



## **LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2011 TO JUNE 30, 2012**

The past fiscal year, the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) experienced a complete reversal of last year's weather condition. Last year was very wet. This year has been extremely dry. Last fall we had some moisture. However, as the winter months progressed, the drier it became. Our spring was very dry, with very little to no moisture during the summer months. It has been the driest year in several decades. Needless to say, it has had an impact, especially on LCD agriculture cooperators, Hay production was below normal for many cooperators due to poor river and stream flows needed for irrigation purposes. Rangeland vegetation was down due to the poor available moisture condition. Some cooperators had to bring livestock home early since the rangeland forage was depleted and drinking water supplies for livestock was limited. Aftermath grazing on hayland fields is short this fall, along with availability of fall pasture ground for grazing. Feeding of hay will likely need to commence earlier this year.

With the shortage of hay throughout the LCD, hay prices have soared, creating an economic



***Bear River water flows were so low existing water gaps were left high and dry.***

concern for many livestock producers. It will be critical that this next water year, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, has at least normal to above normal moisture conditions. It is very tough for agriculture producers to experience drought conditions two years in a row. One thing for certain, each year is different.

## LCD Organization and Business Activities

This past fiscal year, the LCD's conservation activities were overseen and directed by Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member, and Paul Clark, Member. The board is represented by three rural members, one member at-large, and one urban member. Board members are elected to office during the general election. Applications to run for office may be obtained from the LCD office at the Cokeville Town Hall, Room 1, or the Lincoln County Clerk's office. This year, four positions on the LCD board became available.



*LCD board members (left to right) Paula Bowling, Kenny Petersen, Robert Peternal, Brenda Lazcanotegui, Erick Esterholdt, and Paul Clark*

The LCD is a political subdivision of Wyoming State Government and has several state statutes governing its administrative responsibilities. Some statutes include subject matters relating to range management, range improvement and stabilization, conservation of soil and water resources, control and prevention of soil erosion, flood prevention, and the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water within the district.

LCD board members can officially adopt a comprehensive plan to coordinate with federal agencies to carry on range management or erosion control, flood prevention, and water developments as deemed necessary. Conservation districts have the ability to work with other local districts, county and state governments, plus federal agencies to implement sound natural resource conservation

measures on the ground. This grass roots approach can be an avenue for the local people to have involvement in land management decisions.

It takes a lot of effort for the LCD board members to keep abreast of all the natural resource activities going on in Southern Lincoln County. Board members spend many hours reviewing federal resource management plans and giving input to make them compatible for local land users. The LCD has been active in an organization called the Coalition of Local Government (CLG) which was formed by surrounding counties and conservation districts several years ago in southwest Wyoming to review and comment on federal land management decisions. The CLG has been very strong in helping federal land management agencies make land management decision that local land users can support.

Robert Peternal has been the LCD representative to the CLG and has spent numerous hours meeting with other concerned citizens on local natural resource matters. Robert even travelled to Las Vegas, Nevada, this past winter to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) annual meeting to be updated on conservation issues of national importance. He was re-elected again this past fall as Councilman for Area V of the WACD.

All LCD board members serve the LCD on a voluntary basis, being reimbursed only for travel and lodging expenses. Their service to fellow cooperators is very much appreciated.

### **Highlighted LCD Natural Resource Activities This Year**

#### **Instream Flows**

One of the more important conservation issues the LCD addressed this past year was the adjudication of some 17 instream flows permits in the upper drainage of several Bear River Watersheds in Southern Lincoln County. In stream flow statutes were enacted in Wyoming during 1986. Basically, the instream flow statutes allow the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWCD) to file on water to protect fisheries. The

Wyoming Game and Fish Department works closely with the WWCD to file water right permits and then adjudicate them through the Wyoming State Board of Control.

It came to the attention of LCD board members, via the Lincoln County Planning and Development Office, that 17 streams were going to receive final approval of adjudication. The LCD sent a letter to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in April 2003 requesting that the proposed instream flow applications in LCD not be approved and in the future, the LCD be contacted officially for input. Apparently, the state agencies involved did not feel our protests to be of importance and went ahead to adjudicated 14 of the instream flow permits this past August. The LCD sought legal counsel and still lost because the LCD was not deemed to have standing to contest the instream flow adjudications according to the Wyoming State Board of Control's interpretations of state water laws.



*A segment of Huff Creek was recently adjudicated for an instream flow water right.*

It is difficult to understand why their ruling was made since district statutes give the LCD authority to protect public lands, develop and conserve water and related natural resources. LCD board members felt rather than have a long drawn out battle over jurisdictional issues, a total review of the Wyoming Statutes concerning instream flow permitting and adjudication process be undertaken. The LCD is working with county and state legislative representatives to review the instream flow statutes and make them more user friendly so local governments may be granted standing to contest instream flow filings

at the beginning and throughout the permitting process as a matter of public interest within their boundaries. It is also imperative that instream flow permits should only be considered for adjudication if substantial improvement of the existing fishery can be documented. It is ludicrous to think it is appropriate to have an instream flow filing adjudicated just because it is a routine matter of limited importance. It wastes government time and resources and could jeopardize federal land permit users in the future. The LCD desires sound natural resource decisions that will benefit all involved, not just patronizing people to think something of major importance is being done.

