



February 27, 2004

SALINE COUNTY TO RECEIVE GRANT FOR SWAN LAKE

Landowners in the Swan 5 Lake watershed near Tobias recently received letters notifying them of a NDEQ (Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality) grant for \$250,000 for land improvements. The landowners cooperated last year with a land resource inventory and worked to get the grant. Swan Lake is the biggest multi-purpose flood control and public recreational area in Saline County with a permanent pool of 95 acres. The lake has been open for public use since 1994. It is a popular recreation and fishing area but now it is listed on the Federal EPA impaired lakes 303(d) list. The biggest water quality concern is too much Atrazine herbicide and other nutrients in the water.

The 303(d) list refers to the EPA Clean Water Act. Samples of herbicide Atrazine in parts per billion have sometimes exceeded the national standard. Total nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations during the growing season are also elevated. Excessive nutrients produce algae and along with sediment suspended in the water, the water clarity has been very poor. An estimated 8.28 acre-feet of sediment or 13,356 cubic yards of soil is entering the permanent pool each year, decreasing the lake's life.

I think Saline County landowners will respond with some good ideas. Their attendance is very important at a meeting in Tobias at the Fire Hall on Monday, March 8th at 7:00 PM. A land resources inventory has been completed with the help of area landowners already. Now through local community planning, the best ideas will need to come forward on how to spend the \$250,000 to address the Atrazine and runoff issues.

Local NRD and NRCS officials will ask for stakeholders, landowners and operators at the meeting to elect an advisory board. The advisory board will have the authority to set the cost share rates and make recommendations on how we can get the most impact for the dollars given to area landowners. The advisory group will recommend the best management practices to address the resource concerns in the small watershed that drains into Swan 5 which is also called the Willard L. Meyer Recreation Area.

Examples of cost share programs that other advisory groups have set up in the state include 90% cost share on flood and grade stabilization structures, terraces, tile outlets, waterway rehabilitation and construction, no-till farming incentives, cropland and grassland incentives, establishment of buffer strips and field borders, cross fencing and pasture management, tree plantings, stream bank stabilization, pond restoration, etc. The purpose of the meeting at Tobias is to share information about the small watershed that drains into Swan 5, elect an advisory group and determine what practices fit the watershed area the best.

Swan 5 isn't really different than many other lakes in Nebraska, but it is visible and used by a lot of people. Recreation lakes tend to be scrutinized for contaminants more carefully. Land treatment sign-ups can occur as early as June of this year. Work could start as early as the fall of this year.



Now is the time for area landowners and/or operators to sign-up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). There are many environmental cost share programs available to landowners through the EQIP program. There is a good chance Saline County could receive more money than last year for this program. Statewide, 19 million dollars will be distributed out to each NRD district. Last year, five landowners in Saline County were approved for cost share funds on long term contracts for practices listed above and other practices. If you did not rank well last year, try again and ask how to increase ranking. The ranking system is also favorable to livestock producers. For more information, call the NRCS office in Wilber at 821-2251.

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