



Annual Report

2022-2023



Crook County Natural Resource District

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The 2022-2023 Crook County Natural Resource District (CCNRD) Annual Report provides the reader a basic understanding of CCNRD's efforts during the timeframe of July 1st, 2022, through June 30th, 2023. This report provides information regarding the CCNRD Board of Supervisors, summarizes CCNRD's activities and includes information regarding the operations, budget, and programs.

A letter from the District Chair:

Greetings:

The Crook County Natural Resource District (CCNRD) Board of Supervisors requests you take the time to read the following Annual Report for 2022-2023. The Board and staff continue to provide the residents of Crook County with the information and education needed to make informed decisions on natural resource management.

CCNRD was able to maximize the \$60,000 investment from Crook County to expend \$358,188 in grant funding for water quality, forest health management, soil health and wildlife habitat improvement projects in the County. Because the CCNRD is a primarily grant funded agency, the contribution from Crook County is vital in keeping our doors open and allowing the CCNRD staff to pursue these additional funding sources.

The CCNRD utilizes Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and Wyoming Department of Agriculture funds for grant administration, water monitoring, information, and education activities, as well as cost assistance for range and water improvement projects. We continue to monitor the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek to check progress concerning water quality improvements. The CCNRD Board and staff give thanks to those individuals and landowners who allow us to do this. Our Water Quality Program is led by Program Coordinator Carmen Horne-McIntyre and Conservation Resource Coordinator Jessica Halverson.

The CCNRD Forest Health Improvement Program focuses on non-commercial thinning to increase forest health and sustainability, deter disease and infestation, and reduce hazardous fuels by implementing projects to decrease the risk of catastrophic wildfires in Crook County. This program has expanded to include habitat improvements that will benefit both the wildlife and the forested landscape. Our Forest Health Improvement Program is led by Program Coordinator Sarah Anderson.

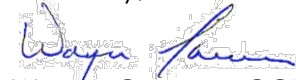
Our Office Manager, Bridget Helms, along with Board Supervisor Lily Altaffer once again put together two successful electronic recycling events in Hulett and Sundance—netting about 7,344 lbs. of material. In total we have diverted over 61,000 lbs. of electronic waste from our landfills.

The soil health program has grown each year in our County. With assistance from the Plank Stewardship Initiative, cost share assistance was available for planting cover crops. Fifteen projects were completed for a total of 1245.6 acres planted in Crook County this year.

In spring 2023 we sold conservation grade trees which arrived in May. It was once again well received by the residents of Crook County, with 80 residents purchasing 735 trees and shrubs. Thirty-four compost bins were also pre-sold this year as staff explores other conservation options for our county residents.

I invite everyone to stop by the office and visit with our staff. They can provide information on projects and questions you may have regarding Crook County's natural resources. Please contact staff or a Board Supervisor with comments and suggestions regarding our activities.

Sincerely,



Wayne Garman, CCNRD Chairman

District Information, Mission & Vision

The Crook County Natural Resource District's mission is to provide coordinated leadership in resource conservation to educate, assist, and meet the needs of Crook County resource users.

The Crook County Natural Resource District's vision is to establish an awareness of natural resource concerns and provide landowners in Crook County with the appropriate education, technical skills, funding, and support to improve and conserve our natural resources for the present and the future.

District Information

Conservation District Law

State Statutes 11-16-103 entitled Legislative Declarations and Policy states the following:

(a) It is hereby declared that the farm and grazing lands of Wyoming are among the basic assets of the state; that improper land use practices cause and contribute to serious erosion of these lands by wind and water; that among the consequences which would result from such conditions are the deterioration of soil and its fertility and the silting and sedimentation of stream channels, reservoirs, dams and ditches; that to conserve soil, and soil and water resources, and prevent and control soil erosion, it is necessary that land use practices contributing to soil erosion be discouraged and that appropriate soil conserving land use practices be adopted.

