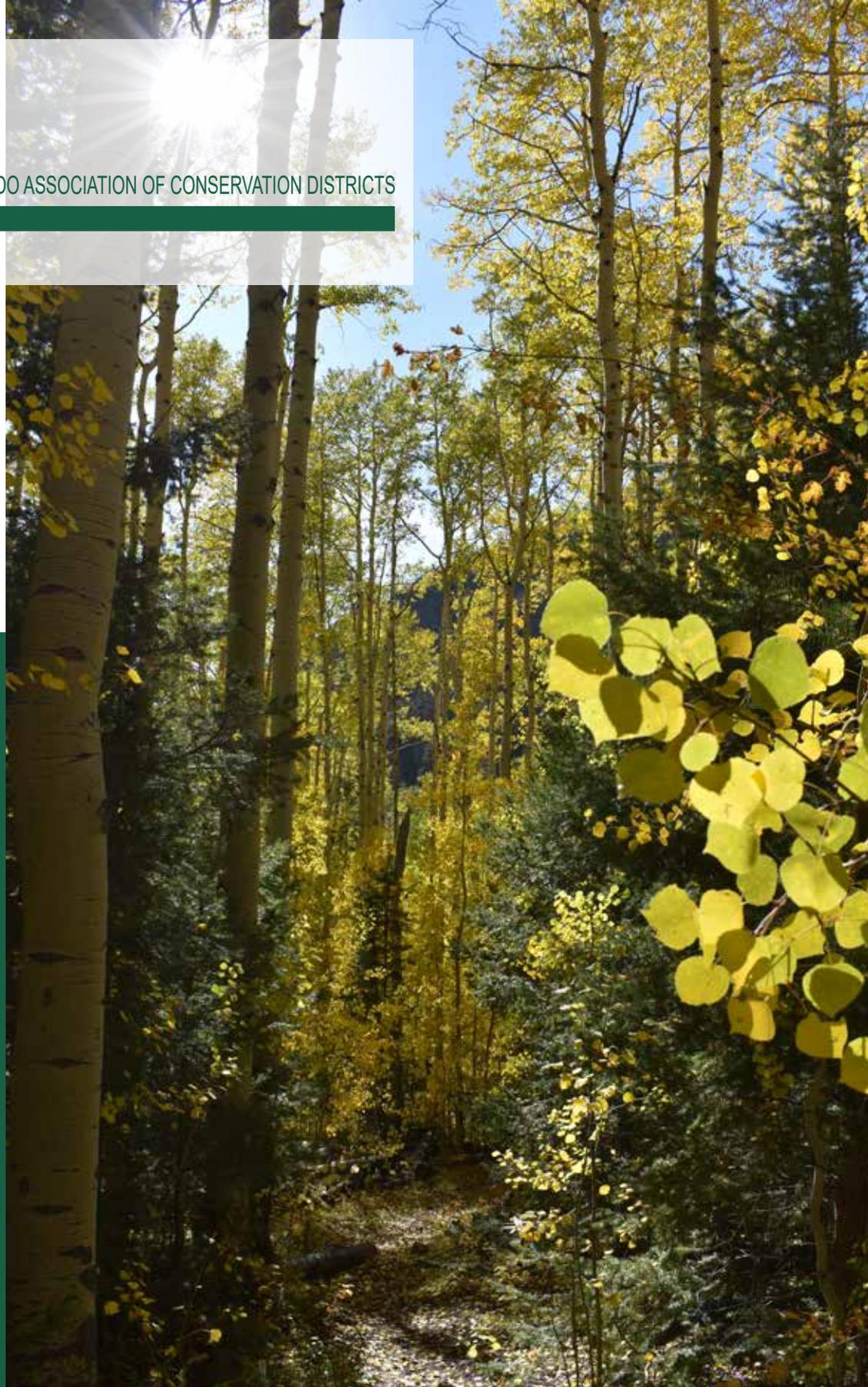




COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

# THE CONSERVATOR



**The Celebration Issue!**

**The Road Ahead**

Conservation in a post-pandemic world

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**Photo by Dan Meyers**

**Cover Photo Courtesy of Ryan Theler**



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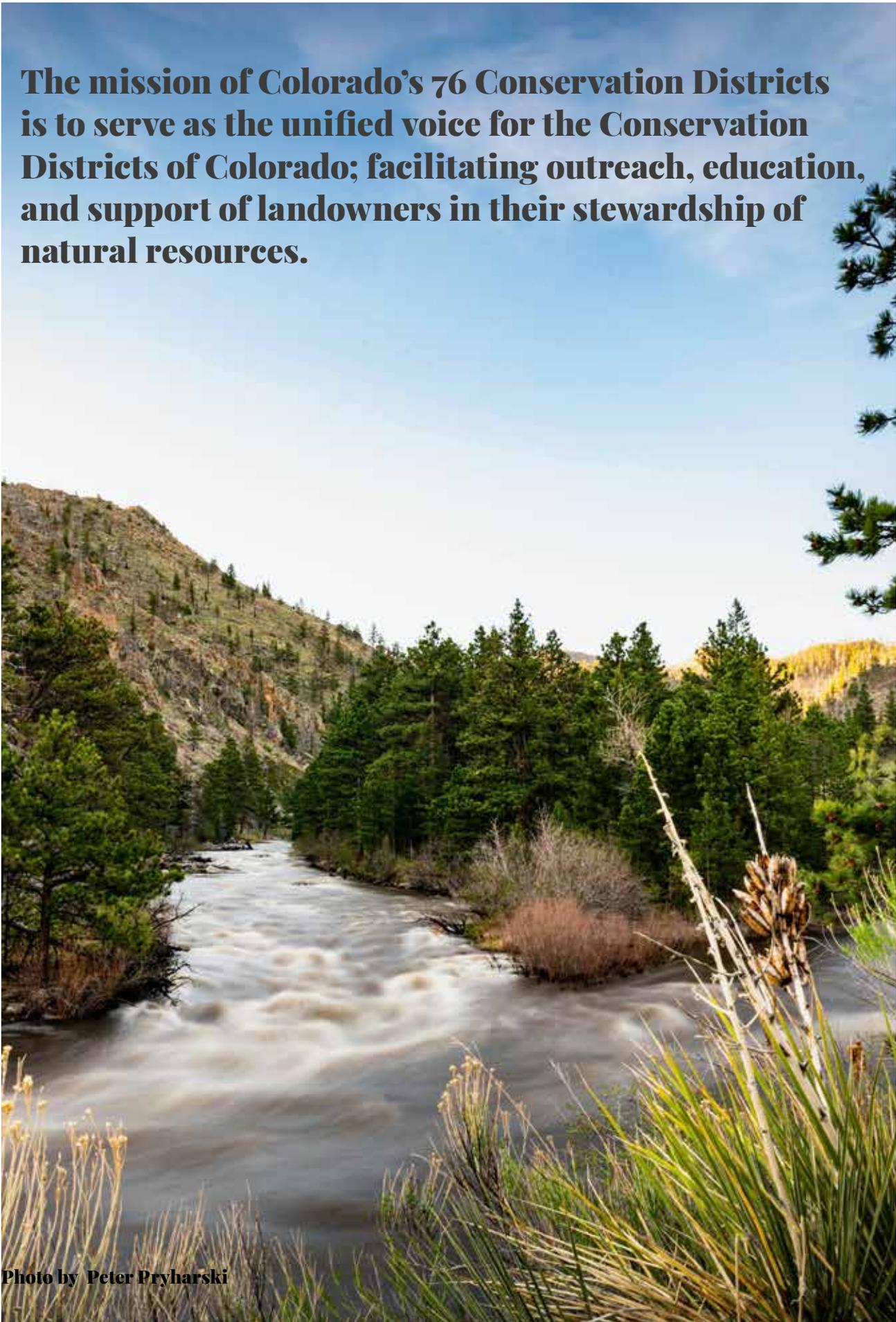
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**The mission of Colorado's 76 Conservation Districts is to serve as the unified voice for the Conservation Districts of Colorado; facilitating outreach, education, and support of landowners in their stewardship of natural resources.**



**Photo by Peter Pryharski**

# A Message from our President

Hello Everyone,

I have thought long and hard on how to start my message. The first thing that came to my mind is that I wanted to bring a message of hope and gratitude to you all; straight from my front porch to yours!

