

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
May 18, 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
Gary Thrash, CACD Director - San Juan Basin - CO NACD Alternate Representative
Nick Charchalis, CACD Director – North-Platte/White-Yampa River Watershed
George Fosha, CACD Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed
Charlie Carnahan, CACD Director - Upper South Platte Watershed
Dale Parker, CACD Interim Director - Lower South Platte Watershed
Brett Moore, CACD Legislative Liaison
Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director*

Absent:

*Bob Warner, CACD Alternate Director - CO NACD Representative - NCF Trustee
Scott Jones, CACD Director - Colorado River Watershed*

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:

President Jim Cecil** asked for a motion to approve the **March and April 2022** minutes. **Director Nick Charchalis** moves to approve the March 2022 and April 2022 minutes. **Director Gary Thrash** gives the second. **Motion Passes.

NRCS Update:

***Acting State Conservationist Bronson Smart** reported they have received \$31K in EQIP funding plus they received \$1M additional. They had asked for \$12M additional. Funds went to increased payments for existing project costs increases. EQIP is 10% obligated. They need to be at 90% to receive additional funds. Salinity offices are behind due to workloads. They plan to bolster staff where staff is short. CSP is one-third obligated. The Leadership Team has been discussing how to better implement the CSP. Over 75% of CSP comes from two field offices. Conservation Districts may be asked to help get the word out about CSP.*

*NRCS is focusing on training this year since there is less money to obligate and offices will have a smaller workload. They will also be catching up on engineering plans and designs. **Gene Backhaus-NRCS** will be rolling out a virtual one-week training for conservation planning. The trainings will be held in six separate locations.*

The new Area 1 Assistant for Field Operations, Chad Cherefko, just started and he is located in the state office.

Todd Bolt is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources. He will be overseeing the PL-566 program (for which they currently have seven applications). The PL-566 goal is to have ten applications by the end of the year.

State Conservationist Clint Evans returns to Colorado in August. **ASTC Bronson Smart** plans to be at the June CSCB meeting. Randy Randall or **Gene Backhouse** may be filling in the ASTC position until **Clint** gets back. **Tim Macklin-NRCS** is leaving, and the position will be posted soon. There are three vacant Resource Team Lead (RT 11, 14, & 17) positions open. **John Andrews-NRCS** will be retiring soon. He will be working for NRCS in a part-time capacity.

The NRCS budget is extremely tight this year and they are looking to bolster the TA agreements with NACD and CSCB. **Randy** and **Bronson** have been working closely to keep staff, provide training and meet key agreements.

Randy reported that covid has seen some uptick but is mostly stable. He added that the budget has been a challenge this year. The partner CSU small acreage support staff have left. NRCS will start with replacement of one of the positions (there are funds available for 9 months) with hopes of filling both positions later.

CACD ED Bobbi Ketels addressed the NACD TA grant which has 4 Districts requesting renewals. CACD supports and encourages funding all four positions. She asked for clarification on how the funding is being managed for this program. Ranking from the partners, (NRCS, CSCB & CACD), is due May 27th. **Bronson** reported that he and **Randy** have ranked the offices and they will be sent to **Bobbi**. **Bronson** noted that the positions are funded at the National level. **Randy** added that Cope/Washington is #1, San Juan 2nd, Longmont 3rd and Delta 4th.

NACD will be looking to fund the top position at 100% and the other three at partial funding. **Bobbi** stated the narrative review sheet that NACD provided, shows San Juan fully funded and the others partially funded. **Cindy Lair-CDA/CSCB** suggested **Bobbi** contact NACD for clarification since it is more on the National level. **Jim** suggested that **Bobbi** send NACD the NRCS rankings.

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

CACD Lobbyist Brett Moore reported that the 2022 Legislative session has ended. This was a typical session for the number of Bills being tracked. CACD was tracking 46 Bills. CACD sponsored a piece of legislation with **Senator Donovan** that the CDA brought to the CACD. This involved the expiration of the Conservation District grant line. **Brett** moved forward with the Bill, with permission from the CSCB and CDA, asking for additional funding for conservation districts. \$148k was the final approved number which is \$2,000 per year for each district. This is on top of the \$6,000 that districts currently receive. This funding is from State general funds.