(b) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of the soil, and soil and water resources of this state, and for the control and prevention of soil erosion and for flood prevention or the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water, and thereby to stabilize ranching and farming operations, to preserve natural resources, protect the tax base, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this state.

Conservation District History

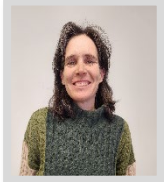
In 1941, the Wyoming State Legislature recognized the need for a local governmental entity that would assist landowners and resource users with conservation practices and provide leadership in natural resource management issues and efforts. As a result, legislation was enacted which enabled the formation of local Conservation Districts and the election of Conservation District Supervisors. The Wyoming legislation authorizing the establishment of Conservation Districts was signed by Governor Smith on March 5, 1941.

CCNRD Board of Supervisors



Chairman, Wayne Garman (Rural)

Term of Office: 2020-2024



Vice Chairman, Lily Altaffer (At-Large)

Term of Office: 2020-2024



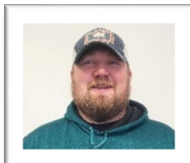
Treasurer, Wanda Burget (Rural)

Term of Office: 2022-2026



Secretary, Kim Fundaun (Rural)

Term of Office: 2022-2026



Member, Casey Devish (Urban)

Term of Office: 2020-2024

CCNRD Staff

Bridget Helms- *Office Manager*

Sarah Anderson- *Program Coordinator*

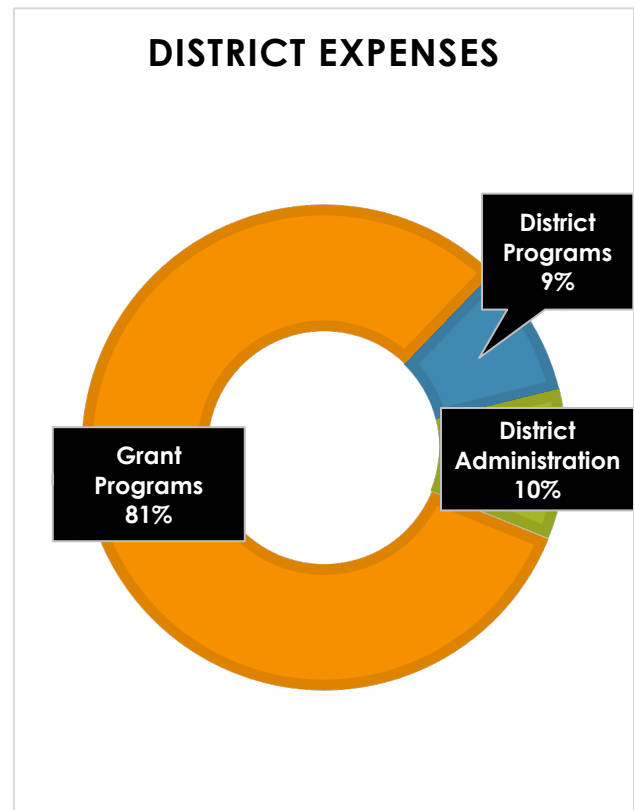
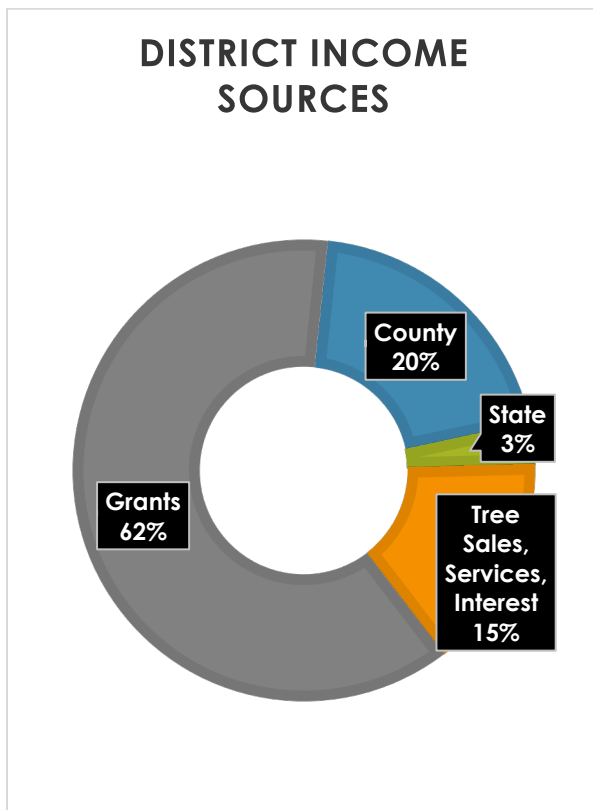
Carmen Horne-McIntyre- *Program Coordinator*

