

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
April 15th, 2020, at 7:30 AM via Teleconference**

Attendees:

Scott Jones, CACD President - Colorado River Watershed Director
Tyler Neely, CACD Vice President - Rio Grande River Watershed
Gary Thrash, Director - San Juan Basin Watershed /CO Representative to NACD
Jim Cecil, Director - Republican River Watershed Director
George Fosha, Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed Director
Nick Charchalis, Director - North Platte/White/Yampa River Watershed
Steve McEndree, Director – Lower Arkansas River Watershed
Nancy Berges, Director – Lower South Platte Watershed
Bob Warner, CO Alternate Representative to NACD
Brett Moore, CACD Lobbyist
Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director

Absent:

Mike Cleary, Director - Gunnison/Dolores River Watershed Director
Charlie Carnahan, Director - Upper South Platte Watershed

Guests:

Les Owen, CDA
Clint Evans, NRCS
Cindy Lair, CSCB
Mark Cronquist, Envirothon Program Manager
Greg Peterson, CAWA

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by **President Scott Jones** at 7:30 AM after establishing a quorum. **President Scott Jones** asked for any additional agenda items. Without any additional agenda items, the board agreed to move on with the agenda.

Prior Meeting Minutes:

President Scott Jones asked for a motion to approve the March 2020 minutes. **Director Steve McEndree** made the motion to approve the minutes and **Director Gary Thrash** gave the second. Without any further discussion, the motion to approve the CACD BOD's March 2020 minutes passed unanimously.

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

Brett Moore reported several new developments with the 2020 Legislative session. The Legislature typically runs from Jan 10 to May 10 for 120 consecutive days. They adjourned on Saturday March 14 due to the corona virus. As allowed by the Supreme Court, the remaining 53 days will be scheduled with 15 extra days (only business days counted to date). The leadership met and they are shooting for May 12 for a refreshed budget forecast. The long budget (annual) is based on this new budget. House and Senate will come back fulltime on May 18 and we should see a week or two session where the budget will be passed along with the School Finance Act and a legislative budget for funding the legislature. These three items must be passed before July 1 when the new fiscal year starts. He expects to see a short session in May. He also noted that these dates are contingent upon the health issues with Covid-19. CACD's top priority will be to keep the direct funding as well as supporting other programs that affect the Districts.

There are 350 bills that have not been acted upon and will mostly likely be addressed later in the year. It is anticipated that the budget will be drastically cut as Colorado depends on tourism and business travel. The recent downturn in oil and gas will be a factor as well. They will want to run bills that help with the corona virus and people that have been negatively impacted by this shutdown.

Brett added that the CACD Policy Committee has been meeting and they have put together a process moving forward to: 1) Do a better job of tracking Resolutions passed at the previous annual meeting, and 2) Review and clean up the policy book, which represents what CACD does for the Districts. Members of the committee have volunteered to take sections of the book and make suggestions to update. Resolutions for these changes will be sent to the Districts so they are aware of these changes. This clean up should provide more clarity.

CDA Update-Les Owen:

Les Owen reported that CDA is able to keep most functions going within the set compliance guidelines. Things like grocery store inspections have been suspended until further notice. The Conservation Division is planning to move on with noxious weed spraying, weed free forage and biocontrol releases. These activities are usually performed in the field by one person.

Concern has been expressed about whether this virus will have an impact on livestock being turned out on federal grazing permits. Les stated that will not be any impact. Both BLM and the Forest Service can meet in the field and stay within social distancing guidelines. Requirements for sheepherders and the H2A program might have an impact on sheep grazing if herders are not allowed to work.

The BLM is proposing a new categorical exclusion for pinyon and juniper control. This is geared towards mule deer and sage grouse habitat. CDA submitted a letter of support. This will allow BLM to get larger brush control projects going.

Director George Fosha asked Les if there was an update on WOTUS. Les stated that it has not hit the Federal Register yet. There is speculation that WOTUS is a huge deal for the current administration and it will create an enormous amount of lawsuits and press and it will mostly likely be delayed until after the election.

CSCB Update-Cindy Lair:

Cindy Lair reported that they interviewed candidates for Mark Cronquist's former position. She thanked CACD Director Jim Cecil for representing CACD on the hiring committee. Noah McCord was hired for the position and will start the 20th of April. The plan was to have Noah shadow Mark Cronquist during the Envirothon, however the State, National and International Envirothon contests have been canceled. Instead Noah will be orientated virtually due to the virus. Noah has a strong youth education background along with volunteer and youth camp management. He has also worked with Conservation Districts in Washington State.

Since the virus started, CSCB has been having daily conservation district calls. Nikki Brinson has been moderating most of these calls. It has allowed Districts to ask questions about operations and how to stay in good standing with the State of CO filing requirements. Due to the slowdown in participation, the meetings are now being held weekly on Tuesdays at 2:00.