### Rangeland Management

Another major undertaking the LCD has emphasized has been the management and improvement of district rangelands. Since the proper use of rangeland vegetation is important for the sustainability of the resource, the LCD has been helping ranchers monitor their rangeland after grazing use. The old verbiage of use half leave half if still important when considering the amount of forage that can be removed. Experience and knowledge of the species of rangeland plants are critical when evaluating plants for proper grazing use. The selection of key grazing sites for plant evaluation is also very important in order to get a true picture of the overall resource use. Emphasis needs to be placed on both the upland and riparian rangeland resource. Considering only one or the other with a bias, the evaluation process may have the rangeland resource underutilized which can adversely affect overall rangeland health over time.



*A BLM technician evaluates sedge stubble height and hoof impact on Little Muddy Creek.*

LCD board members and most rangeland users are very much aware of how important the rangeland grass resource is to their operations. Without their private rangeland and federal rangeland permits, ranchers would not be able to have an economic ranch operation. Grazing grasses are a lot more profitable than just feeding hay. Growing hay has become very expensive to irrigate and harvest. Needless to say, rangeland grass is the most important crop in the LCD hands down.

Rangelands throughout the LCD, for the most part, are in fair to good ecological condition. Rangelands are resilient and can improve over time. If good grazing plans are developed and proper monitoring occurs, over time the rangeland resource can be maintained and improved. This is the reason the LCD helped several ranchers monitor their private rangelands this past fall.

The LCD has also been involved in the monitoring activities of several federal U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) allotments involving many thousands of acres of ground. The main program the LCD uses to help ranchers monitor federal ground is the Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP). Professional rangeland consultants are obtained to do the rangeland monitoring and paid through the LCD. The RHAP has been very helpful to the federal permit holders to gain valuable data and information on their rangeland resources throughout the district. With the limited numbers of federal rangeland professionals hired, this is the only way federal rangeland may be evaluated properly considering the number of allotments.



*The LCD has abundant upland and riparian rangeland habitat for Sage Grouse.*

Some individuals feel the rangeland resources are at jeopardy in the LCD, but without the proper monitoring data it is impossible to know if the rangeland resources are in an upward or downward trend. LCD board members have noted that the local Sage grouse numbers in the district are quite high compared to other areas throughout the Western United States. Some people feel the area wide rangeland habitat condition is the result of the Sage grouse decline. Due to the numbers of Sage grouse in the LCD, it should indicate the local rangeland resource is fairly good. Perhaps West Nile Virus and predation are playing a bigger factor than rangeland habitat condition for the decline in area wide Sage grouse numbers. This is why the LCD is emphasizing the need for all rangeland grazing users to get involved in private and federal rangeland monitoring and management. It is the key to see if the LCD rangeland is properly being used with an upward trend. Education on how to monitor rangeland is the main focus for cooperators right now. Ignorance is not bliss when rangeland data is not available. It is becoming imperative that local ranchers know how to manage and monitor their rangeland or they will lose out in the end.

### **Water Quality Testing**

LCD board members are very interested in encouraging rural land owners to protect their drinking water from pollution or impairments. The best way to protect yourself is to periodically test your well or spring water for pollutants. The LCD has and will continue to assistance land owners test their potable water sources. The LCD will cost share for fecal coliform and e-coli testing. For other parameters the water users will need to test on their own if desired. The LCD acquired the services of a lab in Riverton, Wyoming, to test water for a group rate when done in the spring of the year. All paper work on sampling information forms and testing containers may be obtained from the LCD, Cokeville Town Hall, Room 1 or phone (307) 279-3256. LCD employees will be available to help you through the process. Considering the importance of water testing, the LCD will help throughout the year if an individual has an urgent need. It is better to be safe than sorry. Some pollutants can be lethal to an elderly person or damage a young child's health.

## **Seedling Tree and shrub Program**

The LCD will continue to have its seedling tree and shrub sales program this winter and spring. Order forms will be available on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Tree and shrub seedlings will be sold in lots of 25 for bare root and lots of 30 for potted seedlings. An excellent variety of species will be available; however, as spring approaches, many species will sell out quickly. Also this year, some small tray conifer seedlings will be available in lots of 50. Please contact the LCD office for additional information on species selection and planting techniques. Remember, the seedling stock is for conservation purposes where large quantities are needed. Do not expect large plants. If you want larger potted stock that is sold individually, you will need to contact a local nursery. It is not the intent of the LCD to compete with local nurseries.

## **Personnel changes Within the LCD**

As of June 1, 2012, DeMont B. Grandy, local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist (DC) retired after 37 years of accumulative service. DeMont was the DC for Lincoln and Teton Counties, servicing NRCS offices in Afton, Cokeville, and Jackson. He worked 31 plus years administering USDA NRCS programs in conjunction with the local conservation districts. This time length was very unique for a federal government employee. LCD board members were concerned with the loss of DeMont's conservation expertise and knowledge of the



*DeMont B. Grandy retires from the USDA NRCS effective June 1<sup>st</sup>.*

local ongoing programs. They approached DeMont about working for the district on a part time basis.

