

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2022, via Zoom**

Attendees:

*Jim Cecil, CACD President - Republican River Watershed
Tyler Neely, CACD Vice President - Rio Grande River Watershed
Scott Jones, CACD Director, Immediate Past President - Colorado River Watershed
Gary Thrash, CACD Director - San Juan Basin - CO NACD Alternate Representative
Charlie Carnahan, CACD Director - Upper South Platte Watershed
George Fosha, CACD Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed
Nick Charchalis, CACD Director – North-Platte/White-Yampa River Watershed
Dale Parker, CACD Interim Director - Lower South Platte Watershed
Bob Warner, CACD Alternate Director - CO NACD Representative - NCF Trustee
Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director
Brett Moore, CACD Legislative Liaison*

Absent:

Mike Cleary, CACD Secretary/Treasurer - Gunnison Dolores Watershed

Guests:

*Randy Randall, NRCS
Les Owen, CDA
Cindy Lair, CSCB*

Call to Order:

*The meeting was called to order by **President Jim Cecil** at 7:30 AM after establishing a quorum. **Director Gary Thrash** moves to approve the September 21, 2022 meeting agenda. **Director George Fosha** gives the second. **Motion Passes.***

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

Brett noted the calendar items that are driving his activities. In the Legislative call this morning they learned that resolutions are due in 9 days from the Watersheds and CACD. At this morning's meeting they also discussed resolutions that CACD will be putting forward at the annual meeting. The resolutions will be to clean up things and provide better communication for the work CACD is already doing, making it easier to access and use by the Districts. This will include the Action Item appendix and a review of the intro paragraphs in the Policy Book. The goal is to make it a cleaner, easier piece of policy for everyone to use.

The election ballots will drop in 26 days with the election in 48 days from now. Seventeen of the 35 State Senators are not running for office. Eighteen are running in new districts and all 65 House members are running in new districts due to the redistricting. The 2023 Legislative session is slated to start on January 9, 2023.

The Interim Ag and Water Committee will have their last meeting of the year tomorrow the 22nd. Brett sent around the eleven bills that they will be voting on. If any of the bills get ¾ of the votes, the bill then goes before the Executive Committee of Legislative Council before it moves forward. CACD will be able to see which bills pass the Committee and follow them.

Ag Council is scheduled for their Fall meeting on October 5th at the Farm Bureau offices in Denver. Brett will be attending this meeting in person representing CACD. He will provide notes after that meeting.

Brett added that he was happy to see everyone at the Buena Vista meeting. It was great to meet in person again.

Director George Fosha asked Brett if the bills from the Interim Ag and Water Committee are sure to get approved and moved on. Brett stated that after they go through all the committee reviews and approvals, they are usually gone through. However, there can be exceptions.

NRCS Update:

Randy Randall provided the NRCS update. Currently NRCS is closing the fiscal year. They are optimistic that they will be able to carry forward about \$200-\$300K into next year's budget. There has been a lot of discussion about funds that will go through NRCS in FY23. Right now, they do not know what that is going to look like and how it will impact NRCS service centers. They are looking at ways to quickly roll out the funds including the utilization of Technical Service Providers and bolster partner agreements to get projects on the ground. They have been told that the funds will arrive early this year. This will help them to round out any agreements that were not fully funded this year due to budget shortfalls.

Randy noted that Ag Secretary Vilsack was in town this week with the Deputy Under Secretary Gloria Montano-Greene. He will let Cindy Lair speak to their visit in her presentation. He added that there were over seventy projects funded for a total of over \$2B.

NRCS expects to have about twenty employees attending the CACD Annual Meeting in November. They have funding caps that they must stay below and that will be the limiting factor on how many people from NRCS will be able to attend the meeting. This meeting will give CACD an opportunity to meet some of the new State NRCS leadership.

