



Winter 2026

# NEWSLETTER

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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: STEVENS HIGH SCHOOL FFA AG ISSUES TEAM

*As part of the National FFA Organization's Leadership Development Events (LDE), the Stevens High School FFA Ag Issues team researches and presents on current issues affecting agriculture and natural resources. This year, the team chose to focus on urban expansion and how growing cities impact farmland, wildlife habitat, and the resources communities depend on. The students have been presenting their findings to different groups as they prepare for competition. We are pleased to share their article below, highlighting the importance of thoughtful planning and conservation as Rapid City continues to grow.*

### Urban Expansion: How Growth Impacts Agriculture and Natural Resources

*By the Stevens High School FFA Ag Issues Team*

Urban expansion is when cities grow bigger and spread into surrounding areas. This usually happens because more people are moving to cities, industries are developing, and jobs are easier to find there. Cities need to grow to keep up with the population and provide better services like schools, hospitals, and transportation. Urban expansion is important for economic development and improving the quality of life.

But urban growth also comes with serious problems. One of the biggest issues is the loss of agriculture land. When agriculture land is turned into housing, factories, or roads, farmers lose the land they need to grow food. This reduces local food production and hurts rural communities that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Another problem is the loss of natural resources. Forests, rivers, and green spaces are often destroyed to make way for new buildings. This not only reduces the land's natural beauty but also affects wildlife and the environment. Resources like water, soil, and clean air are also used up faster in cities. Over time, this can lead to shortages of important resources that people and nature depend on.

As students in Rapid City, we chose to research this issue because it's something we've witnessed happening all around us. Those of us who have grown up here have watched the area expand over time and continue to notice its ongoing changes. Through our research, we've found several perspectives to consider when looking at urban expansion. It has major implications on the economy, agriculture, natural resources, and more. We hope to communicate the importance of this issue and explore how our community can support growth while still protecting natural resources and agricultural land.

In conclusion, while urban expansion is necessary for development, it should not come at the cost of agriculture land and natural resources. Agriculture is a way of life for many people, providing food, raw materials, and other valuable resources essential for human survival. Protecting agriculture land ensures food security, supports rural livelihoods, and maintains a balance between urban growth and the environment. Careful planning can help cities develop while preserving the land and resources that sustain both humans and nature.



# CONSERVATION PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: SOUTH DAKOTA FAMILY FORESTS ASSOCIATION

Article by Mary LaHood, SDDFA

Did you know that almost 60% of our nation's forests are privately owned? These landowners play an essential role as producers and stewards, working to improve the quality of individual forests while contributing a critical piece to the overall health of the planet.

The South Dakota Family Forests Association (SDDFA) is an organization of private forest landowners and is the South Dakota branch of the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). SDDFA members adhere to a high standard for forest stewardship and are dedicated to ATFS's four values: wood, water, recreation, and wildlife. Among other things, healthy, well-managed forests produce paper for books, wood for buildings, and heat for homes. They protect the watershed, improve air quality, provide wildlife habitat, and offer abundant recreational opportunities.

What does it take to tend a crop that takes decades to mature? Some would say bullheadedness, but definitely, perseverance and a long range vision are required to transform an overgrown doghair stand into a healthy, resilient forest that is productive, and resistant to bug outbreaks and catastrophic fire.



SDDFA members own at least ten acres of forested land and have a Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP), which is an individualized blueprint for forest management. A cost share grant to assist landowners in acquiring an FSP is available through the Pennington Conservation District.

SDDFA provides advocacy, inspections with a qualified forester, education and training such as field tours and workshops, as well as other opportunities. In January of 2025, SDDFA was awarded a \$5M cost-share grant for on-the-ground forest management practices aimed at creating healthy, resilient forests.

Whatever the question - water quality, air quality, materials for human habitat or a habitat for critters, a place to lose yourself or a place to find yourself - a healthy forest is the answer.

*Mary LaHood is the Executive Director of South Dakota Family Forests Association. She and her husband Bob Burns tend land that has been in the family since 1887 and were named the 2021 National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year.*

## COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER FOR THE 2025 PENNINGTON CONSERVATION DISTRICT CONFERENCE

On September 24, 2025, nearly 100 attendees gathered at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center in Rapid City for the Pennington Conservation District Conference. The event brought together farmers, ranchers, landowners, and community members to learn and share ideas about conservation practices that benefit both the land and those who care for it.

Keynote speaker Burke Teichert led a powerful discussion on the connection between conservation and ranch profitability, showing how ecological stewardship and sound financial management go hand in hand.

New this year were "Conservation Conversations," community-led discussions on topics like land transition and acquisition, resourceful practices for small-scale farming, and no-till growing. These sessions sparked great dialogue and collaboration among participants.

The Pennington Conservation District extends a heartfelt thank you to our sponsors for their generous support, and to all our speakers and attendees for making the event a success.

We're already looking forward to our 2026 Conference—stay tuned for more details in the coming months!



# THE 2026 TREE SALE IS HERE!

Your order form is included in this newsletter — simply fill it out and return it by:

Email: [Penningtoncd@sdconservation.net](mailto:Penningtoncd@sdconservation.net)

Mail: Pennington Conservation District

414 E Stumer Rd, STE #300

Rapid City, SD 57701

Once your order is received, we'll send you an invoice.

Orders accepted through April 1, 2026, but don't wait to submit your order!

## WHY ORDER EARLY?

- Popular tree and shrub species sell out quickly
- Early orders ensure the best selection
- Planning ahead helps us serve you and the community more efficiently

## NEW THIS YEAR: POLLINATOR PLANT BUNDLES!

We're thrilled to announce a new addition to our 2026 sale — four pollinator plant bundles! Each bundle includes five quart-sized native perennial plants, handpicked to provide food and habitat for native pollinators.

### Why Native Plants Matter

Native plants support native pollinators like bees, butterflies, and beetles — essential players in our local food web. These hardworking pollinators sustain the very foundation of our ecosystems and agriculture, ensuring strong crop yields and healthy natural landscapes.

By planting native species, you're:

- Supporting pollinators and wildlife
- Strengthening the local food system
- Adding beauty and diversity to your property

Visit our website for full descriptions and photos of available trees and bundles:

[www.penningtonconservation.com](http://www.penningtonconservation.com)







Pennington Conservation District  
414 E Stumer Rd STE #300  
Rapid City, SD 57701

## YOUR LOGO COULD BE HERE!

Support local conservation and get your business noticed!

Become a Pennington Conservation District Sponsor and we'll feature your logo on this page—right in front of our engaged, conservation-minded readers.

Call 605-503-5299 or email [penningtoncd@sdconservation.net](mailto:penningtoncd@sdconservation.net) to reserve your spot today!

# THANK YOU!

To our sponsors, speakers, and attendees for making the  
2025 Pennington Conservation District Conference a  
success!



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