



LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2014 TO JUNE 30, 2015

One thing is certain, no two years are the same, especially concerning the weather, and implementing conservation practices. Since it is certain change will come, the wise land owner will have contingency plans and be flexible. Perhaps, the best tool to have for predicting weather on your farm or ranch is to have a precipitation gauge in your backyard. Knowing how much moisture falls on your farm or ranch is critical for knowing when to irrigate and when to graze, etc. A nationwide volunteer network called the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CocoRaHS) is a non-profit community-based group. Volunteers take daily measurements of rain, hail, and snow, then report it to the National Weather Service. Those participating in the CocoRaHS program gets a free rain gauge to set up in their back yard. Contact the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD) Field Office for more information if you would like to participate.

Another weather tool which has proven useful to agriculture producers and gardeners in the LCD is the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation's Agri-Met weather station recently installed south of Cokeville, Wyoming. This is a

total weather station giving daily air temperature, evapotranspiration, precipitation, radiation, humidity, and wind information in the Cokeville Bear River Valley drainage. Information may accessed at the website

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/agrinet/webaread.html>



A manual rain gauge is critical for proper rangeland management strategies.

The past year was unique since snow packs were down substantially coming into spring. It looked

like a drought was on the horizon; however, starting the end of April throughout the months of May and June, the rainfall was amazing. Record levels of moisture fell creating phenomenal vegetation growth on area wide rangelands and hayland fields. It was just what was needed to help out the winter drought situation. It cannot be expected that this will happen again. Currently, long range weather forecasts show the LCD to be in a strong El Nino pattern this coming winter. El Nino is a major warming of the equatorial waters in the Pacific Ocean. El Nino events are characterized by shifts in “normal” weather patterns. In the LCD, El Nino causes a shift in jet flows causing storms to split and go north or south of the district causing poor winter snow packs for the most part. Usually, the spring and early summer months have high precipitation amounts similar to last year. It is very important to have a drought contingency plan because no matter how good things are currently, a drought is likely on the horizon.

This Year’s Natural Resource Activities

Rangeland Management

This past year, the LCD has been sponsoring Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) activities throughout the district. RHAP activities within the Smiths Fork BLM Allotment consisted of completing Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) ratings for streams in the allotment, plus rangeland monitoring of riparian areas for livestock movement between pastures and end of season overall use. Over 500 willow cuttings were collected on March 18, 2015, and planted on May 13, 2015, in Mill and First Creeks. Willows were growing very well this fall. Willows are to be monitored throughout the allotment again next year to see if they are expanding and stabilizing streambanks. The biggest problem within willows is currently the use by beaver eating themselves out of a home. This next year the LCD will help the local Kemmerer BLM employees complete Standards and Guidelines (S&GS) for permit renewal purposes.

During past year the LCD helped the South LaBarge BLM Common Allotment permittees complete a rangeland monitoring plan for summer activities on upland and riparian areas.



Newly planted willow cutting this spring in the Smiths Fork BLM Allotment were very successful.

Rangeland monitoring was completed throughout the summer. The LCD sponsored the Miller Mountain rangeland cross fence to divide the allotment into an east and west pasture greatly facilitating proper grazing use. Cost share funding was obtained through the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund and Wyoming Game and Fish Department.



The Miller Mountain cross fence consists of buck and pole and 3-wire lay down fences.

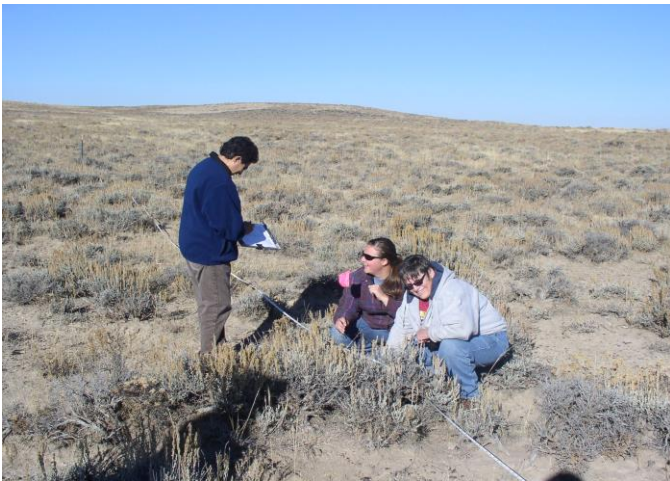
The LCD received approval for the Elk and Basin Creeks US Forest Service (USFS) Allotment’s RHAP applications. A rangeland monitoring plan was worked up last spring and rangeland monitoring was conducted last summer in both riparian and upland areas. Rangeland monitoring will be completed again next summer.

