



Colorado Conservator

Colorado Association of Conservation Districts

Cope and Washington County Conservation Districts Work Together for Area Youth

By Jim Cecil, Cope Conservation District Supervisor and Dollie Gonzales, Washington County District Conservationist

Conservation Districts in Washington County have combined efforts with the Akron NRCS field office, headed by District Conservationist, Dollie Gonzales, to educate local students in the importance of conservation.

The NRCS staff annually conducts an "Earth Day"; K-5th-grade coloring contest for the five schools located in the county including Lone Star, Akron, Otis, Arickaree, and Woodlin. When the awards are presented, the staff members have the opportunity to further explain why we celebrate Earth Day. Goodie bags are given to each student and seedling trees to the first place winner about each grade that participated.

Earth Day presentations are also done with the Akron Headstart students. Presentations have included the students getting dirty while making seed balls, participating in a play that demonstrated the life of a seed, and watching a water demonstration (table top infiltrometer). It's never too early to start the importance of conservation and the value of water.

The wildfire of 2012 near Last Chance burned an area of 45,000 acres. The fire was devastating, but grass rejuvenates and has grown back. The trees that had been long established near Highway 36 were destroyed. Volunteer students from the FFA chapter of Woodlin School joined local producers, NRCS staff members, and the Cope CD in planting new trees to restore this much-needed living snow fence.

Last year, a wildfire destroyed part of the windbreak at the Arickaree School. This long-standing windbreak protected the school from hot winds in the summer and snow deposition in the winter. The windbreak was an integral part of the landscape and had historical value to the school. The school

is located in rural Washington County right in the heart of traditional agriculture. The Arickaree School Board contacted Dollie Gonzales, District Conservationist, to prepare a plan to renovate and replace the burned windbreak. Cope

Conservation District Board Members assisted the school with ordering and delivering trees and other necessary materials. The entire windbreak was planted by hand. The project consisted of two separate phases.

During phase one the local 4-H group and FFA Chapter dug the holes for trees with post hole diggers and shovels. The second phase was planting the trees, laying down the polypropylene and drip system. The entire school took part in the project. The younger students planted two to three trees each, and the high school students cleaned up and planted what was left of the 5,000-foot windbreak. The NRCS staff joined the entire student body and demonstrated to each class how to plant and care for young trees.

The annual 6th Grade Conservation Poster Contest was conducted in the fall. This is an ongoing project for both Washington County and Cope

Conservation Districts. All five area schools were given a packet for information on the national theme, "Save our Trees". The poster contest is judged by the corresponding District Supervisors, and the top two posters are taken to the CACD Annual Meeting. In the spring, the Cope and Washington Conservation Districts present a tree to each sixth



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Cope and Washington...

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grader. It is always a great time to hear students and parents talk about how big their tree is and where it is planted.

The annual State FFA Range Judging contest is held in Eastern Colorado. It is rotated to Washington County once every three years. The Akron NRCS, Cope and Washington Conservation Districts are strong supporters and help facilitate the day's activities. Students come from all over the state, and there are usually 120-150 participants. The students judge two native range sites and then take a plant identification exam. It is a busy but rewarding activity. Local Range Management Specialist Tom Nadgwick assists the local FFA chapters in preparation for the range judging contest, and has been an integral part of the contest.

Education to both our youth and our local landowners is just part of the Districts' and NRCS' daily lives. From helping a local boy scout earn his Eagle Badge, to range judging contests, to working with a three-year-old making seed balls, this is part of who we are and what we stand for. Looking back at the progression of our on-the-ground conservation practices makes us appreciate the value of the jobs we do and anticipate the great conservation to come.



National Association of Conservation Districts Soil Health Champions Network

Submitted by Gary Thrash

The Soil Health Champions Network was created by NACD in 2015 to promote soil health education and outreach among American farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners. Today, the Network is comprised of more than 170 landowners and operators across the nation who are implementing conservation practices on their land and championing the benefits of soil health within their communities. Soil Health Champions have working relationships with their local conservation districts and USDA service centers and are often community leaders and early adopters of conservation practices. Responsibilities of membership in this exclusive network include conducting soil health outreach in their communities and reporting on these activities to NACD for use on NACD's website and in national publications. NACD Soil Health Champions will headline the 2nd Annual Cover Crop, Soil Health Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana December 7-8, 2017.

Colorado currently has two members of the Network: John Heermann of Haxtun, CO and Brendan Rocky of Center, CO.

Programs such as the Soil Health Champions are grassroots conservation efforts that are supported by dues-paying conservation districts across the United States and its territories. The success of NACD would not be possible without districts who value the role of conservation of resources and promote the efforts of locally led conservation as demonstrated by the Soil Health Champions. Do you know a conservation leader that could contribute to this network?

For more information on joining the network check out NACD's website at <http://www.nacdnet.org/get-involved/soil-health-champions-network/>.

NACD current legislative efforts representing conservation districts and the NRCS include lobbying to affect the 2018 Farm Bill; Commenting on proposed USDA reorganization plan; commenting on the recodification of the Waters of the United States definition; commenting on Bureau of Land Management planning rule changes to encourage locally led conservation in planning for public land management.



