



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2016 TO JUNE 30, 2017

It was an eventful year for the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) and its residents. The fall was wet, for the most part. Soil saturation levels were very high going into an early winter. Area wide snow packs increased throughout the winter months, reaching critical levels mid-winter. Mountain snow packs were so high in early spring, they rivaled the mid-1980's snow packs when serious flooding occurred throughout the district. LCD board members and employees started working closely with Lincoln County Home Land Security in February to put together contingency plans to address potential flooding problems. Sand bags and Hesco barriers were made available to communities throughout the LCD. Many local service groups worked together to fill and place sand bags along local rivers and waterways to control water levels. Early preparation measures really helped alleviate a lot of flood issues. However, damage occurred to some communities, primarily from the high ground water levels due to extremely saturated soil levels last fall. Several homes and the Town Hall in Cokeville received extensive water damage to their basements. Although the flooding situation looked very dire, temperatures cooled off in mid-May, which slowed

down river run-off levels substantially, resulting in moderately high water flows. The 1985 and 1986 high water levels were not reached, still the tri-diversion water control structure on the Smiths Fork River above the Town of Cokeville suffered some major embankment damage that Lincoln County Home Land Security helped temporarily repair.



The Cokeville Town Hall's basement had severe ground water damage this past spring.

Overall, the farm crop production throughout the LCD was good, especially the first crop hay and small grain production. Irrigation water supplies were excellent, having ample water throughout the irrigation season for all crops.

The rangeland plants were also productive due to high snow and soil moisture levels. Early spring rains helped the grasses, forbs, and shrubs get off to an excellent start. The moisture levels dropped off during the late spring and summer months, but having cool season grasses throughout the LCD, production levels thrived for the most part. It was a fairly good grazing year.

LCD's Leadership and Employees

LCD board members, this past year, were Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; re-elected, rural representative, Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; re-elected Robert Peternal, rural representative, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member; and re-elected Member at large, Paul Clark. All board members spent a lot of hours directing the LCD activities and business. Monthly meetings were held in order to keep abreast of the LCD programs. Board members are compensated for travel costs to and from meetings, but not their personal time. Their commitment to the wise use of land and its resources motivates their efforts. They are greatly appreciated.

Local technical help given to the LCD was provided by part-time employees, Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk, and DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resources Specialist. LCD's partner in natural resource conservation activities at the national level is the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The federal employees assisting the LCD this past year developing conservation plans and engineering designs were Gary Blazejewski, District Conservationist, stationed in the Afton NRCS Field Office and Wade Payne, Civil Engineering Technician stationed at the Field Office in Cokeville.

Highlights of Some of the LCD Activities

Spring Flood Issues

Due to the heavy mountain snow pack last spring, water runoff was very high in local streams and rivers. The high flows resulted in some damage to river banks, irrigation structures, and cropland throughout the district. The LCD went to work with the Lincoln County Home Land Security and the Cokeville Watershed Improvement District (CWID) to address problems. A dike on the north side of the main Smiths Fork Channel ruptured, spilling water and threatening U.S. Highway 30 and several ranch homes. Repairs were immediately made to correct the problem with funding by the CWID.



A hole in the north dike on the Smiths Fork River threatened several homes and U.S. Highway 30.

The middle channel below the Cokeville Tri-diversion structure was so full of woody debris it had to be cleaned out with a track hoe. The channel was over flowing onto adjacent farmland and flooded parts of the Town of Cokeville. High water flows in the middle and the main channel of the Smiths Fork River caused the water table to rise, causing ground water to get into several residents' basements and it also flooded the basement of the Cokeville Town Hall. It was very stressful to Cokeville Town residents, city council members, and employees to deal with the situation. A lot of property damage occurred. The Lincoln County Commissioners were very helpful dealing with the situation and provided financial help cleaning the middle channel.



The middle channel of the Smiths Fork River had to be cleaned to remove logs and sediment debris.

Along with the flooding issues within the Town of Cokeville, the tri-diversion structure above town that divides the Smiths Fork River into three channels had a water control dike about wash out. With the help of Lincoln County Home Land Security, Hesco barriers were installed to fix the problem.



Hesco barriers were placed on the east dike of the tri-diversion structure to prevent a major washout.