This year has been anything but typical and it is hard to believe we are almost at the end of another year. Especially a year like this; one that no one could ever have expected.

As the president of CACD, I would love to be able to bring words of wisdom as we look back on the events of 2020 and what it has brought to the world of conservation, the world of agriculture, the world of farming and ranching as we know it. As we have always known it. I cannot help but to think about what our way of life will look like going forward, but I know our hearts are still drawn to the land, to our livestock, and to our families. I know each and every one of us still has that fight within us and we will not give up.

This year, as we watched most of the world shut down, we knew this was not an option for us in conservation. In our world of farming and ranching, we have the responsibility of bringing food to the tables of our nation. We have faced obstacles like no other. We have worried about our own families, our own operations, just as everyone else in the world. However, us farmers and ranchers knew we could not stop. We did not stop. We had to persevere and get creative. We continue to hope and fight for the best in such uncertain times.

I think about our producers with family owned operations who have generations and generations of stories to tell; living their dream and making it happen with the sweat of their brow. We work from sun-up to sun-down; through the heat and drought of summers and through the harshest of winters. I think about how much respect I have for so many as I think of all the Districts and Supervisors who have fought so hard to bring conservation to their land and to bring food to the tables of countless families.

I may not be as seasoned as most with as many years invested, but I know what it means to me at this time in my life and how hard I work for the same reasons. I work for the same goals, the same love for what we all do. This year was tough on me and my family. I lost a good friend from this virus and my wife brought our son into this world by herself; as I was not allowed to be with her in the hospital.

I know it has been hard to keep up on all our volunteer work, serving on District boards, Watershed Associations, and state-level boards. We have all had to adapt to not being able to extend a handshake and sit down to the table together. We have had to learn new ways to manage our time with running our operations 24/7 and still figuring out how to collaborate; coming up with new ideas and figuring out solutions to problems as we have always come together to do. Most of us have even stepped into the world of technology a bit more than we would ever like to admit. But with that, we have adapted and kept it together as best we could. We will continue to adapt, while still holding tight to our values and our way of life.

I will end by saying thank you to all who continue to persevere and who refuse to give up. This year has been a test of time and you all have done an outstanding job! So, until we can meet with a good old-fashioned handshake, from my porch to yours, I tip my hat to you all!



Scott Jones, CACD President

# From the Desk of the Executive Director

Greetings Everyone:

As I look back to when I first started as Executive Director, I remember the nervousness and excitement of the new journey I was about to embark on. I wasn't just starting a new job, I was about to learn about an entirely different lifestyle. My connection with agriculture was limited to seeing farms and ranches through the window of my car. Now, everywhere I go, I think of the hard-working people who give meaning to this organization. I have always had respect for our farmers and ranchers, but now my respect has grown into the deepest admiration. Not just for producers, but also for the Conservation District staff and Supervisors who work hard to protect our agricultural lands, often while running farms and ranches themselves.

Each of my three years serving as the Executive Director have proven to bring new obstacles, new successes, and some failures. Along with it, new friends and a sense of family. Just when I started to become comfortable in this role, along came 2020.

This year started off on a positive note. The National Western Stock Show went smoothly as we recognized the CACD Farmer and Rancher of the Year and enjoyed an evening with our legislators and state partners. In February, we headed to the NACD Annual Meeting, which is always a valuable experience. Then came March and life screeched to a halt. We all scrambled to navigate the situation as it changed daily. However, the show must go on. Despite a last-minute shift to a virtual platform, the NACD Spring Fly-In was successful. We held phone meetings with legislators and wrote many letters to both state and national representatives. CACD fought for security for Districts and producers in light of the inevitable financial hardships on the horizon. We were in good company of folks fighting for Conservation Districts and

making as much noise as we could.

As the time came to start working on our educational events, we faced more obstacles. Social distancing posed a huge challenge for education and outreach programs. After weeks of discussion, we made the incredibly difficult decision to cancel Envirothon and Camp Rocky. We weren't alone, as state and national events were canceled left and right. Districts had to cancel many of their own educational events as well. Districts were also limited in their ability to conduct fundraisers like tree sales. Thanks to guidance of NRCS and CSCB, many Districts successfully held socially distanced tree sales. Conservation must go on!

As the world shifted toward the virtual, meetings were converted to online platforms. That has been an adjustment for us all! For me, the best thing that has come out this year is that I've learned to adapt to new technology, which gives me the ability to attend more meetings with our partners. The opportunity to be more involved with partner programs has given me the chance to learn more about conservation issues, planning, teamwork, and to have a better appreciation of the difficult issues we face in conservation. It has been inspiring to watch everyone put their best foot forward and find a way to come together to keep this necessary work going. Thank you to CSCB and NRCS for all they do to support our state association and Conservation Districts!

These are the "positives" I choose to bring out of 2020. I encourage you to reflect on that which you have endured and overcome. Then, take a moment to celebrate all we have accomplished!

Sincerely,



Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director

# CACD Colorado 2020 Legislative Wrap-Up



**Brett Moore, CACD  
Lobbyist**

The 2020 Colorado legislative session was anything but typical. Though it began in normal fashion on January 8, both chambers recessed on March 13 due to COVID-19 emergency orders, and

did not reconvene again until May 26, a 72-day interruption. Through the course of the emergency recess and the coinciding economic shutdown, the state suffered a \$3.3 Billion revenue shortfall, resulting in unprecedented budget cuts to the state budget. There were no funding cuts to the Conservation Districts budget, however.

When the legislature reconvened, the remaining session lasted just short of 3 weeks, with the constitutional duties of passing a 2020/2021 budget (Long Bill) and school finance legislation amidst massive cuts being the top priorities for both chambers. Most 2020 bills proposing new programs or new funding lines were killed in the days immediately after returning from recess, as the state essentially jumped back to 2017/2018 budget levels.

Ultimately, the 2020 legislative session adjourned sine die on June 15, concluding legislative activities for the year after meeting for only 84 of the constitutionally-allowed 120 days. In turn, the governor's signing window closed on July 15 with little fanfare. Unless the Governor calls a special session, which I do not foresee, the legislature is out of session until January 13, 2021, when the 73rd General Assembly will convene.

Despite the 2018 elections resulting in a strong Democrat trifecta, with a 41-24 majority in the house, a 19-16 majority in the senate, and liberal Jared Polis in the Governor's mansion, this session seemed

less political due to the budgetary and health challenges facing the state. It was a clear deviation from normal General Assemblies regarding the politics, policy, and processes that have dictated the regular course of business in my 13 sessions at the legislature.