Message from the President

Greetings District Members:

This is the most critical time for CACD to hear from its membership now that fall has arrived. For those watershed associations that took advantage of having CACD pay the cost of a guest speaker at a meeting, please let us know how well that worked or if it could be improved next year. For those watershed associations that did not take advantage and would like to, start thinking of a topic or speaker for next year and contact your CACD representative or the Executive Director. The reasoning behind the CACD funded speakers is to encourage watershed associations to have better attended and more productive meetings. Because we are a grassroots organization, CACD needs to hear concerns and needs from the districts and membership. The more involvement and representation from the districts at the watershed level the better informed the CACD representative becomes to serve area membership.

CACD is in the process of replying to a few districts that have brought forth concerns directly to CACD, and there are times when it is necessary for districts to respond directly to the Executive Director or the Board. With the CO Conservator, the CACD website, and the email post to the districts from the Executive Director, CACD believes we are keeping membership well informed of the organization's operations and functions. However, we can always improve. The best way for CACD to hear from membership and membership to hear from CACD is through the productive, informative, and entertaining watershed and the annual meetings. PLEASE ATTEND AND BE HEARD.

With that, I am personally asking everyone to attend the CACD Annual Meeting in Loveland this year the week after Thanksgiving. Like last year, we will have the condensed schedule cutting off one day to make the meeting more affordable and easy to attend. We felt this worked well all without sacrificing quality and allowing time for all general business of the organization. We emphasize starting on time and keeping to the schedule while maintaining the flow of the meeting. Most of the changes in the meeting have come about through suggestions from the annual meeting surveys. We think this year's agenda will result in an informative and entertaining experience that you will be very pleased that you have attended.

Sincerely, Donald M. McBee, CACD President



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WGCD Engages its Community Through Collaboration

By Kristi Helzer, Community Education & Outreach Coordinator, West Greeley CD

The West Greeley Conservation District (WGCD) Board of Supervisors is forward thinking and supports a small innovative staff that focuses on education and providing a broad menu of services to their District. Wanting constituents to be aware of available programs and services gave birth to a Community Appreciation BASH on Friday, August 11th attracting well over 500 people to Houston Gardens in Greeley.

The Gardens evolved from an early 1900s family farm, into a botanical garden functioning as a community education resource and nature center that WGCD owns and manages.

It is a perfect location for collaborative learning for all ages. They have hosted an outdoor music camp where preschoolers learned to appreciate the sounds of nature; a literacy Brain Camp for youngsters 6-12 participated in a botany scavenger hunt; a special educational summer school field trip offered abundant sensory appeal. An at-risk pre-teen/teen summer enrichment adventure program at the Gardens, resulted in youth continuing to volunteer. Science and photography classes; as well as the Greeley Art Association use the Gardens for inspiration. Where better to host their community BASH?

"One only had to take a few steps into the grounds



Brandon & Kristen Ewals-Strain answer questions about their exterminating and taxidermist businesses.



Girls are fascinated by the spiders and crawly creatures at the CSU Entomology Mobile Bug Zoo display.



Clark Harshbarger, NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, explains the 5 Senses of Soil and shares their soil tunnel with curious families.

of Houston Gardens Community BASH to realize what a special place you'd encountered. Shady grounds, a welcoming path to gently guide you to lovely seating areas, through xeric flower beds, around water features, topped off with the happy sounds of friends greeting one another and marveling at the many conservation displays, incredible food, and gracious hosts. The West Greeley Conservation District has every reason to be proud of its accomplishments in elevating this historic site to a wonderful new level. Well done!"
-Becky Safarik, Assistant Greeley City Manager

Attendees enjoyed supper served by FFA students and Girl Scouts, then could visit 14 conservation stations that partnered with the District to learn about rescuing raptors, our water cycle and water shed, how to manage weed problems, and NRCS's Soil Tunnel and the 5 Senses of Soil. They heard about birds, bees and bugs, and who can resist a baby farm animal petting zoo? The BASH and FREE BBQ provided unique offerings.

Many of the 30+ Houston community gardeners were on hand to answer questions and enjoy the evening.

"The WGCD's BBQ at Houston Gardens was educational and a lot of fun. We particularly enjoyed talking to the FFA young adults about their calves, goats, and lambs. The young ladies from the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program were very knowledgeable, and we enjoyed

seeing their birds up close and learning about them. We also learned about dairy farm operations from Tucker Dairy from Pierce. We hope the WGCD will hold this event again next year.”
-Jon & Nancy Weaver, longtime Community Gardeners

Citizens learned the history of George M. Houston Gardens, an oasis hidden in the middle of Greeley, while being awed by the unveiling of Greeley’s newest piece of art; a tree carving by Faye Braaten, the Chainsaw Mama.

Much more was accomplished than feeding and entertaining attendees; people were learning! They discovered WGCD hosts an annual tree sale November-April, they now know to call their office if they need a soil test. They found out WGCD awarded 11 college scholarships to students living within their District boundaries who are focused on agriculture, natural resource, animal science, and related conservation careers.

They took home materials explaining WGCD’s grass seeding and equipment rental programs. Their growing cost-share program and consulting services are available for small acreage and irrigation water management assistance; and windbreak planning and design.

“The Community Bash presented an opportunity for us to share how we make our jams and jellies. We explained how the 12 various berry bushes and trees we bought for our windbreak from the WGCD Seedling Tree Sale will expand our offering of fruit flavors and continue to increase our inventory. It was truly our pleasure to be a part of this community outreach.”
-Glenn & Judy Gregory, Owners of Gregory Orchard

Country Sunshine Jams provided samples at their booth. Pollinator partners, Rice’s Honey provided honey samples along with ice cream cups shared by Tucker Dairy and the Western Dairy Association.

