

Annual Report

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT
JULY 2021 – JUNE 2022



As a local government agency, it is the mission of the Laramie Rivers Conservation District to provide leadership for the protection and enhancement of Albany County's natural resources.

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

LRCDD first applied for and received certification from the Wyoming Secretary of State in December 1945. At the time of forming the organization, the Secretary of State assigned the name, the Laramie Rivers Soil Conservation District in December 1949. However, to form the district, the Secretary of State previously added territory to outline the district boundary as early as 1941. The final addition of territory, approved by the Secretary of State, occurred in December 1954. And the current name changed to the Laramie Rivers Conservation District received approval from the Secretary of State in February 2012. However, in legal correspondence, the district used the name Laramie Rivers Conservation District as early as 1984.

The Board of Supervisors is a five (5) member elected board by the residents of Albany County. The selected members of the Board represent both rural and urban populations within the county. This is an all-volunteer board that is only reimbursed for travel expenses while engaged in the district's business. The employees are full-time specialists with responsibilities to implement the projects and programs for the district. Voters in Albany County continue to support a one (1) mil levy tax that first passed on a ballot initiative as .75 of a mil in 2004. After one-year, the Albany County Commissioners approved the full mil for the Laramie Rivers Conservation District (LRCDD).



MISSION STATEMENT

LRCDD's mission is to provide leadership for the conservation of Albany County's soil and water, promote and protect the quality of Albany County's waters, and to promote sustained use of Wyoming's water and all other natural resources, to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, protect the tax base and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of Albany County through a responsible conservation ethic.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Ruth Shepherd, Chair. Ruth is the urban representative for Albany County, first elected to the Board in 2012. Ruth's paternal grandparents and father lived in Laramie since the mid 1918's, and the Laramie valley has been Ruth's home since 1990.

Robert Shine, Vice-Chair. Bob is the representative at-large, serving on the Board since his election in 2015. Bob owns and leases a small acreage operation that is part of the Oasis Ditch irrigation district.

Carol Price, Treasurer/Secretary. Carol ranches with her family near the town of Rock River. Carol, originally appointed to fill the unexpired term of Kelly Kennedy in November 2014; ran for and took the oath of office as a Supervisor in 2015 to represent agriculture. She currently serves as the President for the Albany County Stockgrowers Association.

Larry Munn, retired UW professor of soil science. Larry and his wife reside on a small acreage parcel that supports a horse training operation near Harmony. Larry is the longest serving member of the Board appointed to replace Nancy Stanton in 2008. He is representing agriculture and has served on the Board since 2009.

Zachary Iddings is the newest member of the Board. Zach is the manager of the Monolith Ranch owned by the City of Laramie that purchased the ranch in 1981 to assure a lasting source of drinking water for the residents of Laramie. Zach was appointed to the Board to replace Mr. Orville Johnson in November 2021 and represents agricultural interests in Albany County.

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT (LRCD) STAFF

Martin Curry was historically the district's Resource Specialist for over 14 years. He was promoted to District Manager in March of 2022. Martin continues to train and teach the District's new staff as he also continues to learn his roles and responsibilities as manager.

Holly Sue Dyer is the newest member of the LRCD team! Holly serves as the district's Rangeland and Watershed Resource Specialist. Originally from Logan, Utah, Holly has lived in Laramie for the past 7 years and has a background in agricultural economics, soil health, and land management. In her spare time, she loves to take the horses out with her husband, Ben, or explore a new trail by foot, bike, or skis!

Natasha Dangler, Office Administrator, recently joined the LRCD staff in January 2022. Her background includes a BS degree in Animal Science from Purdue University. She began her career in research on gluconeogenesis studies in animal feed to determine the source of fatty liver disease in dairy cattle. Natasha worked in the pharmaceutical industry setting up trials for animal health before moving over to human oncology/cancer research. Natasha, her husband, and their children enjoy exploring new places and learning all about Albany County's history!

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) STAFF

NRCS District Conservationist, NRCS has been in transition to fill this position with full time staff. The position has been filled by several temporary staff over the interim period.

Jesus Vargas, NRCS Soil Conservationist. Originally from Puerto Rico, where both his paternal and maternal grandparents' own farms. After earning his BS in Agronomy and Environmental Science, Jesus joined the Albany County NRCS office in November 2018.

