

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
March 11th, 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
Charlie Carnahan, Director - Upper South Platte Watershed
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

Guests:

Les Owen, CDA
Clint Evans, NRCS
Randy Randall, NRCS
Mark Cronquist, Envirothon Program Manager

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by **President Scott Jones** at 7:33 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 February 2020 minutes. **Director Gary Thrash** made the motion to approve the minutes and **VP Tyler Neely** gave the second. Without any further discussion, the motion to approve the CACD BOD's February 2020 minutes was **passed** unanimously.

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

Prior to Brett joining the meeting, **President Scott Jones** thanked **Director Jim Cecil** for testifying on HB 1115 hearing. He feels everyone did a great job.

Brett reported that the Legislative session is half-way over and things are moving. He reported that the fencing sales tax exemption Bill (HB 1115) is in front of the Senate Finance Committee and is in limbo as the sponsors work with the Democrat majority. The Bill, as introduced, will not be favorable to the committee as they want means testing or a cap.

It has been difficult to obtain a number for fencing built in the State each year and how much that exemption would be. It has been pushed back to see if a compromise can be reached. The ACRE3 bill submitted by CDA might be of concern to CACD because, as he understands it, it cuts into the proportional funding in severance tax dollars. We will need to review where we are with that bill.

Brett also noted SB 189 regarding local pesticide preemption regarding chemical application. The policy committee will want to review this bill. Conservation Districts that perform noxious weed control will be interested in this bill. It could be a potential issue with local governments setting their own regulations.

*Additionally, Brett is working with the Congressional delegation to set up meetings with **VP Tyler Neely and Director Gary Thrash** when they attend the Fly-In later this month. **President Scott Jones** thanked Brett for all his hard work and recognizes that it has been challenging. Scott will schedule a Legislation Committee meeting soon.*

CDA Update-Les Owen:

Les reported that the deadline for NEPA was yesterday (3-10). He stated that the State's comments were signed by the Governor and the AG. Over-all it seems they are against the proposed changes to the CEQ regs for implementing NEPA. He will send the information to Bobbi so she can send it out.

*The scoping comments revising the grazing regulations comment period just passed. CDA did submit comments and this is the start of the process so there will be additional opportunities to get involved. With scoping done, BLM will review comments and produce a proposed action. There will be a full EIS performed. BLM has hard dates to move livestock on and off BLM leases and if they can take that out of the permit and place it in a non-public document and have management cooperation with the permit holders and the agency, that would add flexibility for movement. **Director Charlie Carnahan** suggested the Les check with NACD and what their comments say.*

We are still waiting on the WOTUS rules to be published. It has not happened yet but is due anytime. Lawsuits will be submitted to get injunctions on the final rule. George asked that Les provide the publication, when it's published, to Bobbi for distribution.

CDA is meeting with the CWCB about their rewrite of the Colorado Water Plan. The only ag water matrix in the existing plan are 50,000 feet of water under an ATM to provide for use other than agriculture. CWCB wants additional matrix in the plan to show how ag is doing. The Water Plan must have a healthy Ag industry as one of the goals. There will be opportunities to offer comments and input on different things that might be good in the Plan. This is an opportunity to educate people about agriculture. Gross diversion for ag water does not include the return flows or the support for eco systems.

The bill reinstating funds for the Acre3 energy grants was introduced but doesn't have a committee hearing yet. There are also a handful of pesticide bills floating around as well.

CSCB Update: No Update

NACD Updates – Gary Thrash & Bob Warner:

***Director Gary Thrash** reported that the Washington Spring Fly-In is next Wednesday. **VP Tyler Neely and Director Gary Thrash** will be attending. **Becky Ross** from NRCS will also be there. NACD has some talking point pages on their website. Brett is working on arranging meetings for them with the State Legislators. He noted that **Congressman Scott Tipton** usually tries to have a face-to-face meeting with them.*

Gary also noted that April 26 to May 3rd is NACD National Stewardship Week. The Theme this year is **Pollinators** and will also be the poster theme for 2020. There is a lot of educational information on their website. He suggested that a link to the NACD website be listed on the CACD website. There is a conservation education hub on the NACD web page as well.

Through NACD, CACD can sponsor an employee to attend the **NRCS Boot Camp** in Lincoln, Nebraska. Currently Mia Corey from the Fremont CD has been approved to attend from May 2 to May 20.

Meetings coming up for NACD include a summer meeting in Bismarck, North Dakota July 18 to July 21 and a fall Southwest Regional meeting in Maui, HI, Sept. 15 thru Sept. 17. The 75th NACD Annual Meeting will be in New Orleans on Feb. 4-19, 2021. Clint asked about NACD meeting cancellations. **Director Gary Thrash** stated that they are still planning to host the Spring Fly-In next Wednesday.