Flooding and riverbank erosion occurred throughout the LCD. LaBarge Creek had high flows which threatened to wash out several irrigation diversions. The LCD helped the NRCS install rock rip-rap on LaBarge Creek so the high water would not wash out a large irrigation water control structure on a canal and change the river channel to the canal threatening homes and gas transmission lines. Funding to repair the problem was provided by NRCS' Emergency Watershed

Protection (EWP) program. The LCD administered the emergency funds from the federal government to complete the project.



Rock rip-rap was placed on the north side of LaBarge Creek to stop bank erosion.

Natural Resource Grant Applications

As with all conservation improvement activities, it takes money to complete the projects. Throughout the year, the LCD part-time employees were very busy filling out detailed grant applications to obtain finances to complete some needed conservation activities.

Grant applications were applied to the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) fund, the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) program and Muley Fanatics to seek financial assistance. One of the grant applications was for a large sagebrush management project to thin Mountain Big sagebrush within the Smithsfork BLM Allotments on Mill Creek Grazing Association Land. Sagebrush canopy levels measured over 50 percent, which hinders both livestock and wildlife use. The Smithsfork Grazing Association members are helping the Wyoming Game and Fish Department with their Southern Wyoming Range Mule Deer Habitat Project to improve mule deer transitional and winter ranges. Thinning the sagebrush canopy in the Smithsfork BLM Allotment using the chemical Tebuthiuron will increase forb and grass production for livestock and all types of wildlife.



NRCS and Wyoming Game Fish employees evaluated sagebrush canopy levels within the Smithsfork BLM Allotment.

Another grant application in conjunction with the Mill Creek Sagebrush Management Project was the Mill Creek Well and Trough project for livestock water development. This project will help curtail livestock use in the Mill Creek riparian zone within the Smithsfork BLM Allotment and access upland areas on the top of Mill and North Corral Creek Ridges. It will also benefit wildlife with an alternative water source. The Bonneville Cutthroat Trout habitat will also be benefited by this project once it is installed.

Another project the CWID directors and the LCD board members have been working with is with the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO) to repair the Cokeville Tri-diversion Structure on the Smiths Fork River above Cokeville. If the structure fails during high water flows, the Town of Cokeville would be severely flooded.

The LCD continued its support of the Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) to monitor rangelands on private, state, and federal lands. The RHAP is administered by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA). It helps bring permittees together with land management agency personnel to coordinated efforts to monitor rangeland health and obtain creditable data. The LCD finished the RHAP contract for the Basin and Elk Creek USFS Allotments. New RHAP contracts entered into by the LCD this past year, were Indian Creek-Devils Hole USFS Allotments, the Lake Alice-Buckskin Knoll-Smiths Fork-Porcupine USFS Allotments and the South LaBarge Common

BLM Allotment extended contract. The data gathered with these RHAP grants will be critical in ensuring multiple use and sustained yield practices will continue on federal lands and to help complete the NEPA documentation to renew grazing permittees.



The Smiths Fork USFS Allotment was checked in several areas for range trend, starting in the Poker Flats area.

Rangeland Management Activities



Rangeland cross fences help develop pastures for grazing systems.

The biggest land use in the LCD is livestock grazing ground. The LCD board members are committed to helping landowners maintain and improve their grazing lands. This past year, the LCD helped one rancher install a cross fence across a rangeland pasture so he would have four pastures for rotation purposes. Rotating livestock through pastures at different times of the year greatly improves the rangeland grass, forbs and shrub production. Grazing management systems are key

to sustain rangeland resources. Cross fences are necessary to create the several pastures needed for rotation purposes.

The LCD continued their efforts with the Smithsfork Grazing Association to plant approximately 1,000 more willow cuttings on streambanks within the Smithsfork BLM Allotment. This has been a big job throughout the years, but the rewards have been fruitful. Not all the cuttings survived. However, the ones that did survive are very vigorous.

The LCD board members see the value of developing livestock water to distribute livestock and keep them off riparian zones. This past year the LCD helped two ranchers develop livestock water supply pipelines and associated water troughs with financial assistance obtained by the LCD through the Wyoming Water Development Commission. Without strategically located water development in the upland areas, livestock can concentrate on riparian areas to water, which can cause streambank degradation.



Livestock water developments are critical to distribute livestock and facilitate proper grazing use.

