

## LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2019 TO JUNE 30, 2020

With the advent of the COVID-19 virus early this spring, the Lincoln Conservation District's (LCD) activities and business were hampered; however, the LCD had a productive year. The LCD was unable to complete willow plantings within the Smiths Fork Allotment, along with some business meetings etc. The LCD stepped up to new technology and had several teleconference calls and virtual meetings to transact business. The LCD office was closed to the public for several months due to COVID-19. Appointments were accepted over the telephone to meet with cooperators.

One of the more challenging aspects for district cooperators this past year was the LCD not being allowed to sell U.S. Forest Service (USFS) firewood and pole permits. Everything had to be transacted through USFS offices on an appointment basis only. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of panic for many people which required some safety measures to be taken in the office.

The past year's weather has been unique. Snowpacks were above average, throughout the district in the spring, for the most part.

It looked like another good agriculture year was on the horizon. As normal, "Mother Nature" was not predictable. This past spring and summer were very dry, except for some few scattered thunderstorms. Extreme care will need to be taken not to have some major range or forest fires due to dry conditions.



*Rangeland and hayland fields, for the most part, have dried up, making poor conditions for fall grazing.*

Agriculture producers were lucky that high elevation snowpacks helped support good early river flows, which created good alfalfa hay, grass hay and small grain crops. This fall, rivers and stream flows really dropped, causing local producers to go into regulation early and stop irrigation. Aftermath grazing on meadows and cropland fields are going to be short this year. Rangeland fields, for the most part are totally dried up. It could be a very hard upcoming year if moisture is not received this fall or winter. Recollections of the 1977 weather year are starting to be remembered, where no significant moisture was received until the spring of 1978. It would be devastating to agriculture producers to go through an extreme drought along with COVID-19. It is best to be prepared even if things hopefully brighten up in the future.

### **Leadership and Technical Staff for the LCD**

The LCD board members who directed LCD's activities and business this past fiscal year were Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; Robert Peternal, Secretary and Treasurer; Paula Bowling, member; and Paul Clark, member. This year, three positions will be on the general ballot for election to the LCD board on November 3, 2020. Two positions will be for rural representatives and one for member-at-large.



*LCD board members/employees (left to right) Kenny Petersen, Paul Clark, Bob Peternal, Brenda Lazcanotegui, DeMont Grandy, Erick Esterholdt, and Paula Bowling*

The LCD board members worked very hard this past year providing comments on PacifiCorp's 2019

Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) once again, representing agriculture interests throughout the LCD. Many written comments were given to the Wyoming Public Service Commission trying to help them understand the repercussion of going to "Green Energy" in the future. Green Energy has a terrible time in other parts of the nation having reliable energy that is cost effective in the end. Local producers need reliable, reasonable power costs for their sprinkler irrigation systems throughout the LCD. It would be catastrophic if power costs doubled. Many small agriculture operations would be driven out of business economically.

The proposed PacifiCorp's 2019 IRP would not only potentially affect agriculture producers in the LCD but have a high impact on local businesses and infrastructure throughout Lincoln County. The proposed 2019 IRP would shut down local power plants and coal mines which provide local tax money to run schools, hospitals, special districts, and county government throughout Lincoln County. It is very concerning to governmental leaders. Lincoln County's quality of life for residents would be greatly diminished



*Under PacifiCorp's proposed 2019 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), Kemmerer Naughton Units 1 and 2 were scheduled for retirement in 2025.*

The LCD board members, county commissioners and local town government officials spent many hours trying to represent local constituents in a fair and equitable manner. LCD board members are not financially compensated for their personal time, except for travel expenses. Most times it is a thankless job, but definitely needed. Remember to thank our local grass roots



government representatives when you interact with them.

Local technical support for the LCD was given by part-time employees, DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resource Specialist, and Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk. USDA federal technical assistance to the LCD was given by Wade R. Payne, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Civil Engineering Technician, in Cokeville, Adam Clark, NRCS District Conservationist, and Janessa Julson, Range Management Specialist in Afton, Wyoming.

### **Highlighted LCD Conservation Activities This Past Year**

#### **Large Irrigation/Flood Control Structure Repair**

Hands down, the biggest construction undertaking by the LCD and the Cokeville Watershed Improvement District (CWID) this past year has been the repair of the Cokeville Tri-diversion Structure on the Smiths Fork River northeast of Cokeville, Wyoming. The tri-diversion structure divides the Smiths Fork River water into three separate channels before the water finds its way to the Bear River. The main channel headgate is in good operating condition. The middle channel headgates are very deteriorated, requiring total replacement. The Spring Creek Channel headgates are also going to be replaced to allow for debris to pass through them allowing the trash rack to be removed. This is a major construction project requiring special building techniques.