CACD monitored 42 bills concerning natural resources issues this session. Bill tracking link: <https://coloradocapitolwatch.com/bill-analysis/3749/2020/o/>

Many sectors saw little progress in the 2020 session due to the COVID-19 crisis, and natural resources, agricultural, and rural issues were no exception. CACD ran a piece of proactive legislation, HB-1115 Sales Tax Exemption For Farm Fencing Material, which was introduced in the first few weeks of the legislative session. CACD board members and others testified in front of the House Finance Committee, where the measure met resistance from urban legislators from both parties. We were working to educate the members of the committee on the inconsistencies in the application of sales taxes on agricultural goods, particularly fencing, when the COVID-19 emergency recess occurred. After returning, nearly all new tax benefits were killed, and HB-1115 was no exception.

Due to a constrained budget and calendar, there will be no legislative interim committees this year, including Water Resources Review Committee, which was codified by SB-214 Suspend 2020 Legislative Interim Committees. This will likely mean less bills being introduced in the early days of the 2021 session, but we are still working to determine what this shortened interim and political season will look like regarding bill drafting and stakeholder processes.

Brett Moore, OnTheBallot Consulting



# A Celebration of Conservation District Success Around the State



Photo courtesy of Rachel Theler

**Pandemic or not, Conservation Districts are doing great work. We've highlighted the work of a District from each watershed. Around the state, conservation still moves forward thanks to the tireless work of Conservation Districts.**

# Gunnison-Dolores Watershed

Gunnison Conservation District //

Author: Sam Liebl, District Manager // Podcast Outreach

Cheatgrass has invaded more than 60 percent of the Intermountain West. While the Western Slope has not been hit as hard as the Great Basin or the Snake River Plain, in many Colorado watersheds cheatgrass invasion is a done deal; the exotic annual plant is now too extensive to control. But the Gunnison Basin is different. Not only is its sagebrush steppe largely cheatgrass-free, but it is also home to about 90 percent of the global population of a bird listed under the Endangered Species Act--the Gunnison sage-grouse. If cheatgrass takes over the Gunnison Basin like it has elsewhere, the species' survival faces long odds.

As a Masters in Environmental Management student at Western Colorado University in Gunnison, Sam Liebl learned about this situation and decided that a podcast would be a good tool to spread information about the Gunnison sage-grouse and to make Gunnison Basin residents aware of their unique predicament. He partnered with the Gunnison Conservation District to make that podcast happen, and received funds from the state's Noxious Weed Fund and from Gunnison County to cover production expenses. The result was Cheatcast, a podcast series in 15-minute episodes, that has been widely listened to. The podcast also led Liebl to create a documentary film, Basin on the Brink, on the same subject. Fortunately for Liebl, that relationship with the District led to his being hired as District Manager. He regularly uses both the podcast and the film to educate his neighbors and conservation partners about an issue that has become a top priority for the Gunnison Conservation District.



Cheatcast podcast logo, courtesy of Sam Liebl



**Photo by Jack Seeds**

## **Lower South Platte Watershed**

**Haxtun Conservation District // Author: Joe Crowder, District Manager // Walk-In Hunting Access Program**

**F**or 20 years the Haxtun Conservation District has participated in the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Walk-In Hunting Access Program. Since the very first season that started with dove and pheasant to the more recent additions of big game (deer) in 2019-20. The District accepts applications, submits them to CPW, posts signs on the properties, removes signs in the spring, makes payments to landowners, and submits 1099 forms to those who qualify.

This is the District's largest fundraiser outside of our small mill levy. The 2018-2019 season contracts were written for 21,944 acres of accepted walk-in hunting. This returned \$77,595 to the landowners. The District received \$0.50 / acre for administration, contracting, and posting and pulling the signs. With the addition of deer hunting in 2019-20, our allocation

was increased to 24,266 acres. Payments to landowners were mailed last spring in excess of \$102,000.

This is an important fiscal impact to the community as well as the District. Each dollar can turn over locally as many as five times. This figure does not include the lodging, food, fuel, and entertainment spent within the community during the hunting season. The District uses these funds for scholarships, student activities, educational events, District operations, and community activities.

Haxtun Conservation District and landowners in the District have benefited greatly from their participation in the program. For more information, contact your local CPW office.

# Colorado River Watershed

**South Side, Bookcliff, and Mt. Sopris Conservation Districts**  
**// Author: Sandy Jackson, Supervisor Mt. Sopris Conservation District // A Homage to 22 Years of Service**

For the past 22 years, Sharie Prow was the friendly face that greeted you at the Mt. Sopris, South Side, and Bookcliff Conservation District office. Sharie wasn't just the District Manager for the three Conservation Districts, she provided so much more. The title doesn't come close to describing Sharie's role in conservation projects, activities, outreach and educational projects over the past two decades. Sharie had the ability to bring out the best in each member of the three boards, and ensured that all felt valued. (I always thought she must have a cheat sheet to remember each person's strengths). An organizational wizard, Sharie was responsible for many beloved events Ag Day, Ag Expo, Small Acreage Workshop, Tour de Farms, the Annual Dinner, the list could go

on. She worked closely with the boards, staff at the NRCS, and the Farm Bureau. Sharie's dedication to her work and positive attitude earned her Conservation District Employee of the Year in 2018, an award chosen by the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts. Through her tireless efforts and personal perseverance, she provided the District Supervisors what they needed to make every project or program a success for our landowners. She and Rodney have relocated back to their roots in Kansas. Regretfully, the retirement fanfare, balloons, and picnic had to be canceled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Sharie is probably thankful for that, she always said – "keep me out of the spotlight". In lieu of a party, please raise a glass and join me in this toast: Thank you Sharie, and we wish you well.



**Sharie Prow with her husband Rodney and their grandchildren. Photo Credit: We snuck this off Facebook as photos of Sharie are notoriously hard to find!**

## **Upper Arkansas Watershed** El Paso Conservation District // Author: Pamela Davison, District Manager // Ponderosa Pine-Alooza

In September of 2019, the El Paso Conservation District held their “Ponderosa Pine-Alooza” at Kiowa Creek Ranch in Black Forest. The Audubon Society leases Kiowa Creek Ranch to Corner Post Meats, a sustainable, farm-to-table ranching operation. Corner Post Meats uses land and livestock management techniques to improve the ecological health of Kiowa Creek Ranch. They employ high-intensity, short duration grazing methods that build soil and improve its health.

At the ranch, attendees learned about the

benefits of well-managed livestock on a landscape. The churning hooves of cattle, tilling noses of pigs, and the fertilization from chickens restore a natural cycle of disturbance and growth to the land. Strategically-timed grazing helps control invasive species. These specialized grazing management practices resemble the role large herds of bison and fire have historically served in building soil. The main takeaway for attendees was that conservation ranching preserves and restores habitat for birds and other wildlife on Kiowa Creek.

## **North Platte / White / Yampa Watershed** Routt Conservation District // Author: Lyn Halliday, Board President // Resurgence in Routt County

After more than two years of dormancy, there is good news for the Routt County Conservation District! Due to successive challenges, the Conservation District was defunct for several years. In April of 2019, a brand new Board of Supervisors was appointed during a Landowners Meeting. Since then, the Board has had their hands full catching up on the required legal proceedings, filings, and paperwork that had been neglected while working through a CSCB Bootstraps plan. A great deal of time was spent on revisiting and revising the antiquated bylaws. Additionally, back budgets, audit exemptions, and a Long Range Plan had to be updated and filed. All this with no District staff!

