

*Stark and Billings*  
**SOIL  
CONSERVATION**  
*District*

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Organization

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“Assisting Residents of Stark and Billings Counties”

Return Service Requested

## Annual Report 2024

*Assistance is available without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.*

### Ron Obritsch ... 15 Years ... Supervisor for the Stark and Billings Soil Conservation District ...



Ron Obritsch was honored for his dedicated service to the Stark and Billings Soil Conservation District from 2009 to 2024. Ron began his career as a supervisor for the Western Soil Conservation District back in 2009 and stayed on board when Western and Central Stark Soil Conservation Districts consolidated to Stark and Billings SCD in 2016.

Ron dedicated 15 years of service to the Soil Conservation District Boards, serving as chairman multiple times and representing the district producers on issues pertinent to agriculture. He attended numerous community meetings with other agencies to discuss problems and possible solutions. Ron's business and financial talents aided in the strong and successful growth of our District Programs.

We gratefully appreciated the time, energy and dedication the Ron provided to the district the last 15 years!

Ron retired his position on the Board in 2024.

**Thank you, Ron**

## The **OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD** for the Stark and Billings Soil Conservation District is **Jim and LaVonne Bobb** .

The Bobb's farm is on a smaller scale, but Jim said, "They farm enough to keep their arms around it". Their no-till farming operation consists of wheat, canola, flax and oats in rotation. Their flax is sold to a food company for a natural food product. Jim and LaVonne have alfalfa for hay but will leave some un-cut for bee pollination and limit their Insecticide to keep bugs. Jim is trying to combat the saline soils by planting AC saltlander grass and alkaline tolerant alfalfa to bring up organic matter. The Bobb's are on the family homeplace his Great Grandfather settled in 1891. His grandfather built the house and barn in 1905. A cottonwood tree over 100-year-old is still surviving. Along with the thousands of trees planted by Jim's Dad, Milton.



# Achievement Recipients

## Tree Award

### **Bernie & Cindy Kordonowy**



Bernie's Dad, William purchased the farmstead in 1946. Bernie remembers planting and taking care of trees and gardens with his grandpa. His grandpa would take seeds from apples and start a tree. Bernie worked/helped at the Bible camp in Medora. He would plant trees around the camp. Bernie and Cindy moved to the farmstead in 1976. They started planting trees in the 1980's for shelterbelts, calving protection and beautification. With all the trees, Cindy's mother day gifts would be to have the kids work on the trees. Both Bernie and Cindy love their trees and take exceptional care of them.

## Rangeland Management Award

### **Cody & Julie Reis and Emmet, Wyatt, & Dillon**



Julie's Dad and Grandpa worked diligently getting water to their cattle. Fortunately, the Fox Hill Aquafer has proved to be an excellent water source to draw from. Windmills were used in the past and one is still running today. Julie's Dad, Allan always dreamed about getting good water in all the pastures. Today with the assistance of several conservation programs, the Reis's have been able to install pipelines and tanks to summer and wintering pastures. A few pastures do have the SW Water taps available as their water source. The water systems were more critical than ever during this year's drought and enabled the Reis's to continue to follow the rotational grazing system. Julie stated that her Dad is smiling in heaven with reliable water in all the pastures.

## Youth Education Award

### **DSU Agriculture Club**



The primary purpose of the Agriculture Club is to develop agricultural leadership and promote agriculture on local, state, and national levels. The club stresses development of character, citizenship, and patriotism. It also tries to coordinate a closer relationship between students and future employers. All Dickinson State students with a close tie to agriculture may join. For more than 30 years, the Club brings the farm into the city every spring to offer over 1500 children from preschoolers to third graders from the surrounding areas a unique opportunity to learn about agriculture with KIDS DAY ON THE FARM.

## 2024 "Make A Splash" Water Festival



## 2024 KIDS DAY ON THE FARM SOILS TUNNEL

Family's from Stark and neighboring counties, came out for Kids Day on the Farm at Dickinson State University.



## Diversity, Direction and Dollars

27th Annual AG Forum was held on January 17th, 2024



## Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture Meeting FEBRUARY 28th, 2024



## 2024 TREE PROGRAM

*Tree Planting crews machine planted 173,147 linear feet of trees in Stark & Billings Counties.*

*Weed Barrier crew applied 310,794 feet of black fabric in Stark, Billings, Dunn & Adams Counties.*



### **Tom Gibson**

Tom Gibson, a conservation educator from Bottineau, ND has been working with the state-wide conservation education program titled "TREES" (The Regional Environmental Education Series) since 1992. He has made numerous presentations to our local area schools as "Pete Bogg and the Amazing Water Machine", "Gunnar in Water you Doing", "Sam Ting", "Darin Ewe, the energetic game show host of Common Cents" and "Traveling with Lewis & Clark". Tom was presented between 400 and 500 programs per year throughout the entire state of North Dakota reaching 20,000 students! The last few years the total presentations were approaching 14,000 total programs with about 850,000 students!!

Tom has decided to retire this year. We want to thank him for the numerous presentations over the years to our schools.

And for the quick wit and humor making us laugh.

**Good Luck Tom in your next endeavors!**

### **...The Humorist Norwegian, Sam**



### **NRCS Hosts Careers in Governments Class!**

At the SCD tree shop on November 14, 2024, 15 Senior's from Dickinson High School's Careers in Government class, visited with our local NRCS agents to learn about career paths related to Agriculture and Natural Resource Conservation Services. This session was held to open their understanding of government jobs, emphasizing the opportunities available outside the political sphere.



