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## Dam Cedar Creek?

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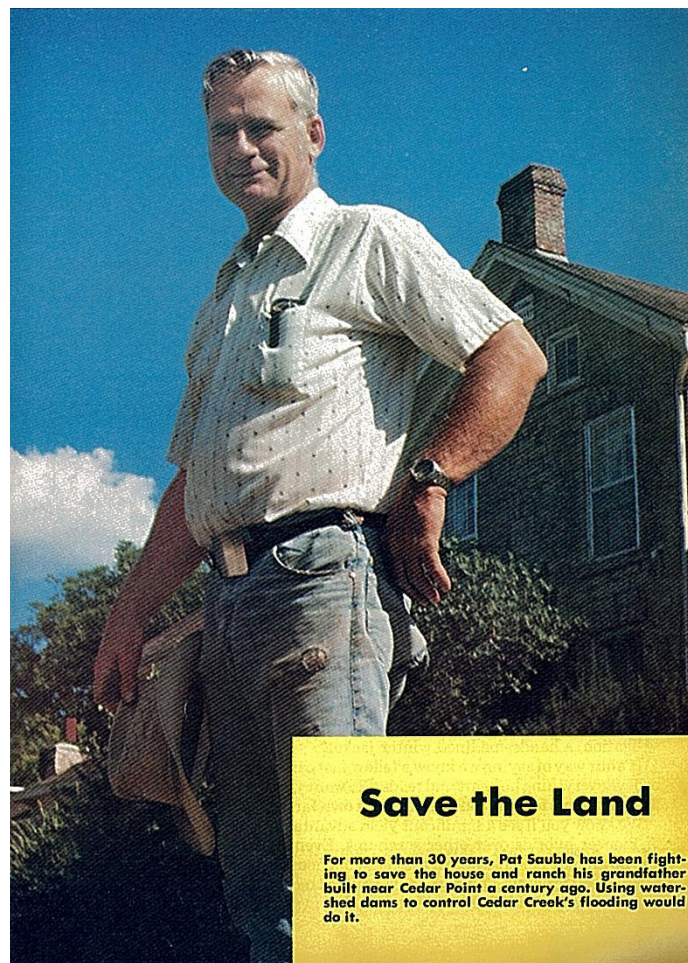
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Pat Sauble  
 Kansas Farmer-Stockman, October 1976

## DAM CEDAR CREEK?

*For more than seventy years, engaged Flint Hills citizens have battled to stop a federal reservoir project at Cedar Creek, near Cedar Point. In late 2017, at the age of ninety-six, Pat Sauble's life-long devotion to water conservation was recognized by the governor, who presented him with a Water Legacy Award. In 1976, Sauble was featured in the following article in Kansas Farmer-Stockman:*

Landowners think a watershed is the answer. For more than twenty years, Cedar Creek has labored under a death sentence, imposed by the Corps of Engineers and Congress in 1954 and periodically upheld by Congress and the State of Kansas.

The Chase County creek's sentence is to be dammed near its confluence with the Cottonwood River, a project that would offer flood protection to downstream residents and farmers but inundate 9,000 acres of farm and ranch land in a lake twenty miles long.

Throughout those two decades the residents of the Cedar Creek valley, aided by a knot of friends from the area and state, have steadfastly fought to get the dam project axed. It's been a long battle, pitting friends and neighbors against each other in arenas as near as their living rooms and as distant as the halls of Congress.

In other words, it's been a typical big dam battle—frothed with controversy.

The picturesque little creek seems an unlikely antagonist in such an eventful drama. It starts inauspiciously in the treeless hills of northern Butler County, then carves a most un-Kansas-like piece of scenery from the hills as it approaches its final confluence with the Cottonwood a couple of miles downriver from the town of Cedar Point. By the time it reaches the river, it is a respectable stream, tumbling an average of about thirteen million gallons per hour into the river.

During flood times, when its 80,000 acres of drainage take all they can hold and send the rest downhill, the creek becomes what the Corps of Engineers figures is a major contributor to the Cottonwood and Neosho Rivers' periodic floods.

Like most of the creeks that provide oases in the otherwise waterless Flint Hills, the Cedar has long been a center of life. Archeologists figure that prehistoric Indians centered their Flint Hills lives on such creeks, relying on water, wood, and small wildlife to support a buffalo-hunting existence.

One of the first settlers in the region was David Sauble, who with a partner came from Maryland to settle on the creek in 1856. That was before barbed wire and

windmills, when a cattleman's worth was measured by the water he controlled.

And David Sauble chose well, picking a site on the Cedar where the water flowed shallow across a bed of rocks, providing freeze-proof stock water even in the coldest of winters.