Cindy informed CACD that there is a District Manager virtual (Zoom) training scheduled for May 20 from 9:00 to 3:00. Teaching material will be sent to each participating District Manager as some do not have enough bandwidth for a Zoom meeting.

Cindy went on to say that the Soil Health Program funds request is not likely to be revisited by the Joint Budget Committee. She has been working closely with the Colorado Collaborative for Healthy Soils and trying to help from the CDA perspective. They are having listening sessions though out the state and they are implementing subcommittees that will focus on different aspects of building a soil health program. She is pleased that there has been consistent participation from Conservation Districts. She has submitted a grant proposal to the Colorado Water Conservation Board for a soil health grant program that CDA and CSCB could

offer to Conservation Districts. They will be smaller grants that might help with purchase of equipment, demonstration pasture plots, training workshops, etc. She feels good about the grant but has not been notified by CWCB that the grant has been approved. Guidance will be emailed out should the funding be approved. If approved, the funds will most likely be available January 2021.

CSCB has been receiving a lot of feedback from Districts about tree sales and how they can serve their landowner's orders. A partnership phone call was held with CSCB, Districts and NRCS to address questions and options. They have put together a flyer that spells out different ways Districts could hold tree sales so they can be socially distancing and taking care of themselves as well as the landowners. The biggest problem is that the State Forest Service does not have a good plan on how they are going to get the trees delivered to the Districts. CSCB has tried to get answers for the Districts. It is currently not resolved.

When Cindy was at the NACD meeting she learned about a program put on by the Illinois Association of Conservation Districts called STAR. It stands for **Saving Tomorrows Ag Resources**. It is a self-assessment tool used for water quality improvement. Cindy feels that Colorado needs to follow this program to develop a soil health program. She has been working with Illinois and their staff. IACD is happy to enter MOUs to help others use this tool and modify to fit their needs. It would save Colorado a lot of time developing a soil health program. Cindy would like to see if it is possible to have the Illinois staff present their STAR program at the CACD Annual meeting.

Cindy said that attending the NACD meeting is the largest boost in her enthusiasm to work with the conservation district partnerships and conservation in general. **Directors Gary Thrash and Bob Warner** attend the meeting every year and bring back good reports. She encourages anyone that is able to attend the annual NACD meeting do so.

Ten years ago, CACD signed on as a signatory in support of Regulation 85. It involves water quality, nutrient pollution, in both point sources and non-point sources. In agriculture we mostly work on the non-point source such as on land, parking lots, etc. that wash into rivers as nutrient pollution. They have been working with an ag nutrient task force for years, looking at all the things that have been done in agriculture to support best management practices to reduce non-point source nutrient pollution. Great strides have been made over the last ten years. This has been done through the task force, NRCS and CSU. She would like to know if CACD wants to get engaged in their October hearing that will be with the Water Control Commission. CSCB is working on a video to present at the October hearing about what Ag has done in its effort with BMP for water quality and nutrient pollution.

Cindy reported that CSCB has submitted a \$100,000 request for a temporary increase in direct assistance that would go to the Districts to help with the covid impact. The funds, if received, would go to Districts in good standing.

Director Gary Thrash added that NACD is lobbying Congress for the next stimulus bill, which is being discussed right now, to try to get funding for conservation districts because as local governments they do not qualify for funding through current legislation.

Next CSCB Board meeting is scheduled for June 1 & 2 in Montrose. The decision to have the meeting in person or virtual has not been made yet. It will depend on the Covid-19 cases in Montrose and Gunnison counties as well as at the State level. There is a State Conservation Zoom account that they can share with CACD for planning meetings. It is an easy platform and it is great for holding public meetings.

NACD is planning a Colorado Wildfire Summit June 22 thru June 24 that is for conservation districts and state forest service emergency managers in Colorado; to help them understand the value Conservation Districts can bring to managing wildfire operation, how to manage fires after the fact and how we implement EWP. It is possible the summit will be canceled.

Cindy reported that Alyssa Clarida submitted her resignation but has withdrawn the resignation and will be staying in Colorado working for CSCB.

NACD Updates – Gary Thrash & Bob Warner:

Director Gary Thrash reported that the Washington Spring Fly-In was canceled and went to a virtual fly-in format. He thanked Brett for arranging phone calls with the Colorado Congressional delegation. Gary had phone conversations with the offices of Congressmen Perlmutter and Lamborn and spoke with Congressman Tipton. Gary sent NACD position papers to those offices and with the help of Bobbi and Brett, letters and position papers were also sent to the rest of the Colorado Congressional delegation.