Clay Thompson, NRCS Civil Engineering Technician. Clay served with LRCD from 1991-2002 before he accepted the position with the NRCS in 2002-Present. Clay ranches west of Laramie with his family.

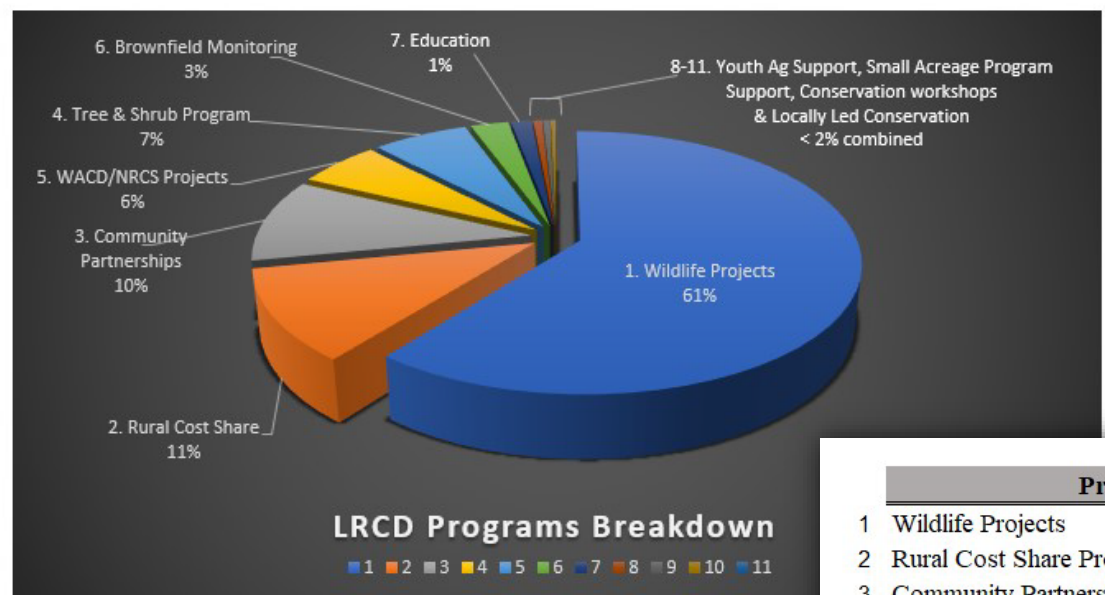


LAND USE AND BUDGET INFORMATION

Albany County’s agricultural land is a non-renewable resource that sustains many of our other natural resources and open lands. Agriculture is important to the county with the raising of livestock, primarily cattle and sheep, and haying as a way of life for generations. In the Albany County Comprehensive Plan, it was reported that 67% of the county was considered agricultural land with a total of 287 operating agricultural units. Each unit consists of an average size of 6,700 acres per operation. Approximately 95,000 acres of meadow are primarily in flood irrigation concentrated along the Big and Little Laramie Rivers, Rock Creek, and other streams in the county.

(Albany County Comprehensive Plan, June 2007)

FY 21 - 22		FY21 - 22	
INCOME		EXPENSES	
Mil Ley	\$600,682	Programs	\$221,946
Other	\$22,136	Personnel	\$220,579
Subtotal	\$622,818	General Operations	\$46,651
Grants	\$163,434	Capital Outlay	\$4,046
Total	\$786,251	Total	\$493,223



Grants	
WWDC Small Water	\$0
State Grant - WY Dept. of Ag	\$8,824
Wildlife/CRM Grants	\$138,985
WACD/NRCS Tech Funds	\$15,625
Total	\$163,434

Programs	
1 Wildlife Projects	\$134,510
2 Rural Cost Share Program	\$25,070
3 Community Partnerships	\$22,875
4 Tree & Shrub Program	\$12,607
5 WACD/NRCS Eng. Projects	\$14,605
6 N. Cedar Brownfield Monitoring	\$5,790
7 Education	\$3,170
8 Youth Ag Support	\$1,380
9 Small Acreage Program Support	\$1,100
10 Conservation Workshops	\$787
11 Locally Led Conservation	\$50
Total	\$221,946

(Approved on July 20th, 2022 by the LRCD Board of Supervisors)