His first home was a trapper's log cabin, built about a hundred yards from a bend in the creek five miles above the Cottonwood. In 1871 he built a stone home and two years later a stone barn, proudly etching his name and the date in the stone.

Today, Pat Sauble and his wife Mary live in the stone home his grandfather built. They've added a 60,000-hen egg operation to the ranch, and Sauble has served as an officer or director of several state farm groups. He's currently on the board of the Cottonwood-Neosho Watershed Association, a district that has been able to get nine watershed districts organized but has failed in getting one for Cedar Creek.

Nobody has fought the concept of Cedar Point Dam any harder than Pat Sauble. As most dam proponents will explain, it's far from uncommon for a man whose farm or home is about to be inundated to fight the dam that will do it.



*Hyalite Reservoir*  
Gesine Janzen

"They always oppose them," say the people who decide where dams will go. "You've got to weigh their arguments against the benefits of putting them there."

And Pat Sauble stands to lose as much as anybody if the dam is built. Most of his land will be buried in the lake, and the rest of it – being Flint Hills grass – will be virtually useless in a solo operation. The house his grandfather built, even

the log cabin he first moved into, will be inundated, as will the hen houses.

Still, Pat Sauble believes he has some arguments against the dam that might carry more weight than the mere protestations of just another victim of eminent domain.

Sauble is a watershed advocate. The guts of his argument is that a watershed project would offer just about as many advantages as the dam and at far lower cost to the government.



In 1957 the Corps of Engineers estimated the dam would cost about \$27.7 million for construction. The Corps assigned a cost-benefit ratio of 1.3, meaning that the project would save \$1.30 for every dollar of cost. The benefits are largely flood protection, with some added for municipal water storage and recreation.

Louis Weiss, chairman of the Cottonwood-Neosho Watershed Association, says he doesn't take sides in the controversy. However, he estimates that a Soil Conservation Service-type watershed project for the area would take twenty or fewer small dams, and could probably be built for five million dollars at the outside.

For the \$27.7 million mentioned by the Corps of Engineers, he figures the SCS could build watershed dams over the entire drainage area of the Cottonwood, thereby providing far better flood protection than that offered by a lone dam on Cedar Creek.

Nobody seems to argue with those figures. The argument centers around how the job can get done fastest, and around municipal water supplies.

Downstream from Cedar Point, there are many people who support the big dam. Primarily, their support seems to be based

on a conviction that the Corps can get the money to build the dam soon, while the SCS wouldn't have the money to get around to it for years.

There's some basis for that conviction. Last year, the Corps of Engineers had a total budget of about \$2.4 billion, of which almost half went directly into construction. The Soil Conservation Service, in stark contrast, is not allowed to hire full time watershed people and last year got a total of \$30 million – one-fifth the Corps' construction budget – for watershed construction. There is a long list of watershed sites awaiting funding today in Kansas.

Feeling at the Kansas Water Resources Board, which oversees water development in the state and has charge of seeing the Kansas Water Plan implemented, is that the Cedar Point project is justified, but not necessarily of high priority.

"The way these projects get to be high priority," says Bill Stepp of the KWRB, "is for somebody to start a concerted drive to see them implemented."

That hasn't happened as yet to any great degree on Cedar Point, he says. However, the KWRB is willing to guarantee the Corps payment for water storage rights, based on expressed interest in future

water supplies by the towns of Strong City and Emporia.

Those two towns have both said they have a "general interest" in the water storage capabilities of Cedar Point Lake for the future, Stepp says. Neither, however, expects they will need the water in the near future. Corps spokesmen say the water might be needed there by the year 2020.

There is no indication that the dam will be going up any time soon. The Corps is currently in early planning stages, and has yet even to recommend a specific dam site to Congress.

Congress will then have to vote funding for the project, something that Sauble believes might be hard to get. He believes a majority of the state's congressional delegation is mildly opposed to the project as needlessly expensive and perhaps unneeded.

However, those views could change, so what Sauble hopes for is getting the proposed dam site deleted from the State Water Plan.

The State Legislature last year approved a bill that would have dropped the dam, but the Senate committee on natural resources refused to approve the move,

leaving the project in the plan and thereby keeping Sauble's fears alive.

Meanwhile, he and others in the area have been stymied in their attempts to get a watershed district started in the area because the SCS has refused to authorize expenditure of funds in an area with an "existing structure."

So the battle over Cedar Creek goes on, the powerful, lumbering Corps steadily progressing toward the day when the Cedar Point Dam is top priority, while a few individuals gamely invoke the virtues of watersheds in hopes of stopping the project.

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