



COLORADO STATE CONSERVATION BOARD

Supporting Colorado's conservation districts in leading
grassroots environmental stewardship

2009

STRATEGIC REPORT

COLORADO STATE CONSERVATION BOARD



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Colorado State Conservation Board is to build the capacity of local conservation districts in developing and implementing cooperative programs for the conservation and stewardship of natural resources for the people of Colorado.

VISION

- The CSCB provides trusted professional assistance, organizational development services, and conservation programs to support Colorado’s conservation districts in leading grassroots environmental stewardship.
- The CSCB functions as an interactive agency working with conservation partners to foster a sustainable environment through land-use management, education, and resource development.
- The CSCB and conservation districts demonstrate accountability for all sources of conservation funding.
- Colorado’s unique and diverse conservation districts are visible in their communities. They are recognized as innovative implementers of locally led natural resource conservation goals.

VALUES

- The highest standards of professionalism, ethics, and personal and institutional integrity for the CSCB and conservation district supervisors and staff
- Accountability for the effective and efficient use of all funds
- Open communications and transparency of operations
- Economic stability for conservation programs and educational efforts for current and future generations
- Innovative responses to diverse conservation issues
- Grass-roots conservation efforts through watersheds and at the local level

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WHO WE ARE

Housed in the Conservation Services Division of the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) was established under the Soil Conservation Act of 1937 (Colorado Revised Statutes Title 35 Article 70) to assist conservation districts in implementing cooperative programs for the conservation and stewardship of Colorado's natural resources.

WHAT WE DO

The State Conservation Board provides trusted professional assistance, organizational development services, and conservation programs to support Colorado's conservation districts in leading grassroots environmental stewardship.



PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

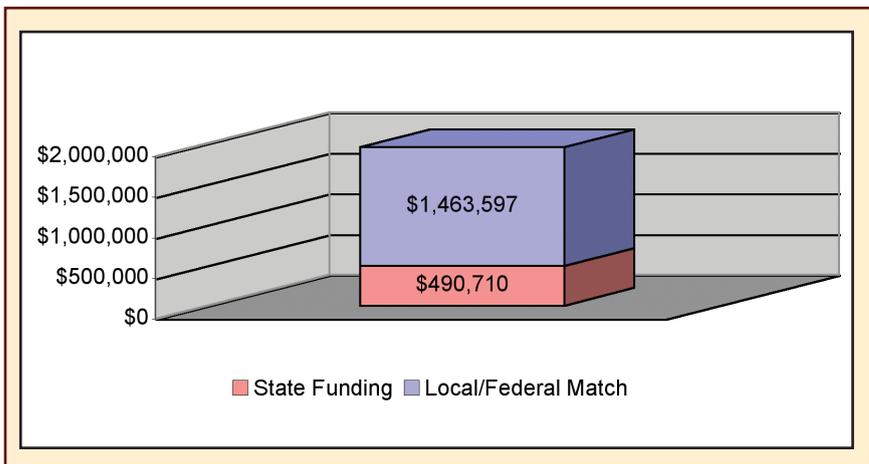
The most valuable assistance provided to conservation districts is the professional services offered through the CSCB staff. These services, primarily offered through the Regional Conservation Specialists, help build the capacity of conservation districts to respond to local conservation issues. A few of the services offered through the Regional Conservation Specialists include: leadership development, assistance finding alternative funding sources, processes to promote operational improvement, and Long-Range Planning facilitation. By helping conservation districts increase their local leadership, the State Conservation Board plays a direct role in helping to conserve and enhance the natural resources of the state.

PROGRAMS

In addition to professional services, the CSCB administers four highly successful conservation programs that promote collaborative responses to critical natural resource issues.

- **Direct Assistance:** The merit-based Direct Assistance grant is the cornerstone conservation district program. Highly leveraged, these funds act as seed money to support conservation districts in developing comprehensive natural resource programs.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Matching Grants (NRCMG):** Funded through level two Severance Tax appropriations, the NRCMG program funds strategic on-the-ground conservation projects that address issues such as: high priority noxious weeds, small acreage management, protection of rangeland and wildlife habitat, improving water delivery systems, forest health, improving water quality, and reducing soil erosion. Although a 50% match is required by the program, a higher match, many times 3:1, is achieved by conservation districts, resulting in measurable benefits to the environment. The authorization for Severance Tax appropriations for this program sunsets in 2011.

2007 Matching Grants Funding Leveraging

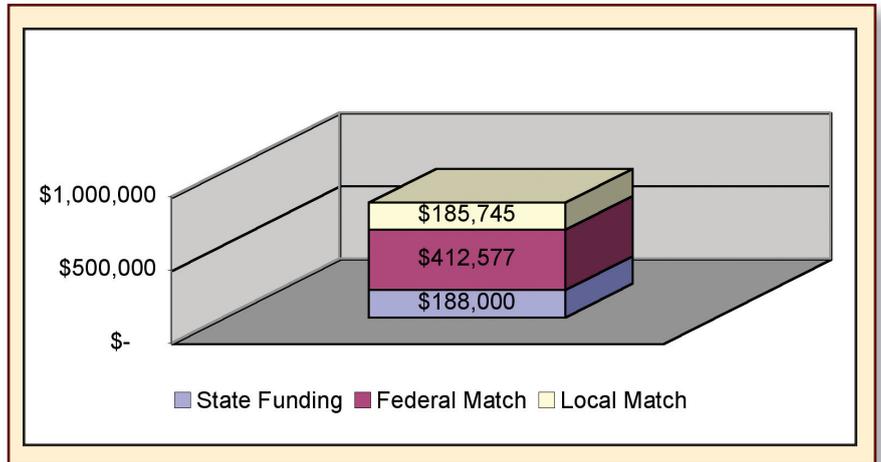


- **District Conservation Technician (DCT) Program:** Through a cooperative funding partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (50%), the CSCB (25%), and local conservation districts (25%), technical assistance is available to landowners to assist them in planning and implementing conservation practices. Currently 36 conservation districts employ 29 Conservation Technicians who are helping landowners protect and improve the natural resources throughout Colorado. The State contribution to the DCT program comes from a combination of General Fund appropriations and level two, Severance Tax appropriations which expire in 2011.

Programs continued

- **Colorado River Salinity Control Program:** Through a partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation, the NRCS and six conservation districts, the CSCB administers federal funds to provide financial assistance of up to 75% to landowners to help reduce the salt loading to the Colorado River by improving the efficiency of irrigation systems. To date over 200,000 tons of salt loading has been reduced from the Colorado River as a result of over \$10,000,000 of cost-share funding.

2007 Conservation Technician Program Funding Leveraging



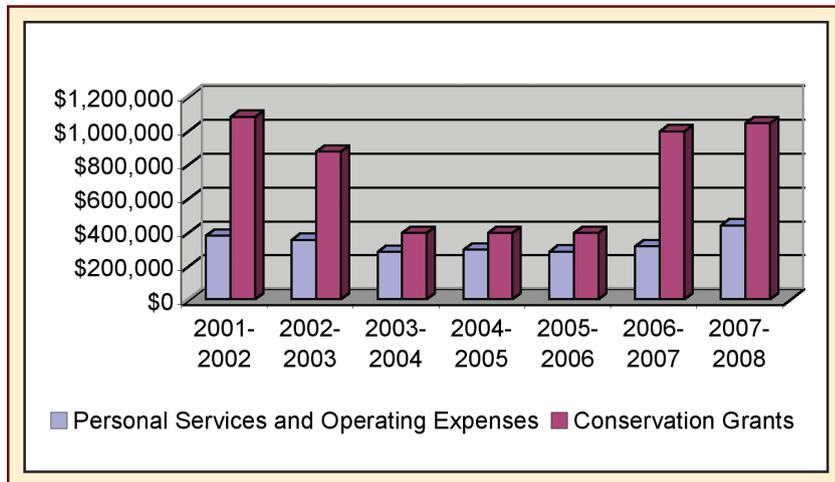
WHERE WE'VE BEEN

As a result of the economic downturn and corresponding state budget cuts during 2002-2003, CSCB funding was reduced by 54%. During this time frame, program funding for on-the-ground conservation was reduced from \$1,076,765 to \$391,714, and the CSCB staff was reduced from 10 to 5 employees. Included in these staff reductions were Regional Conservation Specialists who work directly with conservation districts on organizational development services aimed at improving the ability of conservation districts to deal with natural resource issues. Not having access to the professional services provided by Regional Conservation Specialists compounded the difficulty of conservation districts to adjust to the difficult financial environment.

WHERE WE ARE

Through cooperative partnerships and support from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the State Legislature, and the Governors Office, the CSCB has made great strides in advancing conservation even during difficult economic times. In addition to developing the DCT program with the NRCS in 2003 and having the funding for the NRMG program restored through Severance Tax and General Funds in 2006, perhaps the greatest accomplishment was in 2007, when employment of Regional Conservation Specialists and the professional services they provide to districts was reestablished. In the short time the Regional Conservation Specialists have been working with conservation districts, numerous capacity building efforts have increased districts' ability to develop high-quality conservation programs. Transforming the Direct Assistance program into an incentive-based motivator has also resulted in measurable increases in conservation efforts. In response to the successful results the CSCB has demonstrated, they received an additional appropriation of approximately \$100,000 from the Unclaimed Property fund in 2008 for additional on-the-ground conservation.

Colorado State Conservation Board Funding¹



¹Office of the State Controller. (Retrieved January 2009). 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 Budget to Actual Reports. <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dfp/sco/CAFR/cafr.htm>

WHERE WE'RE GOING (Natural Resource Issues)

Soil erosion and water management have been and continue to be keystone issues for conservation districts and their partners. Likewise, emerging problems and opportunities such as widespread decline in forest health and renewable energy development pose long range implications for Colorado's natural resources. The following are some important conservation issues affecting landowners and citizens throughout Colorado.