Conservation Stewardship week is April 25 through May 3rd. Due to the virus there will be no face-to-face events. NACD is suggesting that families that are looking for things for kids to do, parents can go online and download the information on “**WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT POLLINATORS**” published on the NACD website. There is a lot of free information on the site for K thru 8th grade. Bobbi stated that she would put the information together and send out to the Districts, along with promoting on FB and the CACD website. Gary also suggested that Districts checkout the NACD Market Place as they have specials on items like Cabela’s caps with the Conservation logo on them as well as various Carhart items.

Gary went on to say that NACD sent a position paper asking Congress to consider funding for Conservation Districts in the next stimulus bill. They ask that Conservation Districts contact their local representatives and push for these funds. Bobbi stated that she has been on every town hall meeting that she is aware of and expressed concern for the Colorado Districts and the issues they are having. Her concerns were addressed by Sen. Bennet who said he would make it a priority to push that forward and they know they must come back and clean up issues from the first stimulus bill. He is going to push flexibility and categorization for where the Districts fall and get an amendment to that. He also mentioned that the Districts might be able to receive funds under FEMA. He has already sent a letter to the Treasury and felt that it was an important point for Conservation Districts, and he received a good response to the letter.

NACD meetings are still planned for Bismarck, ND July 15-18, and Maui, HI Sept. 15- 17.

Envirothon Update-Mark Cronquist:

Mark Cronquist reported that he sent an email to CACD with an overview of his time to date, with identified deliverables in the contract. The Envirothon has been canceled and the email is also a discussion of where it goes from here. During the course of his work as Program Coordinator, he has expended 219 hours split between the planning committee outreach and communications, securing an event venue, becoming familiar with the previous Envirothon events, website information and updates, reporting to the Board at the Annual meeting, time looking at awards and suppliers and security and safety at the venue. Also included in the email is an estimation of hours to be expended by Mark until the July conclusion of the contract. He will spend time orienting the new Field Specialist on Envirothon. They may want to start planning for next year’s event and possibly look at other locations to hold Envirothon in 2021. Due to personal commitments he will step away at the end of this contract, but he would assist with locating a new venue and answer any questions that the new coordinator might have. He stated he would be willing to attend the 2021 Envirothon as a consultant as well.

Mark was asked what he anticipated his hours would be when he signed the contract. Mark stated that he anticipated he would be looking at about 200 hours, but he underestimated the time required. Locating a venue took more time than anticipated. Mark added that the theme for 2021 is **Climate Change and Natural Resource Dependent Communities**. Mark hopes that National will look at Agriculture as part of that theme.

Bobbi Ketels expressed CACD’s gratitude for all the work Mark did on the Envirothon. She also thanked Cindy and her staff for their support. She also thanked Mark for his letter sent to Districts and sponsors that donated and sponsored Envirothon before it was canceled. The letter asked if the sponsors want their funds

returned or rolled to next year's event. She hopes to know the answers by the May meeting so the Board can vote to designate those funds to 2021 sponsorships.

Director Tyler Neely stated that in light of the work completed, hours spent and the fact that Mark has offered to put in additional time until the end of the contract, he feels that CACD should honor the full contract price of \$3,000.00. **Director George Fosha** moves to pay Mark Cronquest the full contract price of \$3,000. **Director Jim Cecil** seconds the motion. **Motion passed.** Bob Warner thanked Mark and offered to pay Mark's expenses if he would attend and assist with the 2021 Enviroton.

NRCS Update-Clint Evans:

Clint Evans thanked **Director Nick Charchalis** for reaching out to Kendall at the Craig NRCS office asking about updating fencing specs relating to the CACD Resolution on woven wire and criteria related to wildlife. Clint apologized that it was placed on the back burner over the holidays and then as 2018 Farm Bill was rolled out, NRCS moved down a different track. Clint is working with Gene Backhaus and Rachel Muphr, State Range Con, to get an amendment to the specs with guidance. He has asked them to work with CPW and look to see what criteria they have out so as not to create something that would conflict with CPW.

He noted that NRCS is trying to keep offices operational and programs implemented during the virus. An email went out to all the partners to let them know that NRCS is open and operational even though the offices are closed to the public. They are working with clients through phone, email, and through their conservation client gateway portals. NRCS is looking to see if there is a need to review program deadlines due to the issues with producers not being able to come in and sign all the eligibility paperwork and for those that do not have the capability to complete the paperwork on line.

Clint continued stating there is not a lot of information on the Federal Cares Act where they authorized around \$14 - \$15B to Ag programs through the economic relief package. The only thing they are aware of at this time is that there will be a slight emphasis on the Watershed Operations Program (PL-566). They hope this will stimulate production of jobs to help get money moving in the economy. Projects could include pressurized piping, flood control structures, irrigation conversions, regulating reservoirs and rehabilitation on older watershed structures. Local sponsors will need to reach out and submit applications for these funds. NRCS will reach out to CACD and let them know of other program funds that might be available as they become aware of them.

