



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2021, TO JUNE 30, 2022

This past year has been a mixed bag of climatic events and growing conditions. Last fall (2021), the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) was on track to have a much needed above average water year. The winter snowfall was up and down. Early winter snowpacks were near median or slightly above. Mid-winter snowpacks were dismal. Late winter snowpack gained some ground with April having more moisture than the past couple of months of February and March combined.

Early spring rains were sporadic, with some rain coming the end of spring. The summer months were basically dry until mid-September. Hay and grain crop production overall was fair to good. The soil moisture levels going into the early summer helped out first crop hay production substantially. The grass meadow hay production this past year

was good compared to last year's meadow hay crops. The second crop hay production was down a little due to irrigation water supplies, but better than expected since irrigation water did not go into regulation until later into the growing season.



Hay production was better this past summer than last year.

Harvesting of hay was excellent throughout the growing season due to the hot, dry weather conditions throughout the LCD this past summer. Production levels of hay were good enough to merit some producers selling hay to be compacted and sent overseas. This diversifies the ranching operations with hay and cattle sales making economic sense.

Small grains are still being planted in some areas of the LCD for malting barley, feed grains, and hay forage.

Currently, the LCD is not out of our drought situation. The U.S. Drought Monitor Map shows the LCD to be in a severe drought condition. It has been climatically challenging the last couple of years. Hopefully, the LCD will have better precipitation this coming water year.

Current Leadership and Technical Staff for the LCD

LCD board members this past year (2022) consisted of Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member; and Paul Clark Member. There are two positions open for this year's general election. One urban position and one rural position. Erick Esterholdt and Paula Bowling are up for re-election this coming November 2022. Board members were kept busy this past year attending LCD board meetings and conferences, in addition to directing day to day operations of the district.



Kent Connelly gives a presentation at the Area 5 WACD Meeting.

The LCD sponsored the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD, Area 5 meeting in September. The LCD held the meeting at the Kemmerer Best Western Fossil Country Inn and Suites. A number of natural resource issues were covered during the meeting. Senator Dockstader, Representative Scott Heiner, and Kent Connelly, current candidate for Lincoln County Commissioner, gave presentations on electric coal fired plants, proposed property tax relief legislation, Kemmerer Natrium advanced Nuclear Project, and Tri-site soil enhancement products made from coal. Several southwest conservation district board members, Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) employees, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist were present at the meeting through Zoom. Several presentations were given by state and federal employees on the conservation efforts of natural resources throughout the state.

LCD technical and administrative oversight this past year was given by part-time employees, DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resource Specialist, and Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk. The USDA-NRCS federal assistance to the LCD was by Wade Payne, NRCS Civil Engineering Technician, Cokeville Field Office and Adam Clark, NRCS District Conservationist, and Janessa Julson, NRCS Range Management Specialist, in the Afton Field Office.

Some LCD Conservation Activities This Past Year

Cooperative Planning Efforts

The LCD was busy working with several entities to give input on proposed natural resource projects and legislative mandates that could affect district cooperators. Probably one of the most controversial issues that is heating up again is the Greater Sage Grouse (GRSG) conservation efforts. The LCD worked hard with the Wyoming Governor's Office and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to get a Land Use Plan for GRGS completed in 2019. The BLM is now proposing to start to amend the current Land Use Plan. This is going to create a lot of work again, for the LCD to attend planning meetings and

review lengthy proposals etc.

The LCD is working with the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO), Jay Schag, Contractor, to identify critical eroding irrigation water structures throughout the LCD. This is important to Governor Gordon so the LCD does not have a catastrophic irrigation water structure failure that could be an economic disaster to Wyoming agriculture producers.



The Pixley irrigation water diversion on the Bear River is showing its age.

The LCD is also participating in the development of an Environment Impact Statement (EIS) for the development of a liquid trona mine for the Pacific Soda Trona Company due to water right issues out of Fontenelle Reservoir. The LCD also reviewed plans for an electrical pumping project on the South Fork of the Hams Fork River. The LCD requested Cooperating Agency Status for this project with the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC) due to potential LCD cooperators' water rights.



Soil survey being completed on proposed building lots in the Town of Cokeville.