Following the nearly year-long effort to get back in good standing, the Board has been working tirelessly to re-establish the RCCD’s niche in the conservation community and cultivate old and new partners. Having an entirely new Board is both an advantage and disadvantage. Free from previous conceptions, the Board has had the

opportunity to find new and innovative ways to implement conservation programs and outreach. It also means that any new efforts must essentially be built from the ground up. For example, the old website was deleted due to a lapse in payment so the Board had to create a new one from scratch. RCCD hosted an Annual Landowners and Local Working Group meeting in February of 2020. Even with COVID restrictions, RCCD has been able to begin implementation of the newly adopted Long Range Plan by assisting landowners with diversion infrastructure improvements and starting a new comprehensive soil health initiative. The District looks forward to the day when the Board can all meet in person again to host education and outreach events.

Key lessons the RCCD Board learned are three-fold: maintain good files for future Board Supervisors, make sure your bylaws are viable, and meet all filing deadlines! To read more about the District’s work and to see their revamped website, visit: [www.routtcountycd.com](http://www.routtcountycd.com)

## San Juan Basin Watershed

San Juan Conservation District // Author: Cynthia Purcell,  
District Manager // Navajo River Project

Aging irrigation infrastructure causes negative impacts for riparian ecosystems and creates issues for irrigators. In Archuleta County, the aging Oso Diversion was causing negative impacts to the Navajo River's ecosystem. The San Juan Conservation District, in conjunction with NRCS, led the charge in implementing a diversion improvement project to alleviate the negative impacts of the diversion. Thus, the Navajo River In-stream Riparian & Wetland Improvement Project began. The partners worked with landowners along the Navajo River from the Oso Diversion to the border of New Mexico in the hopes of creating a more diverse river system where aquatic species can once again thrive.

The District installed temperature gauges

in the river at key locations where habitat work was conducted or may be implemented in the future. This temperature data will help determine where the stream may convert from a cool to a warm water system. Establishing this breaking point will ensure the appropriate habitat improvements are installed in the river downstream. This will encourage the Roundtail Chub, a warm water species, to thrive. In the winter of 2020, three years of temperature data will be analyzed alongside other data collected by the Jicarilla Apache Tribe. The project's partners are optimistic that the diversion improvements will yield beneficial results for the Navajo River ecosystem and the farmers and ranchers that rely on its water.



Water temperature gauge protected in PVC. Photo Courtesy of San Juan CD

## Lower Arkansas Watershed

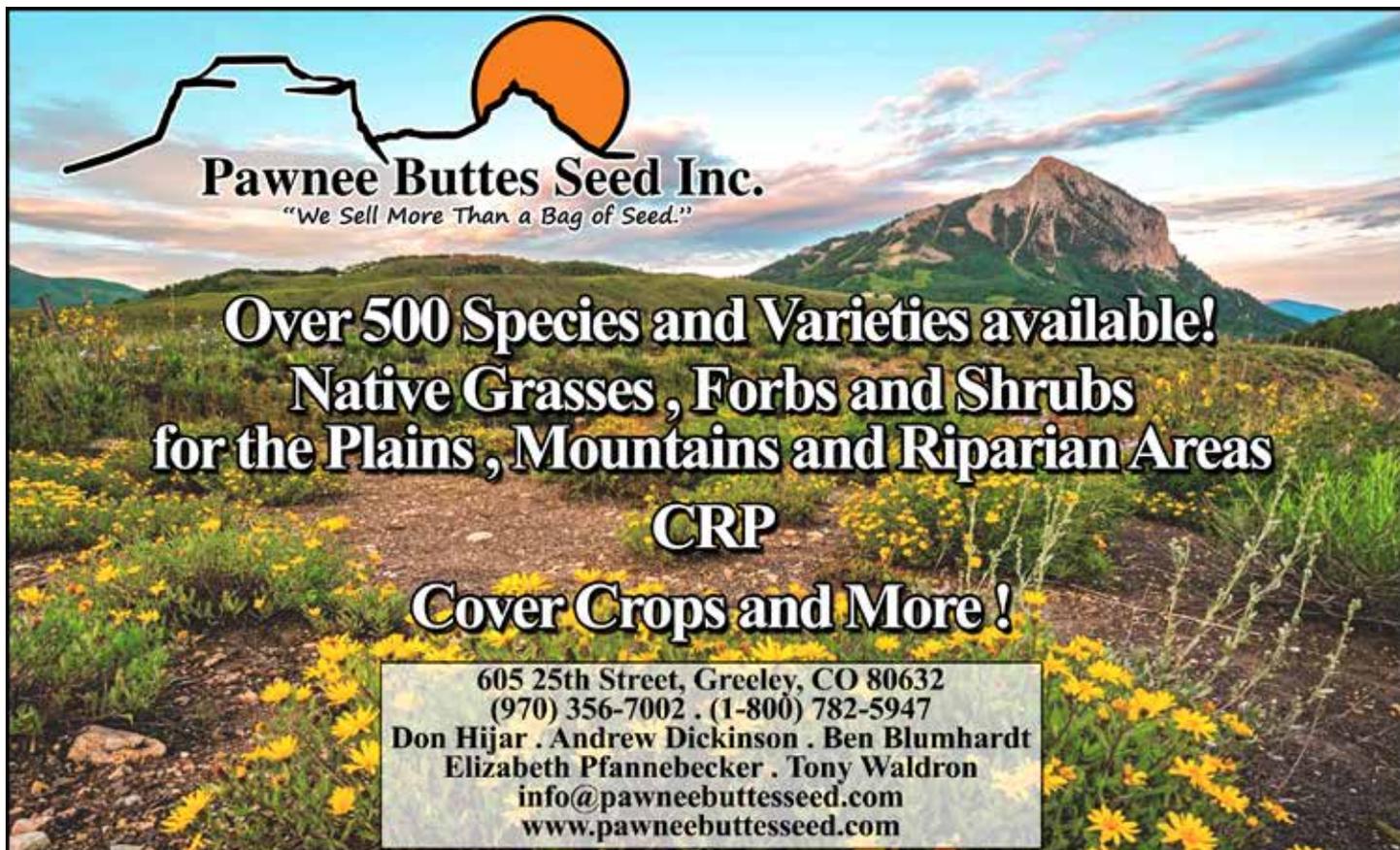
West Otero, East Otero, and Olney Boone Conservation Districts //

Author: Nancy Ashermann, District Manager // Ag Symposium

The annual Arkansas Valley Farm, Ranch, and Water Symposium and Trade Show is an opportunity to update area farmers, ranchers, and business people on pertinent agricultural topics. Academic and industry experts shared the latest research and innovations that contribute to the ongoing advancement of the agricultural industry. In addition, industry representatives and innovators showcased and discussed leading-edge advancements occurring across the county. The exhibit area provided an opportunity for agricultural businesses to set up booths

and display their products and services.

This event is sponsored by the Otero County CSU Extension. The District manager of the West Otero, East Otero, and Olney Boone Conservation Districts serves on the planning committee and the three Districts have been financial sponsors of the event. The first Symposium was held in 2004. Over the last 16 years, the Ag Symposium has educated hundreds of attendees and created an important networking opportunity in the area. A word to the wise: free beer goes a long way in getting people in the door!