Director Bob Warner added that the Upper South Platte Watershed meeting that was scheduled for tonight has been canceled.

Envirothon Update-Mark Cronquist:

Mark Cronquist reported that they are making progress on the Envirothon. He thanked **VP Tyler Neely** for his assistance. They now have a full complement of topic experts. Daniel Bois, who is the coordinator for the **Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project**, will be the aquatic ecology expert.

Mark reported that the COVID-19 venue protocols might cause issues. He should know more within the next 10 days. However, currently Envirothon plans are moving forward.

This year it will be a presentation platform using power point. In the past they have used hard copy charts. National is using power point this year as well. The committee will be sending hard copies and a YouTube video to the students so they can work on the presentations prior to coming to the contest. Written testing stations will be set up the same this year with topic specific stations for aquatics, forestry, soil and land, wildlife and current issues. Scoring will be on how well they do in the topic areas and on their oral presentation.

Lodging has become difficult due to location. Pricing is significantly higher than in the past. Decorations and food have been taken care of. They hope to have pizza after the presentations and before the award presentations. There will be about the same number of contestants as in the past. They will be finalizing volunteers for the different areas next week.

NRCS Update-Clint Evans & Randy Randall:

Clint Evans stated that NRCS hiring is moving forward with 16-18 selections over the past six weeks. Hiring is currently their main priority. They will be actively hiring throughout the year to get to the full staff of 219.

A **State Technical Advisory Board** meeting was held on March 3rd. There were approximately 51 total attendees including in person and by teleconference. In the future, the teleconference option will be eliminated. They will review other options. They are considering a mid-summer meeting in Colorado Springs so more producers might attend. They will look at holding meetings around the state to allow for additional producer attendance. The meeting agenda on the 3rd was primarily about Farm Bill updates. There was not enough time for partner updates due to the extensive Farm Bill policy changes.

Clint has been participating in the **Colorado Master Irrigator Project** development. The team includes **Cindy Lair**. They have just completed their first master irrigator project in Wray.

The project targeted the Ogallala Aquifer and more specifically the Republican River Basin. In the Colorado Water Compact with the State of Kansas, Colorado is to convert 25,000 acres from irrigated production to non-irrigated production between now and 2029. By 2024, 10,000 of the 25,000 acres must be converted to non-irrigated.

NRCS has targeted EQIP funds to help in the Republican River Basin and the Ogallala Aquifer. There will be incentive payments for irrigation efficiency as well as increased incentives to convert lesser productive wells to get producers to convert to non-irrigated systems or go to perennial grass cover for livestock.

This program was designed and built around a model from the Texas Panhandle that helped them improve irrigation efficiency as well as encouraged converting to non-irrigated crops. Clint thanked **Cindy Lair** for getting him involved with the group. The Group was formed by producers as well as state and federal agencies.

Clint also informed the Board that application deadline for EQIP funding for 2020 is April 10. There are 3 remaining Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPP) that have EQIP funding from prior years and the cutoff is also April 10. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) still has opportunities for producers. Depending on whether it is new enrollment, renewing or extending an existing contract, there are various application deadlines between now and the first Friday in May.

Clint stated that he is headed to Holly to meet with the **NE Prowers CD** to discuss the potential to work on a space agreement to help the District. The CD has been housing an NRCS staff person since the 1980s. The location is just a program delivery point not a USDA Service Center. The CD Board has put the building on the market and has an offer. They are holding a public meeting tonight and will hold a vote to see if the District can accept the purchase offer. If the facility is sold, NRCS will move their Soil Conservationist to Lamar. NRCS has offered the CD office space for an employee at the Lamar office. If the CD decides to rent a space in Holly, NRCS will work with them on a space agreement.

Director Steve McEndree asked Clint if CSP was still limited to two rounds for producers. Clint stated that it depends on the year of the contract. There could be an opportunity for extension or a 5-year re-enrollment. It varies with the contract year. He suggested producers call their local office.

With reference to the **Intern Agreement**, Arizona and Colorado have discussed the issues Arizona experienced. This program is targeted to kids that want to return to their rural community, which is a key component of this program. NRCS wants students to know that there are career opportunities for them to come back to those rural locations whether as a NRCS employee or in a Conservation District position. Clint and Randy have recommendations on where they would like to see this program go. The first decision would be whether CACD wants to move forward with the program. If so, the specifics would be reviewed.