The LCD is currently working on two subdivision reviews within the Town of Cokeville. Subdivision reviews are on the upswing due to all the proposed industrial developments in the LCD.

Range Management and Improvement Projects

The LCD assisted permittees in completing the Twin Creeks BLM Allotment Ollie Spring Livestock and Wildlife Project. The project involved developing and collecting water from Ollie Spring, pumping the water to a high elevation storage tank, and then distributing water through pipelines to rubber-tired drinking troughs. The LCD provided partial construction funds through Ruby Pipeline Mitigation funds and a grant through the Southwest Wyoming Sage-Grouse Working group. Some 15,000 feet of 1½ inch PE Plastic Pipe, a 10,000-gallon Storage Tank, 4 livestock troughs, and 1,437 feet of wildlife friendly fence were installed.



Spring water inlet structure for the Twin Creeks BLM Allotment's livestock and wildlife watering project.

The LCD has been active this year meeting with the Tall Forb Steering Committee on a monthly basis to develop Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD) for the USDA Bridger Teton National Forest's tall forb sites. DeMont Grandy, LCD Natural Resource Specialist, has been participating with the Elements and Methods Group to develop criteria for ESD development. It has been a labor-intensive effort. The USFS Kemmerer District and LCD employees completed vegetative monitoring for ESDs on Green Knoll, Indian Creek, and Big Park this past summer.



Tall Forb vegetation monitoring at Green Knoll by the USFS and LCD employees, plus permittees.

The LCD is currently working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Southwest Wyoming Sage-grouse Working Group (SWSGWG), and a Water for Wildlife Group to develop a spring in the Boyd Hollow BLM Allotment on private land for livestock and wildlife use. By developing the spring and fencing it out from livestock use, the three-acre spring source area surrounded by an Aspen, willow, and Choke Cherry plant community will be protected from soil compaction by livestock use. It is a unique wildlife watering and habitat area. Approximately 900 feet of buried pipeline will be run to two rubber-tired water troughs for livestock water. It is a definite win for both livestock and wildlife.



BLM and LCD employees doing MIM monitoring on Huff Creek, Smiths Fork BLM Allotments.

The LCD helped the BLM employees complete Multiple Indicator Method (MIM) monitoring in the Smiths Fork BLM Allotment in the north and middle pastures. MIM monitoring is used to

determine the vegetative trend of riparian zones within the allotment every five to eight years. This year's monitoring showed definite improvement of the riparian vegetation zones in the allotment from data collected several years ago. Willow growth was on the upswing, along with overall vegetative species composition and production.

The LCD has continued its on-going efforts to replace woven and five barbed-wire allotment fences with four-wire wildlife friendly fences. The LCD is in the process of identifying fences in Mule deer migration areas that are problematic for deer crossings. Wildlife friendly fences save on deer mortality when crossing. Mule deer numbers have been on the decline the last several years. Any mitigating efforts to solve the concern is needed. This past year, the LCD cooperated with the USFWS, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), the Nature Conservancy, and Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource trust (WWNRT) fund to get wildlife friendly fences installed between the Beaver and Lake Creek BLM Allotments and a boundary fence on the south end of the Smiths Fork BLM Allotment by Quealy Reservoir. The LCD has been the agency to get all the funds gathered into one pot and payments made to contractors selected by cooperators.



Cheatgrass is already invading areas in the LCD which is a concern.

The next endeavor the LCD will be undertaking is the identifying and controlling the cheatgrass invasion throughout the district. Cheatgrass is a poor forage for both livestock and wildlife. Cheatgrass has invaded large rangeland ranching operations and wildlife numbers. It is controllable in Wyoming if quick action is taken. Some states have already lost the war on cheatgrass invasion.

The effort is going to take the combined efforts of many federal, state, and county entities.

Energy Concerns

The LCD recognizes the economic impact energy costs have on local farms and ranches. Expenses to operate irrigation sprinkler systems, harvesting forage crops, equipment costs, and fertilizer etc. is on the increase. It threatens the economic stability of family-owned farms and ranches. The LCD board members and staff are attending meetings regularly with Rocky Mountain Power and the Wyoming Public Service Commission to keep decision makers aware of the need to keep agriculture costs to reasonable levels. With highly variable income levels from the sales of livestock and forage crops, many small agriculture producers are being forced out of business.

