



Promoting the Wise Use
of all Natural Resources



Douglas Creek Board

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White River Board

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WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

The White River Conservation District and Douglas Creek Conservation District boards exist on behalf of the Rio Blanco County (RBC) landowners. We are here to provide education and technical assistance for you regarding the wise use of our natural resources; rangeland health, wildlife, forest health, water, and soil. We work with multiple partners to provide these services.

This newsletter provides highlights from the White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts' Annual Plan of Work:

1. *Implementation of the RBC Land and Natural Resource Plan and Policies (LUP)*
2. *Rangeland Health*
3. *Water*
4. *Wildlife*

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

We update our website often to provide you with current news and information on numerous projects. Please visit the District websites www.whiterivercd.com and www.douglascreekcd.org. Notes from meetings, presentations, links for more info for each of these natural resource issues and projects can be found in the project tabs.



Use your camera to scan me to take you to the website!

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Office Hours and COVID-19 Restrictions

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Meeker USDA office is open by appointment only. Please know the Conservation Districts and NRCS offices are open and available for service to the landowners, but out of respect for you and our staff, please call before entering the offices. 970-878-5628

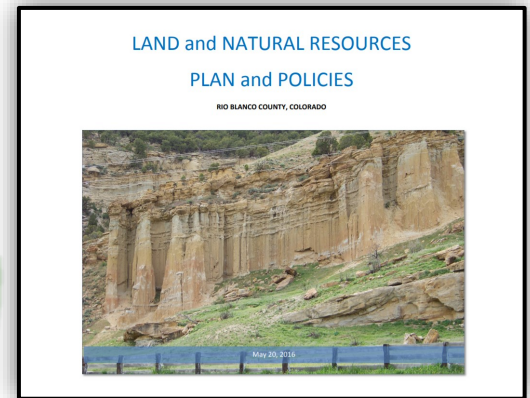
Thank you for your patience!

Annual Plan of Work Activities

#1 RBC Land and Natural Resource Plan and Policies (LUP):

The Rio Blanco County (RBC) Land and Natural Resource Plan and Policies (LUP) was developed in 2016 with extensive public input. It contains background and policy statements regarding multiple uses of public lands. The Districts utilize the LUP when working with governmental agencies to influence their decisions regarding the use of natural resources.

- ◆ The Districts continue to participate in BLM National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) meetings on a weekly basis to engage in discussions regarding grazing permits, vegetation treatments, and wild horse management actions.
- ◆ District staff engage with multiple entities such as Club 20, Colorado Cattlemen Association, Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, Colorado Farm Bureau, etc. encouraging the adoption of resolutions and policies which align with the LUP policies. By cooperating and partnering with all these entities, a more unified voice is developed to help encourage proactive management of the natural resources.



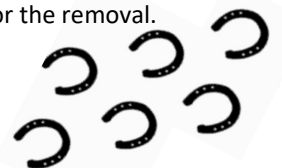
#2 Rangeland Health:

- Through a financial assistance agreement with the BLM, the Districts have two ongoing projects to improve Rangeland Health.
 - 1) Intense Range Monitoring: The Districts are entering into the fourth year of a five-year agreement with Osborn Industries to conduct intensive rangeland monitoring in the Piceance East-Douglas Herd Management Area (PEDHMA). Monitoring has taken place multiple times per year capturing use just before cattle arrive in a pasture, just after the cattle leave a pasture, in the late fall, and then again in early spring. Osborn has analyzed the first three years' data verifying which species are utilizing the forage at different times of the year. Monitoring will be expanded to the West Douglas Herd Area this year



- 2) Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) Project: The District staff are partnering with federal land grazing permittees, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and other pertinent entities to coordinate and facilitate the development of individualized CRMPs to implement conservation practices across landownership boundaries. This program helps facilitate the various agency requirements and seeks funding opportunities to implement vegetation treatments and water developments that will improve rangeland production, wildlife habitat, and watershed health.

- * Two CRMPs are completed with roughly 6,600 acres identified for vegetation treatments and 26 water improvement projects.
- The BLM recently conducted a census of the “wild” horses, and we are awaiting the results, but it is estimated that there are now over 1,400 horses within the County. The designated Appropriate Management Level (AML) is 135 – 235 within the boundaries of the Piceance East Douglas Herd Management Area (PEDHMA).
 - ◆ The Districts continue to request the removal of all excess horses from Rio Blanco County.
 - ◆ The local BLM office has finalized all the necessary NEPA and determined removal of the excess horses is necessary. The Districts' range monitoring data supports that decision, and we will be strongly advocating for the removal.
 - ◆ BLM has submitted a request to the national office for a gather of the excess horses this winter.
 - ◆ Staff met with Representative Boebert and provided an update to her on the excess horse issue.



