



*Promoting the wise use of all natural resources*

---

Quarterly Report to Rio Blanco County  
October 1 – December 31, 2021

The White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts (Districts) provide the below report to the County Commissioners regarding the work and activities from October 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 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:**

- **Grant Applications:** One grant was received, and one application submitted this quarter. The \$20,000 application from CDA's Drought Resiliency Project Fund, which would be used as match funding for Stock Water Repair and Maintenance projects or CRMP water improvement projects, was awarded this quarter. Staff submitted a \$239,000 Colorado RESTORE grant application that will help implement CRMP range improvement projects and would provide \$24,000 in administrative and management time.
- **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 that will help 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.
- **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 District is working with Karen Budd-Falen and County staff to update the LUP. We are currently scheduled to have a draft of the LUP to the County and District Boards by early February. Once all three boards have reviewed and approved it to go out for public comment, we will coordinate that effort with County staff and plan to have a final document for approval by April 2022.
- District staff have engaged in the Greater Sage Grouse EIS discussions and have requested cooperating agency status. We have joined several calls with NW Colorado counties and BLM to ensure a strong local voice.
- Participation in weekly BLM NEPA meetings on Tuesday mornings.
- 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 participated in the October 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 continue with the intense rangeland monitoring project in areas where wild/feral horses are present to determine the use by species. We have worked with Troy Osborn of Osborn Industries (Districts' contractor) in setting up new sites in the West Douglas area to monitor the recovery now that most of the horses have been removed. Troy will be making a presentation at WRCD Annual Meeting on January 13<sup>th</sup> regarding his findings over the past four years. Troy will continue this work in 2022 and beyond pending BLM funding agreement.
- Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP): Staff applied for the RESTORE grant that would pay for an additional 775 acres of brush management.
- 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 Horses:**

- District staff met with the BLM State Director, Jamie Connell, when she was here in Meeker and requested they conduct the Piceance gather in 2022 and assured her that they would have District support in doing so. This support would include the details of the District range-monitoring program in the HMA.

### **Water:**

- **WR Algae Study & TAG:**

- On December 16, 2021, the TAG met with USGS and reviewed the Characterization of Streamflow and Nutrient Occurrence in The Upper White River Basin, Colorado, 1980-2020 report (Identified as Task 8.1) which describes historical streamflow and water quality characteristics. This meeting allowed the TAG to ask questions and make recommendations to the USGS to improve the quality of the report.
- The Investigation of Factors Controlling Benthic Algae in The Upper White River Watershed, Colorado, 2018–21 report (Identified as Task 8.2) was delivered to the TAG during the week of December 20<sup>th</sup>. The TAG will provide comments to USGS on both reports by the end of January 2022 to be considered in the final USGS reports.
- 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. WRCD Board member, Chris Collins, has participated in ~75% of all the riparian and diversion structure assessment which has taken a tremendous amount of time. Liz, Kari, and Chris have done a great job of keeping the landowners engaged in this process.
- The 25 diversion assessments have been completed. Reports for the water right holders are finalized and being delivered to them. The Riparian Health Assessment team has completed all 22 assessments and are in the process of finalizing the reports to be delivered to the landowners.

- The Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) met once this quarter with speakers on in-stream flows and considered the public input on the mission statement and primary goals. Next meeting is scheduled for January 19<sup>th</sup>.
- **Yampa-White-Green Basin Round Table (BRT):**
  - WRCD Board member, Chris Collins, was elected to serve as a member at-large on the BRT during the November meeting.
  - Callie continues to serve on the BRT and attends all their meetings including the Big River Committee.

### **Wildlife:**

#### ● **Wolf Introduction:**

- District staff attended the Stakeholder's Advisory Group (SAG) meeting in Glenwood Springs in October and provided public testimony. Staff has worked to keep constituents engaged in the issue and encouraged them to provide written comments.
- Callie stays in contact with Lenny Klinglesmith who serves on the SAG.
- The Districts submitted a wolf introduction plan resolution to the Colorado Assn. of Conservation Districts (CACD) that provided specific talking points that help ensure the wolf plan will do the least damage to our rural communities as possible. The resolution passed and is now policy of CACD.

### **Additional Activities:**

- Both Districts are beginning to receive applications for funding to assist in stock water facility repair and maintenance. Funding for these projects was provided to the Districts through the Colorado State Conservation Board's (CSCB) drought stimulus funding of \$15,000.
- Unfortunately, the Districts have not been able to hire a District Technician. We will continue to leave the position open for a couple more months to see if we can find a qualified individual that is willing to accept the job.
- Board members attended all the CACD committee meetings (virtually) to ensure our communities' interests are represented. Each district had a voting member participate in the business meeting where all the policies are finalized.
- \*\*\* Marc Etchart received the Supervisor of the Year Award from CACD!\*\*\*