was born not long before the Great Depression and the dust bowl days struck leaving his family with few

resources. He remembers his mother taking eggs and cream to town to trade them for food for the family. Eggs were traded for 6 cents per dozen for basic needs for their family and Gerald says they didn't have much but they always had what they needed to survive. Unlike most kids today with their multiple pairs of shoes made in China and an assortment of other countries; Gerald remembers getting a new pair of shoes as quite an event.

In April of 1940 Gerald's

family moved to a farm his grandpa owned south and east of Arlington. Here Gerald attended and graduated from Arlington High School and he fondly remembers studying his schoolwork by kerosene lantern. Gerald's earliest recollections of the North Fork Ninescah River, is of a river much narrower than the stream is today. When asked what he thought influenced the widen-



Gerald Healzer, right, enjoys lunch and conversation with other producers at a field day.

ing of the river over time, Gerald replied that he feels that our rains in general come as much larger and faster rains compared to the rains of longer ago that came over several days. As the rain runs rapidly into the stream this sudden surge of water erodes away the banks and in some cases changes the stream course.

Today Gerald's farm consists of 1600 acres, 800 of which are in CRP grass and the balance is in cropland and rangeland. Gerald learned the sandy soil

could support rye well and over the years rye provided lots of forage for his cattle herd. Today Gerald has sold his cow herd and has converted much of his cropland to grasses for the good of the land and also for wildlife habitat. Gerald says that the CRP grass has been a good deal for him and he knows it helps clean up the water in the Ninescah River. He likes the idea that the CRP grass slows down the water and allows it to percolate down into the aquifer. This has meant he isn't seeing the declining water table he expected when irrigation became more prevalent in his area. He also likes the benefits to wildlife that CRP has and he says it has increased the value of his land in many cases. Gerald is an avid wildlife supporter and he says that while he likes to

have a few select people hunt on his land, at times he thinks it's better to let the wildlife rest. In Gerald's words, "If the wildlife is having a rough time because of unfavorable weather or cover conditions, it's important to let the wildlife have time to recover before you hunt it again."

Even though Gerald has had to slow down some as he grows older his mind never stops planning his next project. His ability to think of ways to better protect his natural resources makes Gerald, truly, a conservationist.

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Eastern Gamagrass Provides Opportunities For Grazing

By Lisa French

Citing an interest in creating a grazing system for grass-finished beef, Jim French



Jim French speaks to an attentive group about his gamagrass

converted 24 acres of cropland to a permanent planting of Eastern gamagrass in 2004. This highly-palatable, native species is capable of producing 3-6 tons of forage per acre under average conditions for Reno County. Some forage experts consider gamagrass to be a perennial counterpart to sudangrass.

Jim received nearly 70% cost share from the State of Kansas and an additional 30% cost share from the City of Wichita to pay the expenses of a cover crop and seeding of the gamagrass. The forage

was adequate in the second year to allow for limited grazing and by the third year Jim was grazing 30 head for up to 6 weeks during June and July.

At a field day early in May, NRCS Range Conservationist, Chris Tecklenburg noted that the best utilization of gamagrass could be achieved by dividing the field into 9 to 12 paddocks with frequent moves to new forage. Care must be taken to avoid grazing below 8 inches to protect the growing point of the plants.

County Bridge Work Impacts Cheney Lake Watershed

By Lisa French

Flooding during May 2007 moved tons of sediment downstream. Nowhere was it more visible than a section of stream channel on Red Rock Creek. Reno County Public Works had just removed sediment around the bridge and vegetation and brush in the channel and on the streambanks. The receding flood waters revealed heavily eroded stream banks that had no vegetation in place to hold the soil when the record rainfall hit.

A lack of past maintenance around Reno County bridges has spurred new work over the past year. Ten

bridges in the watershed are scheduled for replacement and nearly 20 others are scheduled for extensive work to clear sediment and brush from the channel.

The flooding incident in May 2007 and inquiries from concerned landowners prompted conversations between Cheney Lake Watershed, Inc., the Reno County Conservation District and Reno County Public Works. All parties are in agreement that debris and sand bars that restrict the flow around bridges must be

removed to protect public safety as well as our capital investment in public roads and bridges.

At the same time, the conservation and watershed groups are interested in retaining as much bank vegetation as possible to hold the sandy soils that are prone to erosion. Maintaining stable banks near the bridges will help accomplish goals for both the county and the watershed as less sediment enters the stream system to be deposited at a bridge downstream or ultimately in the reservoir.

KSU Study Evaluates Erosion Reduction

By Lisa French

Researchers at Kansas State University have begun to put some numbers to their estimates of erosion reduction in Cheney Lake Watershed. Dr. Nathan Nelson, and undergraduate research assistant, Mark Davis have used a database of all the conservation practices installed in the watershed since 1997 in conjunction with information on soils, slope, land use, and rainfall to estimate the effects of conservation work in the watershed. Their research will be the subject of a new extension publication in the near future. Some highlights from the research:

- 9% of the entire watershed is terraced (a 20% increase from 1997 to 2006)
- 24% of the watershed is en-

rolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

- On average, researchers estimate a 12% reduction in erosion since 1997.
- Areas with the greatest potential for erosion are estimated to have higher reductions in erosion (up to 18%)
- No-till farming can reduce soil erosion on any given field by more than 50%.

No-till adoption on the top 10% most erosive areas in the watershed could reduce overall watershed erosion by nearly 20%.

These researchers and others from KSU will be working in the watershed through 2009 collecting data. Water quality samplers have recently been installed on Red Rock

Creek at two locations south east of Partridge to provide additional information on sediment and phosphorus loading in our streams. Current research results will be presented to watershed residents in January 2009 and 2010.



Dr. Nathan Nelson and Dr. Phil Barnes install the inlet for an automatic sampler on Red Rock Creek.

off the mark.com by Mark Parisi



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Cost Share Opportunities for Expiring CRP Acres - Howard Miller

Producers who have CRP contracts that expire in October of 2008 are eligible for cost share on perimeter fencing for those acres. The City of Wichita will pay 50% of the cost to install up to 2 miles of perimeter fence on expired CRP contracts within the Cheney Lake Watershed. Producers who are interested should contact the Watershed office at 620-665-0231, in the next few months to complete an application and begin the process of developing a grazing plan. Applications will be accepted at any time for contracts expiring in October. Although funding is not unlimited, the Watershed office anticipates being

able to fund all applications for perimeter fence in 2008.

Additional cost share is available through state cost share programs for developing watering systems and installing interior fences that protect streams and ponds. Up to 70% cost share is available for some practices with an additional 30% from the City of Wichita for contracts within the Cheney Lake Watershed. Producers are encouraged to check with their County Conservation District or NRCS office to apply for the cost share programs. Applications for state cost share funds are subject to a ranking process to fund the most environmentally beneficial pro-

jects.

All cost share funding is based on either actual cost or county average cost whichever is less. The producer must agree to develop a grazing plan with NRCS and maintain the system for 10 years.

The Watershed is planning a Field Day in early August to look at the CRP grazing system with a livestock watering system that Roland Elpers installed on his farm. Producers who are considering installing a CRP boundary fence and/or a livestock watering system are urged to attend this Field Day. Call the Watershed office at 620-665-0231 and we will send you information on the Field Day nearer to the date.