#3 Water:

- **WR Algae Study & Technical Advisory Group (TAG):** The data collection portion of the three-year Algae study is complete. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) is analyzing the data and will have a report completed by end of 2021. For information on the Study, please see the Districts website at www.whiterivercd.com or [Districts' Algae Study tab](#).
- **White River Integrated Water Initiative (WR Initiative):** Good progress is being made on the WR Initiative. Diversion Structure and Riparian Health Assessment teams have been established and are meeting and conducting assessments which will continue through the summer. Additionally, the Districts secured a Colorado Water Conservation Board grant to contract two coordinator positions that will coordinate and facilitate the process through 2022. The Districts are incredibly pleased to announce Elizabeth Chandler as the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) Coordinator and Kari Brennan as the Project Coordinator. For more information, please visit the Districts website at www.whiterivercd.com or [Districts' White River Initiative tab](#).
- **Yampa-White-Green Basin Round Table (BRT):** District staff engages in the bi-monthly BRT meetings and several committees including the Big River Committee that has been working on the Demand Management Proposal and the Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) committee that is updating the Basin Plan. For more information, please visit www.yampawhitegreen.com.
- **White River Management Plan:** District staff and boards are working closely with Alden Vanden Brink of the Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District to seek opportunities to actively engage in the conservation efforts through this Plan that will benefit the RBC community and the endangered fish.



Scraping algae from river rocks in the White



The White River near Rangely, Colorado



Western Gray Wolf

#4 Wildlife:

- **Wolf Introduction:** District staff submitted written comments and provided oral testimony multiple times to the CO Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission and on multiple wolf related bills. The message the Districts are conveying is that:
 - a) Proposition 114 passed; we will have wolves introduced into Colorado.
 - b) Western Slope rural communities, in locations where the wolves will likely be released, should have the largest voice in the development of the Wolf Management Plan.
 - c) The Commission should host most of the stakeholder meetings in these communities and they should have multiple representatives on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- The Districts have been actively engaged at the State level this year. Marc Etchart (White River CD Board President) is serving as the Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) Representative from our Watershed Association. Marc and staff have been actively engaged with Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD) and others on water and soil health policies that were initiated from our Districts. Staff have testified on behalf of these policies at the State legislature.
- The Districts hosted Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture, Kate Greenberg, at their March joint board meeting. She engaged in discussion with the Boards via Zoom regarding the Soil Health Program, Drought Preparedness, and Wolf Introduction.
- Staff assisted in interviews for the new County Natural Resource & Emergency Management position and look forward to working with the new hire, Eddie Smercina.

From the NRCS

Conservation Planning First

By: **Nakayla Lestina**

Everyone has management goals and objectives that they strive to work towards in their operation, whether it be improving the soil and vegetation, improving wildlife habitat, or increasing production. No matter how long it takes to reach the intended target, a plan is usually developed to provide direction. We, here at the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), are here to help farmers and ranchers by providing technical assistance and assisting in developing conservation management plans that can help improve their land and operation.

By reaching out for technical assistance, NRCS and producers can begin the conversation and development of a conservation plan that will meet their goals. There is a three-phase, nine-step process that is used when completing a plan. The process starts by identifying resource concerns and opportunities through the collection and analysis of inventory data across the

operation. The information provided from the inventory guides the development of management objectives to be achieved. Once this background work is completed, alternatives can be identified that will address the resource concerns. After reviewing all the options, the most suitable alternative will be selected by the landowner for implementation. As the plan is implemented, the plan is evaluated to ensure that the resource concerns are being met and if not, adjustments can be made.

Once a conservation plan is developed, NRCS can help determine which of the different USDA financial assistance programs is the best suited to fund conservation practices. The information that is included in the conservation plan from the NRCS consists of: aerial photos of the property; soils map and descriptions; vegetation types and growth potential; resource inventory and concerns; treatment decisions; location and schedule of planned conservation practices; plan of operation and maintenance for practices; and management practices to help maintain the land.