The LCD board members have concerns with wind and solar farms in the LCD, along with the development of other alternative energy sources such as nuclear power, carbon-neutral ammonia, hydrogen power, and carbon capture technology for coal. It is mind boggling to keep up with all the new ideas. The bottom line is the need for reliable, reasonable energy costs for agriculture producers and household users. The LCD board and staff will continue to give input to the on-going energy debates and proposals by power developers and companies.

One concern of many LCD cooperators is the placement of high voltage power lines throughout the district. Landowners have concerns regarding the alignment of power lines through their irrigated sprinkler fields and the nuisance of high voltage power lines over their farmsteads and buildings. The LCD is attending meetings with Rocky Mountain Power concerning their proposed Gateway West High Voltage Electric Transmission Power Line, especially in the Cokeville, Wyoming, area to see the best placement for the transmission line.

Water Quality and Wetland

The LCD is working with the WWNRT, SWSGWG, and USFS to improve aging flood

irrigation infrastructures on private land by installing water control structures and repairing dikes to improve irrigation water distribution in the Bear River drainage north of Cokeville between the Narrows and Border, Wyoming. Repairing and maintaining the flood irrigation systems are critical for many wetland-dependent birds and their habitat, along with hay production. Flood irrigated meadows also provide an excellent filter to keep excessive nutrients from entering the river from up-river winter grazing grounds. The repaired dikes, with structures along the Bear River help stop river-bank erosion by curtailing backwater from going into the river channel causing water quality issues.



Wetlands along the Bear River are being improved through dikes and irrigation water control structure repairs.

The LCD has been attending the Bear River Water Quality Task Force Meetings periodically this past year. At their last meeting a presentation was given by DeMont Grandy on water quality conservation practices being installed throughout the Bear River Basin within the district.

Other District Activities

The LCD sponsored a water quality testing day on August 8, 2022, to test rural and wells for bacteria presence/absence. The LCD provides funding for bacteria testing through a grant from the WDA. Other chemical parameters may also be tested through the LCD's program, but part of the cost will need to be paid by the cooperators. Plans are to continue this program next summer (2023). Don't miss out. Contact the LCD office for details at (307) 279-3256 Ext. 4.

Due to lingering COVID issues, the LCD will not be offering bulk seedling trees and shrubs this coming year (2023) through the Colorado State Forestry Service (CSFS) Nursery. The nursery has experienced significant staff shortages and failing infrastructures. No new orders will be accepted until the next year.

The LCD can help cooperators obtain single potted ornamental shrubs and shade trees in cooperation with the Bear Lake Soil and Water Conservation District. They have a good variety of species available but costs for individual pots are higher than seedling trees and shrubs through the CSFS Nursery. Contact the LCD office for details.

Thanks to all

The LCD is very appreciative to all district cooperators, county, state, and federal agencies for help in implementing district programs and activities. The LCD board members would especially like to recognize the Lincoln County Commissioners and WDA for their financial support and input to district activities and programs.

NRCS Report - by Adam Clark, NRCS, DC

NRCS started to get back to normal operations after the pandemic this year. Availability of materials continues to be a struggle for some projects.

Projects in south Lincoln County in 2022 have included irrigation sprinkler systems, handlines, converting ditches to underground pipeline, harvesting hay in a wildlife friendly manner, and livestock operation improvements such as fencing, spring developments, tanks, solar systems, and troughs. The NRCS office has already received applications and interest from south Lincoln County residents for Farm Bill Programs for the 2023 funding cycle. The sign-up deadline for 2023 is November 23, 2022. All applications received before the deadline will be considered for funding next year.

NRCS continues to receive funds for the Big Game Initiative. These funds can go towards

replacing non-wildlife friendly fences with wildlife friendly fences. (see pictures below.)



Old non-wildlife friendly fences.



Newly replaced wildlife friendly fences.

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

FINANICAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2021	\$	57,972.68
Receipts for FY 2021 - 2022		165,664.68
Expenditures for FY 2021 -2022		145,256.79
Balance on Hand June 30, 2022	\$	78,380.57

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.