



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2015 TO JUNE 30, 2016

Another year has slipped through the hour glass. One thing is certain, we do not stop Father Time. The past year's weather was normal until mid-spring, then it turned off real dry. The past year's winter snow packs were good throughout the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD). There were also good early spring rains, which got the hay, grain, and rangeland vegetation off to an excellent start, but it faded fast, terminating into a dry summer. Due to the good snow packs up high, irrigation water was plentiful throughout the LCD, resulting in good hay and forage crops for the most part. Unusual frosts, although, were experienced throughout the summer and early fall months damaging some small grain and alfalfa crops. Now that fall is here, the rain has decided to arrive with early snow throughout the LCD. It is somewhat unusual to have such heavy snow packs the end of October. It is hard to tell what type of winter may show up, but a hard winter may be due, with heavy snow packs and cold temperatures. It has been rather mild the last several winters.

The one bright star for this year has been the abundance of hay throughout the LCD. Most



Snow came early to the LCD the last week of October

livestock producers will have ample hay to feed, even if we have an early winter. The down side to agriculture this past year has been the sale price for cattle has been low, about one-third to one-half less from last year, it definitely hurts our local livestock producers. Agriculture is a big part of the LCD's economy, especially since oil and gas prices are down.

Current LCD Organization

The past year's LCD conservation activities were directed by Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary/Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member; and Paul Clark, Member. The board members bring a lot of natural resource conservation knowledge to the table. Each board member has unique expertise in varied conservation matters. Their diverse backgrounds really help the wise stewardship and management of the LCD's natural resources. District board members are elected to office in the general election for a four year term. This year three positions were open for election, two rural board member positions and one member at-large position.

As elected board members, they have a responsibility to attend and actively participate in all board meetings, keep abreast of local natural resource issues and attend area and state association meetings. As a board, the LCD board members have many responsibilities, the biggest is to identify local landowner and constituent issues and implement district programs. It requires a lot of personal time and some travel. Board members are not compensated for their time, but reimbursed for travel costs. Their efforts are greatly appreciated. Board members have spent countless hours overseeing state and national management planning actions.

LCD's Past Year's Natural Resource Activities

Water Development

LCD board members are very much aware of how important it is to have adequate livestock water on district rangelands. Without water, livestock cannot utilize rangelands properly, causing rotational grazing problems.

This past year, the LCD sponsored three major livestock water developments in the district. One development consisted of two spring developments on Elk Mountain in the Elk Mountain BLM Allotment with associated water conveyance pipelines, storage tanks, and water troughs. A grant was obtained through the Wyoming Landscape

Conservation Initiative (WLCI) program to help finance the project. The LCD administered the grant.



Spring Development on Elk Mountain, Wyoming State Land

Another livestock water development project included the drilling of a well, installation of a solar pumping plant, water conveyance pipeline, storage tank, and water troughs in the Upper Hams Fork Drainage. Construction funds were obtained through the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO). The WWDO grant was administered by the LCD.



A successful stock water well was drilled in the Upper Hams Fork Watershed, east of Lake Creek on private land.

The third livestock water development project was the development of three springs in the Dempsey Basin in the Mayfield BLM Allotment. The livestock water developments were in the Cow Camp, Mayfield Cabin and Waterhouse Canyon sites. Springs, water conveyance pipelines, storage tanks, and water troughs were installed. Grants

were obtained through the WWDO and WLCI to help construct these projects.



A stock watering trough installed on private land in Dempsey Basin.

Livestock water is key for proper grazing management. Without adequate water throughout a pasture, overgrazing may occur. Watering troughs eliminate the need for livestock to water in riparian areas which can be sensitive to livestock grazing. The LCD is always ready to help cooperators develop livestock water on their rangelands.

Water Studies

The LCD will be wrapping up the Bear River Level I Watershed Study in Wyoming in conjunction with the Uinta County Conservation District and the WWDO. Sunrise Engineering, Afton, Wyoming, was awarded the contract to identify the potential water development projects for both irrigation and livestock throughout the Bear River Watershed. A final report is being compiled with all the sites studied, along with preliminary engineering plans and construction costs worked up. Individual landowners will be able to apply through the LCD for construction grants from the WWDO. The process is time consuming, with a lot of paperwork, which the LCD can help you complete. Money is getting tight with competition throughout the state.