Reach out to your local NRCS office to request a conservation plan and begin the planning process. You can also visit the Colorado NRCS website to learn more and submit a Conservation Plan Request. The Conservation Plan Request deadline is July 23, 2021. NRCS thanks you for allowing us to help you, help the land.



Nakayla Lestina New Position

Nakayla Lestina is the new Resource Team Leader for the USDA-NRCS offices in Craig and Meeker. She has been here for about 1.5 years working with the local communities. She is originally from Dove Creek, CO down in the Southwest corner of the state. Growing up she spent a majority of her time outdoors enjoying nature with her family on camping, hiking, fishing, and skiing trips. The love for the outdoors has remained a large part of her life as she went off to college at Colorado State University (CSU) receiving a B.S. Rangeland Ecology degree. As she attended CSU, she worked with NRCS during the summer in multiple field offices across the state. After graduating, she worked in Sterling for 2½ years as the Rangeland Management Specialist. She was ready to get back to the Western Slope after spending 7½ years on the Front Range and Eastern Plains. When she found the Resource Conservationist position in Meeker, she thought it would be a great opportunity for her and she has enjoyed her time thus far. She looks forward to continuing working with the local communities in her new role.



Up And Coming!

Local Working Group Online Survey

The White River Conservation District, Douglas Creek Conservation District, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) typically conduct an annual Local Working Group (LWG) input session for land owners/managers to voice their natural resource priorities. With the everyone's busy schedules, we decided to do an online survey (link and QR Code below) rather than ask you to attend a meeting.

This is a great opportunity for you to provide input that will help guide NRCS in upcoming program planning and funding of conservation projects in Rio Blanco County. Topics include grazing lands, forestry, irrigation and soil health.

Survey link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=5zZb7e4BvE6GfuA8-g1Gl-mSdlfoJxBEo0iuha-erF5UNFpRUEgxTEI2MIZRTTBLTDBTWVhBUkpLSS4u>



Use your camera to scan me to take you to the survey!



Ag. Bike Tour

Join us on Friday August 6th (tentative) as we bike a few miles to discuss the importance of agriculture irrigation, deep percolation, the local aquifer, and municipal water. We will hear from ranchers, water managers, the Town of Meeker, and the Eastern Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation and Park District about how water is used in Rio Blanco County. Be on the lookout for more information on this event!

2021 Natural Resources Tour

The Districts are planning a Natural Resource Tour for August 26th and 27th (tentative). We anticipate working closely with the Rio Blanco County Stockgrowers and Farm Bureau, guides and outfitters, as well as the County and oil and gas industry to pull together a comprehensive agenda. We will highlight the primary economic drivers for our communities that rely on natural resources including energy, agriculture, and recreation. The focus will be on how we can make the best use of the natural resources with our current reality and discuss opportunities for the future. State and federal legislators, State and federal agencies' leadership, and other key decision makers will be invited to attend and discuss these issues with local citizens. Please stay tuned for more information as the agenda is developed! You can follow this by checking the [Districts' website](http://www.whiterivercd.com) (www. whiterivercd.com).



2016 NR Tour: DR Timothy Gates with CSU speaking on flood and sprinkler irrigation.

Douglas Creek and White River
 Conservation Districts
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 PO Box 837
 Meeker, CO 81641



<p><u>Office Hours and COVID-19 Restrictions</u></p> <p>The Conservation Districts and the NRCS Office are available for service to the landowners by appointment. Please call 970-693-3012 (NRCS) or 970-878-9838 (District) before coming to the offices. Thank you for your patience.</p>	<p>The Districts offer numerous conservation-related products for sale and rent including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock water tire tanks • Trees • No-till drill • Broadcast- seeder • PAM
<p><u>District Board Meetings</u></p> <p>Douglas Creek Conservation District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Tuesday of the Month at 6:00 pm • 2253 E. Main Street, Rangely, CO 81648 <p>White River Conservation District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Monday of the Month at 6:00 pm (summer hours) • Location TBD, Meeker, CO 81641 	<p>If you are interested in purchasing or renting, please contact the Office or visit the Sales & Rentals tab of the Districts' website.</p> <p><u>District Contact Information</u></p> <p>970-878-9838</p> <p>WhiteRiverCD@gmail.com</p> <p>www.DouglasCreekCD.org</p> <p>www.WhiteRiverCD.com</p>