



October 2008

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**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Middle Arkansas Subbasin CREP Informational Meeting  
Sponsored by GMD No. 5

This is an opportunity to learn more about signing up, participation and the program in general.

3-4 p.m.  
December 10, 2008

Larned City Hall  
Larned, Kansas

Middle Arkansas Subbasin Model Meeting

4-6 p.m.  
December 10, 2008

Larned City Hall  
Larned, Kansas

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Benefits Water Resources and Farmers**

*Courtesy of Kansas Water Office*

Water Rights 16097, 30576, 34783 and 33615: Permanently Retired. No more fixing a contrary pump, unplugging clogged nozzles, or replacing costly irrigation equipment. The seasonal grind of irrigation on the land watered by these water rights on the farm of Donald Sanders in Pawnee County and the farm of Denton Koehn in Kearny County has ended.

It's the beginning, however, for a voluntary enrollment water conservation program in 10 southwestern Kansas counties along the Upper Arkansas River corridor. Known by its acronym, CREP, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program provides annual rental payments from USDA and state upfront incentive payment and conservation practice cost share to participating farmers. In turn, landowners permanently retire the water right on their enrolled land. The federal-state program is administered by the USDA Farm Services Agency and the State Conservation Commission with technical assistance provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Almost 10,000 acres have been enrolled to date. Farmers have until June 30, 2009, to enroll acreage until the 20,000-acre program is filled. Meetings on CREP are planned for this fall. The times, dates and places will be announced.

"I'm encouraged by the quality of the water rights enrolled and the conservation mindedness of the participating farmers," says Steve Frost, who manages the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program on behalf of the State Conservation Commission. "It's also a smart business move. Farmers are guaranteed income for up to 15 years in an area that's overappropriated and where water levels are declining."

The fields offered by Sanders and Koehn are among the first to be accepted and processed through the CREP program. They represent both the differences in the landscape in the Arkansas River corridor and the diversity of the landowners who find CREP to fit their business plan.

Sanders' Pawnee County CREP acreage adjoins the Arkansas River and had been watered from both groundwater and surface water sources. The farm's surface water right dates to 1969; the groundwater right, 1978. A battery of four wells provided the water for the alfalfa crop irrigated by a center pivot. *(continued)*

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program *(continued)*

While dryland crop production would be possible, it's not allowed on CREP acres during the 14-15-year life of the contract.

Sanders, whose livelihood has been tied to the oil and gas industry, bought the land enrolled in CREP in the early 1990s to diversify his investments. The land is farmed by his oldest son, Don. "My son had misgivings about my giving up the water right, but I felt it was the right thing to do both economically and philosophically," the senior Sanders says. "When I was in my 20s, I probably would have thought differently. In my early 60s, I'm thinking about more than myself."

His decision was also a practical one. Not all farm ground is equal, and Sanders recognized that the land was marginal and the four shallow wells would run out of water in dry years. That doesn't mean he caught the government napping. All land accepted in the CREP program had to meet minimum standards. It had to have had at least one-half acre foot of water applied four out of six years from 1996 to 2001. And at least 50 percent of the maximum annual quantity authorized to be diverted under the water right had to have been used in any three years from 2001 through 2005.

In discussing his decision with his wife and children, he said putting away the rental payment for the next 15 years would build a reasonable sum. And, in 15 years, the well established grass stand could be pastured or, depending on circumstances, be used as a source of renewable fuel and wildlife habitat. Also weighing in his decision to enroll was the decrease in irrigated land values he observed as regulation, necessary because of declining water tables, restricted the amount of water that could be pumped each year.

His CREP acreage initially was irrigated with a gravity flow, or flood, system. Sanders switched to a sprinkler system, a move that some questioned. "I tried to be a better steward," he says, decreasing water waste as he could.

Sanders says today's prices are attractive, but the costs of seed, pesticides, fuel and fertilizer also are up. "You have to ask yourself, 'Am I that much better off?'" And, he says, you can't ignore the capital cost of sprinkler ownership. His center pivot, which he is selling at cost, is valued in the low to mid \$30,000 range. Today, the cost to replace that same system would be closer to \$60,000.

He acknowledges that most people in the United States have a "want it now" mind set rather than looking down the road 20 years. "Lots of farmers feel that way too. It's not for me to judge, but I am disappointed that more people have not signed up for the program."

Sanders says, "Everyone involved in the program has been cordial and willing to help. That's meant a lot."