Jessica Halverson- *Conservation Resource Coordinator*

Financial Outlook

Conservation districts in Wyoming are funded through a variety of sources such as mill levies, and state, federal and private grants. The CCNRD is not funded through a County mill levy; therefore, the CCNRD does not have secure funding for District operations and programs. This lack of local funding also impacts the ability of the CCNRD to match state and federal grants. The CCNRD is primarily funded by grant awards received through competitive grant writing processes. Grant funding is utilized to initiate specific programs; therefore, it is restricted funding that can only be used to conduct grant specified programs within a designated timeframe. The only guaranteed funding the CCNRD receives is from the County Commissioners, which is requested annually. Financial support from the County Commissioners pays one part-time employee to maintain the District office approximately 25 hours a week and covers expenses associated with maintaining and operating a Conservation District. All other employee positions are solely grant funded.

The CCNRD continues to face financial challenges because of grant allocation protocol. State of Wyoming agencies now allocate grant funding after the grant recipient incurs expenditures and provides proof of payment to the State agency. With limited secured funding this is a challenge, and the CCNRD is working diligently to identify solutions to our financial situation.



Fiscal Year 2023 Income and Expenses

Cash & Grant Reserves June 30, 2022		\$338,736.39
Revenue		
County & State Funding	\$ 68,823.50	
Services, Sales, Interest	\$ 45,153.99	
Total District Income	\$113,977.49	
Water Quality Grants	\$ 27,393.16	
NACD Grant	\$ 60,871.25	
Soil Health & Small Acreage Grants	\$ 31,670.00	
Forest Health Grants	<u>\$ 66,500.29</u>	
Total Grant Income	\$186,434.70	
Total Income		\$300,412.19
Expenses		
District Administration	\$ 44,127.02	
District Operations	<u>\$ 39,484.51</u>	
Total District Expenses	\$83,611.53	
Grant Expenses		
Water Quality Grants	\$ 57,033.91	
NACD TA Grant	\$ 101,372.28	
Soil Health/Small Acreage Grants	\$ 38,285.45	
Forest Health Grants	<u>\$ 161,496.50</u>	
Total Grant Expenses	\$358,188.14	
Total Expenses		\$441,799.67
Cash & Grant Reserves June 30, 2023		\$203,213.58

Program Areas and Goals

The CCNRD offers a variety of programs that allow the county residents to participate in conservation practices. The CCNRD also plays a key role in local, state, and federal land management planning processes, as well as participating in legislative and administrative initiatives to ensure that the resources have an advocate. The CCNRD's programs, goals, and accomplishments are encompassed within this annual report.

1. **Water Quality:** To conserve and improve the quality and quantity of water in Crook County for multiple use.
2. **Forest Health:** To conserve and improve the health of both public and private forests in Crook County.
3. **Wildlife:** To provide the education and the resources needed to promote wildlife habitat and population management in Crook County.
4. **Cropland & Range Management:** To enrich landowners' knowledge, skills, and aspirations to improve natural resources for the future of agriculture, wildlife habitat, public health, and overall sustainability.
5. **Outreach:** To establish an awareness in Crook County regarding what the CCNRD can do for the people and the land.
6. **Information:** To initiate and coordinate educational and informational programs that promote conservation practices of Crook County's natural resources.
7. **Waste Management:** To increase local awareness of waste management issues and to encourage the development of sustainable local waste management systems.
8. **Legislation:** To inform Crook County residents of current legislative activities and issues at the national, state, and local levels and provide action when necessary.