The potential Sublette Creek Reservoir water storage project evaluation was completed by the WWDO this past summer. The LCD supported the Cokeville Development Company (CDC) in their

efforts to develop a water storage site for the 4,100 acre feet of pre-compact water allotted to the local area. The WWDO study was completed by RJH Consultants, Inc. The engineering firm showed that the Sublette Reservoir site would cost 26.7 million dollars to construct. After an economic analysis was completed by Bridger Feuz, Extension Educator for the University of Wyoming Extension, it was considered that the costs to construct the reservoir was not economically feasible. Mitigation costs for upland wildlife, wetlands, and fisheries made up about one-half of the construction costs, causing the total price estimate to escalate due to the sensitive location of the proposed site.



Proposed Sublette Creek Reservoir Site

Water Quality

The LCD has been participating in a strategy to manage nutrients in Wyoming surface waters. The Nutrient Work Group has four divisions; point sources, non-point sources, criteria development, and education/outreach. The LCD has been working mainly with the WY non-point source group. Six priorities have been identified to address nutrient conditions, numeric development of criteria for Wyoming water bodies, assessment methods, update the nutrient criteria development plan, and finally, how to interpret existing narrative nutrient criteria. It has been a big job, with many players involved. The LCD felt it was important to be involved with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WyDEQ) Nutrient Working Group Meetings, since the results could have a big effect on LCD agriculture producers, especially in the non-point source area.

The LCD, once again this fall, sponsored water quality testing for landowners' rural wells and springs. Thirteen landowners participated in the bacteria coliform presence or absence testing. Twenty three landowners participated in the family water quality testing for bacteria coliform presence or absence, sulfate, total hardness, nitrate, nitrites, sodium, total dissolved solids, pH, fluoride and chloride.

Fisheries

The LCD helped administer the grants for a large riverbank stabilization project on the Upper Smiths Fork River this past fall in conjunction with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund. A meander had narrowed so much that it was about to cut through, causing the river to run faster, resulting in bank erosion to occur both up and down stream. The river was re-meandered along with rock barbs and willow clump plantings to stabilize the river banks above and below the narrowed spot. The project saved a lot of fishery habitat and helped maintain an irrigation head gate for a local rancher.



A meander was repaired on the Smiths Fork River so it would not cut through and erode river banks.

Range Management Activities

The biggest undertaking for the LCD this past year has been the administration of the Range Health Assessment Program (RHAP) grants through the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA). The LCD completed the RHAP grants for BLM's Smithsfork and South LaBarge Common Allotments. Both the Smithsfork and South LaBarge Grazing Associations were able to develop

rangeland monitoring plans, plus grazing management strategies. It will help in the renewal of grazing permits for the permittees in both allotments in the near future.

The only on-going RHAP grant in the LCD this past summer was for the Basin and Elk Creek U.S. Forest Service (USFS) allotments. Both allotments were monitored this past summer in order to acquire rangeland condition and grazing data for permit renewals. Without good rangeland data, it is very difficult to get permits renewed. Factual data is needed when wildlife and environmental groups that oppose public grazing take permit holders to court to eliminate their grazing rights.

Previously, the LCD was able to obtain three more RHAP grants to help local ranchers in their efforts to renew their federal permits. Two were on USFS land, including the Indian Creek, Devils Hole, Lake Alice, Buckskin Knoll, Smiths Fork, and Porcupine Creek Allotments. The third one was for the extension of the BLM's South LaBarge Common Allotment.

The BLM is changing the type of rangeland monitoring required on their lands due to the Greater Sage Grouse concerns. With most of LCD's BLM rangelands in Sage Grouse core areas, rangeland monitoring will be centering on grouse habitat. The BLM uses a Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) monitoring evaluation tool to assess effectiveness of conservation actions. The LCD will be working with landowners to become familiar with the HAF tool on their allotments.

The BLM is also starting to use an Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) Strategy to collect quantitative information on the status, condition, trend, amount, location, and spatial pattern of renewable resource on BLM public lands. Both the HAF and AIM monitoring methods are new to the on-going rangeland monitoring efforts done by the LCD in the past, for this reason the South LaBarge Grazing Association was approved for a second RHAP grant to help evaluate these methods in their allotment and continue on with their past monitoring efforts.

One of the activities the LCD tries to do on

federal rangelands is to assist permittees in their end of year upland and riparian monitoring activities. Some of the parameters monitored are riparian stubble heights, streambank alterations due to livestock hoof action, and willow utilization. Upland sites are checked for proper grazing using the Key Forage Plant Method.



Some stubble heights on Huff Creek, Smithsfork BLM Allotment, were 40" at end of season monitoring.

