***Colorado Association of Conservation Districts***

***Board of Directors Meeting Minutes***

***April 20, 2022, via Zoom***

***Attendees:***

*Jim Cecil, CACD President - Republican River Watershed*

*Tyler Neely, CACD Vice President - Rio Grande River Watershed*

*Mike Cleary, CACD Secretary/Treasurer - Gunnison Dolores Watershed*

*Scott Jones, CACD Director - Colorado River Watershed*

*Nick Charchalis, CACD Director – North-Platte/White-Yampa River Watershed*

*George Fosha, CACD Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed*

*Gary Thrash, CACD Director - San Juan Basin - CO NACD Alternate Representative*

*Dale Parker, CACD Interim Director - Lower South Platte Watershed*

*Brett Moore, CACD Legislative Liaison*

*Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director*

***Absent:***

*Charlie Carnahan, CACD Director - Upper South Platte Watershed*

*Bob Warner, CACD Alternate Director - CO NACD Representative - NCF Trustee*

***Guests:***

*Bronson Smart, NRCS-Monthly Update*

*Randy Randall, NRCS-Programs Update*

*Les Owen, CDA*

*Cindy Lair, CSCB*

***Call to Order:***

*The meeting was called to order by* ***President Jim Cecil*** *at 7:33 AM after establishing a quorum.*

***Prior Meeting Minutes:***

*Will be addressed at a future meeting or via email, due to time constraints of this meeting.*

***NRCS Update:***

***Bronson Smart*** *reported that NRCS is waiting for the final budget and working through getting the partner agreements in place including the agreement with CACD. Yesterday they discussed the agreement, and the short-term need, with Bobbi. They are looking for the $30k in funds to get the first plug of money into the agreement since the current agreement expires the end of May. He believes that $30k is available even before they receive their allocation. As additional funds come in the agreement will be amended and funds will be added as needed.*

*Field offices are busy right now. Colorado had over a $104M in applications for EQIP this year. In previous years they have had over $40 million of funding in EQIP, this year there is $31.3M in funds. That means that about one-third of the applications will be funded. Due to increases in material costs, all the extra EQIP funds will go towards bumping up the existing contracts, to make sure they can be implemented, instead of funding new contracts. NRCS field offices have two months to get the existing contracts obligated (June 16).*

*Monday supervisors returned to the offices. All employees have a report date of May 2. This will allow more normal operations for the offices. All CO offices are at 75% right now, on May 2 they go to 100%. In-state travel is open. Approval will be required for in-person trainings and conferences. Travel for field work has opened back up. Bronson said that with the lower number of contracts, there will be more time to train new staff and partners.*

*He stated that besides the lack of funding, things are going very well for the Colorado NRCS. He thanked CACD for their partnership. Several Local Work Group meetings are being held and they are receiving feedback so NRCS will know where the EQIP funds should be spent next year. He anticipates a larger pool of EQIP funds next year since there will not be a need to up the prior year contracts to cover increases in material costs.*

***Randy Randall, Asst. State Conservationist for Partnerships.*** *Randy is involved in staffing, budgeting, agreements, and partnership outreach and other duties as assigned by the State Conservationist.*

*Randy addressed the meeting held between NRCS and the CACD Board at the Stock Show. At that time, they had high aspirations that the NRCS budget would be much more robust than what they received. NRCS has been hit with some curveballs. He has not seen a challenge like this before. $29 to $30 million come into the State for technical assistance funding and right now they are at $27.6 million. That is $2M short of where they would like to be.*

*Last year they brought on about seventy-five employees costing about $7.5M (including training costs). They currently have 241 employees. Randy is now going back through to see what they can afford in agreements. There are eight agreements they typically fully fund. They are only able to go through and* ***partially******fund two*** *of these agreements. One agreement is the* ***CACD agreement****, and the other is* ***the technician agreement with CSCB (Cindy Lair).*** *They are going back and looking at positions that they thought they might be able to hire. Those are on hold, and they are only looking at critical positions. The desire is to go through and trade space for time.*

*It is now April and they have not received their full allocation of funding and October 1 starts the new year of funding for FY2023. They are looking at places where they might be able to gain funds to put into the two agreements. The CACD agreement has high value targets that Bobbi has identified. Those priorities are the annual meeting and Camp Rocky. They are targeting placing $30k in that agreement. This does not impact the CACD demonstration project as it is already in place and fully funded. As soon as additional funds are available, NRCS’s high value targets are the CACD priorities identified, and the technician agreements.*

