



Promoting the wise use of all natural resources

Quarterly Report to Rio Blanco County
January 1 – March 31, 2022

The White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts (Districts) provide the below report to the County Commissioners regarding the work and activities from January 1st through March 31st, 2022. The report does not incorporate specific activities but provides highlights on each of the five priorities within the Districts' annual plan of work that are prioritized by public input gathered from Rio Blanco County (RBC) landowners during the Long-Range Planning process. 2022 is the third year of the three-year Long-Range Plan. The top five priorities include long-term sustainable funding, implementation and enforcement of the RBC Land and Natural Resource Plan and Policies (LUP), water, rangeland, and wildlife.

Long Term Sustainable Funding:

- **Grants:**
 - The Districts are very excited about unofficial notification that we will receive the \$239,000 Colorado RESTORE grant for \$200,000 to implement CRMP range improvement projects and would provide approx. \$35,000 in administrative and management time over the next two years.
 - The Districts have signed an agreement with Colorado Cattlemen's Association for \$22,000 that will be used for implementation of diversion structure and headgate improvements. A committee met in late March and identified two of the five applicants that will be contracted and funded during the second quarter of 2022.
 - District Conservation Technician position has been filled again. This position is through a grant from NRCS and the CSCB. We are working with another entity to secure the District's 20% of the funding for this position.
- **Grant Administration:** The Districts continue to administer grants for four projects: 1) Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP), 2) White River Algae Study, 3) White River Integrated Water Initiative, 3) Livestock Watering Facilities/Pond Improvements Program, 4) small educational grants such as the Colorado Association of Conservation District (CACD) grant that helped offset expenses of the Districts' annual meetings.
- **Conservation Corner articles:** The Districts continue to provide the information for the Conservation Corner in the Rio Blanco Herald monthly to provide conservation information to the community and to create awareness of the Districts within the community. Due to workload, there have been fewer since the first of the year but with the new District Conservation Technician on board, there will be weekly articles.
- **Ongoing Sales and Rental Programs:** including sales of tire water tanks, polyacrylamide (PAM) and seedling trees. The no-till drill, fusion machine, and seeder are available for rent.

LUP Specific:

- The LUP update is slowly moving forward. Tristan has worked on the format and layout following updates from Karen Budd-Falen and Callie. We expect a few more necessary changes to the Socioeconomic section, but the District Boards are currently reviewing it as well as Eddie Smercina and we hope the County Commissioners can review it in April. Once that is complete, we will put it on the Website for public comment for two weeks. Staff will provide responses to all public input and made edits as needed before it is provided to the District boards and Commissioners for a hearing and approval.
- District staff have engaged in the Greater Sage Grouse EIS discussions and have requested cooperating agency status. We have joined all calls with NW Colorado counties and BLM to ensure a strong local voice.
- Participation in weekly BLM NEPA meetings on Tuesday mornings. The District has provided assistance to a BLM permittee regarding a permit renewal based on that permittee's request.
- Participation in monthly National Association of Conservation District (NACD) Federal Lands Resource Committee meeting.
- Douglas Creek Conservation District board member, Scott Robertson, serves on the BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Callie has submitted application for a second term on the RAC and is still waiting to hear confirmation. Callie and Scott participated in the January meeting.
- Callie works closely with the multiple organizations such as Colorado Farm Bureau (CFB), Club 20, and Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD), and the Colorado Cattlemen's Assoc. (CCA) on natural resource and policy issues. She utilized the LUP to provide input on policy issues and positions. She is currently the Vice Chair of the CCA Private Property and Stewardship Committee.
- Many of the priorities and activities below are the result of the LUP and/or utilize LUP policies to guide the activity.

Rangeland:

- **BLM Agreement:**
 - Through the Districts' assistance agreement with BLM, the Districts have wrapped up the fourth year of the intense range monitoring program which is invaluable to the BLM and others in trying to implement active management of the excess horses. The data and brief analysis was presented at both Districts' annual meetings and the full report has been submitted to BLM. A two page summary of the report (attached) was also developed. The analysis of this data has been in the works and will be available to the public by mid April.
 - Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP): Tristan continues to work with multiple landowners, BLM, CPW and other partners to write and implement CRMPs. Receiving the RESTORE grant noted above will be a huge help in implementing these projects. We anticipate at least one brush management, one tamarisk removal, and one water project will be implemented this year. More will be completed providing the NEPA and other requirements are finalized and the drought will allow it.
- **Excess Horses:**
 - District staff have worked closely with the BLM to inform decision makers of the need for removal of excess horses from RBC. The intense range monitoring program is exceptionally helpful!
 - Unfortunately, as of the end of March the horses in Piceance Basin are in extremely poor condition and the BLM is working on a strategy of how to proceed. This was predicted through our monitoring given there was 100% utilization of the feed late last fall.

Water:

- **WR Algae Study & Technical Advisory Group (TAG):**
 - The TAG has met with USGS several times since the first of the year and reviewed the draft reports on the algae study. These have been very productive meetings and we look forward to coordinating a public meeting with a USGS presentation in late May where they will share their findings.
 - For information on the Study, please see the Districts' [updated website](#).
- **White River Integrated Water Initiative (WR Initiative):**
 - The two coordinators, Liz Chandler and Kari Brennan, continue doing a great job moving the process forward. The two are working well together.
 - All diversion structure and riparian health assessment reports have been completed and delivered to the landowners.
 - The Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) met twice this quarter. They finalized the mission statement and four primary goals with a few edits based on public input. The process of identifying the priorities for the Phase III effort is underway. During the first quarter, they identified several priorities for each reach (segment) and are planning public input meetings in the respective locations (Up River, Meeker, Rangely, and Piceance Creek). With this input the Phase II effort will be wrapped up by late fall.
 - As noted in the grants section, the Districts are facilitating and administering two mini grants to landowners to conduct diversion structure improvements this spring. This effort has led to several discussions with landowners and other funders for larger projects in the near future.
- **Yampa-White-Green Basin Round Table (BRT):**
 - WRCD Board member, Chris Collins, and Exec. Director, Callie Hendrickson, continue to serve on the BRT. Both serve on the Big River Committee where they learn and provide input on the Colorado River issues. Chris is serving on the Grants committee.

Wildlife:

- **Wolf Introduction:**
 - District staff attended the Stakeholder's Advisory Group (SAG) meeting in Glenwood Springs again in February and provided public testimony. Staff has worked to keep constituents engaged in the issue and encouraged them to provide written comments.
 - Callie provided assistance to the Keystone Policy Center in their locating the April Wolf Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meeting in Meeker.

Additional Activities:

- To date, the Districts have funded 41 stock water facility repair and maintenance projects for a total of \$25,000. Funding for these projects was provided to the Districts through the Colorado State Conservation Board's (CSCB) drought stimulus funding of \$15,000 per district and \$20,000 Colo. Dept. of Ag drought funding grant.
- The Districts hired Julia Eskelson as the District Conservation Technician and she started work on April 5th.
- The Districts are advertising for a part time Office Manager to fill in when Tristan goes part-time in June.