A project the LCD has been help the Smithsfork Grazing Association members implement is the planting of willow cutting on the exposed creek banks within their allotment. The past two years, over 1,000 willow cuttings have been planted on several creeks within the Smithsfork BLM Allotment. Both years' willow cuttings have been very successful, especially those plantings in steel panel cages and fenced out enclosures. Once the willows get established, five feet or taller, the cages



Willow cutting plantings were doing great the second year in cages.

will be removed and willows will be established in other areas. Willow growth is especially important for fisheries and streambank stabilization. Beavers do have a particular craving for willows, which complicates the problem in establishing willows without cages.

The LCD, this past year, has continued to assist with Coordinate Resource Management (CRM) programs for three allotments in the district. Those individuals having allotments with difficult issues may contact the LCD to get a CRM process started with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.

Other LCD Activities

The LCD has continued to be involved with the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) organization to address federal land management planning issues. The LCD has been working with the CLG this past year as a Cooperating Agency in the BLM's Sagebrush Focal Area Withdrawal effort. The BLM is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze and disclose the potential effects of withdrawing approximately 10 million acres of public BLM and National Forest System lands from location and entry under the United States mining laws, but not from leasing under the mineral or geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. This could have a big impact on mining lands within the LCD. Board members are very concerned with the issue and are making efforts to be involved in the teleconference calls and in the formation of the draft EIS.

The LCD will be sponsoring a conservation seedling tree and shrub sales program again. Only a couple hundred trees and shrubs were sold last year, basically because patrons phoned too late to get species desired. The program is currently up and running. Trees and shrubs are available in large containers, small trays, large tubes, bare root bundles, and now extra-large individual pots. Numerous species are available right now, so don't wait. Phone the LCD office at (307) 279-3256 to get your order form e-mailed or mailed to you.

The LCD sponsored a Firewood Cutting Workshop this spring at the end of April to help firewood burners know the rules and regulations for

cutting dead wood on USFS lands. With the timber sales within the Kemmerer Range District, Bridger Teton National Forest, it was difficult for fire wood gatherers to know what was open for cutting. Some thirty individuals attended the meeting. Adriene Holcomb, Kemmerer District Ranger, and Ken Klingenberg, Timber Manager, for the Kemmerer District, attended the meeting to answer questions.



Ken Klingenberg and Adriene Holcomb, USFS, answer questions during the Firewood Cutting Workshop in Cokeville, Wyoming.

The LCD is currently working with the Kemmerer BLM office to sponsor a workshop on Low Stress Handling of Livestock. The workshop will be presented by Steve Cote. Steve has worked for 26 years helping farmers and ranchers with range and soil conservation and teaching livestock handling techniques learned from Bud Williams. He has traveled the country, from herd to herd helping cattle producers solve their handling difficulties. Steve has won the nation’s highest award for excellence in range management, including honors in writing and teaching range management.

NRCS Report – by Gary Blazejewski, District Conservationist

First of all, the Afton NRCS office would like to express our gratitude to the Lincoln Conservation District for the support they provide to NRCS throughout the year. The district provides numerous services to NRCS, ranging from technical assistance on agriculture lands to tracking down

signatures. Our accomplishments would not be possible without the assistance of the LCD.

As some of you may know, the NRCS soil survey crew has been mapping soils all over south Lincoln County this year. What is a soil survey? A soil is a collection of maps and data about the soils within a specific region. Approximately 95% of U.S. counties have a completed soil survey available on the internet at the Web Soil Survey Site. The purpose of the soil survey is to provide basic soils information to anyone from homebuyers curious about depth to the water table or bedrock, to engineers who are considering development within a certain area. Soil surveys also provide vegetative productivity data, which is invaluable to NRCS staff and ranchers trying to develop a grazing plan. NRCS has been contacting landowners to ask permission to access their land for the purposes of mapping soils. Some folks are hesitant to grant access, as they are understandably concerned about what the data will be used for. If anyone has questions, they are welcome to contact me and I will be happy to answer questions. Soils are described by excavating holes with hand shovels and augers. Of course, holes are filled in upon completion and gates are left closed. Regarding NRCS programs, there are numerous items that NRCS needs to complete before we can give a project a green light. For example, folks interested in applying for practices to facilitate livestock grazing need to have a grazing plan completed up front that meets NRCS requirements. And so, if you have a project you want to talk to NRCS about, consider calling us sooner rather than Later.

For more information about the LCD activities, please check out the district’s web site www.lincolnconservationdistrict.org

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2015	\$ 33,444.10
Receipts for FY 2015 - 2016	422,967.77
Expenditures for FY 2015-2016	298,463.65
Balance on Hand June 30, 2016	\$ 157,948.22

The Lincoln Conservation District is an equal opportunity employer, and offers all programs, services, and assistance on a non discriminatory basis, without regard to age, creed, marital status, national origin, physical or mental handicap, politics, race, religion, or sex.