

## CWF FARMER PROFILE:

# Linda Bowlin

## Cowley County

### Grouse Creek Grouse/Silver Creek WRAPS

By **Connie Pantle**

*Atlanta, Kansas*—Linda Bowlin always wanted to be a cowgirl. “From the time I was a kid I wanted to one,” she said. “And I always wanted to live in the Flint Hills.” Now Linda is living her dream in the southern Flint Hills of Cowley County where she raises 25 cow/calf pairs on 257 acres

However, Linda’s dream did not include flooding on her ranch. And she was not happy with the flooding that was occurring near the watershed reservoir adjacent to her property. “I lost over 30 acres of grass due to flooding,” she said.

The flooding, Linda concluded, was due to the watershed reservoir exceeding its capacity. “It silted in quicker than they planned...30 years ahead of time,” she said. “The lake was so full of sediment, there was no water or fish.”

Sedimentation, from erosion up stream, caused water to back up beyond the watershed reservoir onto her property during a rain event. “Sediment takes away from the volume of the lake and flooding occurs.” Linda said the area around the watershed reservoir was getting “uglier and uglier” due to the flooding.

In addition, Linda said invasive trees along her creek were causing additional damage. Water was backing up beyond the watershed reservoir and causing erosion around the shallow roots of



*Linda Bowlin, Atlanta, shows recent visitors to her ranch the new stream crossings she installed as well as where she removed invasive Osage Orange trees.*

*Photo by Dale Kirkham*

### **Water Quality Concerns:**

- Sedimentation in watershed pond
- Streambank erosion and contamination due to cattle access

### **Best Management**

#### **Practices Implemented:**

- Installed hardened creek crossings to allow for grazing distribution in pasture
- Restricted cattle access to ponds, stream and watershed reservoir
- Installed two alternative watering points for cattle
- Removed invasive hedge trees
- Implemented a managed grazing program

the trees.

Linda worked with the Cowley Country Farm Bureau; Cowley County Conservation District, and the Grouse-Silver Creek watershed district. In turn, she was advised to contact Dale Kirkham, field organizer for the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project. "I was tickled that everyone got involved. Because if it, this place will be beautiful again," she said.

Dale assisted Linda in completing the River Friendly Farm Plan (RFFP) environmental assessment. The RFFP was one of the "best things for my place and for me," she said. Linda confessed that she is "bad at paperwork" however, "once I got into it I really enjoyed it and learned so much from it and from Dale." In turn, once she completed the RFFP, Linda was eligible to apply for cost-share through KRC's CWF-RFFP.

In addition to CWF-RFFP cost-share, Linda received funding from Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Grouse-Silver Creek to implement a plan to protect the reservoir from further sedimentation.

Linda's project "shows what can be done when the landowner is willing to work with several entities, in this case NRCS, the conservation district, the watershed board and KRC. Each has something to contribute to a positive outcome but Linda's desire and dedication is the driving force," Dale said.

Since Linda's main objective was to protect the reservoir and reduce erosion and contamination from the cattle, she wanted to exclude the cattle from the creek and to protect the riparian area. To provide a watering source for the cattle, she installed two new ponds in her pastures—one on the north side of the creek and one on the south side. Both ponds were equipped with water tanks below and fenced. She has also been working on removing the invasive species of trees to allow the riparian areas to heal.



**BEFORE (top):** Linda Bowlin's stream lacked crossings enabling her to cross from one side of the pasture to the other.

**AFTER (bottom):** Linda installed two crossings with approaches. She also removed invasive trees along the stream.

*Photos by Dale Kirkham*

With CWF funds, Linda installed two gravel crossings on her creek which runs into the reservoir. The crossings allow her to control grazing distribution in her newly implemented managed grazing system, as well as a place to cross with a vehicle as needed.

Linda was interested in making the crossing look natural as well as serving a function. "The beauty is as much of it as the practicality," she said. However like most of the ranch, Linda said her work isn't done on the crossings. "I waited to see how water would flow before working on it more," she said. She plans to gravel further back

up the bank to avoid additional erosion.

“I walk over my place or ride it on horse every day. I know every stone and twig,” she said. When she is out in the pasture, Linda keeps tabs on the condition of the grass and clears brush. “I carry my loppers with me,” she said. During her outings, she also detours the cattle from their usual paths. “I throw rocks and tree limbs in their path,” she said. “It detours them and makes them go a different way.” Linda said the grass “recuperates well and is usually healed by the next summer.”

In addition to protecting the reservoir, Linda hopes to make her ranch more profitable by implementing changes. In order to do this, she said her goal is to increase the number of cattle. “My overall goal to stimulate grass and to allow more cattle to graze on the pasture,” she said.

“One thing that stands out about Linda's project is her determination and willingness to work very hard to improve her ranch, not just for herself but for her visitors,” Dale said. Linda is interested in allowing the public to experience the beauty of her ranch. She allows fishing and even overnight camping excursions for families for a small fee. Linda says that is a way that she can share her Flint Hills ranch with others. “It is just beautiful out here,” she said.

*The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has provided financial assistance to the Kansas Rural Center for his project through EPA Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution funding.*



**TOP:** Linda installed two ponds on her property to provide a water source for the cattle, which use the waterers as shown. **BOTTOM:** Linda Bowlin discusses the waterer she installed below her new pond. Linda's cattle are excluded from the ponds and stream, reducing erosion and contamination.

*Photos by Dale Kirkham*