Randy stated that Donna Rasmussen will be retiring, and Shaun Forehand will be Acting for a 120-day detail. He is in Grand Junction and is a management analyst. The State Engineer position is being readvertised. Clint has reached out to the National office to see if they can offer some latitude with the position, such as not requiring the position be in Denver. Other states are having similar issues with hiring engineers as they are in high demand and NRCS is not competing well with salary.

The NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee meeting will be held Oct. 13 on Teams from 8:00 to 12:00. There are programmatic opportunities and announcements they would like to offer to producers earlier this year so field staff has time to get the programs on the ground. He would like to have CACD attend this meeting.

NRCS will offer partner agreement training in the first quarter of 2023. Opportunities, responsibilities, and interactions will be addressed at this training.

Randy thanked CACD for their support while he was the Acting State Conservationist.

With reference to questions on programs such as CRP, NRCS can bring in Ivy Jean Reynolds to speak directly to the Board.

CSCB Update - Cindy Lair:

Cindy Lair reported that CDA was selected for the Climate Smart Commodities grant. CDA applied for \$29M but were awarded \$25M. It will be a pared back version of what was requested. She feels that CDA can still work with the amount awarded. This grant will expand the current STAR Plus program from twenty eligible entities to

fifty. This gives more districts opportunities to apply to deliver the STAR Plus program locally. They will continue to look at other eligible entities to participate as well. It also expands the STAR Plus program to other states that include New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Washington, and Montana. These are all states that signed on during the proposal preparation. This is another phase of the program and will be an expansion of the current STAR Plus program. Under this program, there will be more verification of eco system services that occurred. Those eco system services, and the quantification of those, will stay with the farmer so no one else will be taking those to cash in on. They will be cashed in by the farmers and ranchers that are participating in the program. They are still in the process of seeing how that will work. They are reviewing how they will accommodate less funding. They will be negotiating with USDA on what they think should be continued and what CDA might pare down.

Cindy noted that they are also in the process of hiring a new soil health coordinator. Applications have been reviewed and they will start the interviewing process. She invited CACD to sit in on the interviewing of candidates. Interview dates have not been set.

The State Conservation Board met last week in Grand Lake. The Middle Park Conservation District put on an outstanding tour for them. They looked at the East Troublesome Fire area. The debris flows that have and continue to occur are extremely destructive. The NRCS Watershed Protection Program engineering and funding happened quickly. She stated that the projects were beautifully done. The Conservation District collaborated with the County and Northern Water. She added that the Board meeting went well. The subcommittee reviewing the funding for Conservation Districts that want to consolidate have not determined how to address the issue. **Director George Fosha** is on the subcommittee. There are numerous things to consider before making a recommendation to the full Board. The issue deserves a thorough investigation.

The Soil Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) also met at this meeting. They agreed to a different way they are going to run their meetings. There were no formal by-laws set up. They will be very instrumental in the Climate Smart Commodities grant by giving CDA direction on how the funds are to be distributed and on how to define eligible entities. Cindy thanked **Director Nick Charchalis** for being at the meeting and providing input. Usually, SHAC meets at the quarterly CSCB meeting or immediately after, however due to the CACD Annual Meeting, the SHAC will meet on November 30, 2022.

Cindy added that during **Secretary Vilsacks** visit, they had a good panel of producers there to talk about their involvement in STAR Plus program and what they hoped to achieve with the program. Shaun Brookman from the Eagle County Conservation District spoke as well. At this visit **Sec. Vilsack** noted that climate smart practices are not only important in the US but internationally as well. The CDA Market Division contacted her saying they have a meeting with the UK, and they are asking for proof on what is being done for the climate, regenerative ag and conservation before they sign an MOU with Colorado. She feels this will bring more relevance to the Conservation Districts and what they are doing.

