

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts  
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
September 15, 2021, via Zoom Meeting**

**Attendees:**

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

**Absent:**

**Guests:**

Clint Evans, NRCS  
Randy Randall, NRCS  
Cindy Lair, CSCB  
Noah McCord, CSCB

**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. Without any additional agenda items, the board agreed to move forward with the agenda.

**Prior Meeting Minutes:**

**President Scott Jones** asked for a motion to approve the **August 2021** minutes. **Director George Fosha** made the motion to approve the minutes and **Director Charlie Carnahan** gave the second. Joe Pope noted that he was marked as Absent when he was in attendance. Bobbi will correct the minutes to reflect this change. Without any further discussion, the motion to approve the CACD BOD's **August, 2021** minutes was **passed**.

**NRCS Update- Clint Evans & Randy Randall:**

Clint stated that the covid protocols are directed by the National office. Currently NRCS offices can be at 25-50% staff. Due to Moffit County's covid infection rates, the Craig office can only have 25% staff and they are not allowed to have in-person appointments. The numbers are updated each week so this could change if the infection rate changes. The President has signed an Executive Order requiring all Federal employees and contractors be vaccinated. 73% of NRCS employees are fully vaccinated and another 5% have received at least one shot. 10-11% certified that they are not vaccinated. There will be information about accommodations for employees that have medical or religious reasons for not getting the vaccine. Clint assumes this will apply to partner employees. Clint and Randy will verify this information. Some District Boards were upset when the guidance came out that referred to visitors in the office. It has been requested that the partner relationships be addressed in future guidance so there is no confusion. He has also received notifications from employees that have indicated they will leave NRCS employment if they are required to receive the vaccination.

Kimberly Burr is the Acting Area Conservationist in Grand Junction. She is from San Angelo, TX. The AC position for Grand Junction has been advertised with applications due by Sept. 22, 2021.

NRCS is finishing the Conservation Incentive Contract EQIP funding obligations. There is \$9M in the funding pot. They received almost \$14.5M in applications. Obligations should wrap up Friday, Sept. 24. Clint is appreciative of the staff and the number of producers they have been able to assist. The total EQIP obligation for 2021 in Colorado is \$43M.

Clint would like to discuss the Demonstration Project Agreement before the end of this meeting if time allows. Or table this discussion and come back to it at the next meeting. He is asking if a ceiling should be set for each demonstration project. He is thinking around \$5-10k. Randy will review the contract for in-kind match as there are Districts that would like to participate but do not have the required 25% match in cash. He asked the CACD Board for their input on how to promote this opportunity. If the budget allows in 2022, he would like to be able to amend and add additional monies to the agreement to grow the opportunity to Districts across the State.

Randy shared the covid changes. The latest information shows a significant increase from July 10 until now. The Delta variant has spread throughout the entire United States. Due to the spread of covid, NRCS appreciates the opportunity to go virtual with the CACD Annual meeting. The NRCS reentry plan, scheduled for October 1, has been delayed. Daily guidance is being received. Randy screenshared the current covid spread map in the US. Last week Colorado NRCS had three positives in their offices. Randy encouraged the Board to reach out to him with any questions about the current guidance. The Department has identified **variants of interest**. The latest variant of interest is the **Mu** variant. There is a possibility for it to mutate and spread but at this point it is just something to keep an eye on. As more information is available, he will share it with CACD.

Clint informed the Board that NRCS has defined the **Corona Virus Agriculture Relief Payments (CARP)** that are eligible under the EQIP program. There were seven priority practices identified. Three of those affect contracts in Colorado: **Irrigation pipeline, Irrigation systems and livestock pipelines**. Any of these contracts completed in 2021, and payment was made, there will be supplemental payments made by the State staff. There are about 300 projects that will receive the additional payment if the producer chooses to receive the payment. For payments on contracts that are completed between now and December, there are extra payment options within the payment window that staff can select and approve the additional payment at the time the practice is completed. Center pivot sprinklers were not included for additional payment. Sprinklers did not meet the criteria in the economic analysis for the supplemental payment. Clint expressed his disappointment in this decision.