“The BASH proved to be the most effective tool yet to connect with our stakeholders. There was an excellent opportunity to showcase our efforts and to receive feedback about ‘what more can be done’ to serve the area,” WGCD Board of Supervisors President John Leone said. *“The impact of this collaboration helped WGCD broaden its service awareness – thus meeting many of our goals.”*



In July, Faye Braaten, The Chainsaw Mama, carved this 11’ tree sculpture in just five days to further enhance the beauty of Houston Gardens (Phylabe Houston’s endowment paid for the carving).



Children loved the baby animals from the FFA Petting Zoo, especially these lambs.



The Gregory family shares their Country Sunshine jellies and jams.



WGCD President John Leone and his wife Nancy enjoy the BASH

Embracing a Changing Audience in Conservation

By Mark Cronquist, Northeast Region Conservation Specialist, Colorado State Conservation Board



When soil and water conservation districts were formed throughout America more than seven decades ago, the purpose was to provide a local entity to represent landowners in dealings with the Soil Conservation Service, a federal agency that farmers and ranchers were unfamiliar in working with as on-the-ground projects began to halt widespread soil and water erosion. That traditional partnership between conservation districts and what is now known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service has been extremely successful in implementing state-of-the-art land stewardship practices around the nation.

As the regional specialist having the opportunity to support twenty-eight districts in northeastern Colorado, I have seen the conventional collaborations between districts and the partners who have, year in and year out, successfully dealt with a wide variety of natural resource issues. In addition to NRCS, these partners have included Colorado State Conservation Board, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado State Forest Service Nursery, Colorado State University Extension, numerous agricultural commodity groups, and a wide array of local and regional agencies and organizations. Of course, the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts has been there, being the voice of the conservation districts at the state legislature and on various statewide and national committees.

But...the times they are a changin'!

Many districts around the state have experienced a rapid and intensive conversion of agricultural lands to more urban uses. Water that produced crops and raised livestock for generations has been sold, altering the landscape districts work so hard to protect for future citizens. One of the most difficult things for conservation districts to deal with is the wholesale shift in demographics when the land use changes to subdivisions, small acreages, or business developments. Districts have been so important in helping Colorado agriculture maintain its sustainability that many district boards see their only role as helping agriculture. This is still a vital function for districts with ag lands, but it is important for supervisors to remember that conservation does not end at the city limit sign.

Conservation districts that see all the citizens in their boundaries as their clientele open up a whole new opportunity to educate and influence people who will impact the natural resources in their areas. Water conservation programs, xeric landscaping, community supported agriculture, private lands forestry, and programs that educate adults and youth about natural resources or agriculture are examples of activities districts

in Colorado and around the nation have incorporated in their programs. This is done to engage with the people who have not traditionally been district customers but will be making important decisions in the future affecting THEIR districts and their programs.

Several KEY things for boards to consider as they function in this evolving world of conservation:

1. Take the time to hear the ideas and concerns from all sectors of your citizen base.
2. Be willing to investigate and nurture unconventional partnerships to plan and fund new programs.
3. Embrace the fact that conservation practiced in the city can translate to the availability of improved resources for farmers and ranchers.

Save the Date

Colorado State Technical Committee Fall Meeting Thursday, November 2, 2017, 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

The meeting will be held at the Colorado State Department of Agriculture Building located at 305 Interlocken Parkway, in the San Juan Conference Room, Broomfield, CO, 80021. For those that cannot attend in person, we will be utilizing a teleconference line. Please notify Randy if you would like to give a 10-15 minute presentation to highlight a conservation project.

All Persons interested in participating in this meeting are invited to attend. Please send your RSVP by October 27, 2017, to Marta Villano at (720) 544-2806 or marta.villano@co.usda.gov. In order to receive the teleconference number and a copy of the slides, you must RSVP.

If you have any questions regarding the State Technical Committee meeting, please contact Randy Randall, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, at (720) 544-2824 or randy.randall@co.usda.gov. You may also visit the NRCS Colorado web page at <http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/> for updated information regarding the Colorado State Technical Committee. Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations are asked to please contact Marta in advance.

CACDE ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

By Brenda Anderson

The Colorado Association of Conservation Districts Employees (CACDE) will hold their Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting November 27–29, 2017.

The silent auction will be held again this year; this is our annual fundraising activity. Funds raised from this event are used to fund our employee scholarships as well as our “Employee of the Year” recognition, Employee Years of Service Awards, Colorado Envirothon, Camp Rocky, and NACD. Last year was not a very productive year, and proceeds were over 50% lower than what we normally raise each year. We are, once again, asking for assistance from all of our districts by bringing at least two items for the Silent Auction as well as helping out with the auction by collecting items as they are brought in, setting up the auction, and helping out after the auction closes by collecting payments for items purchased. For all our new district employees that aren’t familiar with the silent auction, please feel free to get in touch with one of our board members, Brenda Anderson-Center/Rio Grande CD, Jonnalea Tortorelli-Branson/Trinchera CD or Debbie Mitchell-Fremont CD.