CDA Update – Les Owen:

Les Owen updated the Board on the Agriculture Drought Climate Resilience Office (ADCRO) office being officially moved under the umbrella of the Conservation Services Division. Kristen Boysen is the specialist in the Division now. The Legislature created the office for Climate Preparedness in the Governor's office. That Bill also came with some FTE for the efforts for several departments including the Dept. of Ag. They are still looking at how ADCRO fits in with other departments. Later this fall there will be efforts to write a strategic plan for the ADCRO. He would like CACD to participate in the creation of this plan.

Les stated that it has been a busy month on the Federal Lands Planning side. CDA has signed five new MOUs with cooperating agencies. There is a big statewide game corridor plan amendment for BLM that is also happening.

The letter of intent is oil and gas focused and the scope is likely to expand to other uses. CDA is also working with the BLM in the NW part of the state on the Wolf Creek Reservoir project which is a multiyear undertaking.

They have started cooperating agency meetings for the 10J Wolf Rule. The Notice of Intent has come out and it provides the preliminary alternatives they are considering. The baseline is that wolves are going to be introduced with or without any action from the USFW. The USFW is interpreting the endangered species act as; you can go to WY, where wolves are not endangered, gather a trailer load, and bring them across the state line into Colorado and the wolves are not considered endangered until their paws touch the ground in Colorado. With this interpretation, the CPW does not need a permit to reintroduce wolves only a permit to manage wolves. Wolves will be introduced. The alternatives are wolf reintroduction with a 10J Rule that provides management flexibility or wolf reintroduction without a 10J Rule, which is the current North Park status. This is not what we want. A draft EIS is expected the first week of October. The Stakeholder Advisory Group wrapped up their meetings and the CPW staff are working on the state plan that should be available the first part of December with the CPW Commission having the final approval next May. Some discussion continued about the local news articles relating to the wolf reintroduction.

Les addressed the release of hazardous substances listed by EPA. He is still checking into what this means for the Ag industry. Herbicide and pesticide are on the list as potential sources. This could leave producers responsible for cleanup, which could have some ramifications.

NACD Update – Gary Thrash and Bob Warner:

Gary reported that he and Bob Warner were in Maui for the joint meeting of the Southwest and Pacific Regions. There were 70 Districts represented. Challenges and successes were discussed at this meeting over things like invasive species, storm water, and wildfires. They toured a 20,000-acre ranch that is under a severe drought. They are experiencing a severe problem with invasive Axis deer that are eating the pastures used for cattle grazing. They also toured a native plant nursery and saw how they are dealing with the same problem. Bob Warner was scheduled as the lunch speaker on the third day to address the game damage compensation for landowners. Gary helped him with the presentation and explained how Colorado dealt with the issue. Gary added that Colorado is a leader in the US on this matter.

Gary attended a meeting with the Natural Resource Policy group. The Inflation Reduction Act was discussed and how NRCS will receive significant increases in some of their programs. NACD's concern is what happens to the NRCS programs when the funding goes away? NACD is in discussions with the Administration about this issue.

NACD, NRCS and a private company are providing carbon reports for a pilot project for landowners to see how much carbon they are sequestering through their farming and ranching operations. They are looking for landowner participants that grow corn, wheat, soybeans and for rangeland use as well. They are looking to get 100,000-acres enrolled in the study by the end of September.

NACD is also watching the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. It provides funding to the state's wildlife agencies for endangered species plans.

The Annual NACD meeting will be Feb. 11 –15th in New Orleans.

CACD Programs:

Camp Rocky: *Bobbi stated that there will be some facility changes at the Camp next year. CACD is looking at how many camp supervisors from RMMC staff they can lock in for next year. CACD may be looking for other ways to fill these positions. Pricing for food and lodging for the contract should be worked out soon. As soon as there is a draft Bobbi will present it to the Board for a vote.*

Envirothon: Bobbi has been working with Rose. Rose has not had the opportunity to present Envirothon to the AP science teachers. Rose will be having a meeting with the CSU Extension office in her area. Bobbi and Rose are looking for a person possibly from CSU to work as the Program Manager for Envirothon. They both also attended an NCF Envirothon online seminar.