Bobbi asked if CACD needs to sign the final agreement for the **Demonstration Project Program**. Clint stated that it does need to be signed so the funds can be obligated. He still wants to give Districts options for the required match as stated earlier. Bobbi stated that the cap is currently set at \$10,000 per project. Clint agreed with that dollar amount. Bobbi also verified that it is okay to sign the agreement with it saying that the in-kind match required is 25%. Per Randy, the in-kind change can be incorporated later. The current contract is 75% federal and 25% hard match. NRCS is also reviewing the possibility that there may be additional state monies included in the 25% or if that would be considered additional Federal match. Randy will continue to work on these issues and will keep the CACD Board updated.

President Scott Jones asked Clint if the lack of materials for pipe projects is a localized or a statewide issue. Clint stated that they are aware of the issue within Colorado and other States. Contracts state that a project must start within 12 months of the obligation of the funds, however they are allowed the flexibility to work with the participants to amend or modify those contracts and move the date to a year later. Due to the increase material costs, some participants have asked to cancel their contracts because of the additional out of pocket costs. NRCS

has been asking these participants to hold off and see if the inflation is temporary and costs will drop again and just delay the project since they have the flexibility to do that. If prices stay high, this will be addressed again.

**Director Jim Cecil** asked if this affects the Demonstration Project Program. Clint said it did not because that program is funded with the general CTAO1 funds.

**Director Mike Cleary** mentioned the cost of natural gas as it is the feedstock for a lot of the plastics industry. We have exceeded the supply and demand curve. Natural gas is being exported and the cost will not go down due to the exporting. Delta County has several BOR piping projects and they cannot physically find the pipe to satisfy those contracts. Clint added that they are working with the National office on the 2022 payment schedules and to see what kind of adjustments there might be due to the increased costs.

**President Scott Jones** asked Clint if the call on the Colorado River for Lake Powell and Lake Mead was something that CACD should address. Clint stated that the call was on Blue Mesa, Flaming Gorge and Navajo Dam. The coming winter has the potential of being cold and dry and these Dams will be at a lower level to start than last year. **Director Gary Thrash** brought up the possibility of Arizona bringing flood water from the Missouri River to Arizona. A 2010-2012 report by the Bureau of Reclamation has looked at this option.

Randy provided an update on the **Demonstration Project Agreement for FY 2022**. He heard back from the Grants and Agreements Division, and they can go back and authorize in-kind match. NRCS is in the process of adjusting the verbiage in the agreement. Randy clarified the verbiage before Bobbi presented the agreement to the Board with a screen share. **Director Mike Cleary** moves to approve the NRCS Demonstration Project Agreement as presented. **Director Charlie Carnahan** seconds the motion. **Motion passes.**

Randy expects the Agreement to be ready for Scott's signature by the end of the week. Bobbi and Petra will send the information out to the Districts.

#### **CSCB Update – Cindy Lair:**

Cindy reported on the State Conservation Board meeting. There were two tours associated with the meeting. One was the matching grant project with the Mosca/Hooper District. It entailed a vermicompost type situation. There is a professor at NM State University that has perfected this type of vermicompost in this setting. It is highly concentrated on a per acre basis. The CD worked with the local composter in Hermosa in Costilla County. It has become successful. This CD was a bootstrap District and has come back strong. The other tour was in La Jara where they looked at The Peoples Ditch. It is the oldest ditch in Colorado and recognized by the Territory of Colorado in 1852. It is part of the acequia water system. It was an interesting education. The local NRCS staff was helpful in setting up the tour.