Clint informed the Directors that he will be going to TX to serve as the Acting State Conservationist starting May 10 and has committed to stay until the position is filled, which could take 4 – 6 months. Starting May 10, for 30 days, Gene Backhaus, SRC, will be serve as the Acting Colorado State Conservationist. Leadership will be looking for someone to come in and serve for 120 days. As soon as that person is known, he will let CACD know. Depending on the status of the corona virus in Colorado, they may rotate other Colorado leadership staff in the position.

Director George Fosha asked if there will be additional information, such as a brochure, produced for the PL-566 program. Clint replied that they had not addressed the possibility. There is a sign-up period that ends this Friday (4-17) but as soon as they know more, he will have their Public Affairs Specialist get something out via email. The initial sign-up is for funds already authorized (\$450M) but they do not know what the increase might be.

Director Nick Charchalis asked Clint to explain what the PL-566 program is about and who can apply for the funds. Clint explained that the Watershed Operation and Flood Prevention Program can be municipal water supply but there must be a flood control component. It can be an irrigation reservoir used for storage, or it can also be a reservoir that supplies both municipal and irrigation water. It covers several options.

Director Gary Thrash asked if the Conservation Planning Boot Camp has been canceled. Clint confirmed that most employee development in-person training has been canceled or at least postponed through the month of May. He will let everyone know when Boot Camp is rescheduled.

CAWA Update- Greg Peterson:

Greg Peterson of CAWA reported that he spoke with several ditch companies that wanted to know about Reg. 85. Most groups are not familiar with Reg. 85. Voluntary action may prevent regulation. We do not know what the regulations will look like. There have been immense positive improvements but there is no data to say this. Data is starting to be collected through EQIP funding. The first WQCC hearing is Oct. 13. Bill Hammerich with the Colorado Livestock Association is orchestrating the industry response. If CACD is interested in providing input, Bill would be the one to contact. There is a need for a larger effort to organize water quality relating to agriculture. Reg. 85 has a 2022 deadline but will most likely come up again in 5 – 10 years. Greg noted that once he can travel again, he will be available to speak at District Board meetings, watershed meetings and ditch company meetings. **President Scott Jones** told Greg that Bobbi would send an email to their contact list with Greg's contact information. Scott thanked Greg for attending.

Financial Update-Bobbi Ketels:

CACD FINANCIALS: 03-31-2020

Beginning Balance in checking on March 2, 2020, \$95,617.06

Checks/Payments Cleared -\$9,701.38, Deposits Cleared \$31,800.00

(Total Cleared Transactions \$22,098.62)

Ending/Cleared Balance in Checking as of March 31st, \$117,715.68

Total Uncleared Transactions= -\$3,576.03 Checks/Payments - Deposits \$0

Ending Register Balance as of March 31st, \$114,139.65

Reserve remains at \$26,075.15 (remaining payback due to reserve total \$15K)

NOI as of 03/31/2020 \$88,064.50 (\$10,174.39 designated for Envirothon)

Credit Card Ending Statement Balance as of 04/06/2020 \$178.45

Total District Dues Paid as of 03/31/2020 \$34,550.00 (membership invoiced (75) \$90,000.00)

UARRP Activity 3-31-20 YTD:

Total pass-through income \$4,585.09

Total pass-through expenses -\$4,585.09

Total CACD Income Earned YTD 3-31-20 \$222.60 (Includes 5% Admin & Payroll Reimb)

Balance of Federal Funds Available \$146,212.00

NRCS Programs:

Education Outreach Workshops:

03/31/2020: \$5000.00 paid out to CACD Education Workshop Reimb Programs

*NRCS Reimbursement invoiced for \$5000 + \$500.00 Admin Fee

Bobbi reported that she submitted a loan application through the PPE program as a non-profit. It was submitted through US Bank and the loan should be 100% forgivable if approved. They will contact her if the loan is approved.

Director Steve McEndree made a motion to approve the February financials. **Director Tyler Neely** gave the second. **Motion passes.**

CACD Programs: No Report

Fundraising: No Report

Camp Rocky-Bobbi Ketels:

Bobbi spoke with Amy and they will not be spending any additional funds on the Camp. They are in a holding pattern.

Annual Meeting:

Bobbi informed the Board they have not started any committee meetings until the state opens back up. Once that happens, the first meeting will be scheduled.

President Misc. Discussion and Updates-Scott Jones:

President Scott Jones reminded the Board that **Bobbi** sent out an email about computer hacking and asked the Board members to change their passwords. Scott and **Bobbi** will look at using a more secure email server and report at the next meeting.

President Scott Jones confirmed the next CACD BOD call will be **May 13, 7:30 AM**. There will be a Legislative Policy meeting the week before the Board meeting. Meeting adjourned at 9:39 AM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels
CACD Executive Director