*Typically, before an election funding is held at a level funding level. NRCS may or may not see an increase in funding. Based on the $27.6M, they will be making adjustments. Currently to fund 241 employees, it takes $24.3M. Looking at the math with a budget of $27.6, take out $24.3M for staff, $500,000 for vehicle fleet, not much flexibility is left to go through and do what they need to do.*

*He asked that CACD and CSCB be patient while they navigate these waters. They will look at what staffing level is sustainable. In his opinion, they should be at the 225 to 230 level. Numerous field offices need additional people. With the current budget he does not see that coming to fruition. Randy stated that he will forward some of this information to Bobbi. Could there be a windfall of funds? Perhaps but the reality is probably not. With Clint working with the finances at the Federal level, Randy is sure that if he could make Colorado NRCS whole, he would. They will be looking at a sustainable staff and budget level and anticipates it will be at the $28M level.*

*Randy wanted to share this information directly with the Board before the rumor mill starts. There might be multiple agreements or amendments to the agreements. The high value targets are the technicians and the CACD agreement.*

***Director Mike Cleary*** *stated that staffing might be a “breathing” number instead of a fixed number because as prices are high and project shrink, NRCS might try to work out a sliding scale based on the number of contracts and actual staffing needs to get the job done. Randy agreed and said there will be retirements within the staff. He also stated that Clint’s detail might be extended. Colorado NRCS will need to be ready to pivot as there will be challenges to face. Randy feels they are poised to do that. All this does not even touch on fires, drought, floods, and snowpack concerns.*

*Randy added that the State Technical Advisory Committee meeting is tomorrow from 8:00 am to noon. He will resend the link. There will be an update from the FSA with National office folks and new Directors will be introduced, including Rural Development. There will also be a NRCS program update. Other areas will be addressed as well.*

*Bronson added that Tim Macklin is retiring at the end of the month. They plan to fly (advertise) his position. Also, the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Western Colorado will arrive for duty on May 9th. His name is Chad Cherefko.*

***Legislative Update – Brett Moore:***

*Brett reported from the Capital today. CACD’s efforts to repeal the expiration of the Conservation District grant fund is underway. Senate Bill 195 has been introduced. He drafted this legislation that has just under $13,000 in funding for each Conservation District in the State. The full request is for $960,000. This amount was removed from the Bill by Senate Leadership before the bill was introduced.*

*Now SB195 is just the repeal of the expiration of the grant fund. He feels the Bill will pass. The difficulty is trying to add the $960,000. He has received positive reports from members of the JBC and others, however it is always a struggle to get funding in place. The sponsor is Sen. Kerry Donovan. Brett warned about counting on anything, but he will keep pushing to find additional funds.*

*The Bill is scheduled to be heard on Thursday at 1:30 pm, should anyone like to listen or testify in person or remotely. However, he anticipates that due to other items on the agenda, this Bill will probably be heard between 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm. He and Bobbi will put together testimony to say or have read at the hearing. Cindy Lair stated that she will attend and testify. Brett thanked Cindy and her team for providing a list of conservation district projects that have been undertaken with the $15,000 that came through last year in SB234. Bobbi will forward the project summary from CSCB to the Board. Brett suggested that CACD thank Sen. Donovan for her efforts in asking for the additional funds for the CDs.*

*He is monitoring 55 Bills for CACD. CACDs Legislative Committee has not taken a firm stand on any of the Bills or alerted Brett that they want a count or want to testify on any of the Bills. He encouraged the Board to look at the Bill Tracker for any additional concerns. This year’s legislative session ends on May 12.*

*Brett added that it might be good to tie the additional funding to District’s participation in their local Watershed Association, if it is an option or legal. If Watersheds dissolve, it will be a big problem for CACD and how they operate. Cindy suggested that CACD take the recommendation to the CSCB as they are the ones that make the decision on how funds are distributed to the Districts.*

***CSCB Update - Cindy Lair:***

*Cindy introduced herself and explained her position at CDA to Dale Parker, new CACD Interim Director, Lower South Platte Watershed.*

*Cindy reported that they have posted Noah’s position and it closes April 28th. The job description has been revamped to have a greater focus on education and outreach including written communications and support for Camp Rocky & Envirothon. Garth will continue helping with the Conservator and other work for CACD that they may need help with from a communications perspective, such as agendas and annual meeting flyers.*