NRCS: CACD completed their last agreement with NRCS. The final reimbursement has been submitted for payment. Bobbi is getting the ezGrants platform set up for the new agreement.

Everything is in place for the seven districts doing the demonstration projects. Bobbi has prepared a power point presentation that she will send to Randy. No reimbursement requests have been received to date.

The **Upper Ark** project is closed out. All funds have been expended The only items left for official close-out are the two year-end reports due in December.

CCA/CAWA: Bobbi is working with Phil Bring on a survey for innovative ideas on workshops to bring to districts and producers. She is also working with CAWA on their new program where CACD agreed to a certain level of in-kind participation. The agreement will be fulfilled by giving CAWA and Ag Water NetWORK presentation time during the Annual Meeting. Bobbi is also collaborating with Ag Water NetWORK and CAWA to bring more workshops to the Districts this fall, winter, and early spring. She is hoping to receive funding backfill from NRCS for the new CACD/NRCS 5-YR cooperative agreement funded in 2022. As Randy stated in his update, this will be determined when NRCS receives their budget numbers for FY23.

Annual Meeting: Bobbi stated that online registration for the Annual Meeting is open as well as the hotel room block. Hotel reservations must be made for the CACD block by Nov. 7th for the \$115/night price. She is working on speakers and breakouts. Additional details for the meeting were discussed.

Bobbi reminded the Board that the Resource Committee Meetings will be the week before the Annual Meeting. CACD will need to set a meeting date before that to review the final resolutions and any emergency resolutions to have time to get them to the Resource Committees. It was decided to add this discussion to the Legislative Committee meeting agenda on November 2nd. There are five resolutions, not counting the CACD Resolution(s). Four of those are emergency resolutions. There are additional watershed meetings this month and there may be more resolutions submitted. Bobbi will send the resolutions to the board members when ready.

CACD FINANCIAL SUMMARY: 08-31-2022

Beginning Balance in checking on 08-1-2022, \$150,521.26

Checks/Payments Cleared -\$50,177.77, Deposits & Credits Cleared \$44,687.73

Statement Ending/Cleared Balance in Checking as of 08-31-2022 \$145,031.22

Total Uncleared Transactions = -\$33,791.67

Ending Register Balance as of 08-31-2022 \$111,239.55

Reserve Total \$41,075.15 *In US Bank Checking Acct

2021 Estimated Funds Rolled Over & Designated for 2022 Youth Programs **\$9,500.00**

NOI as of 08-31-2022 \$60,664.40

Credit Card Beginning Statement Balance as of 8/06/22 \$898.68

Charges Cleared \$8915.53, Credits/CC Payments Cleared \$898.68

Credit Card Ending Statement Balance as of 9/07/22 \$8915.53

Total District Dues Paid as of 8/31/22 **\$46,700.00** (membership invoiced (74) \$88,800.00-budget\$60K)

Total District Dues Paid as of 8/31/21 \$54,600.00 (down by \$7900.00)

Grand Total District Dues PD in 2021 \$58,750.00 (budget \$60K)

Bobbi noted that the dues are below what they were last year at this time.

UARRP Activity 07-31-2022 YTD:

Closed Out – Zero Balance

NRCS Activity 07-31-2022 YTD:

NRCS previous Grant Closed out as of 5/25/22 \$0.00 balance

NRCS new Grant as of 6/30/22 \$30,000.00 \$0 expended as of 8/31/22

NRCS Demonstration Project – 7 district projects approved \$75K – \$0 expended as of 8/31/22 – expires 9/30/23

Misc. Discussion:

Cindy Lair noted that the \$2,000 for the Districts has not been received by CSCB yet. They have asked for an update from the Comptroller. The regular Direct Assistance went out to Districts last month. No other discussion took place.

The next Board meeting will be October 19, 2022.

Meeting Adjourned by President Jim Cecil at 9:09 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels

CACD Executive Director