

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2021, via Video Conference**

Attendees:

Scott Jones, CACD President - Colorado River Watershed Director
George Fosha, Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed Director
Nick Charchalis, Director - North Platte/White/Yampa River Watershed
Nancy Berges, Director – Lower South Platte Watershed
Jim Cecil, Director - Republican River Watershed Director
Mike Cleary, Director-Gunnison Dolores Watershed
Tyler Neely, CACD Vice President - Rio Grande River Watershed
Bob Warner, CO Alternate Representative to NACD
Joe Pope, Director – Lower Arkansas River Watershed
Charlie Carnahan, Director - Upper South Platte Watershed
Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director

Absent:

Gary Thrash, Director - San Juan Basin Watershed /CO Representative to NACD
Brett Moore, CACD Lobbyist

Guests:

Clint Evans, NRCS
Randy Randall, NRCS
Cindy Lair, CSCB
Nikki Brinson, CSCB
Noah McCord, CSCB
Les Owen, CDA

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. Bobbi Ketels would like to add a discussion about changing the meeting schedule. They would like to change the legislative calls to the 1st Wednesday of the month and regular board meetings to the 3rd Wednesday of each month. Without any other 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 minutes. **Director Jim Cecil** made the motion to approve the minutes, and **Director Tyler Neely** gave the second. Without any further discussion, the motion to approve the CACD BOD's December 2020 minutes was **passed**.

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

Brett Moore was unable to attend the meeting.

CDA Update-Les Owen: -

Les Owen updated the covid situation: The State is directing that if employees can work from home, they must. This will continue through February but is subject to change. The State has started rolling out the vaccine. CDA is open for business, and employees are allowed some travel.

Les stated that the US Forest Service is rewriting their Forest Service Manuals and Forest Service handbooks with reference to the term grazing permits. This has not been done for the last 30-40 years. There are a lot of good changes in these new manuals. Changes include allowing for more flexibility and making it easier for a

term grazing permit to be passed on from one generation to another. Some changes assist with conservation easements surrounding properties to make conservation use a bit easier. There is some talk about land trusts and how they figure in. An additional item is the clarification of the buyout of permits. He will send Bobbi the link to the site if anyone is interested in reading it. In his opinion, there are some good changes in the document. Comments on the MOU are due by mid-February.

He also told the Board that there has been some contact from the cannabis industry that deals with volunteer hemp plants that migrate out of their field and cross-pollinate. One of the proposed solutions is to put the migrated male hemp plants on the noxious weed list. The idea is that Conservation Districts have the responsibility to clear those plants where there is no other responsible party. He does not know if this will manifest in any type of legislation this year. It has been a big push from marijuana growers that have had cross-pollination from these hemp plants.

He mentioned that during the Parks and Wildlife Commission meeting is full of information about wolves and reintroductions. He would encourage everyone to join in on the meeting. They will wait to see where CDA will fit in with the outreach efforts. There is a desire to get an educational leaflet out.

President Scott Jones asked Les if there a plan is to speed up the wolf reintroduction in Colorado. Les stated that there is a desire by some to get wolves released this year. The CPW Commission meeting has an action item on the agenda, "**Wolf Plan Process Timeline Proposal and Public Comment.**" It is scheduled to be discussed at 11:00 tomorrow.

Clint Evans noted that Brian Ferebee with US Forest Service, who was the Regional Director here, has taken a position in Washington. Les noted that there is a new **Acting Director, Tammy Angel.**

CSCB Update:

Cindy Lair reported that they just hired a technician from CSU. He has performed a lot of work in the San Luis Valley. Ryan Taylor is his name. He will be focusing on the STAR score sheets and forms to tailor them for Colorado. These forms will be completed by the farmers and will allow them to recognize how they can obtain additional stars for their farm. Signs will be ordered, and they will have the CSCB, NRCS, CACD, and the local Conservation District logos on them. They hope to give out some signs as early as this summer.

Cindy said that CSCB is ready to advertise for the Soil Health Specialist that will be funded by NRCS. The match for the position is being covered by the Gates Family Foundation.