This year we will be offering three scholarships for any district employees who have paid their dues and who need assistance to attend the meeting. Applications are available on the CACD website. Because the Annual Meeting will be held a week later than when we normally meet, we have extended the final date for submitting the application to October 31. This will allow time to review the applications and make arrangements for lodging at the hotel and complete registration.

Once again, we will have an award for “Employee of the Year”. This award is open to all district employees and applications for this award are also on the CACD website and are due October 31. We will also be recognizing “Years of Service” for employees that have been with their district for a minimum of five years and increments of five years thereafter.

This year the Annual Meeting will be shortened to two days, and we will be having our CACDE dinner off-site again this year. It will be at a different venue this year and cost of the meal will be \$15.00 per person, which includes the cost for guests.

CSCB will be providing a breakout session for the district employees during the Annual Meeting. There will be an agenda for the CACDE meeting sent out prior to the meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Brenda. anderson@co.nacdn.net.

Colorado NRCS Update

By Clint Evans, Colorado State Conservationist



With the help of the staff at the Conservation Districts (CD), the Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) and numerous other partners, we were successful in delivering technical and financial assistance for conservation programs to farmers and ranchers across Colorado. I would like to thank all of the CDs for holding the Local Working Group (LWG) meetings as well as the CSCB staff for facilitating the meetings. The LWG meetings provide valuable feedback to help us deliver technical assistance and conservation programs. We will be reviewing the LWG recommendations at the next NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) meeting. The STAC has been scheduled for November 2nd from 1:00-4:00 PM and will be held at the Colorado Department of Agriculture office in Broomfield, CO. Anyone who is interested in participating is welcome to join us for the meeting. A teleconference line will be available for those who cannot attend in person.

The NRCS staff will be completing the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract obligations during the month of September. We are on track to obligate \$34 million dollars in EQIP funding. We couldn’t have accomplished this without the help of our partners. We will be developing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 program accomplishment reports after the close of the FY. The program accomplishment reports will be presented during the CACD annual conference.

In addition, I would also like to thank all of the CDs that are participating in the District Conservation Technician (DCT) agreement with the NRCS and the CSCB. The DCTs are an invaluable part of our conservation team providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers in Colorado. While it isn’t financially feasible for all CDs to participate in the DCT agreement, we truly appreciate those that can and will continue to look for ways to expand our partnership opportunities throughout Colorado.

West Adams Reaches Out to Children

By Rosalie Everson, WACD Secretary/Treasurer

The West Adams Conservation District board made it a goal this year to reach out to a classroom to teach children about the connection between the plants we grow and the pollinators that help plants make food for people. Initially, we had only one class visit planned, Brighton North Elementary first grade classroom of Jessica Martinez, a teacher we had met at our district's booth at the Adams County Fair 2016 Kids Day. However, the school's other two first grade teachers wanted in too!

Most of the students at North are eligible for free and reduced lunches, and several dozens of them are classified as homeless—living in hotels or temporary shelters. Even though many are part of agricultural worker's families, they had no real connection with how their food is grown.



Our first session, which included Brighton's NRCS Conservationist Tiffani Walker, was an organized mad house with Tiffani telling 60 kids about 'soil' (not dirt, kiddos) and each planting two kinds of seeds in individual cups. Our next project was in coordination with Adams County 4-H Youth Development Coordinator, Lacey Mann. Lacey brought in the entomology aspect, including an activity about cocoons that hatched into butterflies in time to be released in the spring, and fun projects that engaged the children for hours, which is no easy feat when working with first graders!

As the school year was ending, and bees were buzzing, Brighton Bee Club specialist Dan Rau arrived with an observation hive, bees, and honey stix. The Bee Club has been another partner with WACD, so we knew Dan, and his delightful presentations would go over well. The kids were enthralled.

Our final foray into North occurred the day before school was out. We gave each child a hardcover book about insects. The silence was instant as the kids settled down to read their own book. The board thought it was important for them to have a book to take home and share with their families. The teacher has already approached us about a project for this year. Maybe this time we will hatch chickens!

Kids Day at Adams County Fair

Every year we try to come up with a booth at the Adams County Fair that will engage children, as well as their parents, and be fun for both. Of course, if you want to attract kids you have to supply food, so past years' adventures have included different kinds of corn (popcorn as the fare), worms (gummy worms, of course) and bees (thousands of honey stix).

This year we are pleased to report that we outdid ourselves, thanks in large part to Brighton NRCS Conservationist Ciara Ahrens. Ciara coordinated with Brian Domonkos, the Colorado NRCS Snow Survey and Water Forecasting Supervisor, to bring in the 'snow pillow' which tells weight, (ok, not in gold) but weight in water and snow! FSA's Alvin Mascarenas joined the crew as we took about six hours to educate at least 940 children about snowfall and its importance to the world. How do we know there were 940? Because when they were finished with their "snow lesson" they could come collect their free snow cones, and that is how many we served!

An advertisement for Quality Irrigation. The background is a blue sky with white clouds. At the top, there is a logo for "QUALITY IRRIGATION" with a stylized "Q" inside a hexagon. Below this, there are three logos: "VALLEY" with a stylized "V", "Diversified Agrisurance" with a circular logo, and "Sukup" in a green oval. Below the logos, there is a list of services in two columns, each preceded by a bullet point. At the bottom, there is contact information: "3900 W Hwy 34", "Yuma, CO 80759", and "970-848-3846".

