



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2023, TO JUNE 30, 2024

Every year the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) has its nuances and anomalies concerning weather patterns and growing conditions. This year did fall within possible climatic events for the LCD. The water year started out well, with snowpacks reaching near median levels throughout the district except for low elevation Snotel sites. This spring brought some moisture, but it dried up early, then turned quite cold until the summer months when weather temperatures turned hotter than normal. This affected growing conditions for agriculture crops throughout the LCD.

First crop alfalfa/grass hayland fields were slow maturing, but overall were fairly good. The second crop alfalfa/grass hayland fields were short, especially where adequate irrigation water was not available. Small grain crop production was down due to the cool spring and hot growing conditions during the summer months. The rangeland production was short due to the lack of early spring moisture in the lower elevations. The higher elevation rangelands were better even into the summer months mainly due to the normal snowpack.



High elevation vegetation was good into the early Fall showing a large bear foraging on vegetation in the Upper Fontenelle drainage.

The past agriculture year was not exceptional but still manageable for producers. Livestock prices are up! The biggest problems agriculture producers and residents in southern Lincoln County experienced were energy costs to operate farm equipment, higher purchase costs for new farm equipment, and the cost to heat residences. Inflation is seriously

affecting agriculture operations and small businesses to remain solvent, plus the increase in taxes is a big concern. The passing on of increased operational costs to the next level down is causing huge concerns to agriculture producers and consumers at the ground level.

This year's winter is predicted by some weather forecasters to be a "LaNiña" type event while other forecasters predict a "LaNiño" type event. The important thing is to be prepared for the unexpected. A drought contingency plan is something all agriculture producers should have in place for their operations.

Who is Running the Wheelhouse for the LCD?

With the help of many volunteers and professional employees, the LCD had a good year overall. The LCD board members the past year were Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member; and Paul Clark, Member. There were three positions open on the LCD board this past General Election, two rural positions and one member-at-large. Kenny Petersen, current Vice Chairman for the LCD board decided not to re-run. Kenny has been a board member since 2001. He has given 24 years of service to the LCD. His expertise and knowledge will be greatly missed. It is rare the LCD board has a turnover on the board.

Through the LCD board members, a lot of grass roots issues are addressed that would slip through the cracks that would negatively affect local agriculture producers and residents in Southern Lincoln County. Lately, federal government agencies are supporting legislative action to restrict use on federal lands which affects hunting, recreation, logging, and grazing activities. It is a never-ending battle to soften federal government actions and policies so people can use the federal natural resources in a conservation manner rather than lock it up with no use at all. Such preservationist attitudes open up our local forests and rangelands to disasters from catastrophic wildfires and insect infestations that would totally wipe out the ecosystems for years.



LCD board members & staff, bottom left to right Robert Peternal, Brenda Lazcanotegui, DeMont Grandy. Top Paula Bowling, Paul Clark, Erick Esterholdt, and Kenny Petersen.

LCD board members serve as volunteers. They spend many hours making sure natural resource issues are addressed through the LCD at the local level. It requires attending monthly board meetings, attending Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) area meetings, and the yearly convention, plus numerous meetings with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG). It is rare to find individuals to serve on boards today. The LCD board members are greatly appreciated.

The LCD technical and administrative assistance this past year was given by part-time employees DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resource Specialist, and Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk. The LCD's main partner, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), federal assistance was provided by Wade Payne, NRCS Civil Engineering Technician, Cokeville Field Office, and Janessa Julson, NRCS District Conservationist, Afton Field Office.

Highlighted LCD Past Year's Conservation Activities

Completed Water Activities

The LCD assisted the Smiths Fork Irrigation District obtain a grant through the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) to develop a Level I reconnaissance study for water conservation measures for the Covey and Mau canals. The study will be very useful for helping individual

landowners within the district boundaries up-grade water measuring devices, headgates, and pipeline conveyance systems etc. The grant was approved and Forsgren Associates, Inc. got the bid to complete the study. It will take a couple of years to complete the study.



Competing engineering firms' personnel toured the Covey and Mau Canals to develop a plan for a water conservation study funded by the WWDC.

The LCD finally got the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program underway this past summer to repair a major bank erosion issue on the Smiths Fork River northeast of Cokeville, WY. High flows a couple years ago threatened the road into a public park and the conveyance system for an irrigation ditch. The project was designed, and cost shared by the NRCS. The LCD helped the landowner get a grant through WWDC.



