



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2017 TO JUNE 30, 2018

The past year was quite opposite of last year. Snow packs were near average at most sites in the Cokeville area but well below normal in the north slopes of the Uinta Mountains. Flooding throughout the district was not a major concern like last year. Some early spring moisture was received but after June 1st, little moisture was received until October 1st. Soil moisture rebounded at some Snotel sites during October, but many sites will go into spring with a dry soil profile which will affect runoff rates next spring. The Kelley Ranger Station Snotel Site's soil moisture is well below normal saturation levels as of November 1st.

Agriculture producers were worried about sustained irrigation water flows throughout the summer months. River flows held up relatively well because the irrigation water reservoirs at Woodruff Narrows, Viva Naughton, and Bear Lake were full in the spring which provided irrigation water for area wide crops. First crop hay production was near normal, while second crop hay was down from normal. The summer was hot and dry with no significant frost until mid-fall. It will

be necessary to have a good snow pack this winter for reservoirs to fill adequately for next year's water use.

LCD's Leadership and Employees

It was a busy year for Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) board members and employees. Past year's LCD board members were Erick Esterholdt, Chairman, rural representative; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman, rural representative; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer, rural representative; Paula Bowling, Member, urban representative; Paul Clark, Member, member at-large representative; and Shirley Ulrich, Associate Member. Robert Peternal also served as the Area 5 Councilman for the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) this past year. The LCD board members serve on a voluntary basis, except for travel costs to and from meetings. Their time and effort are greatly appreciated. Their oversight of LCD activities and business benefits all landowners within the district.

Once again, the local technical help for the LCD was provided by part-time employees, DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resources Specialist, and Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk.



Lincoln Conservation District Board of Supervisors

The LCD's federal partner in natural resource conservation activities was the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The federal employees assisting the LCD this past year by developing conservation plans and administering the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) were Gary Blazejewski, District Conservationist, stationed in the Afton NRCS Field Office, and Wade Payne, NRCS Civil Engineering Technician, who developed engineering plans for projects and oversaw the construction of projects. Wade is stationed at the Cokeville LCD Field Office. Recently the NRCS hired Janessa Julson as a Range Management Specialist for the Afton Field Office. She will be helping with the development of the range conservation practices for local ranchers. She grew up on a sheep and cattle ranch in Vernal, Utah.

Environmental Issues

One of the biggest issues the LCD board members and employees have been participating in has been as a Cooperating Agency (CA) in the development of an amended Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the management of Greater Sage grouse (GRSG), a sensitive species, on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) federal land in Wyoming and Utah and the U.S. Forest Service

(USFS) lands in Wyoming. In March 2010, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concluded that the GRSG was warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In 2015, the BLM and USFS created special management plans for the GRSG. Mainly because of these plans, the USFWS determined that the listing of the GRGS was not necessary. In the last several years, new information has prompted the USFS and BLM to propose amendments to the 2015 GRSG management plans. The LCD board members and employees have attended numerous planning meetings and participated in teleconference calls to improve the clarity, efficiency and implementation of GRSG plans. Current plans include better alignment with the state and federal plans. Currently, the USFS final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the Record of Decision (ROD) are expected to be completed in mid-February 2019. The final ROD is expected to be signed as early as May or as late as July 2019. The BLM is ahead of the USFS with the EIS and Resource Management Plan (RMP) already released for review. The final ROD Amendment is tentatively scheduled for release in December 2018.

The LCD has worked hard to keep livestock grazing as a compatible use on rangelands along with the GRSG, using adaptive management and rangeland monitoring to verify proper grazing use. Most rangeland projects needed on rangelands such as water development etc., are considered deminimis practices. Many practices benefit GRSG.

Water Quality

The LCD continued its effort to improve water quality in the district by planting 1000 willow cuttings on the upper drainage of Little Muddy Creek within the Smithsfork BLM Grazing Allotment. Beaver have been a problem establishing willow cuttings. Beaver eat the new willow plants, causing difficulty with willow establishment. All new willow plantings in the future will require hog panels to be placed around the willow plants. Mature willow plants along streams help curtail bank erosion and moderate water temperatures so fish can better survive.



Collecting willow cuttings for Smithsfork BLM Allotment planting.

The LCD continued its water quality testing program in May 2018. Twenty-two rural cooperators tested their culinary wells and springs for coliform and E. coli bacteria. Thirteen cooperators tested for additional mineral, chemical, and nutrient levels. The LCD will be testing wells and springs in the Spring of 2019. Notices will be published in the Kemmerer Gazette and informational flyers posted throughout the district. Several individuals wanted to test their water but missed the deadline. Contact the LCD office by May 1st this spring to get the date water quality samples need to be submitted.