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2018 Envirothon Planning

By Brenda Anderson



The Envirothon committee held a teleconference meeting on August 24 and got a great start on their plans for the 2018 Colorado Envirothon competition. The event will be held at the same venue as last year at the Arapahoe County Fairgrounds on a date to be determined. Before a date is set, we will be contacting schools to see if another date might work better for the schools and students. We hope to have that information back by December 1. In the meantime, we will be working on securing the individuals who will be preparing the test questions for the 2018 competition. Our goal is to get more continuity in the format for the test questions and have the questions in a format that will be easier to grade.

We hope to have more schools throughout the state participate and we are looking to the conservation districts to help us contact the schools in their districts. Information letters will be sent out to all the districts that they can use when contacting their local schools.

The committee has worked very hard on improving the competition each year, and we hope 2018 will be our best competition since the Colorado Envirothon was established in 2012, but we can't do it without help. If you are interested in joining the Colorado Envirothon program committee, please contact Anthony Lobato, Brenda Anderson, or Bobbi Ketels for information.

It has been the goal for the competition to rotate the venue and district that will be overseeing the competition every two years. Currently, the Center and Rio Grande CDs District Manager has Co-Chaired the event for the 2017 and 2018 year. After the 2018 competition, this task will be taken over by West Greeley CD and Co-Chaired by their District Manager. The Chair for the Envirothon will be a designated CACD board or staff member. The goal for this rotation is to get more districts involved and to get more schools throughout the state to become involved with the Envirothon.

We hope to grow in size, and when that happens, we will need to set up regional competitions in order to keep the State Competition at a limit of 20 – 25 teams each year. Currently, the LaPlata CD board members are putting together a Regional Competition in their area, and the winner will be sent to the State Competition. Kudos to this board for getting this first Regional Competition going.

Hope to see you all at the Annual Meeting in November.



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FFA Rangeland Judgers Compete in Burlington

By Ben Berlinger, Society for Range Management, Youth Activities Chair

Future Farmers of America (FFA) students and their advisors from high schools across eastern Colorado arrived at the Morgan Community College community building in Burlington October 5th. The purpose was to compete in a rangeland plant identification exercise and participate in judging the soundness of the rangeland. This state-level competition attracted an astounding 230 students representing 24 FFA Chapters from as far away as Peetz & Holyoke to the north and Rye & Pritchett to the south.

Team awards and top scoring individuals were recognized at the awards ceremony which was held at the conclusion of the competition. The Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) sponsored the individual honors while nineteen of the Conservation Districts across eastern Colorado and some local business sponsored the team plaques and provided a breakfast snack. Steve Poet, of the Seibert FFA Chapter, provided a delicious "Farm to Table" lunch for the students.

The Burlington Conservation District provided the local coordination for the activity. Jennie McCasland, Conservation District Manager in Burlington, handled the local arrangements for the Conservation District. Colorado Conservation Districts have always united to provide support for natural resources education for our youth in Colorado. The Colorado Section SRM individual awards were presented to McCrae Rider of the Burlington FFA Chapter for the high score on the combined site judging & plant identification (79% score), and to Cody Wilson of Pritchett FFA for second place honors with his combined score of 73% correct.



Rangeland plant identification involved learning the common plant names and characteristics of each plant. (Photo by Emmett Jordan)



A group of FFA students during the rangeland plant identification contest. (Photo by Emmett Jordan)



Eastern Colorado State FFA Rangeland Judging career Development Exercise (CDE) held in Kit Carson County. 230 FFA students participated in this year's contest representing 24 schools from all over eastern Colorado. This picture shows one group of students judging a Limestone Breaks ecological site, one of two ecological sites located near Burlington. The participating teams were Akron, Arickaree, Branson, Burlington, Crowley County, Flagler, Fowler, Hi-Plains, Hoehne, Holyoke, Karval, Kim, Lamar, Las Animas, Liberty, Lonestar, Merino, New Raymer, Peetz, Pritchett, Rocky Ford, Rye, Sedgwick County, and Stratton.

(Photo by Emmett Jordan)

Micah Crane of the Pritchett FFA was recognized as the top individual for the plant identification part of the contest. He scored 96% correct in this exercise requiring the identification of 50 rangeland plants and their characteristics. McCrae will be presented with a \$200 check from the Colorado Section SRM along with his plaque.

The winning high schools recognized at this year's state competition included: Pritchett FFA Chapter, 1st Place Gold Team; Burlington FFA Chapter, 2nd Place Gold Team; Lonestar FFA Chapter, 3rd Place Silver Team; Fowler FFA Chapter, 4th Place Silver Team; Kim FFA Chapter, 5th Place Bronze Team; Hoehne FFA Chapter, 6th Place Bronze Team. In the beginning rangeland judging class Arickaree FFA Chapter placed first, New Raymer FFA Chapter was second, and Lonestar FFA Chapter placed third.

The FFA rangeland judging contest is divided into two parts. The native plant identification involves the naming of rangeland plants common to eastern Colorado together with rating important plant characteristics such as life span, grazing response, and palatability for cattle. The second part of the contest takes place in the field and requires the students to judge the condition of two different rangeland sites. Here the students must determine the plant composition of each site, the range condition compared to the reference plant community, the suggested stocking rate, and range trend. Finally, based on their evaluation of the existing plant community, each student must select the appropriate management practice (or suite of practices) that would be recommended to the land owner for improvement of the rangeland resource and livestock performance.

