

LOCAL NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Allan Tiarks is serving as an elected volunteer and current chairman of the West Pott. County Soil Conservation District Commissioners. Tiarks explained he is one of five commissioners who oversee the administration of federal, state, and local funding of conservation projects in the western half of the county, the only county in Iowa with two Conservation Districts. The mission of the Conservation District is to provide technical, financial, and educational assistance to all land owners while conserving and improving natural resources. This work is carried out with employees working together from federal, state, and local District offices. Tiarks noted there are several conservation programs targeting different conservation environments such as farm fields, watersheds, urban areas and residential yards. In 1944 when the Conservation District was organized, conservation of agricultural land was primary the concern. Tillage for row crop farming was contributing to excessive storm runoff and erosion of the rolling hills of loess soil. Tiarks noted that during the past sixty years about ninety percent of agricultural land of west Pott. County has been terraced resulting in a significant reduction of peak storm runoff rate and soil erosion. A major shift to no-till cropping in the past decade has also been a great help to reduce runoff and soil loss. Current watershed projects on the District's agenda include improvement of degraded water quality of Carter Lake, Lake Manawa management, Indian Creek reservoir dam rehabilitation, and reduction of runoff and erosion from residential development of the Little Pony Creek watershed at the edge of Council Bluffs. Tiarks explained that conservation in the urban environment is a growing program. Water and soil management practices such as rain gardens, bioswales, composting, and pervious paving are gaining attention of urban land owners to minimize storm runoff and erosion and consequent nutrient and pesticide movement from yard areas. According to Tiarks there are funds for cost sharing with land owners to implement conservation practices. These funds come from federal, state, and local sources. The county Local Option Sales Tax provides local funding for enhanced conservation practice installations typically not found in other counties. Tiarks explained that land owners must apply for cost share funding and the design of the practice to be installed has to meet federal specifications. Tiarks said he would be happy to accept any questions about the District programs. More information about the Pott. County Conservation Districts can be found on their web site: pottswcd.org.