- Water Quantity: Increasing municipal demands, de-watering agricultural lands, and ongoing drought are just a few issues affecting the availability of water in Colorado
- Water Quality: Human activities such as mining, construction, oil and gas leases, improper application of nutrients for plant production, and other activities significantly affect water quality.
- Invasive Species: According to the Western Governors' Association, the impacts of non-native species needs to be treated as a national emergency due to the significant harm they cause the American economy and environment.
- Changes in Land Use/Small Acreage Development: According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, almost two million acres of agricultural land in the state have been lost to development in the last ten years.
- Soil Erosion: The erosion of soil costs the United States about \$7.6 billion each year in productivity losses in addition to health concerns associated with dust carried by winds.
- Forest Health: Multiple large scale insect infestations in Colorado's forest, from ips beetles in the pinion forests of southwestern Colorado to mountain pine beetles in northern lodgepole pine forests will result in tree mortality rates that exceed 90%.
- Rangeland Health: Colorado's rangelands are under pressure from a variety of degrading factors including continued drought conditions, overgrazing, invasive species, and fragmentation of grazing lands due to changing land use.
- Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation: Colorado has excellent alternative energy sources including wind, solar, and bio fuels, that can help reduce our dependence on foreign fossil fuels and concerns about climate change.
- Riparian Ecosystem Health: Artificial stream widening and straightening, road and building construction, replacement of wooded or grassy areas with impervious surfaces, unrestricted grazing, crop production activities, and invasion of noxious weeds all affect riparian areas which are used by 73% of Colorado's wildlife species.

WHERE WE'RE GOING (State Conservation Board Long Range Goals and Objectives)

Conservation districts are the local organizations that develop action plans to address these emerging natural resource issues across the state. The CSCB assists in the conservation of Colorado natural resources by helping conservation districts increase their operational capacity of responding to these challenges. To fulfill this role more effectively, the CSCB has developed a comprehensive long-range plan centered around training and leadership development. The annual goals and objectives identified in the plan are aimed at building the capacity of districts to develop locally led conservation programs. Fulfilling these important statutory responsibilities and the long-range goals and objectives associated with them in these difficult economic times will take a diverse set of services and programs and legislative commitment to them.

MAINTAINING CSCB PROGRAM EXCELLENCE

For more than 50 years, local conservation districts have given technical assistance and financial support to their landowners to provide clean air and water, sustainable habitats that promote healthy wildlife and plant communities, and productive crop and range lands that provide food and increase our state's economic viability. The CSCB and its staff provide professional support, organizational development services, and conservation programs that build the capacity of individual districts to work with their landowners and form collaborative partnerships. By maintaining the CSCB staff and grant funding to initiate additional programs for their local conservation districts, Colorado's citizens will continue to benefit from a tremendous effort to sustain our state's natural resources and agriculture.

Exhibit 1

COLORADO STATE
CONSERVATION
BOARD MEMBERS:

San Jaun River Basin
Jack Burk, President

Upper South Platte River
Watershed

Mary Sue Liss, Vice President

Colorado, Gunnison and Dolores
River Watershed
Mel Rettig, Secretary

Lower Arkansas River Watershed
Leroy Brase

Lower South Platte and
Republican River Watershed
Milton "Bud" Mekelburg

Rio Grande Watershed
Danny Neufeld

Upper Arkansas River Watershed
Jack Swennes

White Yampa and North Platte
River Watershed
Jim Amick

Member at Large
(Governors Appointee)
Patricia Meakins

WHO WE ARE

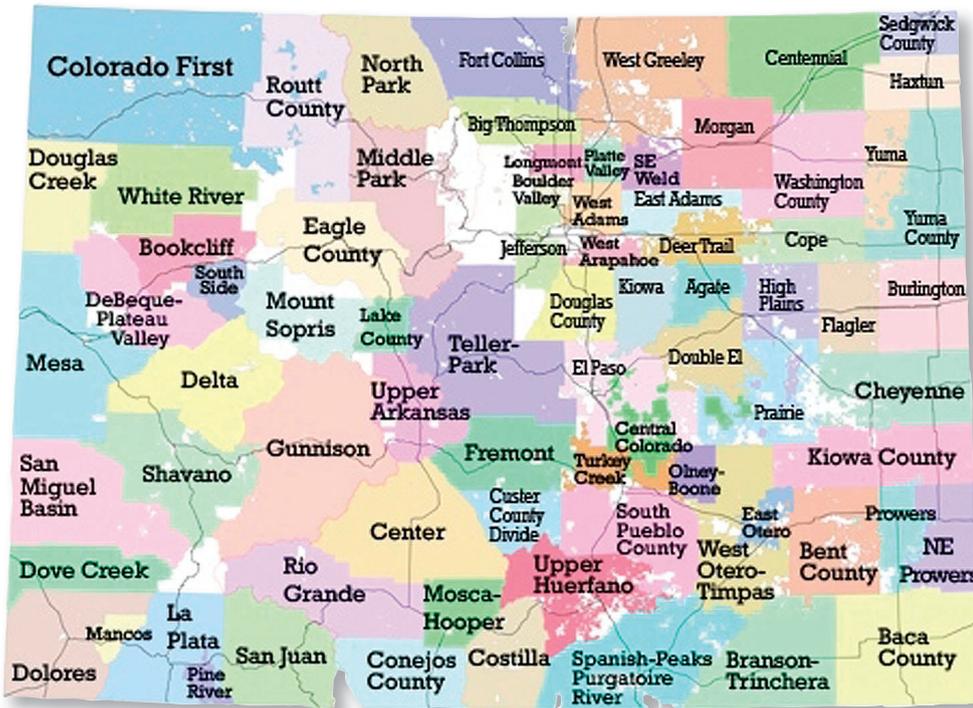
Created in 1937 in response to the "Dust Bowl", the Colorado State Conservation Board's mission is to "build the capacity of local conservation districts in developing and implementing cooperative programs for the conservation and stewardship of natural resources for the people of Colorado."

The Colorado Soil Conservation Act (Colorado Revised Statutes 35-70-101) legislatively establishes the roles and responsibilities of the CSCB. A few of the many State Board responsibilities identified in the act are:

- To act in an advisory capacity with the conservation districts
- To administer and disburse funds for the purpose of assisting conservation districts
- To coordinate the programs of all districts
- To prepare a uniform and adequate system of accounting for districts
- To plan conservation and erosion control projects in cooperation with any party

Housed in the Conservation Services Division of the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the CSCB carries out its statutory responsibilities and its mission through multiple programs and services to maximize the effectiveness of Colorado's conservation districts, who are the true, and statutorily empowered, leaders of local natural resource conservation. Through the various programs and capacity building services to conservation districts, the State Board provides real value to the people of Colorado by fostering conservation on the State's most abundant and critical natural resource, private agricultural lands. In addition to providing food, fiber, feed, and fuel for the people of the State, private lands provide key habitat for the State's wildlife and plant species, open space and scenic vistas for Colorado residents and visitors, clean air and healthy streams for our citizens, and most importantly, a prosperous future rooted in sustainable practices and sound resource conservation.

Representing the people of Colorado and the conservation districts from each watershed of the State, the nine State Board members shown in Exhibit 1 provide guidance and develop policies based upon a common vision for conservation within the state (see inside front cover). Although the State Board members are actively engaged in representing their constituents and enacting the decisions of the Board, the primary responsibility of implementing policies through various programs and services rests with the small, efficient State Board staff of eight employees. Working directly with conservation districts to further conservation, all State Board member and staff actions are guided by core values (see inside front cover).



The State Conservation Board, provides trusted professional assistance, organizational development services, and conservation programs to support Colorado's conservation districts in leading grassroots environmental stewardship.

Colorado's Conservation Districts

WHAT WE DO

The State Conservation Board "provides trusted professional assistance, organizational development services, and conservation programs to support Colorado's conservation districts in leading grassroots environmental stewardship." The CSCB fulfills its statutory responsibilities of advising and coordinating the efforts of districts first and foremost by providing numerous services to conservation districts to help them develop and implement conservation programs, and to facilitate high performance conservation district operations and dynamics. These services are primarily provided by the CSCB staff and some of the most valuable services offered to conservation districts are provided by regional Conservation Specialists who work directly with districts at the local level. Additionally, the CSCB administers and distributes funds to conservation districts through four competitive programs that promote conservation throughout the state. These programs include:

- Direct Assistance (DA)
- Natural Resources Conservation Matching Grants (NRCMG)
- District Conservation Technician Program (DCT)
- Upper Colorado River Salinity Control Program.

COLORADO'S CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

- Grass roots leadership evolved out of the 1930's Dust Bowl
- Conservation district board members are elected by landowners within the districts
- 76 conservation districts in Colorado with 400 elected officials representing all landowners
- Provide over 32,000 volunteer hours annually
- Coordinate technical, financial, and educational resources
- Coordinate local, state, federal, and private funds to conserve Colorado's natural resources
- Ability to leverage state dollars – often 3:1.
- \$40 million of federal funding brought into Colorado through conservation districts in 2006

Some of the critical issues that Regional Conservation Specialists assist districts with include . . . efforts to improve district operations, communication, and overall effectiveness.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

In addition to the programs that it administers, the State Board provides a number of valuable professional services to support conservation districts in their role as local conservation leaders. Most of this assistance is provided by the small State Board staff including three staff members in Lakewood and 5 regional field staff members located in Grand Junction (3), Greeley (1), and Colorado Springs (1). Working directly with conservation districts, the State Board staff offer valuable assistance to support grassroots conservation. Specifically, staff assist districts in: developing and implementing conservation programs; identifying and securing alternative and diverse sources of funding for programs, including assistance developing grant applications; developing local leadership capacity of the district boards; assisting districts with statutory responsibilities including audits, supervisor elections, and budgeting; facilitating public meetings; developing effective and useful long-range plans and annual plans of work; and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of district

operations through district supervisor and district employee training sessions and personal consultations. In addition to the services identified above, the State Board staff, particularly the regional staff members, are available to work closely with individual conservation districts on critical district or natural resource issues that arise. By assisting conservation districts, these services result in actual benefits to Colorado’s natural resources. Being regionally located allows the CSCB Conservation Specialists to work hand-in-hand with conservation districts on critical local issues. Some of the issues that Regional Conservation Specialists assist districts with include designing new conservation programs to address emerging natural resources issues, developing educational programs to raise the awareness of conservation needs and benefits, conducting stakeholder input sessions and



Callie Hendrickson, Western Regional Conservation Specialist, leads a discussion during the 2008 Colorado Conservation Leadership Program.

long-term planning sessions, and engaging in various efforts to improve district operations. With expertise in these diverse areas, the CSCB staff offers professional services which help conservation districts maximize their local strengths and support them with their legislative purpose of protecting the State’s natural resources.