*The CWID's Cokeville Tri-diversion Structure's repair is about completed. Waiting on headgates to be painted.*

After advertising for bids twice, a contractor was finally located in southern Utah, that was willing to come to Cokeville and complete the project. Work was scheduled to start the first of September and to be completed by the end of October. This is the perfect year to complete the construction of the project since river flows are very low. This repair has been needed for several years. A grant from the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) fund are helping finance the repair project, along with a long-term loan from the WWDC secured by the CWID.

### **Rangeland Improvement**

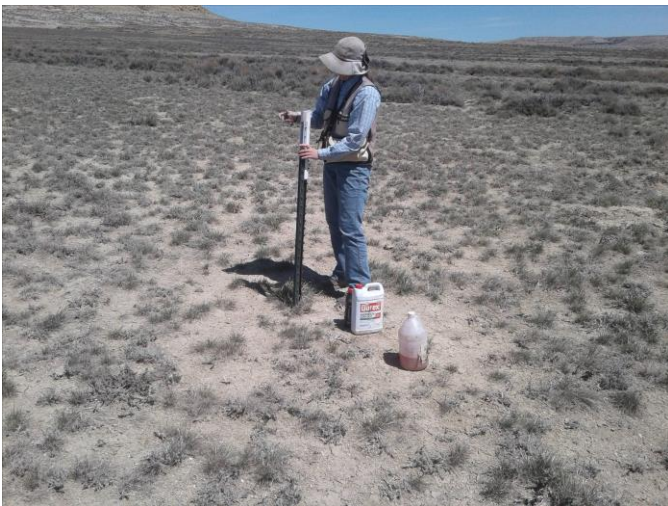
The Mill Creek off-channel livestock water project was a big success this past spring. With four rubber-tired livestock drinking troughs placed down the Mill Creek ridge, livestock was curtailed from overusing the Mill Creek and North Corral Creek riparian zones. It was so successful, another 4,800 feet of livestock water pipeline was installed south of the Mill Creek ridge and a fifth livestock watering trough was installed this fall to keep livestock off riparian zones within the Smithsfork BLM Allotment. Funding for the livestock pipeline and trough project was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through their "Partners for Wildlife Program". Livestock water is critical for rangeland rotation systems and livestock distribution so riparian areas are properly used.



*Another livestock watering trough was added to the Mill Creek Ridge livestock watering system.*

The LCD continued its efforts with several district cooperators to complete their Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) grants to establish rangeland monitoring transects on six different federal allotments throughout the district. Currently, one BLM RHAP grant will conclude this winter and the other USFS allotments conclude next year. It is likely the RHAP will be discontinued next year by Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) due to the state of Wyoming budget restrictions. It will be greatly missed.

One tool implemented by the RHAP was the use of allotment precipitation gauges. Precipitation is critical for vegetative growth on rangelands. Having several precipitation gauges placed throughout an allotment helps ranchers determine the amount of potential vegetation amounts in pastures and helps eliminate overgrazing. An allotment can have several different precipitation zones complicating livestock forage amounts available for grazing. Precipitation gauges are a good rangeland management tool to help manage livestock and create pastures.



*A precipitation gauge being re-calibrated and set to measure moisture events within the South LaBarge Common BLM Allotment.*

Probably the most important rangeland undertaking on USFS lands has been the approval of the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) grant for the development of a Tall Forb Classification System that will eventually be used to develop Tall Forb Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD) in high elevation forested lands. The main resource addressed by the WLCI grant will be to

gather good soils information for the Tall Forb Classification System and ESDs. Soil type determines where tall forbs grow and the forb species prevalent for each site.

Work continued this past summer gathering Tall Forb site information in the Pole Creek US Forest Allotment. Several old transects were re-read and photographed to compare with past transect information to verify current range conditions on Tall Forb sites and riparian zones.

The LCD board members have always supported noxious weed management throughout the district. This past year, a grant was obtained through the Southwest Sage Grouse Local Working Group to spray an outbreak of Musk Thistle on private and adjoining USFS land in the drainages of South Fork Fontenelle and Clear Creeks. Musk Thistle is really troublesome since it can spread rather quickly, making rangeland unsuitable for grazing. The district really encourages cooperators to address their weed infestations.

## Water Quality



*New culvert crossing installed on 1<sup>st</sup> Creek within the Smiths Fork BLM Allotment.*

The LCD worked closely with the USFWS to replace several worn out culverts on streams northeast of Cokeville. Placing new culverts on grade greatly facilitates fish migration and helps stop streams from degrading causing soil erosion and water quality issues.



The LCD, once again, sponsored a water quality monitoring day to gather domestic rural spring and well culinary water to test for fecal coliform and E. coli bacteria this past June. The program was successful with fifteen producers taking water samples for testing. It is very important to test your rural drinking water periodically for contaminants. Contaminated drinking water can cause serious health problems. The LCD, most likely, will not sponsor a water monitoring day this coming spring (2021) since funds will not be available from the WDA. State funding for conservation programs will be extremely tight next year.