Water Quality Monitoring

Goals: To conserve and improve the quality and quantity of water in Crook County for multiple use.

Accomplishments: CCNRD certified staff conducted water quality monitoring at six sites during the primary contact recreation (PCR) season (May 1 to September 30) to assess the water quality impairments in the Belle Fourche River Watershed. Site locations sampled include one on Donkey Creek and five on the Belle Fourche River.

CCNRD water quality personnel collected data describing stream flow and weather conditions, and monitored for basic water quality parameters of temperature, pH, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, flow, total dissolved solids (TDS) and turbidity. Pollutants of concern that were monitored included ammonia, chloride, and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). Sampling was conducted in accordance with the WDEQ's Standard Operating Procedures and the District's WDEQ-approved Sampling Analysis Plan, which was also updated this year. Revisions include the incorporation of additional monitoring sites on tributaries to Donkey Creek to identify potential sources of total coliform and *E. coli* bacteria. Other sites are being added in Summer 2023 as permissions are granted to evaluate nutrient pollutants entering Keyhole Reservoir.

Like 2021, *E. coli* bacteria concentrations observed in 2022 were generally lower than previous years, with occasional spikes resulting from undetermined sources. The 2019, 2020, and 2022 sampling seasons were wetter compared to 2021. Five of the seven sampling events in 2022 occurred within 24-72 hours after rain events. Sampling sites above the confluence of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek showed an overall decreasing trend in bacteria concentrations from June to October, whereas concentrations at the sampling site on Donkey Creek near the county line and a sampling site several hundred meters below the confluence fluctuated across the monitoring period. The site downstream and nearest to the confluence had higher bacteria concentrations than Donkey Creek for much of June to October. Tributaries to Donkey Creek for which sampling permissions were obtained did not contain sufficient flow during the sampling period to collect grab samples.

Ammonia monitoring did not indicate any exceedances of the pH-dependent acute criterion values for 2022. There were also no observed exceedances of the aquatic life acute chloride criterion (860 mg/L) or chronic chloride criterion (230 mg/L) on the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek in 2022. Chloride concentrations were lower in 2022 compared to 2021, particularly for Donkey Creek, where the chronic chloride criterion was exceeded throughout the season. It is noted however, that the chloride criterion does not formally apply to Donkey Creek; rather, it used here for comparison to the concentrations observed on the Belle Fourche River.

Water Quality Improvement Projects

Goals: To conserve and improve the quality and quantity of water in Crook County for multiple use.

Accomplishments: Cost assistance provided by the CCNRD was funded by a competitive grant application process through the WDEQ Water Quality Division-Nonpoint Source Program and Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) Water Quality Grants. The CCNRD conducts education and outreach, water quality monitoring, and a cost-assistance program as recommended in the Belle Fourche River Watershed Implementation Plan to address water quality impairments in the Belle Fourche River Watershed. The Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek are impaired for ammonia, chloride, and the bacteria *E. coli*.

Cost-assistance funding for range and water improvement projects has been concentrated in the Belle Fourche River watershed given the impairments in segments of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek. In 2022, 5,266 feet of cross fencing, 4,948 feet of pipeline and two livestock water tanks were installed. The CCNRD utilized the guidance of its Board of Supervisors to prioritize the implementation of water quality improvement projects. Over the course of the year, the CCNRD worked with landowners interested in improving off-stream water sources, grazing distribution, and practices that allow for more intensive, rotational grazing patterns. The CCNRD is partnered with the Campbell County Conservation District (CCCD), on a WDEQ grant that was awarded in fall 2021. The award, which is managed by the CCNRD, funds collaborative efforts in the Belle Fourche River Watershed from 2021 through 2024.

