

Crook County Natural Resource District

CCNRD

Annual Plan

of

Work

2023-2024

Table of Contents

District Information	3
Board of Supervisors	5
CCNRD Staff.....	6
Annual Budget 2023-2024.....	7
Program Goals.....	8
Water Quality Monitoring.....	9
Forest Health & Wildlife Improvement	11
Cropland & Range Management.....	12
Outreach/Information.....	13
Waste Management.....	14
Outdoor Recreation	14
Legislation	15
Board of Supervisors Approval.....	16



Crook County Natural Resource District

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District Information

Conservation District Law

Wyoming Conservation Districts 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.



Mission & Vision

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

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.*

CCNRD's 2023-2024 Annual Plan of Work provides the reader with an understanding of the Crook County Natural Resource District's goals and objectives for the 2023-2024 fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

This report summarizes the CCNRD's focus areas and funding availability. The Annual Plan of Work serves as a road map for the upcoming year to help the Board of Supervisors and staff reach our goals and objectives. The CCNRD strives to meet the overall objectives outlined in the CCNRD's five-year, long-range plan, as well as the County's Natural Resource Management Plan.

Board of Supervisors

Board Supervisors are publicly elected officials that represent their constituents and help guide the management of natural resources within Crook County.



Wayne Garman, Chairman

Rural Representative

Term: 2020-2024

Lily Altaffer, Vice Chairwoman

At-Large Representative

Term: 2020-2024

Wanda Burget, Treasurer

Rural Representative

Term: 2022-2026

Kim Fundaun, Secretary

Rural Representative

Term: 2022-2026

Casey Devish, Member

Urban Representative

Term: 2020-2024

CCNRD Staff

CCNRD Staff include three part-time employees and a full-time employee who work together to administer and implement conservation-based programs.

Bridget Helms, Office Manager

Sarah Anderson, Program Coordinator

Carmen Horne-McIntyre, Program Coordinator

Jessica Halverson, Conservation Resource Coordinator



NRCS Staff

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is our sister agency. The NRCS provides the technical assistance needed to fulfill water and range improvement and forestry management programs, including mapping, planning assistance, engineering, and completing as-builts for projects.

Keela Deaton, District Conservationist

Jason Nehl, Natural Resource Specialist

Sherry Burr, Soil Conservation Technician

Jessica Van Woerkom, Program Support Assistant

Annual Budget 2023-2024

Cash on Hand	\$ 169,738.40
Grant Reserves & Savings	\$ 33,475.18
Total Cash & Grant Reserves June 30, 2023	\$203,213.58

Income

County & State Funding	\$ 78,824
Subdivision Reviews & Misc. Sales	\$ 5,030
E-Cycling	\$ 5,000
Tree Sale	\$ 40,000
Sponsorships & Reimbursements	\$ 3,000

Total District: Income \$131,854 Expenses \$145,396

Expenses

District Administration	\$ 64,946
District Operations	\$ 80,450

Water Quality Grants	\$ 286,031	\$ 276,693
Soil Health Grants	\$ 41,000	\$ 51,144
NACD Grants	\$ 257,133	\$ 250,490
Forest Health Grants	\$ 1,436,734	\$1,361,233

Total Grants: Income \$1,374,479 Expenses \$1,461,265

Total Income \$2,152,752

Total Expenses \$2,084,956

**Grant expenses exceed grant income due to funds received at time of grant award. These funds are held in Reserves.*

Program Goals

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

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

Wildlife: To provide the education and the resources needed to promote wildlife habitat and population management in Crook County.

Cropland and 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.

Outreach: To establish an awareness in Crook County regarding what the CCNRD can do for the people and the land.

Information: To initiate and coordinate educational and informational programs that promote conservation practices of Crook County's natural resources.

Waste Management: To increase local awareness of waste management issues and to encourage the development of sustainable local waste management systems.

Outdoor Recreation: To improve the outdoor recreation experience to increase users and help connect people to the resource.

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

Monitoring in Action



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

The CCNRD works to improve water quality in Crook County by focusing on impaired stretches of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek. Segments of these water bodies are considered impaired due to their documented exceedances of fecal coliform, *E. coli*, ammonia, and chloride. Due to the potential health risk from contact with pathogens present in these waters, funding has been made available by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and Wyoming Department of Agriculture to address the impairments. The CCNRD has been awarded competitive grant funding from both agencies to reduce contaminant loading into targeted waterways, provide community outreach and education, and to monitor water quality improvements. For 2023-2024, the CCNRD will collect basic chemical and physical parameters and continue monitoring fecal coliform, *E. coli*, ammonia, and chloride concentrations.