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# Republican Watershed

Yuma Conservation District' // Author: Kaci Porter (DM)  
//Farmers Market Fundraiser

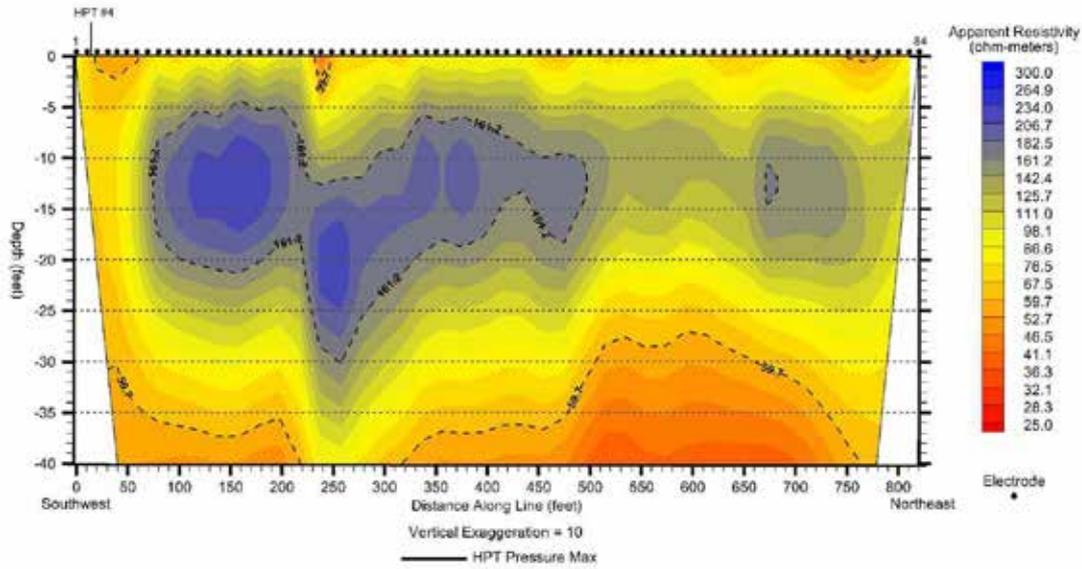
The Yuma Conservation District partners with Farm House Market in Yuma, Colorado to organize an annual community Farmers Market. The Farm House Market is a local gourmet coffee shop and dairy bar that uses specialty Colorado Proud dairy products. The District has been organizing the Farmers Market since 2009 at various locations throughout Yuma. It is typically held during the month of September for all local participants and surrounding communities to enjoy. Local gardeners, tradespeople, and

artisans provided locally produced honey, jams, watermelon, spices, freeze-dried fruits, and more. There is a booth fee for vendors and the proceeds go towards the Yuma Conservation District's educational programming. Hosting a Farmers Market is a great way to raise funds for the District, connect with local producers, and bridge the gap between the agricultural community and the community at-large.



**A few of the farm stands that made the 2019 Farmers Market such a success. Photo credit Meghann Blach**

Mosca-Hooper Conservation District  
 Electrical Resistivity Imaging Survey  
 Line 1 Resistivity Depth Section to 40 Feet



Hasbrouck Geophysics, Inc.

Figure 3

## Rio Grande Watershed

**Mosca-Hooper Conservation District // Author: Jackie Mejia, District Manager // Aquifer Recovery and the Future of Agriculture Project**

In 2018, the Mosca-Hooper Conservation District launched the multi-year, multi-faceted Aquifer Recovery and Future of Agriculture in the San Luis Valley Project. There are four components to this project.

**Aquifer Recovery:** Conducted pilot-scale work to map depths from 5 feet to 40 feet below soil surface to identify specific locations where groundwater recharge has the greatest potential. This component was completed in 2019 and resulting data can be observed at [soilcarboncoalition.org/html/slv/rop.html](http://soilcarboncoalition.org/html/slv/rop.html)

**Compost:** Created a large-scale static compost pile, yielding high-fungal compost to be applied to farms and ranches in 2019 and 2020 to study its impact on agricultural soils.

**Soil Health Data:** Conducting farmer interviews and collecting soil and compost observations. A compost extractor was

purchased to provide fungal compost extract application. Soil health data will be collected and analyzed where the extract has been applied.

**Consensus process training:** Facilitated conversations among landowners regarding groundwater sustainability through a year-long facilitated process.

These combined efforts will result in a greater understanding of regenerative agriculture in the region and inform decisions to positively impact the future of agriculture in the San Luis Valley. The District works alongside farmers and ranchers in the region to implement voluntary conservation efforts and regenerative farming practices in partnership with USDA/NRCS, CSCB, CWCB, Rio Grande Water Conservation District, and many other local, regional, and statewide partners.



Photo by Eric Muhr

## Upper South Platte Watershed

Jefferson Conservation District // Author:

Garrett Stephens, District Manager // Districts in State House

Testifying to legislators is one of the most impactful ways for a Conservation District to influence conservation policy statewide. In 2019, representatives from the Jefferson Conservation District arrived at the state capitol to testify on the importance of grant funding for private lands wildfire projects. By testifying in person, JCD Supervisors represented landowners that rely on these grants to manage their land. In March of 2019--the third time in the past five years--District staff, landowners, and CACD lobbyist Brett Moore attended a House Rural Affairs and Agriculture hearing on House Bill 19-1006 (Wildfire Mitigation in Wildland-Urban Interface Areas). The Bill provides state funding for grants to agencies like JCD for wildfire mitigation projects on private lands. On May 31st, 2019, the Governor signed the bill into law. "These grants are critically important to getting forest conservation work done on the ground," JCD Supervisor Garrett

Stephens said. "Most of the testimony these legislators hear is from agency officials and lobbyists, so it was especially compelling for us to bring private landowners to share their perspective."

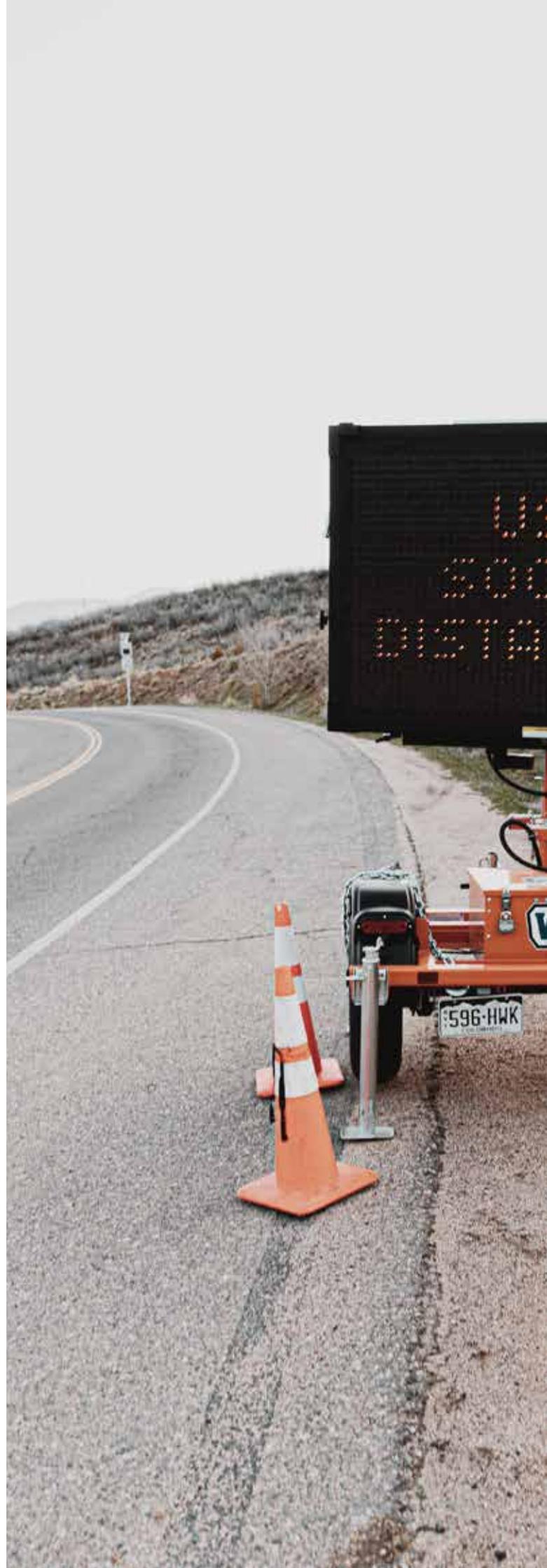
The legislation provides the continuation of an annual state grant that funds various wildfire mitigation and forest restoration across the state. In 2019, the grants will fund \$1 million worth of projects. In the past six years, JCD has treated nearly 1,000 acres through various projects, using a total of about \$1.2 million in state grants under this type of program. Forestry work on Colorado's Front Range is very expensive, ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per acre. This is largely due to our steep, rocky terrain and the low quality of wood being harvested. Without grants and other Farm Bill incentives from partners like the NRCS, these projects would not be possible. The District believes that testifying to legislators is a critical component to ensure continued funding of these grants.

