



Promoting the wise use of all natural resources

Quarterly Report to Rio Blanco County
April 1 – June 30, 2021

The White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts (Districts) are happy to provide the below report to the County Commissioners regarding the work and activities from April 1st through June 30, 2021. 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. 2021 is the second 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:

- **Conservation Corner articles:** The Districts continue to provide the information for the Conservation Corner in the Rio Blanco Herald to provide conservation information to the community and to create awareness of the Districts within the community.
- **Grant administration** continues to implement on-the-ground conservation projects through the Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP), White River Algae Study, and White River Integrated Water Initiative as well as small educational grants.
- Ongoing sales programs including sales of polyacrylamide (PAM) and seedling trees.
- Ongoing rental programs including no-till drill, fusion machine, and seeder.

LUP Specific:

- Attendance at weekly BLM NEPA meetings on Tuesday mornings.
- Staff attends the NACD Federal Lands Resource Committee meeting to stay informed on issues.
- Work on the LUP Update is underway. District is working with Karen Budd-Falen for the legal updates to background and other information. She is offering a couple new policy statements based on updated information. Carly is working on the Socioeconomics & Economic Viability chapter. Callie is reviewing policies in general. This is much more involved than originally planned and will take some time but we plan to have the draft finalized by Sept. 1st.
- Callie participated in the Statewide BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)
- Callie submitted application for reappointment to the BLM RAC for a second term.
- Staff met with BLM on multiple issues. The Districts will work with permittees as their permit renewals are considered at the permittees' request.
- Callie works closely with the multiple organizations such as Colorado Cattlemen's Association (CCA), Colorado Farm Bureau (CFB), Club 20, and Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD) on natural resource and policy issues. She utilized the LUP to provide input on policy issues and positions. She Chairs the CCA Private Property and Stewardship Committee and hosted the BLM National Director, Neda Culver, at the last meeting where Nada spoke re: the America the Beautiful (30x30) Plan. Callie provided input to CCA, CFB, and CACD on natural resource related bills at the State level during the legislative session.
- Callie met with Congresswoman Boebert in Craig re: the 30 x 30 Plan.

- 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:**

- Range Monitoring and Weed Control Update: Contractor, Troy Osborn, has finalized a report summarizing the data and analysis for the first three years of the range monitoring study. The Districts have received additional funding from BLM to expand the monitoring project to the West Douglas HA and an area outside of horse areas the next two years.
- Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP): Tristan continues to work with five ranches/BLM permittees in developing their respective CRMPs. We are excited to announce the first CRMP NRCS contract is in place to install two water projects and several brush management projects over the next three years.
- Some of the new BLM funds will be used to implement CRMP projects. Conversations have begun regarding another 5-year agreement for rangeland improvements since the current agreement expires in September 2022.

- **NEPA:**

- The Districts are currently working with one permittee on their permit renewal.

- **Excess Horse:**

- The Districts submitted comments to the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board and provided oral testimony in support of removing excess horses.
- The Oil Springs fire has burned well over 50% of the summer country for horses. BLM has an emergency gather planned for later July.
- Staff drafted policy for the Districts and RBC to consider as follow-up to the RBC Wild Horse Resolution regarding of removing horses from private land in RBC. The Districts have approved this policy and it will be discussed at the RBC Commissioner meeting on July 13th.

Water:

- **WR Algae Study & TAG:**

- For information on the Study, please see the [Districts' Algae Study web page](#). Currently awaiting final report from USGS.
- Tristan has at least three landowners taking weekly pictures and she is submitting them to USGS. Leif is planning to take drone pictures yet this month.
- Algae is definitely growing in the White River. Much heavier in some areas than others. The Lower White has had significant algae growth early this summer.

- **White River Integrated Water Initiative (WR Initiative):**

- Good progress continues on the WR Initiative. The Diversion Structure assessment team has conducted three assessments and two public workshops. They are scheduling the remaining 17 assessments for August. The Riparian Health Assessment team will be receiving Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) training in July and will be conducting assessments throughout the summer and fall.
- The Districts have hired two coordinators through a CWCB grant. The coordinators are doing a great job with moving the process forward. Kari Brennan is the project coordinator who is helping the assessment teams to schedule assessments with landowners. Liz Chandler is the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) Coordinator. She is coordinating and facilitating all the PAC and public meetings and will be writing the Phase 3 Scope of Work. The two are working very closely and working well together.

Water (cont.):

- **Yampa-White-Green Basin Round Table (BRT):**

- Callie continues to serve on the BRT and attends all their meetings.
- Next meeting is Wednesday, July 14th.
- Staff has been engaged in the Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) update process.
- Staff has been involved in the Big River Committee that has been heavily engaged in the Demand Management conversation and submitted comments to the CWCB on their “Demand Management Framework”.

- **Other**

- Intermountain West Joint Venture’s Water 4 Project – supports flood irrigation and alluvial aquifer storage along with migratory bird habitat. The Districts will potentially be working with them to support additional EQIP funding to improve flood irrigation infrastructure.

Wildlife:

- **Wolf Introduction:**

- Staff provided comments at several CPW Commission meetings regarding the need for them to hear from the western slope communities that will be impacted the most.
- Staff is scheduled to attend public input session in Craig on July 26 and a wolf management focus group in July

Additional Activities:

- The Districts partner with NRCS and the Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) to hire a District Conservation Technician. The Districts received a grant that pays for 75% of the position. This position helps provide technical assistance to landowners primarily on rangeland and water improvements. Currently this position is heavily involved in the WR Initiative Diversion Structure Team.
- The Districts are planning two tours in August.
 - Bicycle Ag and Water Conservation tour (August 7th 7:30 – noon) that will visit several irrigation projects on the Mesa for participants to learn firsthand how the conservation practices are helpful but also how they impact return flows later in the year.
 - Natural Resource Tour (August 30 & 31) – It has been five years since the Districts hosted a Natural Resource Tour for decision makers to visit and see the opportunities and challenges facing our natural resources and management. It will focus on water, rangeland health, and wildlife. It will be held the two days before the CPW Commission here in Meeker (Sept. 1 & 2).