CSCB has been working on podcasts as a new part of their covid activities. The podcast is called **Digging In.** The first one is with **Alex Funk** from CWCB, and he will be talking about the Water Plan, water conservation, and how Conservation Districts can get involved in the Water Plan and make a difference locally on water issues.

Rachel Theler has been working on some soil health spotlights that will shed light on efforts already going on with local Conservation Districts. The first one was in the northeastern part of CO with the **Farming Evolution Conference.** She wrote articles from interviews at the Conference. The next one was with the **Colorado Tillage Association,** which has a CIG grant through NRCS to do this farm program. They have twenty-four farmers who are being mentored by other farmers that have been working on soil health.

An application for a 419 grant was turned in to the Department of Public Health and Environment so they can obtain funding for a pilot program for the STAR program that helps the Districts and local entities be able to participate in the program locally. This will be a great opportunity for the Districts and NRCS. The STAR program is being adopted by the Illinois Association of Conservation Districts. They are working on getting this dovetailed in with conservation activities with the new administration. A meeting was held with NACD last week, and they are talking about expanding that meeting to engage with the NRCS leadership to let them

know that there are a lot of tools coming their way to help engage with districts and lead that traditional partnership into the future.

CSCB is also preparing to apply for an **RCP Alternative Funding Arrangement** grant. They will be taking their ideas out to partners. They would like CACD to be on the application and partner with them to apply for this funding. The interest is to help the soil health partnership, which consists of **National Corn Growers, Bayer, and The Nature Conservancy**. The focus has been on large-scale production Ag, and they have made it as far as Kansas and CSCB would like to see them bring that into Colorado and be able to function well. Making sure large producers can participate. It would also include the STAR program.

She reminded everyone that the State Conservation Board meeting will be virtual on Jan. 27.

The matching grant guidelines review process is also coming up. CACD gets credit for getting those dollars dedicated through the Legislature for the Conservation Districts. CSCB strives to keep the process as fair and equitable as they can. There are some things on the table that CACD might want to address, like asking if Conservation Districts with mil levies should be eligible to apply for the matching grant under the assumption that they have a mil levy and should be asking for these dollars. **Bobbi** noted that **Directors George Fosha, Nick Charchalis, and Nancy Berges** are on the committee for review of the guidelines.

Cindy stated that her team has worked extremely hard on the new **Certification Program**. She gave a special acknowledgment to **Noah McCord** for the work he has done on the testing and record keeping. It is now all online. It will be more streamlined for everyone. She hopes more districts will take advantage of the program.

CSCB is also working on a couple of district consolidation efforts in the state. There have also been a few districts that have fallen off their board requirement and have allowed their board representation to expire and are able to have full quorums.

Lastly, she plugged the NACD meeting in February. She feels it is going to be one of the best. There are a lot of ideas to be shared with other associations and Conservation Districts.

Clint Evans added that the Lower Ark Water Conservancy District was awarded a grant from NRCS to do on-farm trials for soil health-related activities.

Director Nick Charchalis asked that, in the absence of Brett Moore, Cindy would fill them in on the Soil Health Collaborative. Cindy noted that the Soil Health Bill is not a CDA Bill; however, they will probably support it. Cleave Simpson and Jeni Arndt are going to be the sponsors of the Bill. **Director Nick Charchalis'** concern is that CACD gets left out and CDA redesigns its structure to accommodate a new program. He feels that is not the direction the CACD would like to see. They have a lot of respect for the existing structure. It continues to move, and he is not sure where it is going and what the end result will be. Cindy stated that her understanding is that the **Soil Health Program** is going to be in the **Conservation Services Division** and will be closely connected to CSCB. Les confirmed Cindy's comments. He also stated that the creation of this **Agricultural Climate Resiliency Office (ACRO)** with CDA is something that would exist within the Conservation Services Division and would likely house the CSCB, the Soil Health Program, and the Acre3 Renewable Energy Grants. **Bobbi** noted that she spoke with Helen, and her understanding is that they would take all soil programs currently with CDA plus the new soil health program and would combine it with all the climate programs as one new Department under the Conservation Services Division or is the saying that would be on top, and his division would fall underneath that? Les stated that it creates the **Agricultural Climate Resiliency Office** and will basically be a program within the Conservation Services Division. This is no FTE, no personnel, and no funding with the creation of ACRO. It provides the ability for the Department to engage in climate-related issues. All this does structurally is move the existing funding for the ACRE3 Renewable Energy Grants from the **Value-Added Development Board** in the **Market Division** to a new fund that is created under the ACRO within the Conservation Services Division. This allows for a catch-all fund for conservation work. Cindy explained that the reason they are working so hard on the STAR program is because it is the vehicle that Conservation