The CCNRD plans to expand project-level monitoring to better demonstrate the effectiveness of practices implemented. The goal is to demonstrate the effectiveness of best management practices in reducing bacteria concentrations by collecting data before and after project installation.

The CCNRD is in the beginning stages of conducting nutrient monitoring to determine what areas of the Belle Fourche River watershed are contributing to harmful algal blooms at Keyhole Reservoir. Current waters sampled for nutrients include Donkey Creek, the Belle Fourche River, Wind Creek, and Mule Creek. District staff will coordinate with WDEQ and the Campbell County Conservation District to collect data, identify primary nutrient and bacteria sources, and develop a strategy for reducing the incidence of these blooms. The District purchased equipment needed to process samples in our lab, enabling the CCNRD to collect additional water quality data and offer other sampling services to the community.

Water Quality Projects



Water Quality Improvements

The CCNRD's Water Quality Improvement Program utilizes funds to partner with landowners and producers on water development and enhancement practices. These projects are designed to address landowner/producer's resource concerns, particularly as relates to improving alternative watering sources, grazing practices, and rangeland and riparian conditions. Improved water access and upland grazing conditions also reduce *E. coli* loading to nearby tributaries of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek.

In 2022-2023, the CCNRD and its partners completed two upland water development projects. In 2023-2024, the CCNRD anticipates beginning or completing approximately three additional projects. Following completion of the projects, the CCNRD will conduct best management practice evaluations with the landowners to better analyze how the project meets the intent of the project. In addition to projects implemented, District staff secured funds to conduct a pilot project to measure water savings and other operation-related metrics associated with the installation of shade balls in watering tanks.

In 2022-2023 the CCNRD managed two water quality grants from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and two grants from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA). In 2022-2023, the number of grants will be reduced to two; the District plans to respond to agency requests for proposals in Spring 2023 and Summer 2024 for additional funds to address pollutant sources that contribute to impaired segments of the Belle Fourche River.

Forest Health & Wildlife Improvement

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

Wildlife: To encourage responsible wildlife management that support native wildlife populations



The CCNRD's Forest Health and Wildlife Improvement Program promotes non-commercial thinning projects to retain viable forests that will deter disease and infestation; enhances wildlife habitats by treating conifer encroachment and selectively thinning woodland areas to reduce raptor predation in core sage-grouse areas; promotes quality forage for mule deer and improves elk habitat. The Wyoming Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust, Muley Fanatics Foundation, WY Game & Fish Commission, WY Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, are partnering with the CCNRD to help improve wildlife habitat in the County.

The Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program provides financial and technical assistance for projects that reduce hazardous fuels by creating defensible spaces around structures, opens the canopy layer by removing dense trees, and creates fuel breaks in targeted locations. The threat of wildfire is escalating as a result of increased housing and subdivision developments as new residents come to Crook County in unprecedented numbers. Crook County's Ponderosa Pine ecosystem can be a tinderbox if not properly maintained or managed. High duff and dense forests are common throughout the County—coupled with fire prone species such as Rocky Mountain Juniper and steep terrain, conditions become ideal for catastrophic wildfires. The CCNRD is currently working with the USFS Bearlodge Ranger District and Wyoming State Forestry Division to help reduce hazardous fuels in a targeted area along Miller Creek and Lytle Creek. CCNRD staff are working with the Crook County Commissioners and partnering agencies to identify wildfire risks and mitigation efforts for the County.

Cropland & Rangeland



Cropland & Range Management

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

Approximately 78% of the land in Crook County is privately owned; therefore, the CCNRD believes it is important to make private lands a priority. The CCNRD has hosted several soil health and grazing management workshops and will continue providing educational opportunities that assist landowners with the integration of soil health and other regenerative agricultural practices. Ranching and farming are the heart of Crook County and fundamental to resource conservation in Wyoming.

In addition to providing educational events, the CCRND and NRCS partner to secure funds to assist producers interested in integrating cover crops into their practices. The CCNRD assists landowners in implementing sustainable and regenerative practices so that cropland and rangelands can be improved. Healthy cropland and rangeland are essential for sustaining wildlife and bird populations and supporting water quality and air quality. The CCNRD is excited that landowners are interested in implementing a conservation practice that improves a multitude of resources.