Randy Randall addressed the program: We need to insure what is being done is specific to the locations. They looked at the hard to fill locations like Eads. Ideally, they would consider a time period of 12 weeks, from mid-May to mid-August. We need to make sure we're not duplicating recruitment efforts. For example, how does this differ from Pathways? It needs to be unique. Arizona ran into insurance issues with students under 18. It might be necessary to get older students with intent of pursuing an ag related career and coming back to help the community. This is a 75/25 match with NRCS paying the 75% and CACD and the participating Districts responsible for 25%.

Points for the CACD Board to consider: **1)** Paying \$12/hour, 480 hrs. = \$6,000/student for salary. Administrative costs including training materials would be an additional \$2,000.

That would give 10% admin fee available in the amount \$800, **2)** Ask the Board to identify proposed locations (hard to fill locations), **3)** Look at the District Conservationist availability to be sure that we are providing a valuable and meaningful training experience, **4)** Gender pairing (was an issue in Arizona), **5)** How many positions? (NRCS would possibly be willing to fund up to 10 positions).

Funds would have to be tied to NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance funds (CTA). Decisions will need to be made by early June to allow development and fund the agreement. That would allow NRCS, theoretically, to be ready by May 2021 for a three-year period with a two-year renewal option, for a total of 5 years.

Clint added that Arizona included a \$2,500 college scholarship in their program. Clint feels this is high for Colorado. Clint suggested that since NRCS is funding the salary, office space, training and vehicles, CACD and the participating Districts might want to offer a smaller scholarship in the \$500 to \$1,000 range as part of the match. It would not be mandatory. As Clint stated last month, this program would give students an opportunity to see the partnership between NRCS, CSCB, CACD and local Districts.

Director Gary Thrash stated that Wisconsin offered a youth program that they wanted to take it Nationwide. Their education committee didn't like it. He knows of Conservation Districts that already offer a scholarship program, like the La Plata CD in Durango. **Bobbi** added that she reached out to CDs and had 13-15 positive responses. **Director Gary Thrash** stated that he would like to reach out to local Tribes and their students as well. **Director Jim Cecil** asked Bobbi if Districts that expressed interest were in hard to fill locations. Bobbi read the list of Districts that expressed interest, but it is not clear if they are in hard to fill locations.

Director George Fosha stated that CACD was hoping that late high school & early college students would be targeted to participate. From what has been learned from Arizona; this might not be a good option due to the liabilities. Some areas will have a difficult time finding that college age student to participate. But CACD wants to pursue the program.

Clint noted that the Mancos CD works with high school students and they have not experienced any insurance issues. Clint further suggested that Districts look at their policies and see if there would be issues. If they find insurance is not an issue, NRCS would be open to hosting high school students. **President Scott Jones** asked if it would work for the parents to sign a release of liability waiver. Clint was not sure if it would work or not but there might be a solution or option out there for younger students. CACD will investigate that possibility. Bobbi noted that we might need to have insurance at the Federal, State and local level to cover all possible incidents.

Director Jim Cecil asked Clint and Randy what would happen if NRCS sets the required funds aside and there is not the required student participation. Clint said that the funds are good for up to two fiscal years so they could carry unspent funds forward. **Director Nick Charchalis** feels that it is a great and manageable program for student involvement. CACD should move forward with pursuing the program.

President Scott Jones summarized the need for CACD to move forward and start on the agreement by June. Randy confirmed that statement. Randy will work with Bobbi to get the required forms completed. **Director Nick Charchalis** noted that it will be an agenda topic for the next few board meetings.

Bobbi noted the renewal for NACD TA grants. She asked if NRCS was agreeable in supporting additional 2020 funding proposals for the 5 NACD TA position renewals currently funded in Colorado. Clint stated that was correct. One District dropped out voluntarily and a couple others were unable to keep up with the grant reporting. As NRCS continues to fill their positions, they will be reviewing the priority positions and see where staff might be needed.

Bobbi also noted that she is working on the first draft of the 3-year contract (renewal). She is also working on reimbursement Forms and the 425 report. She asked Randy if the new cooperative agreement would roll into the new Grant Solution reporting portal and if it will affect the current match agreement?

Randy will check and let her know. Bobbi stated she knew Federal Grant reporting for some agencies will start going through grants.gov as early as mid-April.