# COVID & Conservation

By Alyssa Clarida, CSCB

Business as usual has been far from reality in 2020. As a pandemic swept the planet, people have been forced to question the concept of “normal.” Beyond COVID-19’s impact on social lives, virtually every industry has had to adapt to new modes of operations. The agricultural industry was no exception. The economy took a tumultuous and unstable shift, commodity transportation became unreliable, meat processing plants shut down and producers scrambled to find local options to process their livestock to bring to markets. Of course, that is all paired with a collective adjustment to a government mandated quarantine, working from home, social distancing protocols, mask wearing, and a new framework for interacting within communities.

In the face of change, Conservation Districts adapted. Districts and agricultural producers have a deep knowledge of the importance of adaptability. Late spring brought an onslaught of rapidly changing protocols that Districts worked hard to stay on top of while continuing to provide conservation services within their communities. Years of working with drought, extreme weather events, fluctuating commodity prices, and many other shifting factors left Districts and producers well equipped to face these changes. People still need to be fed amid a pandemic and conservation-minded agriculture is more important than ever. Conservation District Supervisors, staff, and partners deserve a round of applause for persevering with resilience and determination. While many aspects of life have been altered, there are a few major differences that Districts have had to adjust to.





**Photo by Logan Weaver**

## **Work from Home**

Conservation District buildings, including NRCS offices, closed not only to the public, but to NRCS and District staff as well. District Managers and other District employees needed to quickly shift to a home workplace. Accustomed to relatively distraction-free offices, the presence of kids, pets, spouses, and housework posed a new challenge for many District staff. Furthermore, Districts had to navigate working with partners and government employees who were learning how to work effectively from home as well. This shift was not smooth for everyone. Finding a balance between addressing the pile of dishes lingering in the other room and providing conservation services to producers was not easy, but Conservation Districts boldly stepped up to the plate. The work-from-home model will be one that sticks around in many industries. Luckily for many in the agricultural industry, working from home is nothing new.

## **Education Programs**

Some of the most stark changes of this year have been for students and those who teach them. Virtual learning is very different from in-person learning and requires a different teaching approach. For the many Conservation Districts who implement youth education programs, teaching conservation has never been more difficult. Many education events have been cancelled, including the statewide Camp Rocky and Envirothon programs. Staying informed of schools' ever-changing rules and protocols is a challenge. Moving forward, Districts are shifting towards online programming and learning how to plan socially distant events. Conservation Districts persevere however, as educating future conservationists is critically important work.

## Shift Towards Virtual

Earlier this year, few expected to use the word “Zoom” nearly this much. Glassy-eyed and sore-backed, hours upon hours of video calls left many itching to turn off their video and click the ever-beloved “Mute” button. While in-person meetings have started to pick up again, to some extent, virtual meetings are here to stay. Here are some “Zoom-isms” Conservation Districts have been navigating:

- Broadband in rural America “Your Internet Connection is Unstable”
- “You’re on mute.”
- “Oh shoot I thought I was on mute...”
- Navigating people talking at the same time without body language cues: “You go ahead.” “No, sorry you go ahead.”
- Zoom Mullets: business on the top, pajama pants on the bottom
- Background cameos from pets, kids, and spouses
- Uncontrollable background noises: construction, ambulance sirens, Cindy Lair’s parrot

## Local Work Group Meetings

Local Work Group meetings are the Districts’ chance to connect directly with landowners to understand their priority natural resource concerns. As spring rolled around, most Districts had to cancel their in-person Local Work Group meetings. However, that feedback is critical to ensure NRCS programs are locally-driven. Districts adapted to make some adjustments. Some held their meetings on Zoom to maintain the element of discussion between landowners. Others sent out a comprehensive survey to gather quantifiable data and feedback. In the end, while a different process, Districts succeeded in harvesting resource priorities from their landowners. Many indicated that

they will continue using Zoom technology and surveys into the future to increase participation.

## A new View from the Field: Tree Sales

One of the first challenges Districts’ faced amid COVID restrictions was how to handle their Tree Sales. Suddenly, tree sale events had to shift from a busy day-long event to something different. Meanwhile, the nurseries struggled to figure out how to organize and deliver tree orders amid their restrictions. CSCB, CACD, and NRCS scrambled to provide guidance to Districts regarding how to safely host a tree sale event and work with the nurseries to get their orders. In one instance, Cindy Lair and Les Owen from CDA drove a truck full of trees down to Cortez to ensure the Districts in the Four Corners could conduct their tree sales. Nonetheless, Districts’ adapted to distribute their trees. Heather Cross, The District Manager for the Double El Conservation District, shares this story about their successful transition:

“With a brand new District Manager, Double El Conservation District already faced a challenge as they embarked on their annual Tree Days. Then, COVID restrictions were implemented. Despite their challenges, with planning, hard work, and a ton of cooperation from customers, the event went off without a hitch. The District was able to comply with restrictions while getting trees into the hands of their landowners. Generally, DECD dedicates one day for seedling tree distribution and one day for large trees. However, this year, tree distribution was spread out over three days. Customers were scheduled into 2 hour windows to avoid large gatherings. Everyone was masked up and maintained 6-feet of distance.

Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes were readily available and clipboards and pens were sanitized regularly. Even with the change of plan, the District sold more trees than normal! DECD is grateful for the cooperation of all who purchased trees for contributing to an unusual, but successful year.”



**Double El CD's DCT, Lori Ellefson, sanitizing clipboards and pens between tree pick ups.**



**From L to R: Board VP Cheryl Churchwell, Board member Ben Hendrix and DM Heather Cross waiting for customers on tree pick-up day.**



**DM masking up when not social distancing from trees.**

### Onward into 2021

The agricultural industry will continue to face challenges. Uncertainty is the nature of the work. If history is any indicator, producers will adapt to these challenges with resiliency and strength. So too will the Conservation Districts that serve them. While no one can predict just what 2021 has in store, 2020 proved that Conservation Districts are capable of adapting to unforeseen circumstances. Conservation work will be just as necessary, if not more so, as the times change. There is strength in adaptation and resilience.

# CACD Celebrates State Accomplishments

## CACD Board Resolution Work

CACD's Legislative Committee focuses on policy and legislative matters, and is made up of CACD Board Members. The Committee has undertaken a non-substantive review of the CACD Policy Book in 2020. Five separate Resolutions (one from each section of the policy book) were sent to the Districts for review. This comment period ended October 1. The policy book review resolutions will then be further reviewed and ratified at the 2020 CACD Annual Meeting.