Rangeland Management

Rangelands make up the vast majority of the ground within the LCD. Local ranchers depend upon annual forage that rangelands grow to support their livestock operations. Using best management practices to sustain the district's rangelands are critical for the economic welfare of a ranch operation.

The LCD promoted the installation of several conservation practices to help maintain the district's rangeland resource. Adequate water for livestock is critical for both livestock and wildlife. This past year, the LCD assisted a cooperator and a livestock association install stockwater pipelines, storage tanks and watering troughs. Over 12,000 feet of 2" HDPE pipeline were dug and or ripped into the ground to get livestock water to upland areas. This

helps so livestock do not water and graze on riparian areas which are important for fisheries and wildlife such as GRSG. Riparian areas are extremely difficult to manage if they are the only water resource in a large rangeland complex. Development of springs, wells, ponds, and livestock pipelines from streams is necessary to keep livestock in upland areas and out of riparian zones. It also helps provide water for all types of wildlife.



Ripping the livestock pipeline for the Mill Creek Grazing Association's livestock water pipeline.

Another rangeland practice the LCD has been helping cooperators address is the management of decadent Big Sagebrush stands. It is not only concerning to private and federal land owners but to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). The WGFD has started a Southwest Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative to increase or at least stabilize mule deer populations in Southwest Wyoming. Ever since the 1992-93 winter, all herd units throughout the state have experienced decline. The WGFD plans to focus on habitat and population management in Southwest Wyoming.

The LCD helped one cooperator and one grazing association thin two different decadent Big Sagebrush stands to acceptable levels of sagebrush cover using the chemical Tebuthiuron (Spike). Over 1,000 acres of sagebrush were thinned with technical help from the WGFD and financial assistance from the Wyoming State Grazing Board. The WGFD plans to continue efforts with Big Sagebrush thinning and cheat grass eradication the next several years within the LCD to improve mule

deer habitat. This is an effort both the livestock producer and wildlife manager can work together for a mutually beneficial result, especially since mule deer habitat is being lost to housing developments everywhere. Improving existing habitat is becoming very important.



Applying the chemical Tebuthiuron (Spike) pellets to manage Big sagebrush canopies with a helicopter on Mill Creek state land.

Rangeland Monitoring

Rangeland monitoring on federal and private lands took up a large share of the LCD time this past year. Currently, the LCD is administering three on-going Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) grants to help several cooperators with rangeland monitoring on their allotments. Currently, the LCD has contracted with a private contractor to monitor six allotments on USFS land within the K-17 Range NEPA project area for continued domestic sheep grazing. Approximately 17,000 sheep are permitted within the K-17 project area with multiple permittees. The K-17 project area is up for grazing permit renewals, but very little monitoring data is available that meets USFS standards and direction. This makes it difficult to make valid decisions. The RHAP grants are critically needed in order to have rangeland monitoring data available for permit renewal determinations.

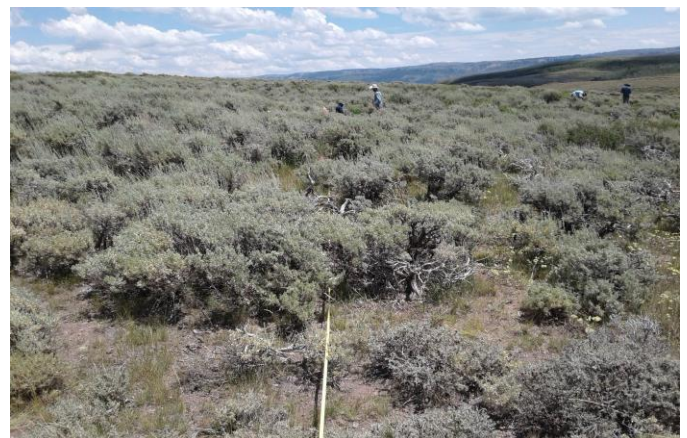
The LCD also just obtained two more RHAP grants for the K-17 project area covering five more USFS allotments. When this additional rangeland monitoring data is collected, ample data for

rangeland trend and utilization levels will be available for permit renewals within the K-17 project area. Allotments within the K-17 project are all administered by the Kemmerer Ranger District.



DeMont is setting up a rangeland monitoring transect north of Lake Alice on the USFS Buckskin Allotment.