The Legislature is adjourned until January 2023. **Brett** will be actively monitoring the Ag Labor Bill. There is a desire to roll back some provisions of the big Ag labor bill that was passed in 2021.

CACD will review the bills that passed. **Brett** posted the bill tracker link in the chat for the Board to review and make any comments. He needs to reflect accurately on CACD's position on bills to the Secretary of State. Next CACD will be looking at the Resolutions that were passed on the 2021 Annual Meeting and prioritize them for the next session with any necessary follow-up.

Director George Fosha clarified how CSCB keeps track of the funding for direct assistance and the new \$2000 for each district. **Cindy** stated that the funds are kept separate but will be managed as direct assistance. **Brett** asked that with the consolidation of Districts will the funds be distributed equally. **Cindy** said that the CSCB tracks this internally. Currently consolidated districts receive 3 years of double assistance. Based on requests from a couple of Districts, the State Conservation Board members are discussing this issue. There are pros and cons to each suggestion.

Part of the problem is the lack of State funding. Some states give their Districts substantially more funds than Colorado. **Brett** suggested looking into how the red tape (statutory requirements) for Districts can be reduced.

Director Mike Cleary added that you can merge without merging by sharing costs. That way both groups still get funded. **Director Gray Thrash** stated that there are Districts already doing just that. However, if one District has a mil levy and they want to merge, that District might have to give up the mil levy and have a new election for the newly formed district.

CSCB Update - Cindy Lair:

Cindy Lair thanked **Bronson** for his work in Colorado especially for his knowledge of the PL-566 program.

She thanked CACD for their offer to partner with the Climate Smart Commodities Grant as well as their letter of support. They had fifty-four letters of support for the grant. If this grant is received, it will expand the program to thirty more districts and eligible entities for a total of fifty. She provided a link to a 3-minute NRP program on the STAR program. Colorado is mentioned in the program. The STAR Plus program, with funding through numerous grants, has \$5.2M and 132 producers working through conservation districts and three eligible entities. She invited the CACD board members to attend STAR office hours which are held every Monday morning starting at 11:00.

Cindy added that she has been working on a video project with CACD and NRCS. The video focuses on the partnerships that NRCS has developed over the years to get conservation on the ground for private landowners. She asked **CACD Board President, Jim Cecil**, if he would be willing to participate in the video project as a speaker.

CSCB held interviews for the NE representative and outreach specialist position. They have a leading candidate that she will meet again and check references before making an offer. **Cindy** thanked **Jim** for his participation in the interview process. She expects the person to start in mid-June.

Cindy reported that she attended a water quality tour of the Lower Arkansas River. Attendees include CDPHE Water Quality Control Division, the Lower Arkansas Conservancy District, and reps from Kansas for water quality and quantity. Kansas has been grumbling about water quality with uranium and selenium issues at the state line. Federal agencies, nor attorneys, were at this meeting but there will be another meeting to include fed agencies. The group was not ready for EPA to be part of the discussion.

NRCS has done a lot of work with contracts in the National Water Quality Initiative. It was a good meeting and not controversial. They will be looking for additional funding for water quality work. CACDs support with Reg 85 and getting the word out to producers to look at better ways of irrigating, has been helpful.

Aug 13 they will have a workshop in the San Luis Valley for the STAR program and she invited the CACD Board members to attend. This is the first of several planned workshops.

CDA Update – Les Owen

Les Owen-CDA thanked **Bronson** for his work while filling in as the Acting State Conservationist for Colorado.

The last meeting of the Wolf reintroduction was held in Meeker. The discussion was around the impact-based management of wolves. It boils down to what producers will be allowed to do to control wolves and what methods will be available. Details need to be worked out. Recommendations from the Stakeholder Advisory group will go to the Parks and Wildlife Commission to create a state management plan. CPW made the payment to US Fish and Wildlife to hire a contractor to start on the NEPA for a 10J Rule, which requires Colorado to have a permit from the Feds to introduce the wolves back into the State. State and local governments can participate as cooperating agencies.

CDA will be reaching out to Fish and Wildlife to be a cooperating agency. He encourages CDs to become cooperating agencies as well. The next meeting will be next week in the Woodland/Divide Park area. NEPA will have additional regulations to improve input opportunities for the local public.