The CCNRD continues to partner with the Plank Stewardship Initiative for funding to provide cost share assistance for cover crop plantings. Additional funds were secured for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. Since July 1, 2022, nine landowners have signed contracts to plant 739 acres of cover crops. Since 2018, the CCNRD has assisted in planting 3,799 acres of cover crops. The CCNRD will continue working with the NRCS, Plank Stewardship, and other partners to increase the utilization of cover crops and promote soil health in Crook County.

Outreach/Information



Outreach/Information

Outreach: To establish an awareness in Crook County regarding what the CCNRD can do for the people and the land.

Information: To initiate and coordinate educational and informational programs that promote conservation practices of Crook County's natural resources.

The CCNRD will continue to be engaged in the community to increase awareness of who the conservation district is and what the CCNRD does for natural resources. In 2023-2024 the CCNRD is expanding program objectives to have more of an impact on the ground in both urban and rural settings. This will be done through funding to work with University of Wyoming Extension staff and other partners to develop urban agriculture outreach programs for the citizens of Crook County. In addition to compost bins being offered, rain barrels are being explored for 2024.

Outreach: The CCNRD strives to engage stakeholders by attending public meetings and participating in local events. The CCNRD is committed to providing outreach to more isolated areas of Crook County throughout 2023-2024 for the purpose of disseminating program information and conveying educational opportunities. Additionally, a conservation easement workshop will be held in November 2023. A grazing management workshop is being planned for spring/summer 2024.

Information: The CCNRD utilizes a website and social media to share information, as well as a booth at the Crook County Fair and displays at the Crook County Courthouse. The CCNRD provides monthly updates to the Crook County Commissioners on District activities.

Tree Sale: The CCNRD offered a conservation grade tree sale in Spring 2023. A wide variety of potted trees, shrubs, and berries were offered to the residents of Crook County. The sale will continue to be offered in 2024.

Waste Management



Waste Management

Waste Management: *To increase local awareness of waste management issues and to encourage the development of sustainable local waste management systems.*

Electronic Recycling: The CCNRD is excited about the demand that has been established to recycle unwanted electronics. Residents want to dispose of their electronics in a responsible way to protect their personal identifiable information as well as reduce contamination possibilities to local soil and water. The CCNRD desires to continue to service the residents of the County by offering an avenue to properly recycle the unwanted waste. In 2024, the CCNRD plans to host at least two electronic recycling events.

The CCNRD is currently exploring other areas to add to current recycling events, such as appliances, steel, light bulbs, batteries, automobile fluids and items containing freon. Funding is the biggest barrier for providing more services in this area. Compost bins were offered in 2023. We continue to seek sponsorships and grant opportunities to provide these services at an affordable rate to the residents of Crook County.

Outdoor Recreation



Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor Recreation: *The CCNRD partners with federal, state, and private entities to implement projects that restore or protect habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species, while promoting the sustainable use of open spaces for recreationalists to enjoy outdoor experiences.*

Crook County is well known for its outdoor recreation opportunities. The CCNRD will continue to work closely with federal, state, county, and local entities to participate in planning and implementation stages of projects concerning the outdoor recreation and sustainable use of public open spaces.



Legislation

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

CCNRD communicates monthly with federal, state or locally appointed or elected officials to inform Crook County residents of current legislative activities and issues and provide action when necessary. The CCNRD continues to stay informed of national, state, and local issues and participates as a cooperating agency when needed. The CCNRD continues to provide comments during public comment periods on issues that may concern natural resources in Crook County.

Black Hills National Forest Plan Revision

Forest Plans set the overall management direction and guidance at a forest-wide scale throughout the Black Hills and Bear Lodge Mountains of Wyoming. The Forest Plan guides the direction of specific projects or activities on the ground. The CCNRD is a Cooperating Agency Status with the USFS Black Hills National Forest to assist in guidance for the implementation of management activities across the 1.2 million-acre of USFS lands in western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming. CCNRD staff serve on the National Forest Advisory Board to represent Wyoming's federal, state, and locally elected or appointed offices and are tasked with assisting with the Forest Plan Revision.

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 2023-2024 Annual Plan of Work, as a guidance document for the CCNRD Board of Supervisors & Staff.

Wayne Garman 12/5/23
Chairman, Wayne Garman Date

Vice Chairwoman, Lily Altaffer Date

Treasurer, Wanda Burget Date

Kim Fundaun 12/5/23
Secretary, Kim Fundaun Date

Casey Devish 12/5/23
Member, Casey Devish Date