*The new person will work with Petra at NRCS with outreach needs, soil health spotlights, landowner spotlights and other work. The person will also help with CSCB layout and production work along with support for Conservation Districts in northeastern Colorado. Cindy asked if* ***President Jim Cecil*** *would like to participate in the applicant interview process when the time comes.*

*Cindy stated that it has been difficult to schedule a Soil Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) meeting due to the number of committee members (13 members). Per the legislation, the meeting is to be held in concert with the Colorado State Conservation Board meetings. The next CSCB meeting is scheduled for June 22 and 23 in Greeley. Margaret and Cindy feel that the SHAC meeting could be held on the second day of the meeting. These meetings will be hybrid, meaning face-to-face and virtual for attendee convenience. There is not funding available to pay for mileage, meals, and lodging however they may be able to provide some meals and mileage for SHAC attendees. They have a budget of $4,000. for the year.*

*Cindy reported that her staff is hearing concern about watershed associations wanting to dissolve. This is a concern because the associations are a way for conservation districts to move Resolutions through to CACD and NACD, nominations for Farmer and Rancher of the Year & Teacher of the Year pass through the Association. CACD Representatives are elected at the Watershed level as well. Would CACD allow individual CDs to submit resolutions? She is bringing this up to see if CACD Board members have ideas.* ***Director Gary Thrash*** *said he is in an area that does not have an active watershed and he wonders if without a watershed association, can he even sit on the CACD Board. There are problems with watershed associations throughout the state.*

*CACD voted to participate with the* ***Climate Smart Commodities******Proposal****. CACD would distribute the capacity building funds to the Districts involved in the program. Cindy thanked CACD for their support. Cindy is not directly involved in the development of the proposal and solicitation of letters of support. Bobbi informed Cindy that a letter of support from CACD is being written and she will send it to the Board for final approval.*

*The proposal would increase the STAR program from twenty participants to fifty. The fifty participants would be conservation districts and eligible entities. The National STAR program is part of the proposal because they want to see the STAR program become available nationwide.*

*One of the biggest benefits of STAR is the possibility for producers to get paid for their improvements by companies like General Mills, Kellogg’s, and other companies that purchase grains. These companies have sustainability goals and CDA feels the STAR Plus is a wonderful way, from a local perspective, to help meet those goals and for producers to be paid more for their crops.*

*She went on to mention the Colorado Zero Food Print Program and the Healthy Soils Challenge. This is a volunteer non-profit group that is asking restaurants to charge a 1% fee that would go to the Zero Food Print program. Producers that are enrolled in either STAR Plus or STAR can approach the Zero Food Print program with a proposal stating that they want to expand their involvement in the STAR program and cover more of their farm and the costs associated with this expansion and the Zero Food Print program would help cover the costs to bring the additional acres into no-till, cover crops and grazing of the cover crops, etc.*

*They would provide money for things like equipment purchases. It is more private engagement and investment in private lands conservation. CDA is moving forward with the Zero Food Print program and this summer they would like to have one of the Districts participating in the STAR Plus, do a pilot with a couple of their producers involved in the program, to be able to put together a proposal to expand their fields and get the funding they need. CDA is working to get businesses, like restaurants, ski areas, tourist businesses and philanthropists involved. Later CDA will be making a splash about what it means to invest in Colorado agriculture.* ***Director Gary Thrash*** *added that Durango has a lot of restaurants that encourage local buying from the small acreage farms.*

*Cindy thanked Nikki for organizing the successful CSCB Coffee Hours they have been having since covid hit. On April 27th, the Coffee Hour will be a Local Work Group (LWG) training session with NRCS employees Liz With and Amber. The LWG meeting is for NRCS but also identifies the local district’s priorities. It helps districts identify items for their Long-Range Plans as well.*

***Director George Fosha*** *spoke about the CD consolidation interest in his watershed. Nikki provided them the documents for the process. He asked if there has been any more discussion about what happens with direct assistance. Cindy stated that it will be discussed at the Greely meeting in June. Some Board considerations are to: make the double direct assistance permanent; double direct assistance for 25 years; or leave it at the current 3-year level. The Board will make the decision. There are varied opinions among Board members. Cindy recommends that CDs speak to their CSCB representative and let their opinion and desire be known. George added that some of the districts do not have managers or have part-time managers and it is difficult. He would like to get more funds for Districts from the Legislature.*