She stated that the **Soil Health Program** is going well. They had a short presentation by Ryan Taylor on the STAR program. As of yesterday, they had 17 applications from Conservation Districts that want to participate in the program. There are four slots for non-conservation district entities. Colorado Corn has applied as one of those entities. CSCB is collaborating with them to share one of the partnership soil health positions. That person will be working with Colorado Corn to assist their members and connecting with Conservation Districts. They are also working with Rocky Mountain Audubon. They have a robust conservation ranching program that is run by Dusty Downy. They will be working on the ranching side of the soil health program. The other two non-district entities are two tribes in Southwestern Colorado, the Ute Mountain Utes, and the Southern Ute.

CSCB received the grant from **Conservation Partnership Program through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**. This grant will cover the Republican River Watershed as well as areas in the Lower Ark and the Lower South Platte that are in the Ogalala Aquifer area. They are looking at the connection between soil health and water availability (water holding capacity of the soil). They would like at least four districts collaborating

with this grant funding. They are still waiting to hear if they will receive the Conservation Innovation Grant through NRCS. She expects to hear about the grant award in October. These grants have budgets that include administrative assistance. She anticipates that they will hire a grant administrator like Abbey's position.

Cindy and Les have a meeting with Commissioner Greenberg and Jordan about how the **Soil Health Advisory Committee** is going to work. CACD has two seats on the Committee. CSCB discussed who on their Board might be interested in representing CSCB on the Committee. The decision was deferred until the changeover, which will be happening later this year, in the State Conservation Board positions. Cindy would like CACD to be thinking of who might like to serve on the Advisory Committee.

At the CSCB meeting, they discussed the joint meeting with CACD in November. Agenda items that they would like to talk about include watershed leadership. CSCB was asked to be more engaged in helping watersheds. They brought in Ray Ledgerwood to help build up a Watershed. Watersheds seem to be lacking officers. CSCB would like to discuss how the two boards (CSCB & CACD) can get the Watersheds more active and meaningful.

CSCB has hired a new **Regional Field Representative, Garth Schaefer**, who will cover the Upper & Lower Ark, Rio Grande and fill the communication and outreach position as part of the NRCS agreement with CSCB.

Cindy informed the Board of an initiative brought forward by the Rio Grande Watershed. Several years ago, CSCB offered an incentive for Districts to have a consolidation election to merge with a neighboring district. In that initiative, Districts that merged would receive 3 years of double State Direct Assistance funds. Mergers would task the CSCB staff, so they are going to meet to study this after the joint meeting with CACD in November. These mergers would decrease the number of annual dues collected by CACD. CACD would need to review their dues structure. CSCB is working on what the positive and negative impacts of consolidations would be. She would like to hear ideas from CACD Board members as they are open for ideas.

**Director Nick Charchalis** asked Cindy how many Districts might be thinking about consolidating. Cindy did not know how many districts would be interested. **Director George Fosha** said he feels it is a great idea and important. He also feels that the dues structure should stay the same. **Director Mike Cleary** stated that if the double direct assistance is permanent then maybe the newly consolidated District might be able to pay double CACD dues. Cindy added that, as more districts consolidate, it puts the work on her staff. Eventually maybe one of the Field Specialists that has an area with several consolidations, could take on some of the work associated with combining districts. Or they could hire a paralegal to do the work.

Clint asked if there is a way to reverse engineer this. His concern is where they have Districts that cover an entire county. They may not have the desire or opportunity to consolidate. Will they be penalized by not receiving the double assistance funds? Is there an opportunity to double incentivize a District that covers an entire county? **Director Mike Cleary** added that the issue would be County Commissioners not wanting to help a district that is in another County. Districts with mil-levies would never want to merge.

**Director Gary Thrash** stated that at the NACD Regional meeting they discussed producing a strategic plan for the Region. He thinks that how Colorado deals with Watersheds should be part of that plan. Cindy thinks this would be another great topic to discuss at the CACD/CSCB meeting.