EXAMPLE

Colorado State Conservation Board Regional Conservation Specialists Services, Colorado Conservation Leadership Program

Conservation district leadership development is a priority for the Colorado State Conservation Board. In 2002, Don Hardin, CSCB President at the time, approached the CSCB and the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD) with the idea of a Leadership Development Program. Through the dedication and partnership of CSCB, CACD, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), CSU Extension Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation the first class of the Conservation Leadership Program began in January 2003.

The mission statement of the Colorado Conservation Leadership Program is: To build leadership capacity in individuals, districts and organizations by sharing and enlarging visions, enhancing communication and networking skills, and increasing the understanding of how to “make a difference” in conservation issues.

The mission of the program has been very successful. Around the state, past class members are now leaders at the

local, watershed, and state levels. From Steve Miles, Dolores Conservation District board member, who has dedicated hundreds of hours to coordinating and facilitating a group to eradicate Tamarisk to Danny Neufeld, Center Conservation District board member, who became the Colorado State Conservation Board President (2007-2008), Conservation Leadership class members have met the challenge of “making a difference”. Since the inception of the program, two members have served on the CSCB (Danny Neufeld & Leroy Brase), four have served on the CACD Board (Monty Smith, Brian Starkebaum, Brian Neufeld, & Larry Sweeney), and numerous others have served as active watershed and district officers.

Since its inception, Callie Hendrickson, CSCB Western Regional Conservation Specialist, has played a critical role in developing the Leadership Program. Involved in nearly every aspect of the program’s development, Callie helped plan the program’s format, content, structure, material, speakers, exercises,

and locations. The first two classes incorporated National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) regional and national meetings as well as the Spring Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. This allowed the class members the opportunity to network and learn from other districts across the nation and see first hand the influence NACD has at the national level. The class of 2008 was restructured due to budget constraints. This class remained in-state and had a great opportunity to learn from each other and speakers focused on helping find solutions to their respective district challenges.

The 2008 class included district managers as well as district board members. This provided additional opportunity to learn the roles of each position and how the two can work together to “make a difference.”

The three classes have developed great natural resource conservation leadership for the State of Colorado. Working with the partners, the CSCB looks forward to continuing the program.

Conservation districts utilize the relatively small Direct Assistance grants as seed money to leverage other funding sources in order to develop educational, technical, or on-the-ground programs that would not have otherwise been possible.

PROGRAMS

- **Direct Assistance:** As political subdivisions of the State, conservation districts advance conservation on private lands and provide real benefits to the citizens of Colorado. To assist the districts with this statutory responsibility, funds are awarded to address local funding priorities that help sustain effective district operations such as secretarial and technical assistance, office expenses, mileage and expenses of board members, and district elections expenses. Starting in 2005, the CSCB restored the tiered

EXAMPLE

Colorado State Conservation Board Direct Assistance



A helicopter sprays Tamarisk along Timpas Creek as part of the EQIP Invasive Species project

Since the CSCB initiated the performance-based Direct Assistance program in 2006, the West Otero-Timpas Conservation District has markedly increased its conservation leadership in their community and has seen corresponding increases in their Direct Assistance evaluation. Although the West Otero-Timpas Conservation District was actively engaged in leading natural resource conservation in their community, during the first two years of the new direct Assistance evaluation process the district ranked 53rd and 65th among 77 conservation districts. Based on the Direct Assistance funds available and evaluation scores in the lower ranges of the distributions, the district received grants of \$5,000 in 2006 and \$2000 in 2007. While these funds may be relatively small in comparison with other grants, the impacts they provide are extensive. Direct Assistance funds are heavily leveraged and provide seed money for building the basic foundation for almost all of the conservation district programs across the State. With these funds and the motivation to capitalize on the financial incentive created by the performance based distribution system, the district was able to help build substantial cooperative programs to address natural resource issues. Specifically, utilizing

distribution system used in previous years and developed a new performance-based evaluation process that provides incentives for conservation achievement and continual advancement. In the three years the evaluation method has been in use, eligible conservation districts have received between \$2000 and \$9000, based on their measured performance on multiple conservation standards. In the short time the process has been in use, the CSCB has witnessed measurable gains in district activity levels as a result

of the performance incentives the program offers. The Direct Assistance program is a critical element of Colorado's conservation investment, not only because it provides an incentive for efficient conservation programs, but primarily because it acts as a catalyst for conservation. Specifically, conservation districts utilize the relatively small Direct Assistance grants as seed money to leverage other funding sources in order to develop educational, technical, or on-the-ground programs that would not have otherwise been possible.

its 2007 Direct Assistance award, the district helped several successful grant applications and projects materialize including:

- Timpas and Apishapa Creeks EQIP Invasive Species projects to treat Tamarisk
- Leone Playa Restoration Project
- Patterson Hollow and Highline Breaks PL-566 projects.
- Multiple grazing management workshops

In addition to the desire to provide the best possible conservation leadership for the landowners in their district, the West Otero-Timpas Conservation District was motivated by the Direct Assistance Program's incentive-based process to look for new and exciting conservation possibilities. As a result of the district's new conservation programs, the district saw substantial increases in its 2008 Direct Assistance evaluation. Ranking 28th in 2008, the district received \$6,000 which it will leverage to develop additional conservation programs. The momentum that the West Otero-Timpas Conservation District is experiencing in its natural resource projects as a result of the Direct Assistance Program is exciting, and it can be seen in other districts throughout the State.

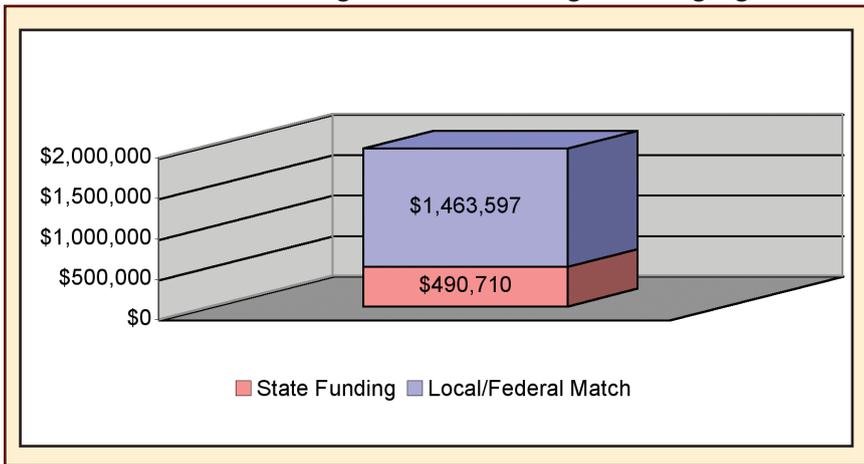


Results of successful Tamarisk treatment along Apishapa Creek.

Although the Matching Grants Program requires a 50% match, many districts provide a much higher match, and overall the state investment in conservation is leveraged nearly 3:1.

- **Natural Resources Conservation Matching Grants:** In 2007, the Colorado Legislature provided a five-year authorization of \$450,000 in annual Severance Tax appropriations, and \$150,000 of General Funds to assist conservation districts in addressing on-the-ground conservation problems identified at the local level. Combined, these funds provided \$600,000 of seed money to support conservation districts in implementing on-the-ground conservation through the NRCMG and the Conservation District Technician programs. As shown in Exhibit 2, in 2007, \$490,000 of State funds were matched and leveraged by nearly

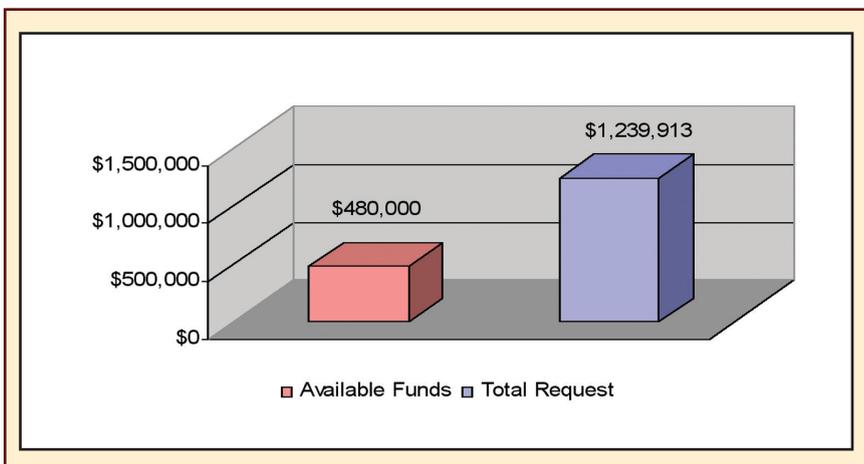
Exhibit 2: 2007 Matching Grants Funding Leveraging



\$1,500,000 of district, local, and federal funds under the Natural Resources Conservation Matching Grants program. Through a highly competitive process, districts leverage State funds to implement important conservation programs in their communities. In 2007, 25 districts utilized the funds to improve water delivery systems, treat high priority noxious weed infestations, protect rangeland and wildlife habitat, address forest health, water quality, small acreage management, and other critical natural resource issues. Although the Matching Grants Program requires a 50% match, many districts provide a much higher match, and overall the state investment in conservation is leveraged nearly 3:1. For the 2009 grant cycle, 57 district proposals requested more than 1.2 million dollars. With over 2.5

times more requests than funds available, the competitive grant will fund 28 high priority district projects in 2009. Exhibit 3 shows the 2009 Matching Grants funding request, while Exhibit 4 shows the districts receiving 2009 Matching Grant funds. The start-up

Exhibit 3: 2009 Natural Resource Conservation Matching Grants Request



funds provided by this program through the Severance Tax revenues and General Fund appropriations enable districts to develop local solutions to natural resource problems. Without these State investments in local conservation efforts, many district projects might not materialize, which could cause local concerns to spread to regional or State-wide natural resource crises. Utilizing Severance Tax funds for locally led environmental programs have shown efficient and successful results. However, without legislative action, authorization of Severance Tax appropriations, which is the primary funding source for these local response programs, will expire in 2011. The loss of this funding source and the conservation opportunities it provides could have a cumulative impact on community and State-wide resources.