Additionally, the Legislative Committee reviewed resolutions that were passed in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to certify CACD has worked with our partners to ensure all resolutions have been addressed. For those resolutions pending additional follow up, the committee has discussed solutions and continues to strive toward more involvement with the conservation districts in the process. We will be providing updates at the 2020 CACD Annual Meeting and will continue to improve upon this process moving forward.

## Education

Unfortunately, COVID-19 required us to cancel our annual Envirothon and Camp Rocky events. The poster contest was still held in a limited capacity. This year's theme was "Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators?". Attendees at the virtual annual meeting will have a chance to vote on the entries, and the winner will be announced on November 19th. CACD sincerely thanks all the Districts and sponsors that have made our educational programs possible. Check out our upcoming Spring issue of the Conservator, which will have an in depth look at educational programs.



**Students at 2019's Camp Rocky Learn about stream health**



**A team at 2019's Envirothon Competition test their knowledge**



## **Watershed Leadership Program**

In the Spring of 2019 CSCB partnered with CACD and NRCS to host a Watershed Leadership Training workshop. The training workshop was developed and led by Ray Ledgerwood from Boardworks by Ledgerwood. The workshop also included watershed planning and stream management plan involvement presented by Phil Brink, CCA Ag Water NetWORK Consulting Coordinator. A follow-up session with Ray Ledgerwood took place at CACD's 2019 Annual Meeting. The purpose from these training workshops was to establish long and short term goals for all Districts within their watersheds to bring more success through their watersheds and at the local level.

## **Partner Presentation at the Capitol**

In April of 2019, CACD President Scott Jones, Randy Randall from NRCS, and Nikki Brinson from CSCB made the trip to our state capitol. We did a joint presentation of CACD's partnership with NRCS and CSCB to the House Rural Affairs Committee. We were able to go through what NRCS, CSCB and CACD do on behalf of private landowners and the Districts and how those three groups work together. This project was a long time in the making, and something that will be a great resource for us in the future.



## Statutory Deadlines

<p><b>January</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisor Exemption from Workmen's Comp</li> <li>• Long Range Plan</li> <li>• Budget Documents</li> </ul>	<p><b>February 15</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Report (Optional)</li> </ul>	<p><b>March 31</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exemption from Audit</li> <li>• (If applicable, otherwise a full audit MUST be completed)</li> </ul>
<p><b>May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Elections odd years only (after 2022)</li> </ul>	<p><b>July</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit</li> <li>• (If applicable, otherwise an Exemption from Audit MUST be completed by March 31)</li> </ul>	<p><b>September 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisor's List</li> </ul>

For more detailed information regarding statutory requirements, please visit CSCB's Operations at <https://sites.google.com/state.co.us/cscb/home>, or contact your CSCB Regional Specialist.



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# NACD Update

**Gary Thrash, NACD CO Representative**

## NACD's 75th Anniversary: A Diamond out of the Dust



“NACD’s 75th Anniversary: A Diamond out of the Dust.”

The National Association of Conservation Districts 75th Annual Meeting is on track for an in person from February 6–10, 2021 in New Orleans, Louisiana. NACD will continue to monitor local, state, and federal guidelines related to COVID-19 (coronavirus). Our top priority is to provide a safe and healthy environment for all participants, and we will continue to share information as it becomes available.

2020 has been a vastly different year for making contacts. The spring fly-in was canceled and a virtual advocacy day was promoted to contact our congressional offices. The NACD summer board meeting utilized ZOOM to conduct the business of the organization in lieu of a planned meeting in Bismarck, ND.

I encourage districts to take advantage of the material available from NACD to support your conservation district. NACD marketplace, webinars, and educational materials that NACD provides to encourage locally led conservation.

In 1955, the National Association of Conservation Districts began a national program to encourage Americans to focus on stewardship. Stewardship Week is officially celebrated from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in May. It is one of the world’s largest conservation-related observances.

The program relies on conservation districts sharing and promoting stewardship and conservation through field days, educational programming, and workshops to educate citizens about the need to care for our natural resources. The Stewardship theme for 2021 is: **2021 - Healthy Forests = Healthy Communities**

Take a moment and check out the free Educators Study guide and supporting materials at the NACD stewardship and education link and the link for NACD webinars .

Gary Thrash

CACD Director, CO NACD Representative



## Colorado NRCS Update

The partnership between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Colorado, Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) and the 76 local Conservation Districts spans over eight decades. Throughout the years, various strategies and action plans have been implemented, but the parallel objective of each organization has remained the same. NRCS, CSCB and local CD's work directly with the farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to implement locally led conservation plans. As we close fiscal year 2020, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect and share some insights.

Not surprisingly, COVID-19 has required all of us to pivot in several areas. NRCS was not immune and was successful in continuing to service and meet the needs of our communities. We were able to fulfill our commitment to customers by providing in-field service with social distancing and worked remotely with landowners to complete their conservation needs. We accomplished this while still maintaining the safety of our customers and employees. We continue to follow the health and safety guidelines administered by the USDA, and have been successful in starting the re-opening process for our offices.

NRCS in Colorado has also seen an impressive increase in permanent full-time employees, we were successful in hiring 30 staff this fiscal year and today we have 206 staff on board of our allocated 219 staffing cap. We are now able to recruit more effectively, as hiring policies and procedures continue to improve, we also have more opportunity to hire on-the-spot. In addition to our permanent staff, NRCS has been extremely successful in leveraging funding in agreements to support our conservation efforts. We are especially proud of our renewed agreement with CSCB to continue our support of conservation technicians which supports 23 local technicians across Colorado.

October 1st represents a new fiscal year for NRCS, which brings new opportunities to partner and work with Colorado's private farm, ranch and forest landowners to conserve natural resources. The partnership between NRCS, CSCB and local Conservation Districts continues to evolve as well. Each entity recognizes the importance of working together as a team to broaden the impacts and effectiveness of applied sound conservation practices. We look forward to our ongoing coalition. Helping to conserve Colorado's natural resources is a mission that requires all of us. Without the collaborative efforts between natural resource conservation organizations and Agencies, the scale of conserving soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy would be hindered.

Lastly, we look forward to your continued involvement and input into our committees. It is your input that allows us to adjust and better address Colorado's conservation needs. THANK YOU!!!

Randy Randall,

Acting State Conservationist

Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Letter from CSCB

Dear Conservation Friends and Partners:

The year 2020 has been a doozy, hasn't it? I heard a question that summarized how a lot of us feel about this year. It went like, "If you had the opportunity to live through 2020 again or get eaten by a snake, what kind of snake would you pick?" Okay, maybe it hasn't been that bad, but between the COVID-19 pandemic, the drought, record-breaking wildfires in the west, invasions of grasshoppers, and political unrest and protests on every TV or radio station you watch, it has been a year of unprecedented stress – at least for the years I have lived. ....and we still have a few pivotal months left! But through every cataclysm is an opportunity to serve and.... to be patient with one another.

On Friday, March 13 when I got the call that we would begin to work from home due to the COVID-19 epidemic (later to be designated, "Pandemic"), it was hard to envision how that would impact our ability to work with Conservation Districts. But I have to hand it to our team and acknowledge their creativity and dedication to getting their work done. We quickly transitioned over to virtual meetings and committed to helping expand the access and use of this technology across the partnership for CACD, Conservation Districts and watershed associations. Our goal has been to keep conservation moving in Colorado and with all the partners chipping in, conservation is still going strong.

