

Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) History



Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group

The Shell Creek covers almost 110 miles, running through five different counties in Nebraska, and drains approximately 304,873 acres of

surrounding farmland. Over the last 20 years, erosion has drastically affected the Shell Creek Watershed. Concerns about poor water quality and the erosion's effect on agriculture production led to the formation of a local group to identify and promote essential conservation practices.

The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) was initiated in 1999. As a thesis project for her Master's degree, Darla Juhl, wanted to organize a watershed and was directed by the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District to begin developing a program in the Shell Creek Watershed. Meetings were conducted in Schuyler, Newman Grove, and Lindsay to gauge interest in the program.

The Shell Creek Watershed had recently gone through a few major flooding events, with 1990 serving a memorable year with devastating damage. The SCWIG was formed as a result of interested landowners and producers. The group consisted of eight original members to discuss flood reduction projects, which evolved into the importance of land treatment projects.

The SCWIG observed that a priority was drainage issues throughout the watershed. A decision was made that it was not ideal to focus on the watershed as a whole; but rather to divide the watershed into manageable segments, allowing for a focus on the conservation issues that were specific to each area. Following guidance from the Lower Platte North NRD, these segments were identified based on land use, conservation concerns, and potential use of conservation practices.

As the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group worked with landowners and producers in the watershed to identify and promote priority conservation practices, they looked to the Lower Platte North NRD and USDA NRCS to engage various agencies on the local, state, and federal level to provide additional assistance. Partners that have been historically involved with this project include: Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG), Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD), Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ), Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET), Nebraska Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Nebraska Game & Parks

Commission, Pheasants Forever, Prairieland RC&D, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the Newman Grove and Schuyler Central High School science programs.

The SCWIG prioritized education outreach as an avenue to improve public awareness of the project and encourage conservation with best management practices. The SCWIG strived to target more suitable practices for modern-day agriculture. In 2002, the SCWIG reached out to Newman Grove High School and Schuyler Central High School with the goal of getting the next generation involved in conservation efforts and to engage families and communities. These two schools formed the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program, led by science and agriculture instructors. High school students collect samples and measurements, analyze data, and report results to determine water quality in the stream. This helps the SCWIG learn about the watershed's health, but it also supports natural resources conservation for future generations.

The success of the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group is attributed to the teamwork and selfless attitude of all participants as they worked together towards a common goal to the benefit of the entire watershed. The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group is a demonstration to the effectiveness of grassroot efforts and local control in natural resources conservation.

To find out more about the SCWIG, please contact Melissa Foreman, NRCS Program Assistant, Melissa.Foreman@ne.usda.gov or (402) 564-0506.