The CO Section SRM & Colorado's Conservation Districts congratulate all of the Colorado high school youth who participated in this year's rangeland judging exercise and wish them continued success with their accomplishments to learn more about the conservation of our natural resources. For more information, please contact Ben Burlinger 719-384-5408 x104.



FFA rangeland judging CDE. Students are judging the second of two ecological sites located near Burlington. The judging consisted of properly identifying the site, determining the range condition & trend, and then recommending certain management practices that could be implemented.

Here the students are judging a Sandy Plains ecological site. (Photo by Emmett Jordan)



Ben Berlinger, Youth Activities Chairman, Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) presented the high scoring individuals with recognition for their outstanding achievement. From left to right pictures are McCrae Rider, high combined score for both site judging & plant identification; Cody Wilson, second high combined score; and Micah Crane, high score on plant identification. (Photos by Emmett Jordan)

Who Will Take Your Place at Tomorrow's Conservation Table?

By Cindy Lair, Program Manager, Colorado State Conservation Board

I recently attended the National Leadership Symposium, hosted by our national conservation partners. It was great to hear from esteemed leaders who make the difference and commitment at the local level. They premiered the new documentary movie about the life of Hugh Hammond Bennett to remind us where this all began. It is important to remember your past as you envision your path forward.

Where are we going? What is our path forward? What will voluntary conservation look like in ten years? In 30 years? With all the different players that want a seat at your conservation table, it is getting ever more critical to ensure we are looking into the future with the needs of future generations, our Millennials, in mind. It is the Millennials that will continue the conservation work that our forefathers started over 80 years ago. If you have not noticed, they think and behave differently than Generation Xers, Baby Boomers or the Traditionalists. However, I am sure if you think back to your own beginnings in conservation, it was the generation before you that invited you in and welcomed your fresh perspective. Now it is our turn to do the same for this generation. As the face of conservation and agriculture change, so too must the methods with which we achieve progress. A significant step towards this progress is encouraging Millennials to join our enduring conservation journey.



All generations were once the upstart, often misunderstood, generation. That is not a bad thing – it simply means we need to embrace their strengths and excitement and be sure that we include them in the conservation cause. If we do not adjust and MAKE ROOM at the “adult table” in this conservation family, conservation districts will become dinosaurs. How many Stegosaurus have you seen roaming the plains lately?

I hope you view this change as an opportunity rather than a chore. Millennials are hopeful and altruistic. They want to make sure if they spend energy on something that it will result in tangible improvements to the causes they are passionate about. They will not go to meetings for the sake of going to a monthly meeting. They will step up to serve, but they need to know that taking time out of their busy schedule to collaborate will render real CHANGE. The good thing is that they do not want the spotlight for themselves. They are team driven, collaborative and they understand the need for partnerships. You will need more than one Millennial to make the difference.

We have to rethink the way we reach out to our public to make sure to attract and involve the Millennials. Normally, I would advocate for having the right blend of all generations, but our conservation table is overloaded to one side. We have some work to do. Stay tuned for future training on this topic!

Healthy Forest Initiative – MacGregor Ranch

Estes Park, Colorado

Officials at MacGregor Ranch along with federal scientists are using the latest research to improve the health of 160 acres of ponderosa forest, and doing it by looking to the landscape of old. Work was completed to remove chosen trees on the southeast portion of the cattle ranch near Estes Park, Colorado to stop overcrowded stands and return the landscape to a more-natural environment. The goal is to reduce risks from wildfire and insect kill as well as to improve water quality and the land's overall health.

The primary goals are the ecological benefits including the control of catastrophic wildfires. This will be accomplished by reducing the density of trees will prevent devastation during a fire because the flames will be less likely to rise to the crowns of the trees and take out all in their path. The finished product will make for a better-looking forest as well as boost native plant species and improve wildlife habitat on site and allow for a less dense forest and healthier trees.

This project is one of the most-significant investments into forest health in Northern Colorado and fits into the mission of the MacGregor Ranch, which prides itself on being good stewards of the land while maintaining a historically significant, active cattle ranch based upon the mission statement.

Forest experts looked at photos from as far back as the 1800s, which showed what the tree cover looked like then as opposed to today. They dug into research to create a plan to return the forest to that scope, to bring back the natural health while mitigating effects on historic resources or threatened and endangered species such as peregrine falcons that nest on nearby Lumpy Ridge



Landing and harvesting equipment where the trees are sized, sorted, processed, and loaded out.



MacGregor Ranch in the early 1900's looking west up the Black Canyon Creek valley. You can notice the sparse population of trees within the valley.

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The work involves removing entire trees that were chosen based on their locations and characteristics. Older trees, some which are 200 to 300 years old, are being left untouched. Most of this is performed by heavy equipment, but any trails or tracks and all slash created from the equipment are removed. The vehicles have extra large tires specifically to cause as little soil compaction as possible.

Some of the removed material will be reused in flood recovery projects within the Estes Valley, and the rest will go onto myriad uses and will become everything from mulch to lumber to landscaping squares. Some will be used in an energy production facility at Colorado State University; others may assist with oilfield mitigation work and still more may become tongue and groove paneling. The majority, though, will end up as farm lumber on fences and other projects.