²Office of the State Controller. (Retrieved January 2009). 2006-2007 Budget to Actual Report. <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dfp/sco/CAFR/cafr.htm>

EXAMPLE

Legend
 MG Grants Projects 09 (34)

2007 Matching Grant Project

WHAT NATURAL RESOURCE PROBLEM(S) DID THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

Many areas of Colorado face the situation of accelerating changes of land use from agricultural into 40 acre or smaller residential lots. Often the new owners of these lots have little experience or knowledge in land management and quite frequently are the unwitting hosts of populations of noxious weeds. By their nature, noxious weeds spread quickly and seed from small acreage lots infests other land, including productive agricultural land. Noxious weeds are hard to control and destructive to land productivity, biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Another consequence of land development for housing is the increased threat of wildfire damage and its after effects to life and property in forested areas.

Douglas County Conservation District identified control of noxious weeds and forest health as two key issues associated with small acreage development in the district and offered cost-share for practices that addressed these two issues.



BEFORE



AFTER

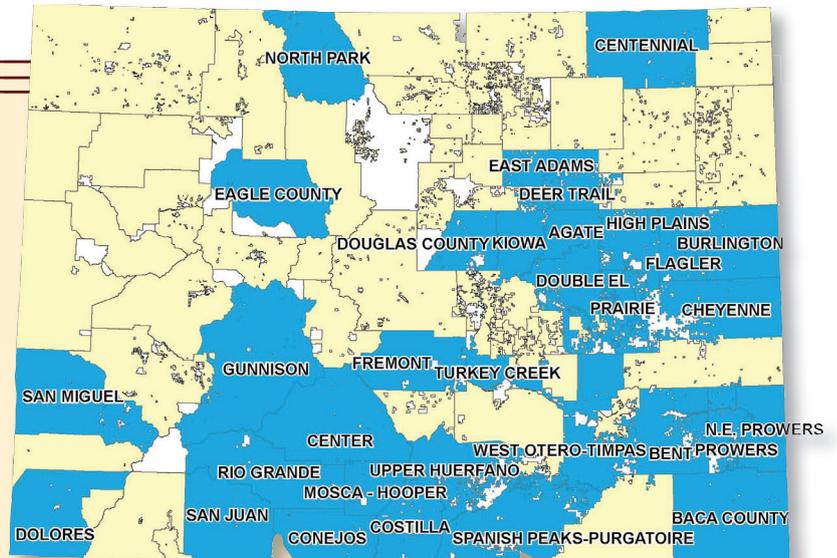


Exhibit 4: 2009 Matching Grant Programs

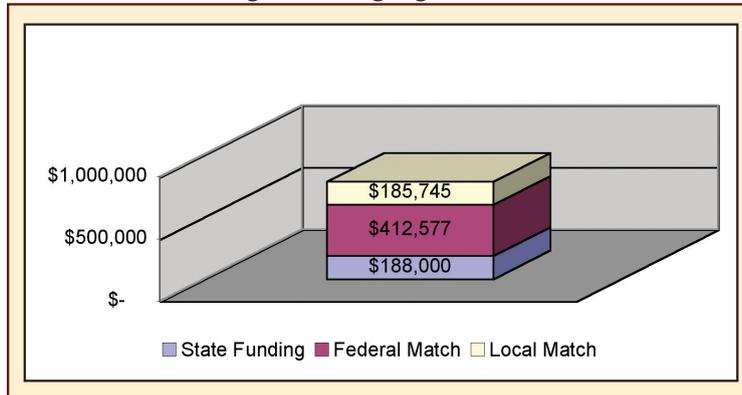
WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

- 827 acres of nine (9) noxious weed infestations treated
- 7,800 feet of cross-fencing erected on 72 acres to enable better grazing management and therefore lessened threat of noxious weed infestation/spread.
- Pipelines and 7 minimal-impact stock watering facilities installed to limit soil damage and resulting weed infestation around watering areas.
- Reforestation of 10 acres of the Hayman fire burn area to reduce soil erosion and benefit wildlife habitat
- 160 acres of forest thinning/dead tree removal to promote forest health and reduce wildfire and beetle infestation risk
- Total of 10 landowners participated and 1,069 acres impacted - from pool of 16 applications
- Projects completed to federal conservation practice standards. All noxious weed projects will be monitored for a minimum of two years and receive preferential cost-share points to support continuing weed control efforts. Noxious weed control typically takes 3-5 years for most effective results.

(Photos Left) A “healthy” stand of Leafy Spurge and Russian Knapweed noxious weeds on a small acreage property before and after treatment. Roots from a single, recently established Russian Knapweed plant can cover up to 12 sq. yards in two growing seasons. Leafy Spurge, with its irritant milky sap, is highly unpalatable to animals, one of Colorado’s most aggressive destructive weeds and extremely difficult to control with roots up to 30 feet deep. (Sources: Colorado State University/Colorado Department of Agriculture)

In 2007, \$188,000 of State funds were leveraged by more than \$412,000 in federal funds and another \$185,000 of local or district match to provide technical assistance under the District Conservation Technician Program.

Exhibit 5: 2007 Conservation Technician Program Funding Leveraging



• **District Conservation Technician Program:** Through federal, state, and local conservation district agreements, technical assistance is made available to landowners to assist them in planning and implementing conservation plans and practices. In 2007, \$188,000 of State funds were leveraged by more than \$412,000 in federal funds and another \$185,000 of local or district match to provide technical assistance under the District Conservation Technician (DCT) program (See Exhibit 5). Fifty percent of the funds are made available by an agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as are, in many cases, the office space, vehicle use, and daily technical supervision and training. The CSCB provides the overall

administration and receives appropriations from the Colorado Legislature to provide 25% of the DCT program funding. Local conservation districts provide the final 25% of funding, either through their own funds or through partnerships with local organizations. Conservation districts also provide the administrative support to hire and manage the technical positions. Currently, 36 conservation districts employ 29 Conservation Technicians, who are helping landowners with soil erosion, noxious weed control, water quality, rangeland management, wildlife habitat, highway blizzard mitigation, and many other technical services that protect and improve the natural resources for all of Colorado’s citizens. Exhibit 6 shows the district participation in the District Conservation Technician program.



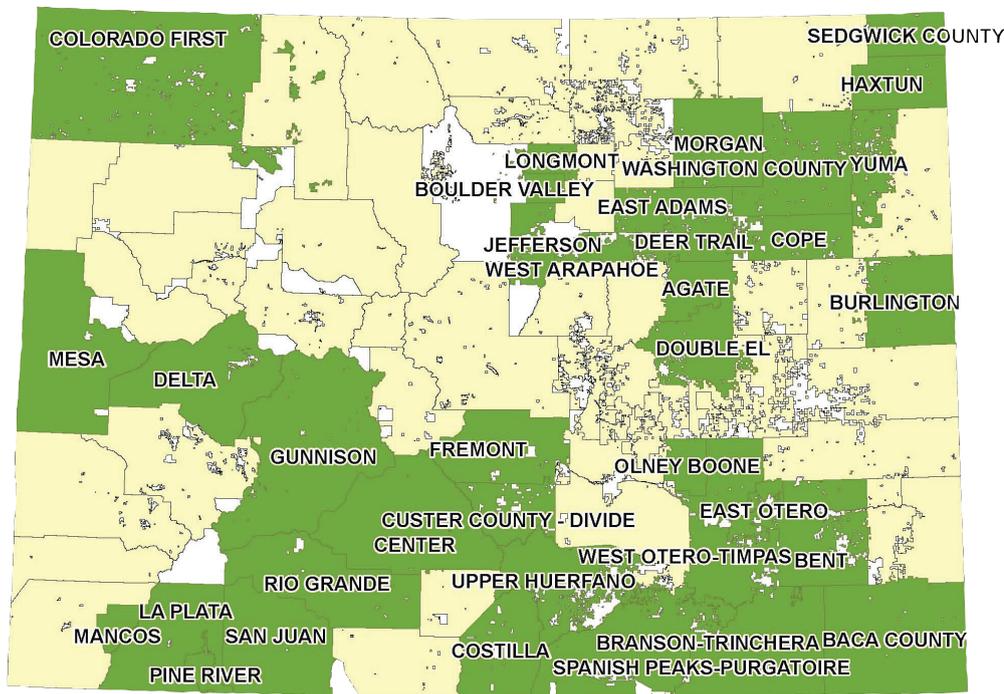
Top left, Longmont and Boulder Valley Conservation District Technician inspects an irrigation system improvement.

Bottom left, Routt County Conservation District Technician monitoring rangeland health.

Bottom right, San Juan Conservation District Technician marks trees as part of a healthy forest project.

Pictures courtesy of conservation districts.

Exhibit 6: 2009 District Conservation Technician Programs



Top: Shandra Nobles, Baca County Conservation District Technician, checks Surface Drip Irrigation System
 Bottom: Shandra, performing crop residue management inspection.