Forest Health & Wildlife Habitat Improvement

Goals: To conserve and improve the health of both public and private forests in Crook County.

Accomplishments: Between July 1st of 2022 and June 30th of 2023, the CCNRD successfully wrote five forest health and wildlife improvement grant applications and were awarded funds from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Muley Fanatics Foundation. CCNRD staff also utilized hazardous fuels reduction funds from the Wyoming State Forestry Division and U.S. Forest Service. During the timeframe of this report, contracts were awarded to six landowners and 295.5 acres of forest health and wildlife improvement projects were completed. Additionally, nine hazardous fuels reduction projects were contracted, and 71.5 acres of projects were completed to reduce catastrophic wildfires along the Pine Ridge Road area in Crook County.

The Forest Health Improvement and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program has greatly expanded over the last decade from an aggressive mountain pine beetle program to non-commercial thinning, to protecting Crook County structures and properties from catastrophic wildfires. CCNRD also have been working with Wyoming Game and Fish

to improve wildlife habitats and enhance meadows. CCNRD board and staff work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Sundance Field Office, Wyoming State Forestry Division 1, the USFS Bearlodge Ranger District, Wyoming Game and Fish, local timber industries, Crook County Commissioners, and numerous landowners and local stakeholders, to help keep northeastern Wyoming's forests sustainable for future timber harvests, reduce the risk of insect and disease infestation, retain vital wildlife habitats, and decrease the peril of catastrophic wildfires—which is indispensably important to Crook County and has become part of the CCNRD's fundamental conservation objectives.

Additional forest health and wildlife habitat improvement projects and hazardous fuels reduction projects will continue through the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Cropland & Rangeland Management

Goals: To provide landowners with further education and support that may enrich their knowledge, skills, and aspirations to improve natural resources for the future of agriculture, wildlife habitat, public health, and overall sustainability.

Accomplishments:

Cover Crops: CCNRD reached out to Crook County landowners to improve cropland and rangeland management by hosting workshops and offering technical and cost assistance. With funding from the Plank Stewardship Initiative, the CCNRD was able to provide thirteen landowners with cost share assistance on 985.3 acres of cover crops. The CCNRD Board is enthusiastic about their support of soil health concepts and other regenerative agricultural practices taking hold in Crook County.

Water Development/ Grazing Management Cost Assistance: The CCNRD secures funds to work with landowners to reduce sediment, *E. coli*, and other pollutant loading to streams by providing cost assistance to install off-stream and upland livestock and wildlife watering systems. These systems provide alternative watering sources during spring, summer, and fall grazing seasons and winter-feeding periods, thus decreasing livestock and wildlife defecation and waste deposition in and/or near the river and tributaries within priority areas of the watershed. These improvements oftentimes also benefit producers seeking to improve grazing distribution and rotation, thus additionally improving forage conditions.

In addition to watering systems, the CCNRD works with landowners to implement other grazing management BMPs including cover crops, fencing, and windbreaks. In 2022 5,266 feet of cross fencing, 4,948 feet of pipeline and two livestock water tanks were installed.

Information and Outreach

Goals: To initiate and coordinate educational and informational programs that promote conservation practices of Crook County's natural resources. To establish an awareness in Crook County regarding what the CCNRD can do for the people and the land.

Accomplishments:

Classroom Education & Participation at Annual County Fairs

Natural resource-based outreach activities have resumed for elementary students in the classroom and at local youth camps. The annual County Fair booth provides educational opportunities for youth and program information to adults.

Local Working Group Meeting

The CCNRD attended the Local Working Group meeting in Gillette for the Division 5 NRCS Field Offices. The meeting was held to assess local natural resource concerns and to evaluate the effectiveness of NRCS' programs. Natural resource agencies and local producers and stakeholders from Weston, Crook and Campbell County attended the meeting to voice concerns and to help identify natural resource issues and appropriate program delivery.