#### **Legislative Update - Brett Moore:**

Brett reported that this is the slow legislative time of year, and he is taking care of older resolutions. He is working on the issue of clarifying an action item vs a policy item, which would be a CACD lead Resolution. It will include an action item appendix in the Policy Book that will go back 5 years. Action items will either sunset or be complete at that time. This will give Districts a place to look up those items. It will also provide a Resolution progress report at each annual meeting. This will create more transparency and continuity. The CACD Legislative

Committee also continues to follow the **Ag Labor** legislation. They are having calls on this every couple of weeks and Bobbi sends the meeting information out to the Board. The one size fits all in this legislation does not work due to the variety of needs and time constraints with the various crops.

**Director George Fosha** said that CACD did issue a letter of support on the BLM wild horse issue. Also, he spoke to Callie about the water recording issue. He spoke to the State Forest Service. He will give the Legislative Committee an update at the next meeting.

**Director Nick Charchalis** said that on the Richardson ground squirrel issue, AFIS has a program that they will implement. They presented the program to the Cattleman's groups in his area last week. AFIS is working on a new formulation that they hope to offer. It will cost about \$35/acre. This is all related to the Resolution.

**President Scott Jones** asked Brett about nominations for Legislator of the Year. Scott mentioned Jerry Sonnenberg due to his support of the Drought Relief Funding Bill. He has been the Legislator of the Year several times over his 16 years in the Legislature. Brett feels it might be more appropriate to give him a life-time achievement award as this may be his last term as a State Legislator. Brett will review and make suggestions for this award later.

#### **CDA Update - Les Owen:**

Les reported that the ACRE<sup>3</sup> funding can be used for any type of renewable energy even piping for pressure for hydro power. In some situations, the funds must be spent by June of 2022 and in September in other situations. The drought stimulus funds have \$1.5M in the competitive grant portion of that legislation. Applications are open until the 30<sup>th</sup> of September. CDA has received 16 applications as of today. Some of the applications are from Conservation Districts.

An Arizona lawsuit has vacated the 2020 navigable waters. The EPA and Army Corp (ACE) has gone back to using the 2018 guidance. Which is what Colorado has used. **CDPHE's** response to that is to abandon their GAP waters dredge and fill permitting authority, that they have been after, and support the Biden Administration's efforts to rewrite **WOTUS** which will continue the protections that were in place with the 2018 guidance. This brings back the ditch piping projects and whether they need a dredge and fill permit. As of July 31, 2021, there is a **Regional General Permit** that can cover those type projects. Those projects should be in contact with the ACE and make sure they are covered under the Regional General Permit. The overall guidance released by **CDPHE** for all projects states that, if you have a jurisdictional permit from the ACE from April to September of this year that said it was non-jurisdictional, you should go back and get another jurisdictional determination. The State submitted comments on the Federal Register on the new rewrite of **WOTUS**. The Administration's plan is to reinstate the 2015 rule and write another rule to supplement that rule.

**Director Gary Thrash** said that NACD has been involved in the **WOTUS** discussion for a long time. NACD had a conference call to discuss their position. They continue to work with EPA and the ACE. He will send the summary on the NACD position to Les. Les stated that the position of Ag organizations is different from the State of Colorado. However, the State supports all the modifications to the ag exemptions under the 404 permitting.

The **GMUG** Forest Plan is out for review with comments due November 12. They are holding virtual meetings, by Ranger District, to answer questions on the Plan. Les encourages all Districts involved to look at the Plan and provide any comments they may have. Districts that have questions can reach out to Les or Adam.

Les reminded the Board that the CDA is participating in a stakeholder advisory group and technical work group for the wolf reintroduction. Les welcomes any questions or concerns that anyone would like to discuss.