Districts can use and with that hopefully get funding that they can be sent to the local level for Conservation Districts to do this work. The structure is dependent on Conservation District participation. If they are not interested in participating, there will probably be other groups that would like to participate or maybe a neighboring District that would like to cover a larger area. ACRO is just a way to house the Soil Health Program, CSCB and ACRE3. Bobbi explained that the CACD Policy does not cover this new department configuration. **Director Nick Charchalis** would like to see more districts involved in the soil health program. **Director George Fosha** stated he concurs with Bobbi and Nick. Les feels that the concerns of CACD are valid and wants to make sure the point is heard. Once more information is available, Les will pass it to the CACD Board.

Bobbi added that in her discussion with Helen, they discussed the change on their Bill where CSCB went from an ex officio to a mandatory member. CACD would like to do that as well. They would like to change that in the Bill so CACD has one vote, and they need to stand on it running under CSCB. If the Board approves, Bobbi will go back to Helen and ask for those changes. After Board discussions, Bobbi will communicate to Helen that the BOD does not want to request any changes at this time.

Les will ask their Legislative person to attend the next CACD meeting.

Cindy reviewed that the CACD wants the **Soil Health Program** under CSCB. She noted that, as Les described, it was placed alongside rather than under CSCB due to the lack of consistent and solid oversight by all Conservation Districts and the desire to have that program coverage statewide regardless of whether the Conservation Districts can implement it locally. Other groups may want to participate, and Conservation Districts may be ok with that. If the program is under CSCB, it gets away from CSCB Conservation District focus. She asked CACD how they would address that concern. Scott Jones stated that his opinion is to give the Conservation Districts an ample opportunity to first try to run the soil health program and its funding opportunities, and there are organizations out there that run over Conservation Districts when it comes to these programs. Districts are there for soil and water. Cindy agrees. **Director Nick Charchalis** suggested that if there is a Conservation District that does not or is not able to participate, there still might be a role for CACD to assist with other groups interested in reaching out with soil health.

NRCS Update-Clint Evans:

Clint Evans gave the NRCS update. Clint and Randy will be working on a draft plan to do demonstration projects at the District level. They plan to have this draft by the February Board meeting. He would like input from Districts on what type of projects might be beneficial for producers in Colorado. He reported that the full annual NRCS budget has been approved by Congress. However, they are waiting to receive their allocations which will probably be in mid-February. At that time, they will have a better idea of how much funding they will have to support the demonstration projects. Right now, he is looking at projects related to soil health, grazing lands, forestry improvements, and ideas related to water quantity and/or quality. The deadline for all agreements is the end of June. Clint would like feedback from the Districts sometime in March.

He stated there have been about a dozen retirements at the end of 2020. Retirements have been across the State. All vacated positions have been submitted for advertisement, and hope to get them through before inauguration day since there is usually a hiring freeze with administration changes. The Lamar position has been offered to an internal applicant. Direct hire authority has been approved. This allowed NRCS to put in 30 additional entry-level positions. They were advertised last Friday. With this type of hiring, they can hire locally, which allows them to submit the hire to HR, and once they are verified to meet the qualifications, they can make an offer on the spot and get the hiring process started. Within the next 3 or 4 months, these positions should be on board. They have until the end of the fiscal year to fill the positions. Currently, Colorado NRCS has 200 employees on staff. Budgets will be key to these hires.

