

SWCD takes action to save resource

Special to The Odessa File

ALPINE, June 30, 2017 -- The Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) received a call recently notifying it of an outlet control structure failure on an expansive, 33-acre, New York State DEC wetland in the Town of Hector off of NYS Route 228, just north of the Town of Catharine line.

If left uncorrected, the entire wetland would have drained in less than 24 hours. This wetland is home to tens of thousands of fish, turtles, amphibians, and diverse plant life that would all be lost if the wetland went dry. Nearly two thirds of the water had already drained, but no fish were yet lost.

The SWCD and its two highly skilled operators, Jim Barrett and Michael



Manwaring, were able to respond immediately. The Soil and Water District utilized its own equipment, as well as equipment from Bergen Farms. The District was assisted by the Town Catharine Highway Department, which provided its loader, roller, dump truck and multiple operators. The Schuyler County Highway Department also assisted by bringing in large beams to walk the equipment out onto the very wet dike.

The first step was to stop the outflow of water. This was done by sealing off the failed outlet control structure with both clay and a specialized, impermeable grout type of concrete. The next step in the process was to build a coffer dam out of clay in order to open up the dike itself to install a new outlet control structure. This was completed immediately and water levels began to recover.



During inspection of the site, it was noticed that the dike itself was in very poor condition. This was due to water breaching the dike many times, as the outlet control structure had not been functioning properly for some time. It was also noticed that the earthen, emergency spillway had eroded severely and the only thing that would retain the water in the wetland (even with a functioning, primary outlet control structure) was an existing beaver dam.

So the SWCD rebuilt the dike itself, and then stabilized the emergency outlet utilizing rip rap and clay material. Over 400 tons of rip rap was used to make the repairs. With all of the rain that soon followed, it didn't take long for the wetland to fully recover.

Photos in text: At work on the repairs, and the finished landscape. *(Photos provided)*