### **Special projects**

The LCD continued its efforts to work with other state and federal land management agencies to get best management practices on the ground. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering one program to help promote Greater Sage-grouse numbers with the Forage Harvest Management conservation practice for hayland field with legumes present. This past year contracts were given to eligible producers for \$50.54/acre for three years if a 30 feet wide buffer, totally one-half acre for every 40 acres of hayland harvested was maintained, along with harvesting fields during daylight hours and mowing from the center, or one end of the field to the other. To be eligible for this conservation practice, hayfields must be within 5 miles of an active sage-grouse lek and within one-half mile of sagebrush. This is quite common in the Cokeville area. The field must also contain at least 30 percent legumes. This practice saves Sage-grouse from being killed by mowers when harvesting hay, which is a problem.

Currently, the Sage-grouse concerns are not over. The newly revised Wyoming Sage-grouse Executive Order–2019-3 has not been totally accepted by non-government organizations (NOGs). The proposed USFS and BLM changes to their 2015 land management plans have been challenged. It is hard to tell when the proposed 2019 Sage-grouse plans will be ratified. Efforts to manage sage grouse needs to be emphasized so the USFWS does not list it under the Endangered Species Act.

Another program the LCD is helping the USFWS through their Partners for Wildlife Program and the WGFD, Southwest Mule Deer Initiative, is the replacement of old worn out boundary and cross fences, especially woven wire fences, with deer friendly barbed and smooth wire fences. Deer numbers have been going down through the LCD. Decreasing deer mortality numbers due to poor fence design would greatly help the population. The NRCS also has a deer friendly boundary and cross fence cost shared practice that can be combined with the USFWS's and WGFD's programs that could provide adequate funds to totally replace most fences without a lot of cooperators financial commitment.



*Poorly maintained and constructed fences, along with hard winter conditions, create high mortality rates for Mule Deer.*

It has been the hope of the LCD board members to be an influence on national natural resources issues. For this reason, the LCD has maintained close working relationships with the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) this past year. Robert Peternal has attended monthly meetings with the CLG to help with their efforts to have equitable decisions made by state and federal land management agencies decisions in Lincoln County.

In order to help with the many federal land management planning use issues, the LCD has been cooperating with Lincoln County to get their Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) updated. Lincoln County's NRMP serves as a basis for communicating with the federal government and its agencies on land and natural resource

management issues. The LCD supports the inclusion of quantitative data in land use planning, plus data that is credible and the use of best available science when making vegetation management decisions. The LCD's cooperation was very valuable when developing Lincoln County's NRMP. It is a big part of LCD activities keeping track of the many state and federal land management plans being enacted in the district.

## **Conclusion**

Even though it has been a difficult year, the LCD board members would like to thank all the cooperators and state and federal cooperating agencies helping implement district programs and objectives. A special "Thanks" goes out to the Lincoln County Commissioners and the WDA that have provided financial assistance for the district operations. COVID-19 may have set back conservation activities in the district this past year, but it definitely did not stop the good work that is proceeding throughout this pandemic. Have a great year and stay safe.

## **NRCS Report**

The LCD would like to introduce you to Adam Clark who took over the vacated NRCS District Conservationist position in Afton that provides assistance to our area. Adam grew up in Byron, Wyoming, working on the family farm. His wife, Ranae, is from Lovell, Wyoming. They have three boys; Al, Jaxen and Tre. Adam graduated from the University of Wyoming and worked a few summers for the USFS, BLM, and WGFD. He started working for the NRCS in Torrington, Wyoming, as a technician. He then took a job as a Soil Conservationist in Buffalo, Wyoming. Adam talked his wife into a fun adventure, and they moved to Fairbanks, Alaska, to work for a few years in the NRCS office there. He was able to get some work done between fishing and hunting trips. At the end of this adventure, he moved back to Wyoming, where he took a position in the Rock Springs NRCS office as a soil conservationist. He accepted the job as a District Conservationist in Afton and has been working here since March 2020.



*Adam Clark harvested a large Caribou during this time in Alaska.*

Adam is excited to be in this beautiful place and looks forward to meeting more people in the area. He enjoys fishing, hiking, sports, and hunting. Growing up in Wyoming and being involved in agriculture has provided him with a good background for working with the NRCS. The multiple offices and states have taught him about different problems and challenges people face with irrigation, rangeland management, wildlife and other concerns. Please reach out to him if you have any questions or projects where you think he could be of assistance.

**For more information about the Lincoln Conservation District activities, please check out the district's web site at:**  
[www.lincolnconservationdistrict.org](http://www.lincolnconservationdistrict.org)

## **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

Balance on Hand July 1, 2019	\$	54,316.57
Receipts for FY 2019-2020		135,862.21
Expenditures for FY 2019 – 2020		134,080.50
Balance on Hand June 30, 2020	\$	56,098.28

**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.**