*Cindy said she would like to make the additional assistance from the Legislature permanent, but she does no know if that will happen. She thanked Brett and CACD for lobbying for the additional district funds.* ***Director Nick Charchalis*** *stated that it is hard to get an engaged district manager with limited funds. So, funding would be immensely helpful. Ag is being put on the front line for climate change but no money to help accomplish these goals. He added that Districts need to “beat their own drum” by reaching out to the public. Let them know what CACD does, what NRCS does and the results we see from these partnerships.*

***CDA Update – Les Owen:***

*Les provided an update on the noxious weed program. Steve Rider, State Weed Coordinator, has retired and Patty York took his place on April 1st. Patti’s former position will be filled.*

*The Wolf Management meeting will be in Meeker next week. The Technical Advisory Group identified four phases of the wolf recovery program Phase one is State endangered, Phase two is State threatened, Phase three is a delisted wolf, and phase four, should they get there, would be a hunted population of wolves. Phase one to Phase two would be about fifty wolves, phase two to phase three is about two hundred on the ground. These numbers are still being debated. What matters is impact based management, with two main things being discussed: 1) impacts to livestock and 2) impacts to other big game herds.*

*Of discussion and disagreement is when will the wolves be taken when they are attacking livestock and will there be permits available. Under Phase one and Phase two, while the wolf is still state listed, per state law there must be a permit issued by State Parks and Wildlife. Terms, such as attacking, need defined or deleted. Once wolves are on the ground, some restrictions may go away. When they are delisted by the State, CDA should have the statutory authority instead of CPW. Since wolves are on the Federal list, CPW cannot do anything without a permit from the Feds. CPW is paying the Fish and Wildlife Service about $1M to provide a NEPA analysis on this matter. The announcement for the NEPA process should come out in May. There is an aggressive timeline with a completed EIS by December 2023. Funding for producer compensation and ongoing non-lethal measures is an ongoing discussion.*

***Director******Mike Cleary*** *stated that he feels that the livestock in Colorado are sitting ducks for wolves, and this is not addressed anywhere. He is concerned about being attacked by a wolf while tending to a calf. There is also the issue of pressure on cows, fertility and reproductive cycles that should be of concern. He suggests a fertility study so there is a data bank for comparison in the coming years. There should be compensation associated should fertility rates decrease. Les agreed and feels good record keeping is essential to quantify losses. Other states have not addressed these issues. The legislature gave CPW $1.1 million for the program, but those funds did not cover the Agency’s expenses related to the program. The additional $1M given to them in the Long Bill will go directly to the Fish and Wildlife Service for the NEPA.*

***Director George Fosha*** *added that if the NEPA goes back to wording in WOTUS, it could cause issues. Les stated that there will be regional roundtable meetings for that effort coming up in the next couple of months. There were ten states chosen to host these meetings, Colorado is not one of them. The closest meeting will be in either Montana or Wyoming. NEPA guidance has been rolled back and is now back to where it was but there will still be changes made to the guidance.*

***Director Gary Thrash*** *stated the State Courts are getting involved in challenging the bed to the rivers and waters in the State’s control.* ***Director******George Fosha*** *replied that the navigable waters and whether it is used for commerce helps define whether the river can be accessed by anglers and others. It depends on the definition of the word “commercial use.”*

***President Jim Cecil left the meeting and turned the meeting over to Vice President Tyler Neely at 8:30.***

***NACD Update – Gary Thrash:***

***Director Gary Thrash*** *reported how other states deal with their legislatures. He stated that NM goes to the capital and stays for a month during the session. Every year NACD sponsors a Spring Fly-In in Washington DC to discuss Farm Bill and Conservation issues with State Legislators. Bobbi gave a summary of the CACD meetings with Legislators. She touched on the main talking points of the four issue papers from NACD. She added that Bronson did an outstanding job. He spoke on how the partnership between NRCS and Conservation Districts works. Rachel Theler attended some of the meetings as well. Bobbi is receiving communications from some of the Legislator’s offices, so she feels they built relationships at the Fly-In. She thanked Bob, Bronson, and Rachel for helping with the meetings. Sen. Hickenlooper’s office is still trying to coordinate a meeting with CACD, which Gary will take the lead on. Gary thanked Bobbi for attending and running the meetings.*

*Gary’s NACD Highlights:*

*NACD’s summer meeting will be in Puerto Rico in July.*

*The Virgin Islands are reestablishing their conservation districts after 20 years.*