A local logging company won the bidding process and was selected due to their location and ability to perform the work as specified under the EQIP program. Costs of such a project can exceed \$2,000 per acre depending upon the terrain.

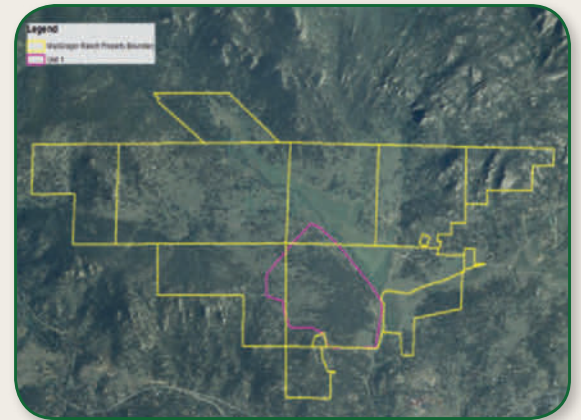
Partners include NRCS, Big Thompson Conservation District, Rocky Mountain National Park, Northern Colorado Water Conservation District, Larimer County, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, Front Range Community College, the Big Thompson, Little Thompson and Estes Valley Watershed Coalitions, Colorado State Forest Service and the Estes Park Environmental Center.

With help from these partners, the Big Thompson Conservation District created a holistic forest management plan that will ultimately improve wildlife habitat, boost the soil, improve tree health and increase the vegetation that grows beneath the large trees. Trees are marked to be removed; they are cut and taken to the landing where they are sorted by size, quality, and use. The slash which is lost or spread over lower thinner density plant growth is used for fuel away from the ranch.

Once the project cutting and the wood is removed, the monitoring process will begin. That monitoring could lead to seeding and weed control if needed, but the MacGregor Ranch land has been so well cared for that there are not a lot of invasive weeds or vegetation on site.



November 2016, looking west from Twin Owls Trail into the Black Canyon Creek valley, with a heavy population due to non contact approach to forest management.



Treatment area in red consisting of 160 acres.

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Established in 1948, the WGCD strives to be the leader in natural resource information, education, outreach, and services to its stakeholders to encourage effective, responsible, sustainable use of the land. Their boundaries encompass over 1.6 million acres of irrigated and non-irrigated cropland rangeland, and urban communities where citizens live in northeastern CO.

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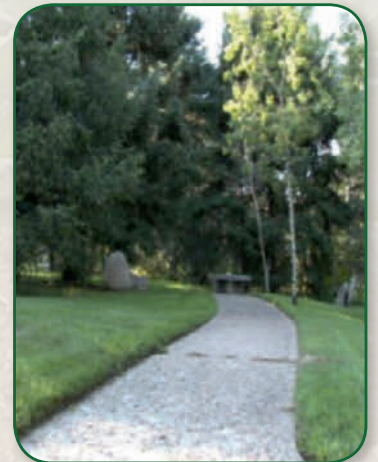
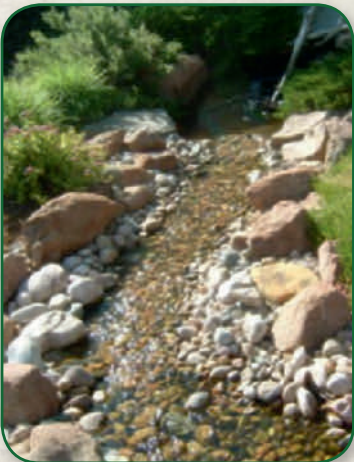
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Front Range Ag Community Supports 2017 Pedal the Plains Bike Tour

By Petra Barnes, (720) 544-2808, petrabarnes@co.usda.gov

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was an enthusiastic supporter for the 2017 Colorado Pedal the Plains bike tour. Hundreds of cyclists from all over the country gathered for the 3-Day 177-mile event, and the NRCS Brighton field office along with the West Adams County Conservation District were hands-on presenting an interactive and educational booth at one of the tour's rest stops.

"This is the first year that the annual ride has come thru Brighton and its surrounding areas," shares Cindy Einspahr, District Conservationist for the NRCS in Brighton. "When we heard about the routes location, we immediately knew we wanted to participate because we would have the opportunity to expose a large non-traditional audience to NRCS and the importance of conserving natural resources."

This year marks the 6th anniversary of the event, and the ride stayed close to the Denver metro area yet still remained true to one of its original missions which was to highlight Colorado's eastern slope rural communities. Bikers rode through Weld and Morgan counties starting and ending in the town of Kersey while winding through Keenesburg and Brush.

The event provides a number of experiences for riders by working with locals, farmers, ranchers, business owners, local government, etc., to stage rest stops on farms, displaying educational signage about the area and local agriculture.

"We partnered with Adams Conservation District to showcase our soil tunnel and share information about NRCS initiatives including our organics program and to compliment to meals served at the evening rest stops which featured locally grown food, we served produce from a local melon farmer who donated red and orange melons," Einspahr goes on to say.

Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper kicked off the event along with former Denver Post publisher Dean Singleton. The duo discussed the importance of Colorado's Eastern Plains, which are often overshadowed by the western slope. For more information about NRCS, its programs, initiatives and opportunities, please visit www.co.nrcs.usda.gov.