Brett informed Les that the Delta Conservation District has a Resolution that has not moved forward. The issue is the ACRE<sup>3</sup> program. The ACRE<sup>3</sup> grants are only available for agricultural use and not mixed residential. Small producers are using the same water for ag as for the residence. Delta asked that a meeting be set up with Sam Anderson to discuss that and see if there is a way to provide a work around for the smaller projects. Les acknowledged that there are some caveats in the program with regards to not allowing residential renewable generating. It must be beneficial to the ag operation. **Director Mike Cleary** stated that Sam Anderson's division also does energy audits. The case in point is when you have a small operation and are running ag related equipment, such as a refrigeration unit out of their garage to sell their products, the economics for working with Sam are not there when they must use a separate meter for the ag related equipment. In the energy audit, a split in use could be derived to produce the proper percentages for residential and agricultural use. He went on to state that hydro power is now more expensive than solar power so it would be good to let people use a meter for both and have its use split, the ACRE<sup>3</sup> program would have more participants. Per Les, that requirement was added to the program by the Value-Added Development Board. He acknowledged that there are more small farms that are tied to the residence. Changing that requirement would need to come from the Board.

**Director Nick Charchalis** asked Les if CDA has taken a position on the wild horse issue in Sand Gulch. Les stated that CDA is not allowed to take a position on the issue. CACD did take a stance and signed a letter written by the Board.

**President Scott Jones** asked Les if there were additional discussions on funding for the wolf reintroduction. Les said that funding comes up at every stakeholder meeting. There is consensus that the funding does not need to come from sportsmen nor hunting license fees, but the habitat stamp does come up as well as private sector donors. At this point nothing has been identified. It is early in the process and recommendations from the groups will be decided by the Parks and Wildlife Committee. If it comes from general funds, the Legislature will decide. There are no numbers on how many or where to do the releases. It will take an enormous amount of money to cover the loss of livestock due to the wolves. There are many questions still to be answered.

**NACD Update – Gary Thrash and Bob Warner:**

**Director Gary Thrash** reported that he and Bob went to the **SW Regional** meeting in Jackson, WY the end of August. The focus was on Conservation District marketing. Washington State presented on how they do marketing. They have full-time communication people that help with the marketing. Rachel Theler led them through an exercise on developing a marketing program using worksheets. One of them helped identify your audience. Gary felt these worksheets would be helpful to a Conservation District.

Tomorrow there will be an Urban and Community Conservation Webinar at 12 pm EDT. The presentation will be from the Washington State Communication Manager for Conservation Districts about the marketing toolkit they use.

He also reported that due to turnover, NACD is currently hiring several positions. Should this Board know of anyone that is interested in working at the National level, please refer them to the NACD website. NACD is working with Mercer Insurance to offer health insurance benefits to Gold level or higher NACD memberships. Bobbi will be looking into this insurance and what it could mean for the Colorado Districts.

The **NACD Annual meeting in Orlando, FL will be February 12-16, 2022**. The next Summer meeting is going to be in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Pacific and Rocky Mountain Regional meeting is going to be in Maui, HI, provided covid does not restrict the meeting.

Bob Warner added that they had an excellent conservation tour at the SW meeting. In was in an area outside of Jackson where they have created a stormwater wetland to get rid of the salts that are getting into the river. He

went on to say that the WY group did a wonderful job with the conference. The facilities were good, and they had an enjoyable time.

### **CACD Programs Update:**

#### **Camp Rocky Wrap Up: Noah McCord**

Noah reported that he was happy they were able to go forward with Camp Rocky this year. The kids that attended were excited to be out and doing something different. He is working with Bobbi and others to increase the Camp attendance. They have created promotional materials for future distribution. The CACD Board will review those materials. The goal for next year is thirty students. They are reviewing the current location to determine if it is the best spot for the future. It is a terrific location for outdoor learning, but the venue has other activities, and they may want to include other groups at the same time as Camp Rocky. Noah would like the CACD Board members to think about what they would like students to take away from Camp. Would they like to see students connect with the conservation districts and what they are doing, becoming a youth rep, or speak with County Commissioners about the importance of what the District is doing? He will continue looking at the rural/urban interface for students.