Monthly Financial Update-Bobbi Ketels:

CACD FINANCIALS: 02-29-2020

Beginning Balance in checking on February 3, 2020, \$99,019.92

Checks/Payments Cleared -\$16,266.95, Deposits Cleared \$12,864.09

(Total Cleared Transactions -\$3,402.86)

Ending/Cleared Balance in Checking as of February 29th, \$95,617.06

Total Uncleared Transactions= -\$5,286.12 Checks/Payments - Deposits \$0

Ending Register Balance as of February 29th, \$90,330.94

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

NOI as of 02/29/2020 \$64,255.79

*Total Open Invoices A/R summary \$28,487.86

Credit Card Ending Statement Balance as of 03/05/2020 \$3,985.92

Total District Dues Paid as of 02/29/2020 \$8,750.00 (membership invoiced (75) \$90,000.00)

UARRP Activity 2-29-20 YTD:

Total pass-through income \$3,385.09

Total pass-through expenses -\$3,385.09

Total CACD Income Earned YTD 2-29-20 \$259.25 (Includes 5% Admin & Payroll Reimb)

*Total UARRP Open Invoices (1) \$259.25. *Projected to receive in March

Balance of Federal Funds Available \$147,412.00

NRCS Programs:

Education Outreach Workshops:

02/29/2020: \$5000.00 paid out to CACD Education Workshop Reimb Programs

NRCS Reimbursement invoiced for \$5000 + \$500.00 Admin Fee *Projected to receive in March

Total NRCS Open Invoices (4) \$28,228.61. *Projected to receive in March

Director Charlie Carnahan made a motion to approve the February financials. Director George Fosha gave the second. Motion passes.

CACD Programs:

Fundraising: No Report

Camp Rocky-Bobbi Ketels:

Bobbi reported that they are working on having enough supervisors and that all supervisors will be doing the full background checks, which includes fingerprinting. The committee is working on filling positions with instructors and instructor assistants and evening speakers. They are concerned that the virus might have an impact on the Camp.

Annual Meeting:

Bobbi informed the Board that she is working on the forms for the Poster Contest and Annual Meeting. Her current focus is completing the required NRCS work. She recommended that the first planning meeting for the 2020 Annual meeting be scheduled towards the end of April. **VP Tyler Neely** agreed.

CACD/NRCS Education/Speakership Workshop Program:

See NRCS update above.

President Misc. Discussion and Updates-Scott Jones:

President Scott Jones stated that **Bobbi** sent an email out last night with the 15 EQIP programs. He and **Bobbi** were on the NRCS Water Resource Committee teleconference. The Board needs to vote on the top resource issues and submit the Boards top 10 issues to **Becky Ross** at NRCS.

The top 15 to choose 10 from: Bobbi was asked to read the top 10 first, and then discuss the last 5.

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|-----|---|-----|---|
| 1. | 449- Irrigation Water Management | 6. | 328- Conservation Crop Rotation |
| 2. | 340-Cover Crops | 7. | 528- Prescribed Grazing |
| 3. | 590- Nutrient Management | 8. | 384- Woody Residue Treatment |
| 4. | 391- Riparian Forest Buffers | 9. | 345- Residue & Tillage Management- Reduced Till |
| 5. | 329- Residue and Tillage Management- No-Till | 10. | 580- Streambank and Shoreline Protection |
| 11. | 327- Conservation Cover | | |
| 12. | 645- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management | | |
| 13. | 643- Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats | | |
| 14. | 395- Stream Habitat Improvement | | |
| 15. | 612- Tree/Shrub Establishment | | |

Director George Fosha feels that No-till and Reduced Till are much the same. He supports Reduced Till.

Director Nick Charchalis stated that in their area the top 5 were the same with some changes in the other rankings. It was clarified by **Randy** that the top ten would receive additional funding and that ALL programs will continue.

Randy said that in the notes from **Becky** in 2019, thru EQIP, **Becky Ross** reported 49,000 acres of IWM, 18,000 acres of cover crops, 44,000 acres of nutrient management applied, just less than 17,000 acres in no till and just under 175,000 acres of prescribed grazing.

After much discussion, the CACD Board decided to move forward with the CACD top ten as follows:

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|----|---|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | 449- Irrigation Water Management | 6. | 328- Conservation Crop Rotation |
| 2. | 340-Cover Crops | 7. | 528- Prescribed Grazing |
| 3. | 590- Nutrient Management | 8. | 395- Stream Habitat Improvement |
| 4. | 391- Riparian Forest Buffers | 9. | 580- Streambank/Shoreline Protection |
| 5. | 345- Residue and Tillage Management- Reduced Till | 10. | 612- Tree/Shrub Establishment |

Director George Fosha made the motion to submit the Resource Concerns list to NRCS with the above changes. **Director Gary Thrash** 2nd the motion. **Motion Passed.**

After BOD discussions took place about the next call date, **President Scott Jones** confirmed the next CACD BOD call will be **April 15, 7:30 AM**. Meeting adjourned at 9:35 AM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels
CACD Executive Director