*April 24th thru May 1st is the 67th Annual Stewardship Week hosted by NACD. Healthy Soil, Healthy Life is the theme. Free materials are available.*

*April 21st is the next Urban and Community Conservation online seminar. See the NACD website for additional info (nacdnet.org).*

*The next Annual Meeting will be in New Orleans Feb. 11-15, 2023.*

*September is the Southwest and Pacific Region meeting in Maui, HI*

***Bobbi*** *noted that she takes the Stewardship Week info from NACD and puts it on the CACD website, and it also goes out to the Districts with all the attachments.*

***CACD Programs:***

***Camp Rocky****:*

*Bobbi reported that she is working with Noah McCord on Camp Rocky. She asked for a vote on the contract with Noah. The contract will pay Noah $3,500. Bobbi and Noah started meeting in March with all the committee members and instructors. They are rebuilding the documentation that was lost when Amy left. Camp registration is open, and they currently have six students registered with a goal of forty attendees. She is waiting on the contract with RMMC and is anticipating an increase for lodging and food. Next year there could be a change in location from the RMMC facility, depending on how much space RMMC can commit to Camp Rocky. Instructors have been lined up for the four disciplines. Noah is looking for people over 18 years of age to supervise the kids in their cabins.* ***Director George Fosha*** *moves to approve the contract with Noah McCord for $3,500.00 for Camp Rocky.* ***Director Scott Jones*** *seconds the motion.* ***Motion Passes.***

***Annual Meeting****:*

*Bobbi is working with the same company as in the past putting together proposals for venues. She has three locations on the east side and three on the west slope. She has concerns with the funding for the new 5 yr. cooperative agreement with NRCS. Their funding has gone down from $90k to $30k. She anticipates the annual meeting will cost around $60k. She suggests they find a way to cut back on the annual meeting expenses. Possibly not holding the resource committee meetings in person and shave a day off the meeting schedule.* ***Director Scott Jones*** *said that previously they discussed using a venue in Black Hawk. At the time they were interested in working with CACD and prices were comparable to Hotel Elegante. Or maybe hold it with the Stock Show for more participation.* ***Director Nick Charchalis*** *thought it a good idea to look at using a facility in Black Hawk.* ***Director George Fosha*** *suggested talking to CCA and consider coordinating a joint meeting as an option. Bobbi and Tyler will explore these options. Bobbi will scale back the venues they are looking at.*

*Bobbi stated that there are 16 CDs interested in the Demonstration Project program. She has notified the interested CDs that they have until May 15 to send in their proposals. CACD will draw up their own contracts for this program. The Board has approved one so far. Reimbursements will be managed different than with the current contracts.*

*Bobbi has submitted an invoice to NRCS for $61k. She has obligated the remaining $47,830 of the contract to the education workshop/speaker grants, as well as the traditional CACD programs. There are eight educational workshops still scheduled and must be completed by May 25. The remainder of funds will go to Camp Rocky, The Conservator and Envirothon.*

*Bobbi noted that she has attended watershed association meetings and witnessed the same issues as Cindy with regards to the lack of interest. She has tried to recruit a member from the Lower Ark with no avail. A few watersheds did not have a quorum for their meetings. No Resolutions were brought forward at the watershed meetings she attended.*

*Bobbi added that there are Districts that are not dues paying members and CACD still supports them. She asked what the benefits be for paying dues versus not paying dues besides the ability to vote?* ***Director Nick Charchalis*** *suggested making a list of the benefits that CACD provides to conservation districts and ask them what is important and what is not. Then tie the amount of dues to the benefit.* ***Director Scott Jones*** *added this has always been the case. He feels the watershed issue is of more importance. He does not want to go back to the non-dues paying issues.* ***Director******George Fosha*** *agreed with Scott. It is a touchy issue. Nick feels we need to hang on to watershed associations. Funds for districts only help the watershed associations.*

***CACD Financials***

*Will be addressed at a future meeting or via email, due to time constraints of this meeting.*

***President Misc. Discussion and Updates:***

*Will be addressed at a future meeting or via email, due to time constraints of this meeting.*

***The next Board meeting will be May 18, 2022, via Zoom.***

***Meeting Adjourned by Vice President Tyler Neely 9:35 AM.***

*Respectfully Submitted,*

***Bobbi Ketels***

***CACD Executive Director***