The noxious weed program is fully staffed again. The seasonal crew is hired and will be out doing weed mitigation. Weed free forage inspectors are being lined up for the summer growing season.

NACD Update – Gary Thrash:

CACD Director Gary Thrash reported that the NACD has partnered with Acres USA for conservation to offer conservation centered books through their marketplace. These books will be of interest to beginning farmers or existing farmers wanting to motivate their operation. Their education hub offers free education materials for K through eight as well. Materials are based on the current year's topic. This year's theme is **Healthy Soils Healthy Life**.

NACD's President, Michael Crowder, will host **Coffee with Crowder** tomorrow night at 5:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to call in with any questions. The Summer meeting will be in July in San Juan, Puerto Rico. **Gary** will be attending the meeting. The SW/Pacific meeting will be on Sept. 8th in Maui, HI.

The Indiana State Department of Ag hosted an online seminar series called grant and funding opportunities for soil and water conservation districts. There is a link on their website.

As a side note, **Gary** stated that 23% of Colorado's Conservation District pay dues to the NACD.

Bobbi asked that the Board approve **Gary's** travel to the NACD Fall meeting. **Director Mike Cleary** moves to approve **Gary Thrash's** travel expenses for the Fall NACD meeting. **Director Charlie Carnahan** seconds the motion. **Motion Passes.**

NACD TA Grant Update:

Bobbi asked the board to approve the four District applications for the NACD TA grant and that all four be fully funded. She will send a write up from each district on the importance of these positions to NRCS and CACD. After discussions and clarification, **Director Mike Cleary** makes the motion to encourage the NACD to support full funding for each of the four district applications. **Director Gary Thrash** provides the second. **Motion Passes.**

CACD Programs:

Contract: CACD ED Bobbi Ketels reported that she is working on the second draft for the NRCS cooperative contract. It must now include all programs including the education/speaker workshop grant. She is considering offering something like ten districts a \$500 grant for summer/fall workshops. It was **Bobbi's** understanding that the \$30k would be from the signing date through Dec. 31. She has been notified that the contract will run from June 30, 2022, to June 30, 2023 (considered contract year), so it will not be until then that CACD can request more funds on the contract. She will provide the revised copy to the Board members.

Annual Meeting: Bobbi met with **CACD VP Tyler Neely**, and they decided to stay with the week after thanksgiving or the week before thanksgiving. They have shaved a day off by having resource committee meetings via Zoom. A joint board meeting is still on the agenda. There will be a separate board meeting for an hour to address resolutions, then go into breakout sessions. There will be two breakout sessions from 2-5 pm, that way they can have four sessions. Monday evening, have a cocktail hour, dinner, and live auction (which might be scratched due to low revenue and participation).

A silent auction might be planned with the employee's association, or a live auction, combining the two with a theme supporting youth programs and employee association scholarships. Venues are charging for more

*including meeting rooms and minimum food orders. Tuesday morning there would be a general session. Tuesday afternoon would be the membership meeting. On Wednesday, CACD would have their regular Board meeting. **Morgan with Conference Direct** is looking at IHG properties that wave room attrition and food minimum. Looking at the airport area, Stapleton area, Blackhawk/Central City and Crested Butte.*

***Camp Rocky** has had robust advertising since March. Twelve students enrolled but two have canceled. There is a good list of instructors for all four disciplines this year. There are no covid restriction right now. There will be food price increases. Planning for ten students per discipline. She has concerns about the low registration. She has offered District funding to visit the schools and teachers to share information about the Camp. A Camp Rocky Committee meeting is scheduled for next Thursday. After that meeting, there will be an Envirothon meeting.*

***Rose Banzhaf** has meetings scheduled for June where she will be promoting Envirothon to teacher groups. The website will be updated with information for this year and help teachers understand how to approach the program and build it into their curriculum. An ad has also been placed on Facebook and **Bobbi, Noah McCord** and **Ben Berlinger** were guests on the CSCB Coffee Hour to promote Camp Rocky and Envirothon.*

***Demonstration Project Proposals:** CACD has received nine proposals and only have funds for seven. **Bobbi** will visit with **Randy** to confirm which proposals will be approved by NRCS. She thanked the Board for reviewing the proposals. She will be preparing contracts with the districts who receive approval. The contract expires in September of 2023 at which time the program will end, and all projects must be wrapped up. She hopes to reintroduce the program in a couple of years if NRCS has the funds.*