EXAMPLE

Colorado State Conservation Board District Conservation Technician Program

The Baca County Conservation District is a proud participant in the District Conservation Technician Program, and the district's landowners reap the benefits. This grant administered through the CSCB allows the Baca County Conservation District to hire one full time District Technician and one Summer Technician each year. These employees "live to serve" by providing district landowners technical assistance for conservation planning and practice installation.

Shandra Nobles, District Conservation Technician, has been with the district since October of 2006. Shandra has spent the last two years out in the field with landowners, helping them improve conservation practices on their land. She works independently on projects for the district, as well as in tandem with NRCS staff on Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

(WHIP) contracts. Shandra makes inspections during practice installation and upon completion, and verifies the practices meet NRCS Standards and Specifications. On any given day she can be found checking pipelines, tanks, fence, doing residue compliance reviews, helping NRCS survey terraces, or helping landowners plant trees.

Fifty percent of the funding for the District Conservation Technician program is provided by NRCS, 25% is State funded through the CSCB, and the remaining 25% is provided by district or other local sources. The Baca County Conservation District meets its required 25% match through various revenue generation conservation projects and grants from private foundations. Although the Baca County Conservation District is a successful, thriving district, it would be unable to provide landowners with this type of technical assistance without the DCT grant program.

To date, the program, in partnership with Federal programs, has reduced the salt loading to the Colorado River by over 200,000 tons.



Forty-two acres of micro irrigation system installed under the Salinity Control program. The 90 % efficient system reduces salts entering the Colorado River while significantly reducing labor cost, helping orchards and vineyards remain agriculturally viable and preventing them from being sold for new housing developments.

- **Upper Colorado River Salinity Control Program:** The State Board administers federal funds in partnership with six conservation districts to provide financial assistance of up to 75% to landowners in order to improve the efficiency of irrigation systems on irrigated lands in western Colorado. It is estimated that over 1,000,000 tons of salt were entering the Colorado River each year from designated salinity areas in Colorado prior to 1978. By implementing the program, landowners can help to reduce the amount of salt entering the Colorado River, as well as gaining a more efficient, labor saving, improved irrigation system. To date, the program, in partnership with Federal programs, has reduced the salt loading to the Colorado River by over 200,000 tons annually. Over \$10,000,000 in cost share funding to local landowners has been provided through the program. District cooperators participating in the program have contributed over \$2,500,000 out of their own pockets, implementing improved irrigation systems that have contributed to salinity control and efficiency goals.

EXAMPLE

Colorado State Conservation Board Regional Conservation Specialists Services, Long-Range Plan Facilitation

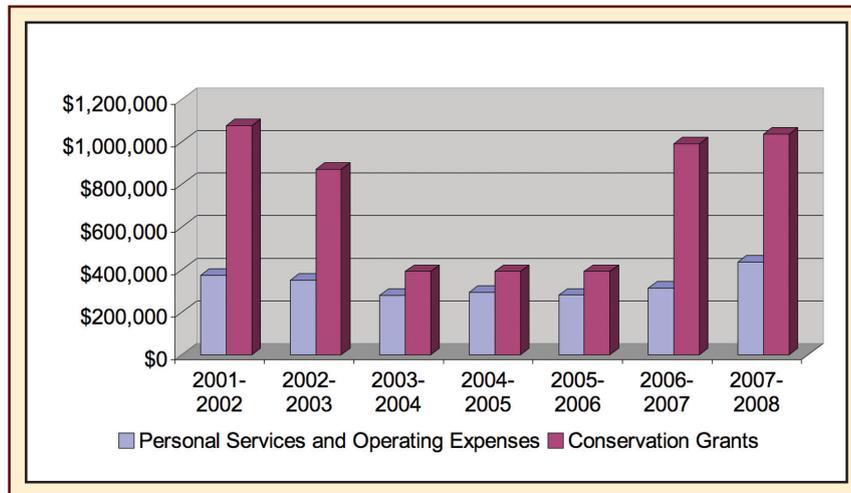
One of the major responsibilities of conservation districts is to develop a plan for the care and treatment of the natural resources within their boundaries. A major tool districts use in fulfilling this responsibility is the district Long-Range Plan (LRP). To help districts maintain realistic plans that address current natural resource issues, the CSCB developed a three-year LRP template that replaced the five year plan that conservation districts historically used. State Board Regional Conservation Specialists are experienced in LRP facilitation and are available to assist districts through the planning process. As governing boards that represent the local landowners, effective conservation district planning processes start with a public stakeholder meeting which, allow landowners and other interested parties to identify and discuss current natural resource

issues that need the conservation districts' attention.

In preparation of their LRP efforts, the Teller-Park Conservation District hosted a public input session in April of 2008. In usual fashion, the conservation district made the most efficient use of its resources by utilizing the public input session for multiple purposes. Specifically, the Teller-Park Conservation District obtained a grant from the CACD to host a public meeting for the purpose of providing input to the NRCS for the Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) program. Since many of the district's landowners, partners, and interested stakeholders would be attending the RWA meeting, the district was able to capitalize on the opportunity to receive public input to kick off their LRP efforts as well. The multifaceted meeting had several objectives:

- Provide information about the conservation district and the natural resource services it offers
- Detail the watershed boundaries
- Explain the RWA process and the importance of planning on a watershed basis
- Have landowners, partners, and stakeholders convey local natural resource concerns
- Attendees leave knowing how information gathered will be used in the district's LRP and the RWA

Scott Shirola, CSCB Southeast Regional Conservation Specialist, provided various support services to the Teller-Park Conservation District to assist it with the preparation and execution of the public meeting so that all of the identified objectives could be successfully met.

Exhibit 7: Colorado State Conservation Board Funding³

³Office of the State Controller. (Retrieved January 2009). 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 Budget to Actual Reports. <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dfp/sco/CAFR/cafr.htm>

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

Momentum of natural resource conservation efforts were severely slowed as a result of the State budget cuts that resulted from the economic downturn and the corresponding effects on State funds during 2002, 2003, and 2004. During that time frame, the already relatively small CSCB budget was reduced by 54%. As a result of the reductions, the State Board staff of 10 employees was reduced to 5, and State funding for on-the-ground conservation was cut from \$1,076,765 to \$391,7142. Exhibit 7 shows the CSCB funding over a seven year period. In the midst of the difficult decisions State officials had to make to balance the budget, the CSCB and the conservation districts continued to efficiently fulfill their missions to the greatest extent possible. Nevertheless, with almost complete elimination of programs and services to conservation districts,

conservation across the state was severely impacted. Furthermore, with the extraordinary ability that conservation districts have to leverage funding, the negative impacts to conservation efforts were much larger than even the actual budget reductions. Perhaps the biggest impact to conservation districts was the loss of professional assistance through the State Board Regional Conservation Specialist. Since these staff members work directly with conservation districts on planning and implementation of conservation programs, identifying and obtaining sources of alternative funding for planned efforts, as well as consulting with districts on strategies to improve the overall district effectiveness, losing these State Board services reduced the districts' ability to respond to the State funding and program reductions. As a result, conservation opportunities were missed. In response to these difficult financial times, the CSCB took various steps to maximize the results of the reduced funds appropriated for conservation. One example is the change in how it allocated Direct Assistance funds to conservation districts. With the direction from the general assembly of demonstrating accountability, the CSCB developed a merit-based distribution system that provides incentives for conservation achievement. These changes resulted in a greater visibility of districts' abilities to leverage and produce quantifiable conservation benefits with State funds. Although the CSCB was able to maintain a base level of service to the conservation districts, without the Regional Conservation Specialists in the field, the CSCB was not able to work closely with districts on capacity building initiatives to improve the independent functionality of districts, on proposals to help secure alternative sources for funding for conservation efforts, or on planning endeavors to develop programs to address urgent natural resource issues.

A few services Mr. Shirola helped the district with include:

- Meeting requirements
- Agenda development
- Review of meeting facilities and arrangements
- PowerPoint presentation development
- Presentation delivery
- Facilitation of public input
- Review of public input and meeting notes
- Review of final report for the RWA grant

Through a lot of hard work and effort by the Teller-Park Conservation District, the public meeting was a great success. Thirty-nine stakeholders, representing diverse agencies, groups, and interests, attended the meeting and had a lively discussion of emerging natural resource concerns. The resource issues that were identified were forwarded to the NRCS to be included in the local RWA. These concerns will also be used as a basis for developing the district LRP, when Mr. Shirola assists the district by facilitating board planning sessions during 2009.

EXAMPLE

Colorado State Conservation Board Regional Conservation Specialists Services, District Consolidation Election

As land uses and production practices change, the assistance and support needed from a conservation district by its landowners can change as well. Like other areas of Colorado, Centennial and South Platte Conservation Districts had been working together on a variety of programs to more appropriately serve all the property owners in Logan County and a portion of northeast Weld County, the lands encompassed by the two districts. In March, 2008, the Boards of Supervisors from these two districts submitted a joint letter to the Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB), petitioning them for the opportunity to consolidate. The reasons for consolidation to better serve their cooperators included:

- Combining the resources of both districts would help a consolidated district offer a stronger conservation program.
- District boundaries would more closely match existing geopolitical county boundary lines, reducing confusion by cooperators as to which district they are located in for cooperators in Logan County.
- Consistency of programs offered by the conservation district. Currently, both cooperators in one-half of the county may have access to a district program that the other one-half does not have access to.
- Representation by a full board. Both districts are experiencing difficulty in recruiting supervisors to serve on the boards.

The State Conservation Board has the statutory responsibility to conduct the election that would decide the question of consolidation. On July 1, 2008, CSCB approved giving the two district boards the opportunity to begin the consolidation election process. On September 12, 2008, the two district boards met with Mark Cronquist, CSCB Northeast Regional Conservation Specialist, to discuss the details and time line for conducting the election. Since CSCB is responsible for conducting the election, Cronquist was appointed Designated Election Official to coordinate all aspects of the election. Cronquist worked very closely with Janette Terry, Conservation Specialist, to meet all the legal requirements for holding the election.