Noah attended a meeting with **Envirothon** State reps around the Country. Everyone struggled last year with cancellations or turned over the program to teachers and had them run Envirothon within their schools and forgo a State program. The consensus is that if the program goes virtual another year, it may be the end of the State program. They will make every attempt to have an in-person program next year. If they cannot and must go virtual, how do you have a successful program and make sure it is not the end of people's engagement and interest in the program? Envirothon has rolled out new education standards that will guide the topic groups for the National program. They will be optional for State programs. When the Colorado program members meet, they will look at the new information for possible implementation. Additional discussions were about the liability of running a youth program. He added that if any CACD Board member has ideas about what they want students to be educated in and able to speak on, he would appreciate the input.

There has not been a **National Envirothon** event hosted west of the Mississippi in 5 or more years. Colorado and Utah were approached and asked if they would be interested in hosting the **2025 International Envirothon Competition**. Noah feels this merits thoughtful consideration, however Colorado's modest program does not translate to 1200 students for a week. There would be administrative funds that come with the program should CACD want to consider it. This is not something that needs to be decided right away but he would like it in the back of everyone's mind.

Noah added that there are a couple of openings on the **State Conservation Board**. They have not received any nomination forms yet. The Board positions are representatives for Watersheds and nominations are due Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>. Positions open are for the Republican, Upper Ark and Upper South Platte Watersheds.

**Director Gary Thrash** stated that through the NACD Education Committee, they have curriculum developed on a 5-year rotation for use by teachers K-12. He would like teachers to know that this curriculum is available. This year the topic is Healthy Forests, Healthy Community. Noah suggested that his information come from the local Conservation Districts to the Schools. Currently States have their own curriculum, and it would be helpful for teachers to know where the NACD information is located and how it falls in line with the State curriculum.

Bobbi added that CACD has received approval from NACD on how they promote and send this information out to Districts. She has promoted it as well as through an ad campaign on Facebook, email blasts, and access to it through the CACD website. **Director Gary Thrash** said he has shared the information with a Nature Center in El Paso County. It is free material and should be shared outside the Districts as well.

**President Scott Jones** told Noah of a local camp in his area called Walking Mountains Camp School. It may be a location to consider for Camp Rocky. He has mentioned the opportunity to the School's Board members, and they are interested. Scott volunteered to set up a meeting with Bobbi, the School and Noah. Both Bobbi and Noah think this is a good idea for 2023.

**Director Nick Charchalis** asked, "what is the best time of year to hold Camp?" Noah replied that currently the Camp is held the first week after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. He feels this should be readdressed. Bobbi added that there are several other camps held around the same time as Camp Rocky. She suggested that they consider splitting the Camp in the different regions.

Bobbi would like to obtain the quotes from the parents about Camp Rocky. She asked Noah to contact them, or supply her with the contact information, and get permission from the parents to put the quotes in the Conservator. Noah said he would do that.

**Director Mike Cleary** added that in the Delta area, we have students that do not have the rural experience. Before the curriculum is rewritten, he would like to know who the target audience will be. Noah noted that it has always been for the ag community and that is his focus. If attendance numbers are low, he will target the urban students. They are not teaching ag but educating students about ag related careers like commercial forestry, natural resource production, etc. **Director Nick Charchalis** feels the rural urban connection is good for conservation learning. **Randy Randall** added that there are shifts within the communities. He sees conservation opportunities expanding within the industry. NRCS will continue to support these education opportunities.

Discussions continued on how to get the educational materials out to the schools.

#### **Financial Report Ending 8-31-2021 – Bobbi Ketels**

This report was tabled due to migration issues seen in some reports during the conversion from desktop to the on-line version of QuickBooks. Bobbi will work get the issues resolved and send out the financials in a separate email.

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

*A CACD BOD Annual Meeting work session will follow at 1:00 PM. Meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

**Bobbi Ketels**  
**CACD Executive Director**