

Natural Resources



COST ESTIMATE: Get a detailed, accurate cost estimate to build ponds like this one in less than 15 minutes in NRCS offices with new software and LiDAR elevation data.

Tool simplifies pond building

By LYNN BETTS

OBTAINING a quick, accurate estimate of the cost of building a farm pond could be a whole lot easier in the future, thanks to a new online computer program.

In less than 15 minutes, PondBuilder can place a proposed pond in the landscape, generate an aerial photo with the

pond's permanent and temporary pool areas clearly drawn, estimate the cubic yards of dirt to be moved, figure size and length of pipe needed, and create an accurate cost estimate.

That rapid turnaround time compares to several months using current methods in most parts of the country, where it takes time for conservationists in USDA field offices to schedule and

make a field site visit for preliminary surveys, and then more time back in the office to make the calculations for sizes and costs.

PondBuilder is one of several new online programs now possible because of new LiDAR (light detection and ranging) elevation data being made available by government agencies. LiDAR data, gathered by aircraft with mounted laser equipment, are accurate within 1 foot in most terrain. Billions of LiDAR-generated points in effect reproduce 3-D location and elevation sketches of the terrain, including waterways, ditches, hills, roadways and tree cover. Government agencies are beginning to use it to plan road projects, and update floodplain maps and other projects to save time from traditional land surveying.

The PondBuilder program was developed by Agren Inc., of Carroll, Iowa, as part of a conservation innovation grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Conservationists tested it in four counties last year, and it is now being offered to 40 more counties there at a reduced rate as part of another NRCS grant.

"Before we awarded the grant, I visited field offices and talked to people who had used some of the tools on a trial basis," says NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims. "I was impressed by their enthusiasm for the time-savings the PondBuilder offered. Even better, though, was that extensive ground

truthing by field offices showed that cost estimates made in the office from this program were very accurate. It's important to us to be able to rely on original cost estimates, so we don't have to go through contract modifications that take time and create problems for us."

Expanding nationwide

In Iowa, the Department of Natural Resources has about 90% of the needed LiDAR information collected now, with plans to have it all available by March.

LiDAR information is being gathered across the country, says Tom Buman, Agren president. "We've been talking with people in Ohio, Michigan and Nebraska, and there's some interest in these programs in Missouri and Minnesota. I believe Pennsylvania and Louisiana are using LiDAR data, too. It's expanding nationwide."

In addition to the PondBuilder program, Agren offers subscriptions in Iowa for online access to a new BasinBuilder program for sediment and water control basins, an RCNCalculator for rainfall and runoff calculations, and a RUSLEll Calculator to predict expected erosion rates. Agren is also working on a wetlands tool and a waterway tool similar to PondBuilder.

Betts writes from Iowa.



TOM BUMAN

■ For more information, e-mail Buman at tom@agren-inc.com or visit www.agren-inc.com.

Want to see it again?



No one controls tough broadleaf weeds faster than Status® herbicide from BASF. You can see it working within hours. And it provides solid residual control as well. For total control, tank-mix it with Roundup®. Try it yourself and time it — if you can.

866.315.9487
www.statuserbicide.com



Always read and follow label directions.

Status is a registered trademark of BASF.
Roundup is a registered trademark of Monsanto.
©2010 BASF Corporation. All Rights Reserved.
APN 10-01-078-0002

BASF
The Chemical Company