

Local Producers Learn about Options for Drought Proofing their Ranches

“Drought Proof the South” was held in Shaunavon on October 15th. Karlah Rudolph, Agri-Environmental Group Plan agrologist with the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards, helped plan the workshop. “We get lots of questions about the proper way to develop water, so we wanted to shed some light on how to do this, to create an economical and sustainable livestock watering system”. Topics included tips on proper pipeline development, ground water aquifers, and opportunities for powering water delivery using solar power.

The day involved two site visits – taking a hands-on look at some different watering strategies. The first stop was at Pole Trail Ranch, northwest of Shaunavon. Describing their gravity-fed trough system, Ray Glasrud said “I believe in keeping this simple – that a ranch can be run with a pick-up truck and a good saddle horse!”. Their gravity-fed system makes use of a flowing spring to feed a trough, and the overflow is piped back into the original spring. This system keeps their cows out of the spring itself, while providing consistent, clear water. Ray and his son Garrett also showed off their pipeline system – which allows them to make better use of their upland grass. Initially somewhat leery of installing their first stretch of pipeline, they were surprised at how easy it was. “It took us longer to hook up the fittings than to lay the line down!”, said Glasrud.

The second stop was to look at Karmen and Jason McNabb’s solar system, which pumps water from a dugout to a trough 100 feet away. Jason emphasized the need to choose a system with enough pumping power, even on cloudy days. “The forest fire smoke caused problems with our system this summer – we ended up having to add an extra solar panel and two extra batteries in order to keep up when it was really smoky!”. Will Odie, with Kelln Solar, agreed, while reminding producers to keep their future plans for herd expansion in mind when sizing their solar systems.

The day wrapped up discussing a few of the ecological benefits of developing additional water sources. “Water development obviously adds flexibility to your grazing management, but dugouts and farm ponds can easily be designed to provide many ecological benefits at the same time”, said Rudolph in the final presentation. Her presentation described methods of constructing dugouts to mimic natural systems. Creating a shallow two foot deep “bench” along the edge of a dugout can provide habitat for a variety of different aquatic species and encourage natural vegetation to re-establish. The Northern Leopard Frog, which is locally quite abundant but listed as “threatened” on the federal Species at Risk Act, makes use of these “benches”. They require shallow water to lay their eggs in and deep zones that do not freeze in order to over winter successfully.

This workshop was a joint initiative between the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards, the Old Wives Watershed Association, and the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program. The workshop was funded by Growing Forward 2, a joint federal-provincial-territorial policy framework of agricultural programs which is administered by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture. For more information on livestock watering options, and the funding available, contact your local Agri-Environmental Group Plan agrologist! In the Swift Current Creek watershed call Karlah at 306-770-4606. In the Old Wives watershed call Jamie at 306-648-3301 ext 5, and in the Frenchman watershed call Dallas at 306-774-3689.

Article and Photo submitted by : Krista Connick Todd, SODCAP Inc