For Denton Koehn, who farms in Kearny County, the decision to enroll a pivot circle in CREP was an easy one. "We were facing a declining water table, rising fuel and fertilizer costs and poor soil," Koehn says. The well that once yielded up to 1,000 gallons a minute season long had fallen off to 400 to 500 gallons per minute. His CREP acreage is watered by one well with a single water right perfected in 1985. *(continued)*



Switchgrass is one of the grasses included in the mix recommended by the Natural Resources Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Mixtures are determined as a part of the conservation plan developed for the enrolled tracts. Other possible grasses in the sandy soil mix are little bluestem, big bluestem, sand bluestem, Indiangrass, sideoats grams, blue grama and sand love grass. Wildlife mixes include forbs.

### **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program** *(continued)*

While not the first in line to enroll in Kearny County last December, he was able to offer his acres before the 5,000 acre per county cap for the program was reached. Farmers were encouraged to continue to offer acres beyond the cap should acres offered earlier be withdrawn or rejected. Currently, due to withdrawals and offers that did not qualify, the offered acres are below the cap. New acreage offers are being accepted.

Koehn already has seeded his pivot circle to a forage sudan grass that will serve as a cover crop for the native grass he'll drill into the residue. He's relying on the Kearny County Natural Resources Conservation Service for the seed mixture best suited to his acreage. Since his land is classed as unsuitable for dryland farming, he'll be able to apply limited irrigation water, if needed, to help establish the native grass seed.

Pivot corners that had been farmed are allowed to be enrolled as dryland acres. In Koehn's case, the pivot corners were never farmed and are in native grass.

"I appreciate the program," Koehn says. "If I could, I'd enroll more acres."

### **Subbasin Water Resource Management Program Updates Website**

The Subbasin Water Resource Management Program has updated their [website](#) with new content and updated project areas. The current project areas include the Upper Arkansas River Subbasin, Middle Arkansas River Subbasin, Rattlesnake Creek Subbasin, Solomon River Basin, Pawnee River Subbasin, Ogallala aquifer and Ozark Plateau aquifers.

Newly added content includes information on voluntary incentive programs, the new five-phase process, hydrologic modeling and the 2007 field summary for each area. We are working on a section for the streamflow monitoring data under the Pawnee-Buckner-Sawlog subbasin. The streamflow monitoring data will be available in the near future for the Solomon subbasin.

We are always looking for ways to improve our website or make it more useful. Please feel free to send an email through the "contact information" section or submit your feedback on the comment form in the top right-hand corner of the website.

### **Five-Phase Process**

The Subbasin Water Resource Management Program is a special project funded by the State Water Plan and implemented by the Kansas Department of Agriculture's, Division of Water Resources. In 1993, we began to address water quantity issues identified in the State Water Plan. Resolutions to groundwater decline, streamflow depletion and related water quality concerns are developed using a hydrologic basin approach.

The program was recently realigned with a new mission, which is to analyze aquifers and stream systems in targeted areas and work with stakeholders in developing and assessing strategies for protecting water rights and improving hydrologic sustainability. To achieve this mission, the program encourages input from interested parties and residents affected by the program in their new five-phase process.

The process includes participation from local representatives, state, federal and local entities, and other interested groups. The program involves five phases that include initiating the project, analyzing and education, evaluating alternatives, making recommendations and implementation of management alternatives developed with stakeholder input.

For a detailed outline of the five-phase process go to <http://www.ksda.gov/subbasin/>. Any comments or feedback to improve the new process is encouraged.



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Visit [www.ksda.gov/subbasin/content/199/cid/1035](http://www.ksda.gov/subbasin/content/199/cid/1035) to view current and past Middle Arkansas Subbasin Newsletters online!

## 2008 County Precipitation

Precipitation information is provided by the Kansas State University Weather Data Library at [www.oznet.ksu.edu](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu). Rainfall reports for all stations within a county have been summarized and given as a county average.

County	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	2008 Total	Yearly New Normal
Rush	0.43	1.16	0.28	2.51	7.72	3.56	3.03	18.67	23.63
Pawnee	0.17	0.48	0.13	2.68	3.48	1.43	--	8.37	23.99
Stafford	0.29	0.66	0.79	5.78	5.64	2.85	4.26	20.27	26.03
Rice	0.39	1.18	0.86	3.62	2.99	4.34	4.29	17.65	28.25
Edwards	0.15	0.61	0.22	2.21	7.16	2.14	2.07	14.55	26.75
Barton	0.42	0.97	0.55	3.68	5.21	4.17	3.42	18.41	26.62

## Division of Water Resources Publishes Newsletter

The Division of Water Resources' electronic newsletter, DWR Currents, is distributed quarterly and focuses on providing useful, timely information related to Kansas' water resources. You can subscribe to receive the newsletter via email, or view current and past newsletters, at [www.ksda.gov/dwr/](http://www.ksda.gov/dwr/)