



Promoting the wise use of all natural resources

Quarterly Report to Rio Blanco County
July 1 – September 30, 2021

The White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts (Districts) provide the below report to the County Commissioners regarding the work and activities from July 1st through September 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:

- **Natural Resource Tour:** The Districts coordinated and hosted the two-day Natural Resource tour on August 30 & 31. There was a total of 60 attendees including three State senators, one State representative, Senator Bennet and Hickenlooper's staff, the State Water Engineer, Colorado State Forest Service NW Colo. Area Manager, CPW Director, CPW Commissioner and legal staff, etc. The tour was well received, and many conversations are continuing to develop from the discussions on the tour. The tour focused on the positive and negative economic impacts to the community from our natural resources expressing how challenging it is to have our energy industry devastated only to have severe drought and introduction of wolves that are/potentially will severely impact our remaining economic drivers, agriculture, and big game.
- **Grant Applications:** Four grants have been submitted this quarter and one is in progress. One \$4,900 to support the Natural Resource Tour (awarded), one \$20,000 from CDA's Drought Resiliency Project Fund which would be used for Pond and Water Improvement projects or CRMP water improvement projects, two STAR Program (soil health) grant applications were submitted. Staff currently drafting a \$300,000 application that will help implement CRMP range and water improvements projects.
- **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.
- **Grant Administration:** The Districts continue 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 such as the Colorado Association of Conservation District (CACD) grant and sponsorships of the Natural Resource Tour held in August.
- **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:

- Participation in weekly BLM NEPA meetings on Tuesday mornings.
- Participation in monthly National Association of Conservation District (NACD) Federal Lands Resource Committee meeting.
- Approval of policy regarding the removal of "wild" horses from private ground in RBC by both District boards and is ready for consideration by the County.

- Callie has submitted application for a second term on the BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Those announcements are forthcoming.
- Callie attended the Club 20 Summer committee meetings, the Colorado Cattlemen's Association (CCA) convention and chaired the Stewardship Committee hosting the Acting BLM Director and the CSU AgNext Director.
- Callie works closely with the multiple organizations such as 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.
- 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:**
 - The Districts have received additional funding from BLM to expand the range monitoring project to the West Douglas HA and an area outside of horse areas the next two years. This additional monitoring was delayed due to the gather in West Douglas this summer. BLM and Troy Osborn (contractor) are currently determining and setting up sites.
 - Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP): Tristan continues to work with four ranches/BLM permittees in developing their respective CRMPs. The first NRCS contract is in place to implement 750 acres of brush management and install 2 watering facilities (well & pipelines). Staff is in the process of applying for the RESTORE grant that would pay for an additional 775 acres of brush management and additional water distribution projects.
 - Some of the new BLM funds will be used to implement CRMP projects. Conversations continue regarding another 5-year agreement for rangeland improvements since the current agreement expires in September 2022.
- **Excess Horse:**
 - Callie submitted written comments and Tristan provided oral testimony for the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting in July.
 - BLM conducted an emergency gather in the West Douglas HA and surrounding area. They were successful in removing 457 horses and believe there is approximately 30 horses remaining that they hope to remove soon. Staff attended only one day of the gather due to very limited public attendance. The Districts submitted a supportive and fact-based letter to the editor of the paper in response to a very negative letter with false information.
 - Staff drafted letters and conducted a TV interview in support of the BLM removing the excess horses from the Sand Wash Basin HMA.
 - Districts passed a RBC Wild Horse Resolution regarding of removing horses from private land in RBC. RBC may want to consider adopting the policy.

Water:

- **WR Algae Study & TAG:**
 - USGS has completed the analysis of the Water Quality report, and is halfway done with the Algae report. The Algae report is expected to enter the review process by the end of November 2021. Per our conversation with USGS staff on 9/29, USGS will provide the TAG with the analysis report for review in December 2021. Once the TAG has provided ground truthing, the report will go to a final review process for publication. That may take 2 – 10 months. We are working out some details with USGS on the payment schedule which will extend into 2022 as the reports are finalized.
 - Leif Joy completed the drone flights of the river segments for the algae and has nearly completed processing them and they will be shared with USGS.
 - 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, are doing a great job moving the process forward. The two are working well together.
- A total of 27 diversion assessments have been completed. Reports for the water right holders are being developed and will be provided to them in the near future. The Riparian Health Assessment team is using the Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) training and is in the process of conducting assessments with plans to complete them by October 30th.
- There have been two Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings this quarter with speakers on forest and rangeland health and in-stream flows.
- Four public input sessions have been hosted throughout the County with good attendance (70 people) and support for the current mission statement and four primary goals.
- Each of the reaches (river segments) committees have held at least one meeting each to begin developing their respective objectives to help reach the overall goals. Their next meetings will be held after the assessment information is available.

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

- Callie continues to serve on the BRT and attends all their meetings including the Big River Committee.

Wildlife:

- **Wolf Introduction:**

- The Natural Resource tour was scheduled around the CPW Commission meeting in an effort to get as many Commission members to attend the tour as possible. One CPW Commissioner (Dallas May from Lamar) and two Assistant Attorney General attorneys that work with CPW attended the tour along with CPW Director, Dan Prenzlow, who spoke to the group.
- The CPW Commission met here in Meeker on September 1 & 2. Callie attended the wolf presentation at the meeting and the Bar-B-Que with the Commission.
- The Districts submitted wolf planning comments.
- Staff attended the public input session in Craig and a wolf management focus group in July

Additional Activities:

- Both Districts are offering a stipend to landowners and public land permittees for maintenance of watering facilities such as pond cleaning and other watering systems repairs during 2021. This is being paid for through the Colorado State Conservation Board's (CSCB) drought stimulus funding of \$15,000 to each of the Districts.
- Tristan has done a very nice job of developing and launching a new District website and we encourage all to utilize it.
- The District newsletter went out to 700+ landowners in the County in September providing an update on most of the activities covered above and promoting Districts' sales and rentals.
- 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 80% of the position beginning in 2022. The districts are working with the Intermountain West Joint Venture's Water 4 Project to secure the other 20% of the cost. This position helps provide technical assistance to landowners primarily on rangeland and water improvements. The Districts are currently seeking job applications for this position as Kendra has taken a job in Utah.