Just recently, the LCD submitted a RHAP application to the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) to start rangeland monitoring

activities within the Devil's Hole and Indian Creek USFS allotments. Pending approval, a rangeland monitoring plan will be worked up this winter with rangeland monitoring scheduled to begin this coming summer.

This past spring the LCD participated in the development of S&Gs for the Twin Creek BLM Allotment to address permit renewal needs, development of grazing management strategies and the construction of conservation practices.

S&Gs were completed this past summer for the Granger BLM Allotment for permit renewal purposes. The LCD helped completed end of season rangeland monitoring and establishment of Greater Sage Grouse rangeland monitoring transects within the allotment.



Kemmerer BLM employees set up Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) transects to monitor Greater Sage Grouse habitat in the Granger BLM Allotment.

The LCD is also working closely with the WDA implementing several Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) projects to install spring developments, livestock watering facilities with associated pipelines and livestock control fences. The LCD is also helping the BLM with a WLCI project by sponsoring some Low Stress Handling of Livestock Workshops next spring, along with the use of low moisture blocks to help distribute livestock within pastures in allotments.

Water Quality

The LCD helped the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality evaluate water quality

conditions in the Hams Fork and Smiths Fork Rivers. Sites monitored were the West Fork, East Fork, and Elk Creek Drainages into the Hams Fork River plus the main stem Hams Fork River below the Kemmerer City Reservoir. The North Fork and upper main stem of the Smiths Fork River were also monitored for water quality parameters. Full core monitoring was conducted at all sites consisting of numerous chemical evaluations, biological evaluations of chlorophyll a, macro invertebrates, periphyton, E-coli bacteria, and physical evaluations of bank stability and cover, channel type, Rosgen, cross-sections, ruffle and discharge etc. It was exhausting work, taking 12 hour days.



Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality employees take water quality samples in the Hams Fork River this past fall.

The LCD completed 12 bacteria coliform Presence/Absence tests and 12 Family Water Quality evaluations for several water parameters for 24 district cooperators' rural wells and springs. Most samples came back okay, some water sources had to be rehabilitated to meet standards.

Water Development and Conservation

With the Level I Small Watershed Study completed for the Hams Fork River Drainage that was sponsored by the LCD and funded by the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) ten applications were signed up by district cooperators to complete livestock water development and irrigation water projects. Four of the projects have been designed, with two being constructed already. Three other projects are in the process of being designed.



Large rubber tired watering troughs are being installed in the Albert Creek BLM Allotment to provide water for livestock and wildlife using WWDC funds.

The LCD sponsored a Level I Small Watershed Study for the Bear River Drainage within Lincoln County and was approved by the WWDC. Currently, the WWDC consultants are contacting cooperators in the district to evaluate potential water development projects and complete their study.

The LCD is continuing with their efforts to help the Cokeville Development Company complete a WWDC Level II Watershed Study for the reservoir on Sublette Creek southeast of Cokeville, Wyoming. Concerns were voiced about lowering water temperatures within the Smiths Fork River when filling the proposed Sublette Creek Reservoir. Temperature measurements were being taken this summer in the Smiths Fork River to evaluate the situation.



Temperature recording devices were installed in the Smiths Fork River to determine water temperatures during the summer and fall months.

The LCD has also been supporting the Cokeville Watershed Improvement District in their efforts to complete a WWDC Level III Study to rehabilitate the Cokeville Tri-diversion Structure northeast of Cokeville, Wyoming, for flood and irrigation water control purposes.

The LCD sponsored a “Waterwise Workshop” with the University of Wyoming Lincoln County Extension Service this past summer to promote efficient use of municipal water within the Town of Cokeville. Cokeville residents were given tips on how to water lawns and gardens without wasting water.

Wildlife Management

The LCD helped the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with their Partners for Wildlife Program this past year to complete some river dike and small water control structures on a couple of cooperators land to promote water fowl habitat.

Efforts were taken with USFWS employees and the LCD to obtain surveys and a design to restore river function and rehabilitate banks on the Smiths Fork River above Cokeville, Wyoming. This project may be constructed this fall, pending the acquisition of a contractor to complete the work.

The biggest wildlife issue the LCD this past year was the decision by the USFSW to propose a rule to list or not list the Greater Sage Grouse (GRSG) as an Endangered or Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As a member of the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG), the LCD’s representative, Robert Peternal, spent countless hours reviewing the BLM’s 9 Sage Grouse Land Use Plan Amendments, in addition to Governor Mead’s Wyoming Sage Grouse Executive Order, giving ideas and comments on how to best manage the GRSG numbers and habitat. On September 22, 2015, the USFWS made a decision that the GRSG is “Not Warranted” to be listed as an Endangered or Threatened Species. The listing of GRSG could have had a severe economic impact on Wyoming land uses. The CLG has been a great help in making sure federal and state GRSG policies and rules would be workable locally.