A portion of the Smiths Fork River eroding riverbank was shaped and rock-riprapped to curtail severe bank erosion

The LCD has been working with several federal and state agencies to get the Quealy Reservoir repaired at the head of Birch Creek. The reservoir has been breached for many years. It is one place in the LCD that could accommodate a gravity flow sprinkler system to irrigate cropland downstream of the reservoir site. A win-win situation for the landowners and energy conservation.



The Quealy Reservoir is being considered to be repaired due to the principal spillway failure.

Within the past year, the WWDC, LCD, and several other conservation districts in southwest Wyoming have partnered up to launch a Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) through the NRCS. The Programmatic Partnership Agreement (PPA) has been signed. The NRCS has set aside \$25,000,000.00 for the program within the Upper Colorado River Basin in Wyoming. The water conservation program can include irrigation sprinkler systems and livestock water developments plus many more practices. Contact the Afton NRCS Office or the LCD for more details.

The LCD cooperated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) again to complete a couple more wetland restoration projects along the Bear River this past year. The wetland projects have helped the agriculture producers irrigate their meadow hayland more efficiently and provide habitat and rest areas for migrating waterfowl using the Bear River.

Range and Wildlife Activities

The LCD has been working with nine cooperators to install Wildlife Friendly Fences (WFF) throughout the district this past year. The new fences really help with upland big game animal crossing when migrating. They also help agriculture producers have good fences around their properties which help with trespass issues. Currently, four of the producers have completed 12.6 miles of WFF. The others are still in the process of getting their fences completed. This is the last year the NRCS-RCPP WFF program will have cost share money available. It has provided the lion's share of the money for WFF installations. Next year the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) will be the only NRCS source of money to cost share on WFF which is highly competitive with other conservation practices. Those wanting to replace an old barbed/woven wire fence need to act on it this year. The LCD has got some cost share money from the Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) and Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) to help with the additional costs to install WFF projects.



Wildlife Friendly Fences are starting to appear throughout the LCD. Fences really help with the migration of Big game wildlife.

Cheatgrass invasion throughout the LCD is still a big concern. The LCD joined with the WGFD, USFS, BLM, and the Lincoln County Weed and Pest District (LCWPD) to locate cheatgrass invasion areas and eradicate the problematic weed.

This past summer the LCD and WGFD searched the west slope of the Raymond Mountains to identify cheatgrass invasion areas on private

property. There are cost share programs through the NRCS and WGFD to help with the eradication of the weedy grass. The chemical of choice to control cheatgrass is Indaziflam which is currently quite expensive. Cost share programs are a necessity to help with the costs and are currently available. If you have cheatgrass on your property, contact the LCWPD or LCD for help eradicating it.



A Cheatgrass monitoring transect was established at the bottom of the Raymond Mountains to evaluate the effectiveness of chemical treatment in the future.

The LCD is still working on Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD) for Tall Forb Communities in the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF). A lot of soils information was gathered throughout the west side of the BTNF this past summer for ESD development. Once ESDs are developed, existing Tall Forb Communities can be evaluated to determine their serial stage. Management decisions can be made based upon desired conditions that are feasible. Nothing is worse than wanting a desired condition that is not achievable. This hurts permittees' trust in land management agencies' competence when directing natural resource concerns.

The LCD completed the Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) Grant Agreement for the Southern Wyoming Range Conditions and Trend Assessment and Ecological Site Development for the Tall Forb Type Project as of August this year. Currently, the West Zone of BTNF has hundreds of monitoring transect sites established for Tall Forb Communities. It has been a time-consuming endeavor over several years in

steep, roadless terrain on horseback. Now that the monitoring sites are in place, visits can be made after several years to determine the Tall Forb Communities' vegetative trends over the years.

Cooperating Agency Activities

The LCD is still working with several federal, state, and county land agencies plus several cities and towns within the LCD to create a proposed Southern Lincoln County Collaborative to address natural resource issues at a landscape scale. The Star Valley Conservation District (SVCD) already had a natural resource collaborative up and running for the last several years. Efforts are underway to combine the two collaboratives under one umbrella with the Lincoln County Commissioners providing financial assistance to both the LCD and SVCD to hire a management coordinator for the undertaking. There is more strength in having one county-wide collaborative when requesting grant money to establish natural resource projects.