Tree Sale

The CCNRD sold conservation grade trees in May 2023 for the second time since 2011. County residents were able to purchase potted trees, shrubs and berries through the District. 735 trees were sold to 80 county residents.

Website & Social Media

The CCNRD utilizes a website and a Facebook page to share district updates, program information and education.

Waste Management

Goals: To increase local awareness of waste management issues and to encourage the development of sustainable local waste management systems. Host electronics recycling events in Crook County.

Accomplishments: In August 2022, the CCNRD held two electronic recycling events in Hulett and Sundance. These events prevent unwanted electronics from entering the landfill in Crook County or from being shipped to other countries. These events have become very popular with the residents of Crook County. The CCNRD takes great pride in providing this service with the financial assistance of the Crook County Commissioners, City of Sundance, and Town of Hulett; in 2022 sponsorships from Sundance State Bank, Powder River Energy, ONEOK, Neiman Enterprises, and Pinnacle Bank were received to help offset the rising costs in recycling and allow the CCNRD to offer the first 100 pounds of waste free to residents. A total of 7,344 pounds of electronic waste was collected in 2022, for a total of over 62,000 pounds over 7 years.

At the event, items are weighed, categorized, and loaded onto a flatbed trailer with the help of Protech Computing and local volunteers. Protech handles the hauling of the materials to Metech Recycling in Denver, Colorado. The electronics are dismantled and repurposed and the hazardous waste is safely disposed. Metech was chosen because they maintain E-2 certifications and utilize processes to ensure that sensitive information is secure and cannot be retrieved.

In 2023 the CCNRD was able to offer home compost bins for sale by pre-order. Thirty-four bins were sold.

Legislative and Local Interests

Goals: To inform Crook County residents of current legislative activities and issues at the national, state, and local levels and provide action when necessary.

Accomplishments:

The CCNRD meets with the Crook County Commissioners monthly to provide District updates. We attended the Area 1 meeting in Newcastle, and the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts convention in Casper. CCNRD also attends any local meetings of interest to our project areas and local concerns.

The CCNRD participates in providing comments and amending resolutions in support of Crook County's natural resources and district topics taken on collectively by the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts.

Legislation:

CCNRD reviewed resolutions that were drafted by conservation districts in Wyoming. The resolutions were presented at the annual Wyoming Association of Conservation District's (WACD) Convention. If they were approved at the annual convention, then they will proceed to state legislation by the WACD lobbyist.

Local Concerns:

Keyhole Reservoir Harmful Cyanobacteria Blooms- The CCNRD IS working with Keyhole State Park, WDEQ, and other partners to determine the primary sources of nutrients entering Keyhole Reservoir. Excessive nutrient loading to the Reservoir leads to cyanobacteria blooms; in some instances, these blooms produce toxins that are harmful to humans, livestock, wildlife, and pets. The CCNRD is expanding water monitoring to test nutrient levels in tributaries around Keyhole Reservoir as landowner permissions are granted. In 2022 the CCNRD utilized grant funding to provide harmful cyanobacterial toxin advisory signage to be posted when toxin advisories are issued.

USFS Forest Plan Revision- The CCNRD is a cooperating agency with the U.S. Forest Service Black Hills National Forest. Sarah Anderson represents the State, County, Locally Elected or Appointed Offices in Wyoming on the National Forest Advisory Board. CCNRD Board and staff regularly meet with partnering agencies to provide advice and recommendations on a broad range of natural resource concerns in preparation for USFS Forest Plan revisions.

Board of Supervisors Approval

We, the Supervisors of the Crook County Natural Resource District, as duly authorized by the Wyoming Conservation District Law, hereby approve the 2022-2023 Annual Report, as a reflection of Crook County Natural Resource District's accomplishments.


Chairman, Wayne Garman

12/5/23
Date

Vice Chairman, Lily Altaffer

Date

Treasurer, Wanda Burget

Date


Secretary, Kim Fundaun

12/5/23
Date


Member, Casey Devish

12/5/23
Date