The other ongoing RHAP grant is on the South LaBarge Common BLM Allotment. Currently, the grant is in its second year. This past summer, the South LaBarge Grazing Association (SLGA) hired an employee with the RHAP grant funding from the LCD to rangeland monitor several pastures within the allotment. A number of Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) transect sites were read and established throughout the South LaBarge Common Allotment (SLCA) with the help of BLM employees, a LCD employee, the private contractor and permittees of the SLGA. The rangeland trend and utilization data will be very important when grazing permits are renewed.



Acquiring AIM rangeland monitoring data on the South LaBarge Common BLM Allotment.

The LCD's natural resource specialist, DeMont Grandy, helped the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Afton Office employees rangeland monitor 20 transects on private land for the NRCS Rangeland Stewardship Program (CSP). The CSP provides incentive money to ranchers to go the extra mile in managing their rangeland resources. One of the practices needed for payments is to have yearly rangeland monitoring completed on their private lands.

Water Control Structures



Pixley Dam south of Cokeville before it was repaired.

This past year, the LCD helped the Pixley Diversion irrigation water users get the help to repair their diversion dam across the Bear River that was damaged by flood irrigation water a couple of years ago. The Pixley Dam is old and antiquated. It needs to be totally replaced in the near future. A number of partners will be needed to help with the cost of replacement.

This past year the LCD board members have been working closely with the Cokeville Watershed Improvement District (CWID) directors to get the tri-diversion structure on the Smiths Fork River above the Town of Cokeville repaired before it totally washes out. The Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) will be presenting a grant request to the Wyoming State Legislators this winter to get finances for the structure.



Cleaning out a gravel deposit between the trash rack and screw gates on the Cokeville Tri-diversion Structure.

Other LCD Activities

The LCD continued its tree/shrub sales program last winter and spring to help land owners with their conservation planting projects. 105 seedlings and 29 large shrubs/trees were provided to cooperators by the Colorado State Forest Service Nursery and the Bear Lake Soil and Water Conservation District. The program will be offered again this coming year. It is important that seedling stock is ordered early, right now, by contacting the LCD Field Office, phone number (307) 279-3256.

Just a reminder for you tree/shrub care takers. A lot of large trees are lost each year because cooperators forget to deep water them in the late fall around Halloween time and even at Thanksgiving time if the soil is not frozen. Conifer trees especially transpire all year long and need ample water to make it through the winter. Water so you do not lose your trees.

The LCD continued its effort with the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) to participate in federal land management decisions throughout southwest Wyoming with a coalition of area conservation district representatives and county commissioners from each county. The CLG has been a valuable tool to help federal agencies manage their federal lands from a local perspective. The CLG has an attorney and consultants hired to help local elected officials contribute effectively with federal land management decisions at the start of the planning process. The conservation districts

and each county are considered a Cooperating Agency (CA) and are involved at the beginning of the planning process for federal land management decisions. A big plus for the grass roots involvement.

NRCS REPORT by Gary Blazejewski

As always, I would like to start with a message of thanks to the LCD. The LCD is involved with every project that NRCS does in south Lincoln County. Whether it is assisting with rangeland monitoring, tracking down signatures, or providing office space, NRCS appreciates all that the LCD does to help projects move forward!

This year the Afton NRCS office was able to hire a new employee. Her name is Janessa Julson, and she has been hired as a Rangeland Management Specialist. She is originally from Utah but comes to Wyoming from Idaho. She was raised on a family owned/operated sheep and cattle ranch and studied range management at both Utah State University (bachelor's degree) and University of Idaho (master's degree). Her husband (who is involved in wildland fire and forestry) and two rowdy dogs keep her busy during her free time.



Janessa Julson, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist.

During 2018, NRCS assisted with numerous irrigation improvement projects in and around Cokeville. One NRCS rule that often comes into

play is the NRCS is the 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. As such, the note to producers is to maintain irrigation records and or file crop reports with the Farm Service Agency to document what you are irrigating, if you intend to apply to NRCS for improvements.

In the future, NRCS would like to provide much more assistance on grazing lands. Recently WY NRCS has been receiving significant funds for the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) each year. Many of the projects that ranchers want to apply for meet the goals and objectives of the Sage Grouse Program. To be eligible to apply for these SGI funds, ranchers first need to work with NRCS to develop a grazing plan for the specific parcels of land. Some examples of practices that ranchers can apply for include cheatgrass treatments, rangeland seedings, cross fences, spring developments, and prescribed grazing assistance.



A contractor bores under the Bear River in order to install a livestock pipeline.

Questions? Confused? Feel free to give us a call. We are here to help!

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2017	\$106,797.46
Receipts for FY 2017 - 2018	177,623.48
Expenditures for FY 2017-2018	200,558.78
Balance on Hand June 30, 2018	\$ 83,862.16

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.