The LCD continued efforts this year in conjunction with the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) in Southwest Wyoming to address Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for proposed management changes, new projects, and conservation rule changes on federal lands. Some of the more important BLM and USFS issues undertaken this year are as follows:

- a) LCD board members and employees worked closely with the CLG to submit comments on the BLM's Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Draft EIS for Greater Sage Grouse Protection Plan. The LCD and the CLG supported the old 2019 RMP Amendment and the new Preferred Alternative 5 with a state-specific management approach. The final RMP and EIS have been issued. Any changes now will have to go through litigation if not acceptable.
- b) The BLM's Rule for Conservation and Landscape Health was strongly contested by the CLG and LCD. It was still enacted. Currently, several states and organizations

have challenged the new rule and it is in litigation.

- c) BLM's Western Solar Programmatic EIS and RMP Amendment had objections by the CLG and LCD due to the nationwide size of the endeavor. Comments were given to size the project to BLM districts. The LCD is waiting on the final EIS and Amendments. Hopefully, the BLM incorporated the suggested changes into their documents. Otherwise, litigation will likely to occur.
- d) BLM's Grazing Rule change was pulled back due to challenges by the CLG, LCD, and many others. The BLM made changes to their in-house grazing policies which do not require outside involvement. The BLM created Internal Memos to offices for rangeland health and flexible grazing methods plus the creation of a drought monitoring tool.
- e) One of the USFS' bigger undertaking this past year was their Old Growth Plan Amendment Draft EIS and Proposed Plan that has been out for public review. It has been a controversial undertaking locking up more USFS lands from public access for logging etc. The final EIS will be out shortly. Hopefully, the USFS will incorporate the CLG's and LCD's comments into the final EIS. It is likely a candidate for future litigation due to the speed it was given by top officials for enactment.
- f) The LCD has been participating with the BTNF to write a new Forest Plan. Currently the USFS is gathering assessment information throughout the BTNF for evaluation purposes of natural resources and uses etc. This is a large undertaking. Once the natural resource issues are identified and uses categorized, management decisions can be made. It will likely take several years before a new BTNF Plan is finalized. A forest plan requires a lot of public participation and inter-agency involvement before it is finalized.

Miscellaneous Activities

The LCD completed requests for three sub-division reviews this past year, which is normal. Projections for growth throughout the LCD will likely create several more reviews this coming year.

All of the LCD board members and employees received Public Officers Training this past winter. Board members were given an in-depth training course on how to handle public finances, board meeting, and employee conduct issues etc. It was a good refresher course and is now mandatory by the Wyoming State Audit Department for new board members to complete upon election to a special district board.

The LCD will be sponsoring another rural water quality testing day this coming spring for rural cooperators. It is very important that rural cooperators take the time to evaluate their spring and well water so changes can be taken early to correct any water quality problems. Some microscopic organisms can cause havoc to an individual's health. The LCD will be participating with cost share for testing potable water. Call the LCD office phone number (307) 279-3256 extension 4 for details.

The LCD has had to cut back on seedling trees and shrubs sales due to the limited orders we were getting. The LCD will be participating with the Uinta County Conservation District (UCCD) to fill seedling orders. Contact the LCD and their employees will help you get your orders processed through the UCCD. The LCD will also be working with the Bear Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District, as in the past, to obtain single type orders for larger trees and shrubs.

Greeting from NRCS!

What a whirlwind of a year! I can't believe it's almost Christmas time. NRCS has many different programs available for funding projects, including three different Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPP) located here in Lincoln County through the Inflation Reduction Act. Solar conversion pumps for livestock water wells have become more popular over the years and NRCS can

help with funding these types of projects. Please contact Janessa Julson with the NRCS office in Afton if you have any questions or projects in mind. As always, it's been great working with LCD. A huge thank you to the staff and board members.



A new installed solar system on an existing livestock well.

THANKS

The LCD support from district cooperators, and local, county, state, and federal agencies implementing district activities and program was excellent this past year. The LCD board members would like, as always, to thank the Lincoln County Commissioners and Wyoming Department of Agriculture for their financial support and administrative assistance. The LCD greatly appreciates all the support and help of participating cooperators and agencies. This coming year is on a solid pathway with everyone's involvement.

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

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2023	\$ 71,482.14
Receipts for FY 2023 - 2024	272,663.46
Expenditures for FY 2023-2024	308,934.29
Balance on Hand June 30, 2024	\$ 35,211.31

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