Reflections on My Urban Agriculture Internship with Jefferson Conservation District

By Jesse Soule

Internships are encouraged by both academia and employers, being touted for the wide swath of benefits that they are thought to provide: bridging the gap between abstract theories taught in schools and real-life situations. This opportunity provides invaluable experience that builds professional skillsets, forming a foundation for future careers, boosting resumes, expanding professional networks –just to name a few. My internship this past summer as an Urban Agriculture Intern for the Jefferson Conservation District certainly provided all of these benefits and so much more.

Along with two other Urban Agriculture Interns, Natalie Fioretti, and Adam Gremp, we were charged with a variety of responsibilities, most of which required constant teamwork and communication, allowing each of us to utilize our varying expertise to complete the tasks at hand. One of our most integral responsibilities was to develop and maintain personal relationships with farmers and landowners, which we carried out through on-site visits. It was through these visits that we were able to learn about a wide variety of agricultural practices while seeing first-hand the conservation measures that had been put into place. For example, we witnessed the implementation and utilization of soil moisture sensors and hoop houses, we participated in the production of a wide variety of crops, and we learned about the importance of herd management and sustainable grazing practices in animal production. Furthermore, these visits allowed us to interact with the farmers and the land in a way that could never be replicated in a textbook or classroom. This experience gave us the opportunity to witness their challenges and their feats, and to guide them through the systematic processes of federal cost-share programs and other forms of assistance provided by the district.

The relationships that we developed did not stop at farmers and landowners but carried over into interested organizations including Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Colorado State University (CSU) Extension, University of Colorado - Denver, the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council, and GoFarm. It was these relationships that allowed us the flexibility to pursue our specific interests for our internship projects. For me, that meant shadowing Jennifer Cook, a small acreage manager for NRCS/ CSU Extension, to learn more about pasture management. This included accompanying her to on-site visits to consult with small-acreage landowners while utilizing her expertise to develop specialized pasture seed mixes for the district. On the other hand, Natalie was able to pursue her interest in food distribution, working closely with the non-profit GoFarm, ultimately culminating in a job-offer of which she has accepted. Lastly, Adam was able to integrate his dual passions of urban agriculture and photography into the creation of a book, detailing all of the conservation practices that the district provides assistance for.

Another major facet of our internship was to organize and carry out a variety of events, aimed at the promotion of the district and its urban agriculture program, in particular. The first of these events was a Pub Talk, showing the documentary 'Growing Cities' followed by a discussion of the importance and potential of urban agriculture. I then held a Pasture Walk with Jennifer Cook at Five Fridges Farm, aimed at educating landowners on the importance of good grazing management practices. Our last event and a testament to our gains both personally and professionally were the Summer Soiree and Annual Dinner Event, at which we were each able to present our internship projects. It was through these events that Natalie, Adam and I were truly able to showcase the relationships that we had formed, the projects that we had developed, and the breadth of knowledge that we had obtained throughout the course of the internship.

We have all walked away from this internship with an enhanced skillset and a much deeper understanding of our field and of the career paths that we wish to pursue. Specifically, our experiences related to urban agriculture, conservation practices, the importance of relationship building and public relations, and the ins and outs of government process, among others, is unparalleled. Additionally, this internship has exponentially improved my written and oral communication skills, and it has solidified my desire to pursue a consultant position in natural resource management.

Yuma County Conservation District Hires New District Manager

Dana Barth has joined the Yuma County Conservation District as the new District Manager. Dana is new to the Yuma County Conservation District, but she is not new to Northeast Colorado. She was raised on a ranch southeast of Holyoke and graduated from Holyoke High School.

Before starting the position with the Yuma County Conservation District, Dana was the District Manager for the Northeast Prowers Conservation District in Holly, Colorado. Dana will be a great resource for conservation practices and information in the county. Stop by and see her at the office located at 247 North Clay in Wray or contact her at 970-332-3107 or email at yccd77@gmail.com.



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All Conference forms are now available at www.coloradoacd.org.

**QUESTIONS? Contact Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director
executivedirector4cacd@gmail.com - 719-686-0020**

CACD, P.O. Box 1175, Lamar, CO 81052

2017 Camp Rocky a Huge Success!

By Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director

With many weeks of preparation to follow just after starting my new position with CACD, I had no idea what to expect when Camp Rocky finally rolled around. I woke up Saturday morning, threw my bags in the car and hit the road! Our first day focused on preparation with our Jr. Leader staff. We ran through drills of what would take place over the course of the week. We practiced songs, played games, and worked on strong Jr. Leadership skills.

Somewhere in-between the awkward hellos and the sad goodbyes, students explored and learned about conservation plans and implementation. They created and presented power point presentations, and on the last day we broke into groups and set out to bring these work plans to life. It was an amazing experience for all!

Our numbers doubled this year to 30 campers plus a Jr. Leader staff of six. I have never seen a group of volunteers and instructors work so hard! At this time I would like to give special recognition to these folks, our conservation districts and to all our sponsors who helped make Camp Rocky 2017 a huge success! Without their support, both financial and technical, Camp Rocky would not be possible!

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CACD Seeking Board Supervisor

Are you passionate about conservation? Do you currently serve or have you served previously on the board of your local conservation district? CACD has a current vacancy on its board for the Lower South Platte Watershed representative.

If you are interested in representing your watershed at the state level, or would like to learn more, please contact your local district or the Lower South Platte Watershed board. If you would like to find out more about serving on the CACD board, please contact Don McBee at 719-688-2122.