I have missed seeing our conservation community in person. Talking through a computer screen has kept us safer, but it hasn't replaced the importance of gathering in person. CACD made the difficult decision to take the "2020 Annual Membership Meeting" to a virtual format. It is now more affordable than ever to participate in your association and hear compelling speakers bring new information and ideas about conservation. If you have a computer and a decent internet connection you are on your way to enjoying this gathering without leaving home! The CACD and CSCB team has been working hard all summer to make sure this meeting is planned and orchestrated to run smoothly. It may have a few bumps but I know it's going to be a great success. I hope you'll register and plan to attend as much of it as you can.

In closing, I want to acknowledge that conservation and land stewardship is not a political action. I have worked in this position for 15 years, under Republican and Democratic Presidents and Governors and while a few things change, our common vision for passing the land to the next generation better than we found it is how we prevail. I'm thankful for this conservation partnership that has lasted over 75 years. I'm reminded of the Native American adage, "The left wing and the right wing are part of the same bird." Regardless of what direction you lean or firmly plant yourself, we're in this together and I'm thankful for the opportunity to serve conservation with you. Please stay healthy and I hope to see you soon.



Cindy Lair

Program Manager

Colorado State Conservation Board

# Meet our 2020 CACD Board of Directors & Staff

## Colorado River Watershed: Scott Jones, President - Gypsum, CO



Scott Jones serves as the president of CACD. He is also on the Eagle County Conservation Board and has served on the board since 2008. Scott and his wife Jennifer, along with their two children work together as managers of the Colorado River Ranch where they raise cattle, grow hay and train horses. Scott also enjoys team roping in his spare time.

## Rio Grande River Watershed: Tyler Neely, Vice-President-Del Norte, CO



Tyler Neely is a fourth-generation farmer from the San Luis Valley. He and his wife, Margaret own and operate Rio West Farms, LLC in Rio Grande County where he has served as a supervisor for the Rio Grande Conservation District, as well as a member of the board for the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation Education Initiative since 2014. Tyler also serves as the vice-chair for the Rio Grande Watershed and as a board member for the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, where he is proud to continue a family legacy of land and water stewardship.

## Gunnison-Dolores River Watershed: Mike Cleary, Director - Crawford, CO



Mike Cleary serves as a director and vice president of CACD. Mike and his wife Kristina live on their cattle ranch on the Western Slope Crawford in Delta county. Mike is a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines and a professional engineer with 40 years of field experience. He started ranching operations in 2004. He also serves as a board member on both the Clipper and Grandview Ditches.

## San Juan Basin Watershed: Gary Thrash, Director - , CO



Gary Thrash is a Colorado native and farms with his wife on Florida Mesa, SE of Durango, CO. He has been a supervisor on the La Plata CD since 2012. He retired from the Bureau of Land Management with 36+ years in public land resource management. Gary is an alternate representative for Colorado with the National Association of Conservation Districts.

## North-Platte, White, Yampa Watershed: Nick Charchalis, Director - Meeker, CO



Nick Charchalis, a northwest Colorado native. Nick is a lifelong farmer/rancher having raised sheep, cattle, hay, and dry-land wheat. Nick and his wife, Ann, live near Craig in Moffat County.

**Upper South Platte River Watershed: Charlie Carnahan, Director - Kiowa, CO**



Charlie Carnahan is a 4th generation rancher. Charlie and his wife Jane have 4 children and 4 grandchildren. He and his son Chris, run a cow/calf operation and he also produces hay crops south of Kiowa in Elbert County. Charlie has served as a director on the Kiowa Conservation District Board for over 30 years. He is deeply committed to conservation practices.

**Upper Arkansas River Watershed: George Fosha, Director - Calhan, CO**



George Fosha is a consulting water resources engineer, with over 45 years of experience in water rights, water infrastructure and project construction management for a variety of industrial, governmental, municipal, and agricultural clients throughout Colorado. In his spare time, George and his wife Sally operate a small cow-calf operation on Big Sandy Creek, near Calhan, Colorado, a family ranch dating back to the 1870's. George has served as a supervisor for the Double El Conservation District from 2000-2020.

Conservation District from 2000-2020.

**Lower South Platte Watershed: Nancy Berges, Director - Julesburg, CO**



Nancy Berges and her husband, Raymond, are 3rd generation owners of their dryland family farm located in southeast Sedgwick County. They have three sons: Ron, Rory, and Ryan. Nancy recently retired from Highline Electric in Holyoke where she served as Member Services Director. Berges enjoys gardening and canning. She shares many canned foods with friends plus donating many baskets of canned foods for area fundraisers.

**Republican River Watershed: Jim Cecil, Director - Cope, CO**



Jim Cecil and his wife, Vickie, live near Cope in Washington County. They manage the cow/calf and yearling operation and grow wheat, corn, and hay crops. Conservation and sustainability are essential to this 4th generation family farm. Jim serves on the Cope Conservation District Board of Directors. Jim's father and grandfather also served on this board and were always mindful of conservation of the soil, air, and water.

**Lower Arkansas River Watershed: Steve McEndree, Director - Springfield, CO**



Steve McEndree is a 4th generation rancher in northwest Baca County near Springfield. Steve served 18 years on the Baca County Conservation District as well as being involved in other organizations including the Baca County Fairboard, Bent Prowers Cattle and Horsegrowers Association, Pritchett School Board, and others. He is the manager of the Pipesprings Ranch. Steve proudly has three grandchildren and is pleased to be introducing them to the conservation in agriculture.

**NACD CO Alt Board Member & CACD Alt Board Member: Bob Warner – Fort Lupton, CO**



Bob Warner serves on the Board of Trustees for the National Conservation Foundation (NCF) as well as the NACD/NCF Joint Funding Committee. He is a member of the NACD Stewardship and Education Committee and supports the Inspirational Program each year at the Annual Meeting. On the local level, Bob is a member of the Southeast Weld Conservation District and is a member of the Upper South Platte Watershed Association. Bob is a rancher/farmer with a small cow/calf and private feedlot natural beef operation near Fort Lupton. He also raises corn and hay for his livestock and some local buyers. Bob has participated in Conservation District activities for about 46 years.

**Executive Director: Bobbi Ketels**



Bobbi became CACD's Executive Director in April 2017. Bobbi coordinates CACD events such as the NACD Spring Fly-In, Envirothon, Camp Rocky, and the CACD Annual Meeting. She also works with Districts on the CACD's matching grant programs, participates in partner committees, and is involved in all legislative committee projects. She lives in Lamar, Colorado, with her husband and together they have six children and eight wonderful grandchildren. Bobbi enjoys reading and venturing around Colorado with her husband on their Harley Davidson motorcycle.

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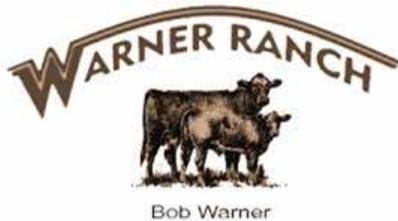
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## **Conservation Quiz**

- 1. How much of the lower 48 states is held in private, rural ownership?**
  - A) All of it.
  - B) 10%
  - C) About 70%.
  - D) None of it. The government owns it all.
- 2. How much of America's soil is still at risk of erosion?**
  - A) Erosion? We have that?
  - B) 35%
  - C) All of it.
  - D) None of it, everything's OK.
- 3. Five tons of topsoil spread over an acre is as thick as–**
  - A) Your thumb
  - B) 6 feet
  - C) A dime
  - D) A pick-up truck.
- 4. What percent of Americans are farmers?**
  - A) Half.
  - B) 25%
  - C) Less than 2%.

**Submit your answers to [bobbi@coloradoacd.org](mailto:bobbi@coloradoacd.org). If all your answers are correct you'll be entered into a drawing for a special prize!**

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