A Public Hearing was held in Sterling October 9 to determine if landowners were supportive of the consolidation proposal and the proposed polling place election scheduled for December 2. The Public Hearing was successful and plans proceeded for the election. The Conservation Specialist's spent a significant amount of time and was responsible for a wide array of duties to prepare for the election:

- Publicize the election through Public Notices and newspaper articles.
- Download and edit all required election forms.
- Develop mail-in ballot materials and orient staff to handle these ballots properly.
- Schedule and train two election judges.
- Obtain registered voter lists from each county.
- Obtain real property ownership lists from each county.
- Print and post signage for the special election.
- Set up the polling place site for the election.
- Be at the election to work with the election judges.
- Make sure all election certification forms were completed.
- Package election materials for storage per statute.
- Communicate the election results to all required parties.
- Document the process for replication, if needed.

One of Specialist Cronquist's main roles during the entire election process was to provide timely communication by e-mail and telephone to keep the districts and other entities informed as plans were made and finalized.

The election was successful and the new consolidated district will be known as "Centennial Conservation District". Cronquist will work with the new district to help them identify their first board of supervisors, revise their bylaws and develop a new Long-Range Plan to direct the efforts of the consolidated district.

WHERE WE ARE

... the CSCB has made important strides in the programs it administers and the services it offers through Regional Conservation Specialists, these gains and the conservation benefits seen on the ground are vulnerable to reversal if funding for programs or services are lost in future budget-balancing decisions.

Even through the difficult times, the State Board worked to protect the State's natural resources. Through cooperation with partners, creativity, and great support from the Department of Agriculture, the State Legislature, and the Governor, the CSCB has been able to advance conservation. Specifically, in 2003, and in every year since, the State Board has successfully been awarded District Conservation Technician funds through the NRCS which are administered to qualifying conservation districts. These funds help districts provide local technical expertise for conservation project planning and implementation. Federal funds also support a State Board staff member to coordinate and administer the DCT Program. Additionally, in fiscal year 2006, the State Legislature restored the Natural Resources Conservation Matching Grants Program for five years through annual appropriations of Severance Tax funds in the amount of \$450,000. This funding source, which is highly leveraged by conservation districts, many times 3:1, acts as seed money for new conservation programs such as noxious weed management, forestry health, small acreage management, rangeland health, water quality, riparian stabilization, and soil erosion efforts. Without further action, the Severance Tax funding of the NRCMG program is set to expire in 2011. In another example of partnerships extending the value of State conservation funding, in 2007, the State Board, through cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation, was able to utilize a small portion of the federal Salinity Control Program allocation to fund the State Board staff position that provides technical and administrative oversight to that program. With this reorganization in 2007, along with additional support and funding from the legislature, the CSCB was able to end the four year drought of services to conservation districts and once again employ Regional Conservation Specialists to work directly with conservation districts. In the short time the Regional Conservation Specialists have been with the CSCB, they have assisted numerous conservation districts with exciting capacity building efforts and conservation projects. The current organizational structure of the CSCB staff is shown in Exhibit 8, page 20. In response to the State Board's and the conservation districts' ability to demonstrate successful and efficient implementation of State funds, in fiscal year 2009, the State Board obtained approximately \$100,000 of additional funding through Agricultural Management Fund, which is funded by the Unclaimed Property revenues. These funds will also be leveraged by the conservation districts and will act as seed money for local solutions to natural resource concerns.

Although the CSCB has made important strides in the programs it administers and the services it offers through Regional Conservation Specialists, these gains and the conservation benefits seen on the ground are vulnerable to reversal if funding for programs or services are lost in future budget-balancing decisions. There are critical natural resource issues across Colorado and conservation districts are one of the primary organizations to address them. To help districts be as effective as possible, the CSCB needs adequate staff resources to work directly with conservation districts on important district and natural resource issues and a diverse set of programs that can be locally adapted.

COLORADO STATE CONSERVATION BOARD

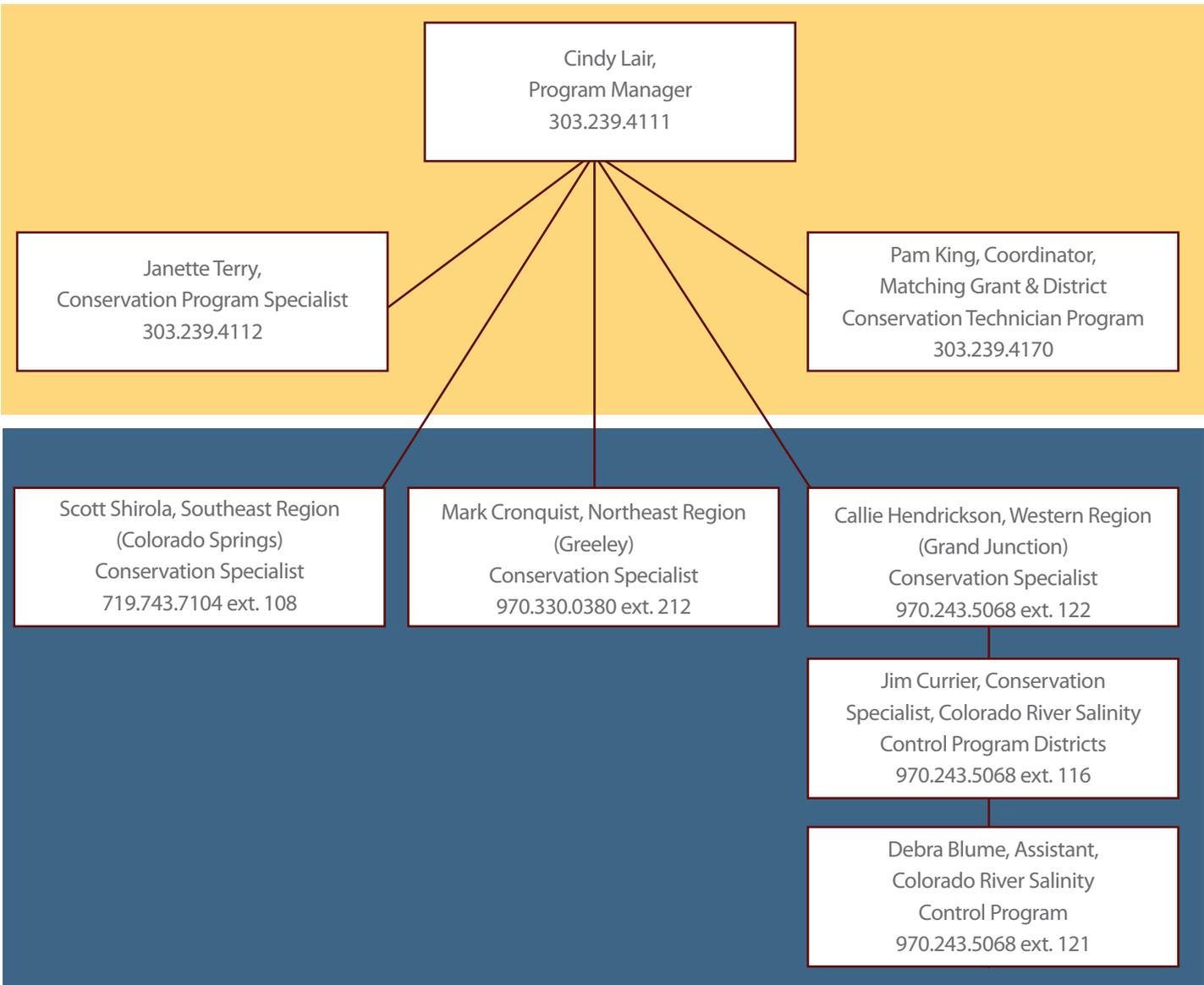
Exhibit 8



Colorado State Conservation Board

- Bill Ritter, Governor, State of Colorado
- John Stulp, Commissioner, Colorado Department of Agriculture
- Eric Lane, Director, Conservation Services Division, Colorado Department of Agriculture

STATE CONSERVATION BOARD STAFF
LAKEWOOD OFFICE
REGIONAL OFFICES



WHERE WE'RE GOING (Emerging Natural Resource Issues)

When we look at natural resource conservation in the state, there are issues like water management and soil erosion that have been keystones historically and continue to be critical for conservation districts and their partners as they work to meet the needs of landowners in their areas. Emerging problems or opportunities such as the widespread decline in forest health and renewable energy development are “hot button” media issues but have long range implications for conservation planning and practices.

The following are important conservation issues affecting landowners and citizens throughout Colorado and a brief review of some of the ways conservation districts are addressing these concerns:

WATER QUANTITY

Increasing municipal demands, de-watering agricultural lands to meet river basin water compact compliance requirements, and dealing with the ongoing drought in Colorado are just a few of the issues affecting the amount of water available to meet the needs of a growing human population, urban development, and energy exploration in addition to established uses including agriculture, industry, and recreation. The economic well-being of our state depends on a reliable supply of water, particularly in the agricultural sector. The very existence of many small rural communities is dependent on successfully finding solutions to decreasing water supplies which negatively affect the agricultural production that is so vital to the survival of these towns.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Water Quantity issues:

- Facilitate landowner contracts to improve

Agricultural production suffers when water quality is poor, with reduced crop yields and decreased efficiency in water use by plants.

irrigation efficiency of sprinkler systems and other water delivery systems.

- Demonstrate strip till and no-till equipment and practices to maintain soil moisture through minimum tillage and managed irrigation.
- Demonstrate improved irrigation practices to conserve water.
- Provide well test metering to establish actual water use from irrigation and stock wells.
- Through research trials, identify and advocate the use of alternative low-water use crops.
- Provide educational materials and demonstration plots with xeric/low water-use plants to decrease water use in landscape plantings.
- Involvement of district supervisors in collaborative discussions to investigate additional water storage options that are environmentally responsible.