Randy noted that there have been several threats against government facilities. He suggests that if you visit any NRCS facilities, be aware of your surroundings and use caution.

He also stated that they are seeing positive trends on the covid side. Numbers are going down. Clint mentioned that two NRCS employees had positive covid tests, so they have had to have employees go back to teleworking. Most offices are Level 0 or Level 1. Fieldwork continues to move forward. They will keep everyone informed.

NACD Update – Gary Thrash and Bob Warner

Director Bob Warner gave the NACD Update. The NACD virtual meeting starts Feb. 1 and runs thru the 10th. The registration fee is only \$50. He encourages participation since it is their 75th anniversary. He regrets they cannot be in New Orleans for the originally planned in-person meeting.

Bobbi added that she registered for the meeting as well. The first week is free business meetings. She asked if any board members like to register for the meeting. Do they want to approve CACD paying the registration for Directors that want to attend?

Director George Fosha moves that CACD pay the registration fee for any Board member that would like to attend the NACD Annual meeting. **Director Tyler Neely** seconds the motion. **Motion Passes.**

Bobbi stated that NACD will be presenting a slide show for the **Parade of States** at the annual meeting. She and Mary created a collage of pictures with pictures of Board officers, including the two NACD representatives, our name, and our logo. NACD also asked for awards for the State District Training Program. NACD has not checked with Colorado since 2012. There are 15 categories, and Bobbi discussed this with Nikki. Bobbi will follow up with NACD on the deadline for application submission. Nikki stated that she will work on the application this week.

Monthly Financial Update-Bobbi Ketels:

Bobbi asked the Board to table the vote on the Financial due to the change in bookkeeping to QuickBooks online. The checkbook did balance. The Board approved tabling the financials.

CACD Programs:

Exec Director Bobbi Ketels stated that she is finishing the PPP loan. She is waiting on the CPA to verify the needed information. In the interim, they shut down this round of funding. It was opened again yesterday. She will review the changes.

The UpperArk project received approval for modification# 2, which was pending. Due to the migration of their program, it was delayed, and they were showing CACD as out of compliance with SAM, which was incorrect. Bobbi has worked with them to correct this issue.

Tyler and Bobbi are working on a new company that will produce the new land signs for the Conservationist of the Year (Farmer and Rancher). They have been unable to reach the company they have used in the past. Tyler said they may be looking at a new design because the old company had the original sign artwork.

NACD opened round four for the TA grant. Clint has given Bobbi permission to offer the grant to the existing grant holders. If there is additional funding, other Districts will be invited to apply. They currently have three Districts that have applied.

Bobbi does not have the final figures for the annual meeting, but it appears that CACD is in the black for the 2020 annual meeting.

Noah reported that the National Envirothon just switched back to a live competition to be held in Nebraska in July of 2021. Tomorrow he will send everyone a calendar invite to attend an open house meeting to allow students, districts, teachers, etc., to chime in on what they would like to see this year. He has had a few new

teams inquire about the competition. Anyone having contacts from previous years, please send them to Noah. He would like to have 20 teams in 2021. He will make sure Bobbi receives all related emails.

There is no update for Camp Rocky at this time. However, all is looking good for having an in-person camp this year.

Other:

Bobbi reported that CACD has been contacted by Colorado First, and they are looking for the history of Conservation District signs. She asked if anyone was aware of the history. Cindy recalled that CSCB had a grant many years ago to fund the signs.

President Misc. Discussion and Updates-Scott Jones:

President Scott Jones asked what Board members would like to be on the Legislative Committee. **Directors George Fosha, Jim Cecil, Nancy Berges, Scott Jones, and Nick Charchalis** will serve on the Committee.

President Scott Jones reported that CAWA is meeting on January 29. The first legislative call will be on the first Wednesday in February. He also confirmed that the next CACD BOD call will be on **Feb. 17, 7:30 AM, in a face-to-face Zoom**. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 AM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels
CACD Executive Director