



Everything Is Better With Buffers!

Established, native grass buffers surrounding the Morris RWD 1 wells provide excellent protection to the wells and wildlife habitat.

Conservation buffers are an effective, common sense approach to improving water quality. The capability of native grassed buffers to reduce sediment and pollutants from run-off is unparalleled. An established native, grassed buffer may trap up to ninety percent of sediment run-off from a field, preventing it from ending up in streams, lakes, and ultimately, water treatment plants.

However, installing buffers can be challenging. More than ninety-eight percent of Kansas land is privately owned, and the large majority of it is in agricultural use. While state and federal programs are available to assist landowners with installing environmental enhancements such as grassed buffers, the voluntary aspect of these great practices can be a stumbling block.

Kansas had success with landowners installing buffers over the last ten years, but many critical locations are still lacking this much-needed practice. Some landowner hesitation may come from taking prime cropland out of production or issues with program requirements. However, a number of landowners see the bigger picture and realize that establishing grass in an

environmentally significant location is simply the right thing to do, program or not.

How one landowner makes a difference

Richard Roeser is no stranger to state and federal conservation programs. When it comes to buffers, however, he has had reservations about some of the program requirements. Mr. Roeser owns a piece of property with a rather unique location. Nestled at the junction of Clarks Creek and the Kansas River, his Geary County field is also home to three wellheads for Morris County Rural Water District No. 1. Morris RWD 1's ground water source is from the Clarks Creek alluvial aquifer, and the wells are located five miles northeast of Junction City.

Approximately five years ago, Mr. Roeser considered enrolling this particular field into Continuous-CRP (Conservation Reserve Program). This would have provided him with an annual federal payment for at least ten years for establishing and maintaining native grass around the wellheads. Clarks Creek was a high-priority watershed within the state at the time, making it eligible for additional incentive payments. However, Mr. Roeser decided not to participate in the program.

Today Richard Roeser has a most impressive stand of established native grasses around the Morris RWD 1 wells. Mr. Roeser decided four years

Landowner Richard Roeser stands in his native grass buffer near a Morris County RWD 1 wellhead.





Access to the rural water district's wells is not hindered by the impressive grass stand.

ago that even though enrollment into a federal program wasn't right for him, he could still do the "right" thing by installing buffers on his own. He planted native grass around two wellheads, protecting the perimeter of the wells from ag-chemical applications. The native grass buffers have been effective in catching vital snowfall, eliminating runoff, and providing quality habitat for wildlife. Mr. Roeser planted brome and wheat around the third Morris RWD well in the fall of 2010. The brome seeding was in combination with a large diversion terrace and drainage project for the edge of the field prone to flooding. The project was installed through the assistance of the Geary County Conservation District.

The Morris RWD 1 wells are now protected more than they ever have been in the past. While there is always room for improvement, Mr. Roeser and the Morris RWD have taken a step together in the right direction. Protecting the water source for a public water supply is the core element in a Source Water Protection Plan. Morris RWD 1 developed and adopted a Source Water Protection Plan (SWP) in 2001 and is in the process of updating it to reflect the changes that have taken place over the last ten years. Source Water Protection (SWP) Plans not only outline potential contaminants and threats to water systems, but they also relay information to state and federal

agencies how projects are being implemented. Morris RWD 1 has made source water protection work over the past decade through implementation activities and by utilizing positive partnerships. Mr. Roeser's successful efforts to install buffers will be reflected in the updated SWP Plan, counting toward the implementation efforts of the RWD.

Installing a native grass or introduced grass buffer is a positive thing.

Government programs are a fantastic, easy way to establish a conservation practice that will have quality results. However, enrolling in a state or federal program is not essential when it comes to protecting our water resources. Establishing grassed buffers where they will have the most impact should be the focus of importance. Utilizing partnerships can make source water protection a positive experience for both landowners and public water suppliers.

I would be very pleased to visit with your city or rural water district to provide more information on conservation buffers and source water protection, and programs that can help landowners and water systems work in partnership to protect water quality. Email me at katie@krwa.net or contact me directly by phone at 785-210-6628.

I hope that readers will also attend the 2011 KRWA conference. There are numerous sessions that address water quality and source water issues. And of course, there's the largest exhibition for water and wastewater utilities in the Midwest as a bonus. Don't miss it; the dates are March 29 – 31 at Century II Convention Center in Wichita.

Katie Miller joined the KRWA staff in October 2009. She previously worked for Flint Hills Resource Conservation and Development as a Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Project Coordinator since



2003. She organized and coordinated the Twin Lakes Water Festival in 2005 – 2009; it has been attended by more than 6,000 participants.




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