There are still concerns currently how the BLM's 9 Sage Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendments are going to be interpreted. The CLG has to come to a decision as to what their next steps will be. The GRSG not to be listed has compliance issues that have to be addressed at the federal and state levels. It will take several years to get everything sorted out, especially if law suits are filed due to the USFWS not listing the GRSG.



Greater Sage Grouse use agriculture lands as well as rangelands.

The LCD helped the Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) this past April (2015) with a workshop covering the USFWS's Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurance (CCAA) program to protect GRSG numbers and habitat, while investing in the future of rural land management. A consultant, LeAnne Correll, was hired by the WSGS to inform ranchers about the CCAA program advantages, especially if the GRSG were listed.

Other LCD Organization and Other Program Activities

Currently the LCD conservation activities are being directed by Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, Member; and Paul Clark, Member. All board members have been very active, attending monthly LCD board meetings, and working closely with state and federal agencies to maintain and implement needed natural resource conservation practices that work for local land managers and producers. Their oversight has been very valuable so local land owners

have input on natural resource decisions which affect us all.



LCD board members and employees (left to right) Paula Bowling, Kenny Petersen, Robert Peternal, Brenda Lazcanotegui, DeMont Grandy, and Erick Esterholdt. Paul Clark not in picture

This past year, the LCD board members have been developing a local Land and Natural Resource Use Plan and Policy Handbook. Having local policies and plans for the LCD helps give the district better standing in federal land management decisions under the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA). As a Cooperating Agency with local determined natural resource plans and policies, the LCD can stay more focused on grass root issues of concern when in the NEPA process. This handbook has taken many hours to develop.

In September, the LCD sponsored the Area V Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) meeting in Kemmerer, Wyoming. The seven conservation districts' board members in southwest Wyoming met for a day and received reports from state and federal agency employees on the conservation activities for the past fiscal year. Area V district board members reviewed agenda items for the upcoming WACD convention to be held in November.

The LCD participated in the Local Work Group meeting this past August. Input was given about NRCS conservation programs in the district. A natural resource concern priority list was worked up to present to the state NRCS technical committee. Comments were also given on how to make the NRCS programs more useable and efficient in the local area.

The LCD's seedling tree and shrub sales program went well last spring. A number of seedling trees and shrubs were sold for farmstead and field wind breaks. The program will be offered again this year starting December 1, 2015. Stop by the LCD Field Office, Cokeville, Wyoming or phone (307) 279 3256 to have an order form sent to you. Don't wait too long to get your order form filled out and sent to the office. Some plant species sell out quickly.

NRCS Report – by Gary Blazejewski, District Conservationist

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, making phone calls, or even writing letters to Congress, NRCS appreciates all that the LCD does to help projects more forward!

Over the past year, NRCS has shifted their deadlines a bit. For the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the headline has shifted from mid-December to mid-September. The purpose of this is to give NRCS employees time to see projects before the snow covers the ground, and also to provide additional time to discuss alternatives with farmers and ranchers. Folks interested in applying should be aware of this change. In addition, as many producers are aware, the NRCS services may be free, but they are not always as quick as we all would like. There are numerous items that NRCS needs to complete before we can give a project the green light. And so, if you have a project that you want to talk to NRCS about, consider calling us sooner rather than later.

A lot of folks have inquired about fences of the past year. When can NRCS assist with a fence? When can't NRCS assist? In a short summary, there are two instances when someone can apply for assistance to install a fence. The first instance is when the fence will split a pasture into two smaller pastures, thereby reducing the grazing period and increasing the regrowth period on each side of the fence. The second instance is when a fence is proposed to reduce livestock access to a river or

surface water body. Fences along property boundaries, or fences that separate grazing lands from non-grazing lands (cropland) are most often not eligible. But every situation is unique, so please do not hesitate to contact the Afton office and ask!



A cross fence that was installed on state land which split an allotment pasture in half. Located in south Lincoln County.

LCD Summary

We would like to thank all those who supported district programs this past year. Most of the LCD administrative funding comes from the Lincoln County Commissioners and the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, which is greatly appreciated. LCD board members and employees have worked hard to get grants from federal and state agencies to install conservation practices throughout the district. Grants received this past year have amounted to tens of thousands of dollars, with almost all of the dollars going for construction purposes to help cooperators. Without the administrative help of the county commissioners, the LCD could not obtain these grants.

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

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance on Hand July 1, 2014	\$ 32,910.87
Receipts for FY 2014 - 2015	201,611.46
Expenditures for FY 2014-2015	201,078.23
Balance on Hand June 30, 2015	\$ 33,444.10

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.