WATER QUALITY

The quality of the water available for all uses in Colorado is as important as the amount of water on hand. A number of human activities including mining, construction, oil and gas leases, improper application of nutrients for plant production, and a variety of everyday activities around the home and business can significantly reduce water quality.

Decreased water quality has negative impacts on many sectors in our state. As an example, the Colorado Water Quality Control Division

found the state waterways designated as not fishable due to water quality problems nearly doubled in four years, jumping from 8% in 2002 to 15% in 2006. These conditions have long-term implications for Colorado's \$10 billion outdoor recreation economy. Agricultural production suffers when water quality is poor, with reduced crop yields and decreased efficiency in water use by plants. Rangeland livestock production can be affected when livestock wells are contaminated and are unusable for watering stock.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Water Quality issues:

- Demonstrate and cost share improved irrigation practices to minimize runoff and maximize water availability to crops.
- Assist farmers and ranchers in developing Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans to optimize fertilizer use.
- Work with municipal and county governments to educate homeowners and businesses about proper use and disposal of chemicals to prevent water contamination.
- Educate agricultural producers and homeowners about cultural and biological methods of pest control to reduce chemical applications.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of buffer strips along waterways and riparian areas to reduce runoff sediment and chemicals from reaching surface water.

Where We're Going (Emerging Natural Resource Issues) cont.

According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, almost two million acres of agricultural land in the state have been lost in the last ten years to development.

INVASIVE SPECIES

According to the Western Governors' Association, the impacts of non-native species need to be treated as a national emergency due to the significant harm they cause the American economy and environment.

- Non-native species cause an estimated \$138 billion in economic damages annually.
- Invasive species are a factor in the listing of 42% of all species under the Endangered Species Act.
- 70 million acres of land in the western United States have been lost to invasive weeds.

Noxious weeds such as leafy spurge, diffuse knapweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, and tamarisk are just a few of the invasive plants changing habitats into inhospitable monocultures, displacing native plants and wildlife, cutting agricultural crop production, seriously reducing rangeland available for livestock, and negatively impacting both water quantity and quality.

Critical threats to water quality in Colorado are aquatic nuisance species including zebra mussels, quagga mussels, and New Zealand mud snails. These mollusks can clog water pipes, water treatment and pump screens, and consume the food of native species. Some also concentrate environmental pollutants, which are toxic to wildlife that may feed on them. They also degrade the water quality around them through their excrement.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Invasive Species issues:

- Provide cost share programs for landowners to implement weed management on their properties.
- Have displays at county fairs and other community events to educate the public about noxious weeds and management options.
- Develop partnerships with government agencies, water conservancy districts, and conservation groups to form watershed-wide weed management areas.
- Developing and implementing alternative weed management methods including intensive weed grazing by cattle and goats.
- Publish weed guides to educate the public about noxious weeds and control options.
- Conduct workshops to train small acreage and other landowners in identifying noxious weeds and using an integrated approach to controlling invasive plants.

CHANGES IN LAND USE/SMALL ACREAGE DEVELOPMENT

- According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, almost two million acres of agricultural land in the state have been lost to development in the last ten years.
- In a 2006 report issued by Environment Colorado, the state is losing 690 acres of farm and ranch land every day.
- Small acreage development in Adams County, Colorado saw a 72.5% increase from 1997 to 2006 in acreages 2 to 40 acres in size, going from 5026 properties to 8672. During this same time frame, acreages 31-40 acres in size increased

167% (551 holdings in 1997 to 1471 in 2006).

Conversions of agricultural land to other uses including urban sprawl and small acreage development can adversely affect a variety of natural resources.

Water supplies for crop and livestock production decrease through the purchase and transfer of water from agricultural ownership to municipal uses. Water quality can be impaired by runoff from construction sites or from acreages with poor grazing management or inadequate manure management. Noxious weed problems are common on small acreages and on lands disturbed for energy development, water transport, and other urbanizing activities. Parcelization of land for residential and commercial development decreases native biodiversity.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Changes in Land Use/Small Acreage issues:

- Work with municipal and county planning departments to review requests for development and recorded exemptions.
- Collaborate with other agencies and organizations to conduct workshops to educate small acreage owners about the broad range of issues affecting land ownership and management.
- Hire conservation technicians to work directly with small acreage owners to understand the need for and to implement conservation practices on their properties.
- Serve on committees working to conserve farm and ranch lands through easements and other actions.
- Develop educational brochures and other materials for distribution to acreage owners, real estate agents and decision makers on a variety of topics including weed management and grass establishment.

SOIL EROSION

According to a Cornell University study, around the world, soil is being washed and blown away 10 to 40 times faster than it is being naturally replenished, destroying cropland the size of Indiana every year.



Eroded soil covering a fence in Weld County 2006. Pictures courtesy of Nick Hoban.

- The economic impact of soil erosion in the United States costs the nation about \$37.6 billion each year in productivity losses.
- The vast majority –99.7%-- of human food comes from cropland, which is shrinking by more than 10 million hectares (almost 37,000 square miles) a year due to soil erosion, while more people than ever – more than 3.7 billion people – are malnourished.
- Erosion promotes the critical losses of water, nutrients, soil organic matter and soil biota, harming croplands, forests, rangeland and natural ecosystems.
- Erosion increases the amount of dust carried by wind, which not only acts as an abrasive and air pollutant but also carries about 20 human infectious disease organisms, including anthrax and tuberculosis.

Ever since the huge destructive dust storms of the 1930's created the "Dust Bowl", causing ecological devastation across America's Great Plains, preventing soil erosion has been a major driving force of conservation agencies and organizations, many of which were established because of the damage caused by moving soil during the "Dirty Thirties". Local conservation districts were formed through federal and state enabling legislation to address the critical issue of soil erosion.

A variety of factors continue to make large areas of land susceptible to erosion. Overgrazing of rangelands and riparian areas eliminates vegetative cover and opens the soil to wind and water erosion. Improper management of small acreage properties and lands being developed greatly increases the exposure of soils on the properties to erosive forces. Wildfires destroy ground cover and forests in decline

have significantly reduced canopy cover, leading to increased soil loss. Agricultural croplands under conventional cultivation regimes, including frequent turning of the soil and removal of crop residue before planting, expose the soil to wind and rain energy.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Soil Erosion issues:

- Demonstrate strip till and no-till equipment and practices to minimize soil disturbance and increase crop residue to decrease erosion.
- Sell native grass mixes and provide planting instructions to help landowners establish perennial ground cover on a variety of lands.
- Conduct workshops to educate landowners about rotational grazing and facilitate contracts to construct cross fencing and livestock water facilities so effective rotational grazing can be implemented and grass cover increased.
- Selling seedling trees and materials to protect the new plantings to encourage the development of windbreaks to help hold soil moisture and lessen the effects of wind on the lands these plantings protect.

Where We're Going (Emerging Natural Resource Issues) cont.

FOREST HEALTH

- Several large scale insect infestations in Colorado's forests, from ips beetles in the pinion forests of southwestern Colorado to mountain pine beetles in northern lodgepole pine forests will result in tree mortality rates that exceed 90%.
- Sudden Aspen Decline (SAD) more than doubled in Colorado from 2006 to 2007, increasing from 139,000 acres to 334,000 acres. In some areas, more than 10% of the aspen cover is affected.
- Intense wildfires that burn in built-up, continuous fuels can cause extensive damage to property, communities, and water supply systems.
- Currently, suppressing wildfires in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) accounts for 85% of firefighting costs in the United States. A Colorado State University analysis project's that Colorado's WUI areas will increase from 715,500 acres in 2000 to 2,161,400 acres in 2030, a 300% increase.

Colorado's forests are on the verge of extraordinary change. This change will impact the benefits forests usually provide such as clean water, clean air, diverse wildlife habitat, recreation-based economies, products manufactured from forest resources, and quality of life.

Declining forest health and extended wildfire seasons linked to climate change are critical issues in Colorado. Forest fragmentation and development also negatively impact the state's forests. Additionally, decades of fire suppression has left a legacy of old, unmanaged, and unnaturally dense forests in many areas which are prone to insect and disease epidemics, and devastating wildfires.

Rural sprawl is another issue negatively affecting the state's forests. Thirty five-acre ranchettes and other low-density small acreage holdings in the forest are more difficult to protect from

wildfire. Low-density development takes more land to house fewer people, greatly increases traffic and pollution from additional driving, and disturbs wildlife. In addition to fragmenting wildlife habitat and travel corridors, increased rural development threatens and endangers wildlife species. More than half of new rural housing is in the wildland-urban interface.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Forest Health issues:

- Preparing displays for county fairs or other community events to educate the public about forest health issues and how citizens can help address these concerns.
- Form collaborations with natural resource agencies, citizens' coalitions, government entities, and property owners to implement strategies to use timber from dead trees, reforest private lands, and teach homeowners about the FireWise program and defensible space in case of wildfire.
- Hire conservation technicians to work with private landowners to manage the forests on their properties, including tree thinning, removal of excessive fire fuels, reforestation after removal of dead trees, and establishing defensible space around their homes and outbuildings.
- Work with county commissioners, planning departments and developers to establish a master plan that minimizes rural sprawl and protects the integrity of the forest ecosystem whenever possible.
- Review building permit applications and development plans to determine if they are incorporating defensible space and FireWise construction in forest environments.
- Facilitate grass establishment on deforested lands to minimize soil erosion, enhance soil water retention, and suppress noxious weed infestations.

RANGELAND HEALTH

- On pastures and rangelands, forage losses due

to noxious weeds are nearly \$1 billion annually across the United States, even with control expenditures exceeding \$5 billion a year.

- Colorado rangelands in varied areas are under pressure from a variety of degrading factors including continued drought conditions, overgrazing allowing for invasive species, and fragmentation of grazing lands due to changing land use.