*The current NRCS contract expires on May 25th and **Bobbi** is trying to wrap up and verify about \$48,000 for nine district workshops and work done on CACD programs. If there are funds left, CACD can use the funds for CACD programs like Envirothon, Annual Meeting, Camp Rocky, and The Conservator. All obligations have been met to spend these funds.*

***Bobbi** has provided **Mary** with a list of items that she needs help with updating on the CACD website.*

CACD Financials

***Bobbi** asked the Board if they would like the financial packet that she sent to **CACD Secretary/Treasurer Mike Cleary** sent to them. QuickBooks On-Line does not breakdown **Bobbi's** time. She has moved her hours into an Excel spreadsheet and broken down her time into classes and programs. She has added her total hours and then broke out what would qualify as a 50% reimbursement from NRCS. Her time in QBs will be on the public disclosure. She explained the spreadsheet and how her hours are reflected. She asked the Board if they are okay with how she has prepared the spreadsheet. **Mike** said this information is given to the districts and they seem comfortable with CACD's reporting. All necessary backup is there.*

CACD Secretary/Treasurer Mike Cleary** moves to allocate Bob Warner's prepaid sponsorship for the 2022 Stock Show, (received by CACD in 2021 and shows as income in 2021), be moved to 2022 sponsorship. **Director Nick Charchalis** seconds the motion. **Motion Passes.

***Bobbi** asked the Board if they would like the negative balances left as is or should she move private donations from general funds and make the balances a zero. It was decided that the balances will be left at a negative balance with paperwork to backup the expenses and income. No motion is required.*

*The next Legislative Committee meeting is on June 1. **Bobbi** would like to use the meeting as an extension of this board meeting to review all financials with no other updates. It will be considered a working meeting. Any votes on the 2021 financials and the first quarter 2022 will be part of this meeting.*

CACD Secretary/Treasurer Mike Cleary makes the motion to have the June 1 Legislative Committee Meeting an extension of the May 18 meeting to discuss financials. **Director George Fosha** seconds the motion. **Motion Passes.**

Bobbi informed the Board that she has been looking for a different hotel for Leadville. **Sarah**, who works with Lake County and the Upper Ark CDs, has been in contact and she is aware of the Upper Ark Grant. She is aware of the need for the tour of the project to wrap things up. The tour is set for Wednesday August 17. **Bobbi** would like the Board to decide if that is when they will have their face-to-face meeting and if so, should she plan for a full day meeting.

CACD President Jim Cecil asked how the meeting would be funded. **Bobbi** said the actual expenses would be funded and donated time would be considered in-kind. Upper Ark will reimburse mileage. They will also pay for meals and hotel rooms. There is still about \$19,000 in that grant and **Bobbi** is waiting to hear from the program manager on how these funds will be managed. If the program manager does not show up for the tour, CACD will need to talk again.

Brett Moore added that CACD should give **Senator Donovan** the Legislator of the Year award since that area is in her District and she has expressed interest in attending the meeting. **Director Tyler Neely** makes the motion to award **Senator Kerry Donovan with the Legislator of the Year award.** **Secretary/Treasurer Mike Cleary** seconds the motion. **Motion Passes.**

Bobbi will ask **Morgan** to get hotel rates for Tuesday & Wednesday. She needs to know what nights each Director would like reserved. She will book a meeting room for the entire day and have lunch catered. **Rachel** from NACD and the two conservation districts will be attending the meeting as well.

President Misc. Discussion and Updates:

CSCB's quarterly meeting is scheduled for June in Greely. This includes the first Soil Health Advisory Meeting. Director **Nick Charchalis** will attend both meetings. **Bobbi** will send the meeting information to the Board. **Nick** would like to know what this board is going to recommend with the districts that are merging. He asked that members reach out to him with their suggestions.

President Jim Cecil stated that Colorado is interpreting that producers cannot graze or hay on CRP lands. Discussion continued but it is not clear that this is the case in emergency situations. **Jim** would like to have this researched by the June 1 meeting for clarification.

The next Board meeting will be June 15, 2022, via Zoom.

Meeting Adjourned by President Jim Cecil at 9:47 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels
CACD Executive Director