# 2024 Awards Banquet



**Jim & LaVonne Bobb** were recognized and commended for their stewardship at the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts Annual Convention.



The North Dakota Conservation District Employee Association (NDCDEA) Appreciation Award is presented at the NDASCD Convention to honor an individual who stands out for contributing their time and effort to provide guidance and leadership to SCD Employees. This years winner is:

**HANNAH NORDBY**



Ty Nordby accepted the tree awards for Stark and Billings Soil Conservation District for the most trees planted and the most trees sold for the 2023 and 2024 tree season.

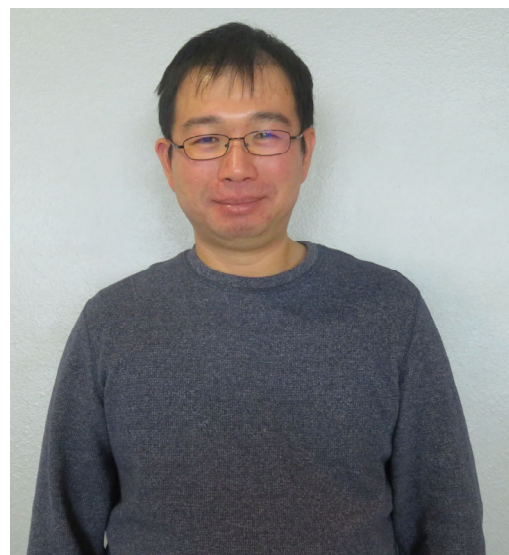


## WELCOME STAFF AND SUPERVISOR TO THE DICKINSON FIELD OFFICE



Hi there, I'm **Erin Miller**. I am excited to be joining the **Soil Conservation District** here in Dickinson. I recently moved to North Dakota from southern Illinois, where I raised bees and explored the forested rolling bluffs along the Mississippi River. I studied Natural Resources and Environmental Science at the University of Illinois and competed in soil judging for several years. That experience was where I learned to really enjoy soil and water conservation. I moved to North Dakota to pursue an internship after college and loved the area, especially the badlands, enough to make it my home. I'm looking forward to meeting and learning from all you folks in Stark and Billings Counties!

My name is **Keith Chan** and I am the new **Natural Resources Specialist** for the Dickinson Field Office. I have a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Nevada, Reno and have spent my career with the U.S. Forest Service and with NRCS. During my time with the Forest Service, I worked in the rare plants and noxious weeds program on the Tahoe and Modoc National Forests in California. In my last position with the NRCS's Remote Sensing Laboratory in Fort Worth, Texas, I assisted with data collection for National Resources Inventory program. I am excited to be in North Dakota, and hope to learn a lot from all of you. Outside of work, I enjoy hiking and camping, and I look forward to exploring the Roughrider Country.



We welcome **Clint Diede** as the newest **Supervisor** for the Stark and Billings Soil Conservation District Board.

Clint has a ranching operation South of Richardton. Over the years the Diede ranch has planted numerous windbreaks for livestock protection. They have also installed numerous water developments including spring developments, wells, pipelines, tanks, along with fencing to facilitate their grazing operation and provide better grazing management opportunities.

We are looking forward to having Clint on the Board.



# VENTENATA

New to Montana and knocking at North Dakota's door, Ventenata, an invasive annual grass, could begin to overtake our pastures and rangeland and decrease available forage for our livestock. Luckily, one of the best management practices observed across western states is the application of preemergence herbicide.

Originating in eastern Europe, Ventenata was first discovered in the United States in the 1950s in Idaho and Washington. After being discovered in the state nearly 30 years prior, this grass was listed as a noxious weed in Montana in 2019 due to its aggressive spread into grazing lands.

Ventenata is most identifiable by its reddish-black nodes along the stem, narrow, folded leaves, and panicles with bent awns on its seed heads, sort of resembling a grasshopper's leg. As Ventenata grows and reproduces, its dead plant material lays on the surface of the soil, creating a thick layer of thatch. This thatch layer prevents desirable perennial vegetation from growing and increases the risk of devastating wildfires.



Since Ventenata is not palatable to cattle and other livestock, grazing to control it is usually unsuccessful, however, putting livestock on infested pastures could help decrease the presence of the thatch layer by hoof-action and trampling. Because the seeds are so small and airy, mowing is less productive and sometimes even helps disperse seed.

The best way to manage and prevent Ventenata is to apply a herbicide and, if necessary, reseed to establish desirable vegetation. Ventenata and other annual grasses produce seeds that can remain viable underground for years. Foliage can be treated with herbicide to kill a growing plant, but there could be a thriving seed bank below waiting to emerge. A preemergence herbicide

would prevent germination of this annual grass and provide long-term control of the area.

Because the quantity and quality of available livestock forage is compromised by Ventenata, a chemical treatment would increase the overall profitability and health of your pasture. Available Animal Unit Months (AUMs) and the value of those AUMs would increase, creating an opportunity to quickly recoup the costs of treatment. One study from a chemical company found that 3.5 times the forage production was regained after treatment compared to the same field infested with Ventenata.



Ventenata's quick spread across Montana and its encroachment into North Dakota poses a significant threat to pasture and rangelands. The key to controlling it is early intervention with preemergence herbicide, to prevent germination and promote the return of desirable vegetation. While other management efforts may have limited effectiveness, herbicide treatment offers a long-term solution. By addressing Ventenata now, landowners can protect their lands, livestock, and bottom lines for years to come.



*Photos by Montana State University Extension and California Invasive Plant Council.*