

Lower James RC&D

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Grassland Critical To Water Quality

Five southeast South Dakota landowners are partnering with the Lower James RC&D Council, USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and their local watershed partners such as the City of Mitchell, and the James River Water Development District to improve stream side (riparian) pastures within five miles of priority public lakes. Approximately 600 acres of riparian pastures associated with Swan Lake, Lake Mitchell, Lake Hanson, and/or Marindahl Lake are being leased for 2 to 15 years, to improve riparian vegetation as a tool to filter pollutants out before entering these important public lakes.

Project Background/Project Need:

Local efforts to restore water quality in lakes identified by the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources as priority lakes needing restoration to meet their beneficial uses, were experiencing difficulty improving the stream riparian areas within the first five miles above these lakes.

Project Plan/Methods:

Landowners and Conservation partners working to improve water quality in these lakes requested assistance to pilot a program to offer additional incentives to landowners with pastures in these critical riparian areas. During 2007, a South Dakota Conservation Innovation Grant was awarded to the Lower James RC&D Council (\$64,000) to implement a pasture lease program to work in conjunction with the Conservation Reserve Program to improve riparian areas.

Project Results:

Of the six hundred acres of grasslands critical to water quality enrolled in the program, 450 acres are under the Lower James Council, Clean Water, and/or local funds, and join with 150 acres enrolled under the Conservation Reserve Program. These landowners would not have enrolled their riparian pastures if they would not have been able to also enroll adjoining grasslands under the local lease program. For each dollar invested by this Lower James RC&D grant, twenty dollars are invested by other sources. Riparian Area Management Programs are now being incorporated into most Clean Water Restoration Projects in Southeastern South Dakota.



Riparian Area in 2007



Riparian Area in 2009