DeMont accepted their offer and now devotes part of his time to LCD conservation activities and programs for two or three days a week. He is really enjoying working with the technical aspects of conservation work now instead of the NRCS' personnel and administrative contracting issues.

The NRCS and LCD partnership will continue on as before, other than the DC job for the NRCS in Lincoln and Teton Counties has been moved to the Afton NRCS field office. This makes the NRCS location more central for the offices involved. Gary Blazejewski, from Massachusetts, was hired as the new DC to coordinate NRCS activities with the three districts and their programs. Gary may be reached at the Afton Agriculture Service Center, 625 Washington Street, Afton, Wyoming, at telephone number (307) 886-9001 ext. 109. Gary has two assistants, Maureen Meagher and Dayle Funka, NRCS Soil Conservationist, both stationed in Afton, who will assist him with his work load.



*Local NRCS staff (Left to right) Gary Blazejewski, D.C., Dayle Funka and Maureen Meagher, Soil Conservationist.*

Wade Payne, NRCS Civil Engineering Technician, for Southwest Wyoming, will continue to work out of the LCD field office. He may be reached at the LCD office telephone (307) 279-3256. Wade will deal mainly with the development of NRCS engineering structure type plans and their implementation. He will also continue his snow survey monitoring activities.

Brenda Lazcanotegui, LCD District Clerk, will continue administrative and financial operations. She will also continue assisting other land management agencies by selling USFS firewood, pole, and Christmas tree permits so Cokeville residents won't

have to travel to Kemmerer for these purchases.

## **NRCS Report**

The LCD will continue its partnership in promoting NRCS. It is an arrangement that has been in place for many decades. Yet, it is important to note that conservation districts are legal, political, subdivisions of State Government and thereby have the right, under state statutes to work with any conservation type land management agency or organization at the local level. Many state wide conservation districts have several full time employees and have substantial financial operation budgets to implement conservation programs due to conservation mill levees. The LCD is just starting to spread its wings with its limited budget.

### **Lincoln County NRCS 2012 Annual Report by Gary Blazewski, District Conservationist**

NRCS has had a very productive year in south Lincoln County during 2012, largely due to assistance provided by the Lincoln Conservation District. NRCS staff would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the LCD for their support to NRCS during 2012.

One of NRCS's greatest accomplishments in South Lincoln County during 2012 was the assistance provided to help implement prescribed grazing. Financial and technical assistance were applied to 5600 acres to assist with the implementation of grazing plans, while an additional 7470 acres received only technical assistance. To further assist ranchers with grazing, NRCS assisted with grazing, NRCS assisted with the installation of two livestock water facilities, 2050 ft. of pipeline, one pumping plant, and 8600 ft. of wildlife friendly cross fencing. They assisted one producer to rotate his supplement and feeding areas throughout approximately 1600 ac. of grazing land to promote water quality, and another producer to implement a herd management plan on 600 ac. to utilize BMPs to minimize Brucellosis risk.

Assisting producers to improve irrigation efficiency was another significant accomplishment. In order to improve irrigation efficiency, NRCS

assisted producers to implement irrigation water management on approximately 640 ac. We also provided assistance with the installation of two pivots, serving a total of 214 ac. In addition, NRCS provided assistance with installation of one irrigation pumping plant, two water control structures, 1250 feet of irrigation pipeline, and the installation of a 2178 sq. ft. high tunnel.

Through the NRCS Wetlands Reserve Conservation (WRP), a permanent wetland conservation easement was placed on 690 ac. in south Lincoln County. Construction has begun to restore wetland hydrology to the majority of this acreage. Once completed, the restoration will provide the opportunity for approximately 590 ac. to be managed for wetland wildlife.

The Afton NRCS office would like to express appreciation for DeMont Grandy, who retired after 37 years with NRCS. We would like to acknowledge the conservation accomplishments of DeMont over the years, particularly in south Lincoln County. We will always appreciate the relationship he has built between the producers and the NRCS. We are grateful for the assistance he continues to provide to both NRCS and the producers of Lincoln County through his work with the LCD.

## **LCD Summary**

Overall, the past year has been quite successful due to the support of numerous cooperators and state and federal agencies. We all have a stake in the wise use of our natural resources. It is a never ending responsibility that must be supported by us and future generations. It is the goal of the Lincoln Conservation District board members to continue with a sound conservation program throughout next year. Your support will be needed.

### **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

<b>Balance on Hand July 1, 2011</b>	<b>\$68,441.02</b>
<b>Receipts for FY 2011 - 2012</b>	<b>78,535.42</b>
<b>Expenditures for FY 2011-2012</b>	<b>56,175.71</b>
<b>Balance on Hand June 30, 2012</b>	<b>\$90,800.73</b>

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.