Poor rangeland management, including continuous grazing, minimizes naturally available forage, allows for the proliferation of noxious weeds, decreases groundwater recharge, and increases stream bank erosion, sediment deposition, and excessive storm runoff. Livestock, when allowed to continuously graze, overuse favored pastureland, suppressing forage growth and degrading overall range health, which is detrimental to profitable ranching and wildlife diversity. In a number of mismanaged rangeland areas throughout Colorado, the dominant species are indigestible or dangerous including leafy spurge, various knapweeds, Canada thistle, and yellow toadflax.

Rotational grazing, if conducted properly, provides the following land management benefits:

- Reduces the fuel load for potential wildfires.
- Improves grass regeneration.
- Improves habitat for many wildlife and plant species.
- Reduces the encroachment of noxious weed species and woody plants.
- Maintains the diversity of grassland ecosystems.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Rangeland Health issues:

- Work in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop grazing plans for district ranchers and farmers.
- Conduct workshops to educate landowners about establishing rotational grazing systems on their rangelands.

- Provide cost-share funds and facilitate contracts to establish grass stands, build cross-fencing, corrals and water developments to help landowners initiate and improve advanced grazing systems.
- Cost-share a variety of integrated noxious weed management practices to improve rangelands.
- Offer training sessions and printed materials to teach small acreage owners about grazing management and grass establishment.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

- America consumes more than 20 million barrels of oil every day to power our cars, trucks, tractors and homes, yet our nation has less than 3% of all known oil reserves.
- In 2007, Colorado produced 0.7% of the renewable energy generated in the United States.
- Colorado has excellent wind resources with an estimated 6 million acres of windy lands, particularly on the eastern plains. Two large scale wind developments currently generate a total of 60 MW, while Colorado's wind power potential is 601 million MWh/yr.
- Renewable energy consumption contributed 7% of the Nation's total energy demand in 2007.

With fluctuating energy prices and growing concern over climate change, our nation has both a significant challenge and a great opportunity to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Reducing our fossil fuel consumption can provide economic opportunities, such as jobs in rural areas, while also protecting the environment and creating a stable, renewable domestic energy supply.

Reducing our dependence on fossil fuels will require a two-pronged approach: reducing energy use through conservation, and finding alternate, renewable energy sources. Conservation districts can play an important role in both areas by providing technical assistance, education, cost-sharing and other support.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation issues:

- Conduct demonstration projects and educational events to promote no-till and reduced-tillage practices on cropland for a variety of conservation purposes including energy conservation.
- Facilitate contracts, cost-share programs, and grants to assist landowners in installing renewable energy and energy-conserving applications such as solar-powered livestock watering units, soft-start center pivot systems, bio-digesters, wind turbines for individual operations, more efficient irrigation systems, and windbreaks.
- Collaborate with other agencies and organizations to promote renewable energy/energy conservation concepts including carbon sequestration and carbon credit marketing, utilizing biomass for alternative fuel production, and developing economic incentives, technologies, and markets for products created from declining forests.

RIPARIAN ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

- According to the Tamarisk Coalition, more than 50,000 acres of the Colorado, Arkansas, and Purgatoire Rivers and their tributaries are infested with the noxious tamarisk plants, which consume an estimated 75,000 acre feet of water annually above and beyond what native vegetation would use. This amount of water can supply enough potable water to support 187,000 households every year.
- It is estimated that riparian areas are used for at least part of the year by 73% of Colorado's wildlife species.

Colorado has approximately 1.4 million acres of riparian habitat which includes 232,000 acres of riparian forested zones, consisting primarily of cottonwood, willow, and shrub species. Although the forested riparian land area represents only about 1% of the state's total forested area, these areas provide essential benefits disproportionate to their size. Benefits of riparian zones include

maintaining water quality and quantity, recharging ground water, and reducing erosion. Native trees and shrubs along waterways help filter water, prevent flooding, remove excess nutrients, and provide excellent wildlife habitat. These areas also provide aesthetic and recreational benefits.

Unfortunately, various land use practices have degraded riparian areas, resulting in impaired environmental conditions, decreased agricultural production, and a variety of social costs. Both agricultural and non-agricultural land use practices are responsible for the degradation of riparian areas. These degrading land use practices include:

- Artificial stream widening and straightening.
- Road and building construction close to streams.
- Replacement of wooded or grassy areas with roads, houses, and parking lots resulting in increased runoff into streams.
- Unrestricted grazing or loitering of livestock in or near streams.
- Crop production activities including plowing, planting, fertilizing, and pesticide applications close to streams.
- Poor manure management practices in livestock operations near streams.
- Invasion of noxious weed and woody species into the riparian zone.

Examples of conservation district efforts to deal with Riparian Ecosystem Health issues:

- In partnership with NRCS, develop grazing plans for landowners to properly use or avoid riparian areas, depending on particular habitat.
- Conduct grazing schools and small acreage workshops to teach proper management of these critical areas.
- Facilitate funding opportunities for fencing and water development to protect these zones during rotational grazing.
- Encourage the planting of vegetative buffer strips to prevent soil and chemical runoff into these areas.
- Review and comment on building permit applications regarding their impact on riparian zones.

WHERE WE'RE GOING (Colorado State Conservation Board Long-Range Goals and Objectives)

To help build the capacity of Colorado's conservation districts in addressing the current and emerging natural resource issues across the State, the CSCB has developed a comprehensive Long-Range Plan centered on providing training and leadership development of conservation districts. The goals and objectives identified in the LRP are intended to raise the overall ability of conservation districts to respond to emerging environmental issues. By providing services and programs that help conservation districts improve the effectiveness of their operations, the CSCB directly impacts the ability of local communities to react to current issues and to plan proactive approaches to tomorrow's conservation opportunities. Supporting conservation districts in responding to conservation needs provides the greatest return on State funding and the greatest impact on the sustainability of Colorado's natural resources. Exhibit 9 summarizes a few of the highlights from the CSCB Long-Range Plan. To receive a complete copy of the current State Board LRP, please contact the CSCB Lakewood office.

Colorado State Conservation Board Long Range Plan Summary:

1) Issue: Conservation District Board and Staff Recruitment and Diversity

Goal #1: All conservation districts have full board participation with only temporary vacancies

OBJECTIVES:

- Assist with board member elections
- Assist with board recruitment efforts
- Help districts develop board member job descriptions
- Provide training on the benefits of board diversity

Goal #2: Recruitment and retention of highly qualified conservation district employees

OBJECTIVES:

- Assist districts with developing effective employee job descriptions, employment agreements, performance plans, and related personnel policy.
- Assist districts in developing employee benefits packages
- Provide training on skills and personnel development training to conservation districts

2) Issue: Connection between board members and their constituents

Goal #1: Conservation districts serve their constituents

OBJECTIVES:

- Conservation districts utilize local work groups as part of the Long-Range Planning process
- Assist districts with institutionalizing circular communication mechanisms with constituents and partners
- Help districts enhance the involvement of landowners and partners at district Annual Meetings

Goal #2: CSCB members are actively engaged and representing their constituents within their watershed

OBJECTIVES:

- CSCB members are effectively engaged in circular communications with the districts they represent
- Improve the process for CSCB members to report on important conservation district issues
- CSCB members are actively involved in Watershed meetings to strengthen relationships and build circular communications

3) Issue: Accountability Requirements

Goal #1: Full integration of CSCB reporting requirements for maximum efficiency

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a consolidated reporting system within the Direct Assistance process
- Provide training to conservation districts on professional reporting incorporating graphics, narratives, and creative formats.

4) Issue: Professional Board Development

Goal #1: Thirty board members completed core training certificate through CSCB

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a voluntary conservation district certification program
- Administer initial training to CSCB and CACD boards and volunteer conservation district board members
- Create an award recognition program for full conservation district board participation

MAINTAINING COLORADO STATE CONSERVATION BOARD PROGRAM EXCELLENCE

As demonstrated in this report, the programs and funding for local conservation districts coordinated by CSCB and its staff provide exceptional support for on-the-ground conservation practices and natural resource education throughout Colorado. The funds distributed by CSCB programs provide a small, but significant, source of income for rural communities all over the state.



Colorado citizens expect clean waters, clean air, sustainable habitats that promote healthy native wildlife and plant communities, and productive crop and range lands that provide food and increase our state economic viability. For more than 50 years, local conservation districts have given technical assistance and financial support to their landowners to deal with the natural resource issues that impact the environmental and economic well-being of Colorado. The successful grassroots efforts of the 76 conservation districts and their partners in addressing a wide spectrum of critical natural resource problems, from soil erosion to energy conservation, are strengthened through CSCB's support.

The CSCB and its staff provide professional assistance, organizational development services, and conservation programs that build the capacity of individual districts to work with their landowners and form collaborative partnerships with a wide array of agencies and organizations. The ongoing work of the CSCB and its staff statewide fortifies the vital infrastructure of Colorado conservation districts and the enormous energy they put into helping their constituents.



Equally important to the sustained achievement of the conservation districts is funding to address the significant natural resource issues facing agricultural producers and landowners. The ability of districts to leverage funds received from state, federal, and other funding sources is a major reason for the high-quality conservation they deliver around the state.

In 2008, the CSCB coordinated the distribution of \$678,710 of State funding. These grant programs stimulated an additional \$1.4 million in local and federal matching funds, which means

- the conservation districts receiving this funding were able to deliver \$3 of conservation work for each \$1 invested by the state.
- This financial impact multiplies with other funds generated through conservation districts across the state.
- To ensure the best use of tax dollars, CSCB programs are competitively funded, and the CSCB monitors the proper and effective use of dollars awarded through regular district reporting and staff visits.



As land uses change from agriculture to development around the state and pressures on all of our natural resources increase, the state's 76 local conservation districts work with private landowners and citizens to solve the challenges created by these changes. By maintaining the Colorado State Conservation Board staff and grant funding to initiate additional programs for their local conservation districts, Colorado's citizens will continue to benefit from a tremendous conservation effort to sustain our state's natural resources and agriculture.



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COLORADO STATE CONSERVATION BOARD

STRATEGIC REPORT