LCD board members also see the value of ranchers being able to evaluate their rangelands for proper grazing use, soil health, and long term trend. The LCD assisted the local NRCS office with the administration of their Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The CSP help provide financial incentives for ranchers to properly utilize their rangeland and become responsible stewards of private rangeland. The LCD provided the technical help to monitor the rangeland. This year the LCD helped two ranchers with their CSP activities on

thousands of acres of rangeland.

Workshops – Tours – Work Groups

This past winter, the LCD conducted a Low Stress Handling of Livestock Workshop. This workshop taught ways to move large herds of cattle between pastures facilitating proper grazing use. Approximately 20 individuals attended the two day workshop. The presenter for the workshop. Steve Cote, has a booklet called “Stockmanship” that may be purchased through the LCD office.



The Bear River Commission tour participants check out the B. Q. Diversion.

The Bear River Commission (BRC) sponsored a Central Bear River Tour this past summer partly facilitated by the LCD. The tour had numerous stops throughout the LCD discussing the Bear River water management, mainly for irrigation purposes. It was a very informative tour covering everything from the history of the Central Division, to the geology and water quality improvement activities. Currently the BRC is completing its 20 year review of the Bear River Compact. The tour really helped explained how the Bear River Compact was administered among the three states where the Bear River flows.

The LCD has been working closely with the BLM the past couple of years participating with a workgroup that was studying a proposal to withdraw 10 million acres from mining and other land uses. Numerous teleconference sessions were held to evaluate the proposed action and its effect on the LCD’s economy and local job. The LCD was very pleased with US Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s decision to cancel the 10 million acre

Sagebrush Focal Area Withdrawal proposal. The proposal was originally initiated to benefit Great Sage grouse, but data showed that mining would affect less than one percent of sage-grouse-occupied range.

Other LCD Activities

The LCD sponsored its seedling tree/shrub sales program last winter and spring to promote large conservation planting projects. 225 bare root and potted trees/shrubs were provided to cooperators through the Colorado State Forest Service Nursery. The seedling tree/shrub sales program is already being offered again this year. Orders may be made now by contacting the LCD Field Office, phone number (307) 279-3256. Remember this program is for small seedling stock in large quantities. Contact your local tree/shrub nurseries for large potted stock.

The LCD, once again, continued its water quality efforts last year to help cooperators test their wells and springs for coliform and E. coli bacteria, plus other minerals, chemical and nutrients if desired. The LCD will cost share with participants when testing for coliform and E. coli bacteria. The LCD will be completing water quality tests again in June of 2018. Mark the date on your calendars and come into the office to get your water quality testing kit and instructions. Your life may depend upon your due diligence.

The LCD completed one subdivision review and seeding recommendations for a large gas company within the district this past year.

NRCS Report by Gary Blazejewski, NRCS District Conservationist

I would like to start off with a big thanks to the Lincoln Conservation District helping NRCS get through another year. The District helps NRCS in numerous ways, ranging from technical assistance on agriculture lands to administrative support. NRCS is very appreciative of their smiles and willingness to help!

NRCS has been working with the permittees of a BLM allotment in south Lincoln County this past

year to develop livestock water on non-federal land. Although the project is located on federal land, these types of projects take some time to become shovel ready. Numerous discussions with land-owners, permittees, and other agencies can be required. And so, I wanted to inform producers that it is best to contact NRCS sooner rather than later for assistance on lands when numerous producers and landowners are involved.



Storage tank and solar panels that were installed in south Lincoln County to help provide reliable water for livestock.

Every year there is a strong interest in Lincoln County for NRCS assistance with irrigation. One NRCS rule that often comes into play is the NRCS irrigation history requirement. NRCS can only consider an irrigation application for funding if 95% of the acreage has been irrigated for two of the previous five years. NRCS is not authorized to provide financial assistance towards projects that convert lands from non-irrigated to irrigated. As such, the note to producers is to maintain irrigation and crop records, and to maintain your existing irrigation systems if you intend to apply to NRCS for improvements.

For more information on LCD activities and programs please visit our website at: lincolnconservationdistrict.org

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2016	\$157,948.22
Receipts for FY 2016 - 2017	205,535.36
Expenditures for FY 2016-2017	256,686.12
Balance on Hand June 30, 2017	\$106,797.46

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.