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

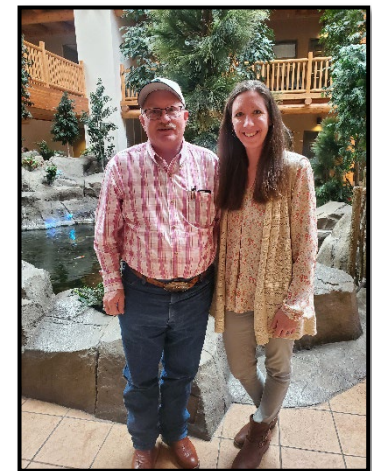
The following bulleted items highlight some of this year’s district operational tasks and meetings.



- Hosted Winter Legislative function
- Completed FY 21/22 annual audit review
- Completed WACD certification training – Cheyenne, WY
- Attended annual Local Working Group (LWG) meeting with NRCS
- Attended WACD State Convention – Cody, WY
- Completed all WDA compliance requirements
- Attended Area II meeting – Torrington, WY
- Signed WY Toad Safe Harbor agreement with USFWS
- Prepared February 2022 Newsletter
- Attended WCDEA Employee Training – Casper, WY
- Completed Water Quality Training Re-certification – Saratoga, WY
- Paid WACD and NACD dues & memberships
- Supported WACD annual fundraising
- Finalized Garfield Street property purchase
- Attended NRCS STAC meeting – Casper, WY
- Sat on the Albany County Natural Resource Planning steering committee
- Attended Sheep Mountain Mule Deer meeting and field tours with WGF
- Attended a WSGA & Young Producers ranch management workshop
- Hired 2 new full-time staff members:
 - Office Administrator and Rangeland Resource Specialist
- Updated all internal district policies and procedures
- Hosted the 2022 Conservation Expo
- Managed the LaBontè Summer Garden
- Completed 18 Albany County subdivision reviews
- Judged the 2022 Wyoming State Science Fair competition
- Attended the Wyoming Watershed Conference – Riverton, WY
- Completed the annual Toltec Dam inspection



M. Curry & N. Dangler attend WACD Winter Training and legislative functions at the Statehouse in February, 2022



M. Curry & N. Dangler attend WCDEA training in Casper, WY



M. Curry, District Manager, trains newly hired district staff.



M. Curry works to help a county resident repair their tank float.



M. Curry speaks at the WCDEA Employee training in April, 2022.



M. Curry helps host and educate public residents at a plant ID walk.

North Cedar Property – Yttrium Plant Update

The North Cedar property is the site of a Brownfield cleanup that has been historically used as a petroleum refinery, Yttrium processing plant, logging business, auto paint/body shop, and a trash disposal business. The site is ¼ mile to the east of the Laramie River. An unconfined aquifer is present at the depths of approximately 5 to 8 feet across the site. The primary contamination feature in the subsurface is a hydrocarbon smear zone ranging in thickness from 2 inches to 1 foot. The smear zone is located at the top of the unconfined aquifer. The primary direction of groundwater flow is from the southeast to the northwest across the site and in the direction of the Laramie River.

LRCO purchased the property and accepted the responsibility for voluntary remediation of the approximately 2.8-acre site. LRCO received a \$200,000 grant from the EPA, and the District contributed approximately \$20,000 in public funds toward five (5) years of monitoring obligations for this project.

- \$7,500 (2019) first year monitoring cost to close on the remediation project
- \$5,416 (2020) second year monitoring requirement for continuous tracking
- \$5,790 (2021) third year monitoring requirement for continuous tracking
- \$5,790 (2022) fourth year monitoring requirement for continuous tracking

Updated view of the current property (looking east)



Early view of the Yttrium Plant (looking north)

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

LaBontè Community Garden

LRCO employs a part-time, seasonal worker that manages the community garden plots and the kids' garden areas at Labontè Park. Traditionally the garden has yielded several pounds of vegetables each year, which has included turnips, carrots, zucchini, green beans, beets, cucumbers, peas, and radishes. The 2022 harvest went to local community members and their families. The garden also hosts a demonstration beehive for public viewing. A local volunteer beekeeper harvested 30 lbs. of honey, which filled approximately 48 ½ pint jars! The District shares these jars with local partners and cooperators throughout the year.

2022 Harvest Totals*

Squash ~30 lbs

Green beans ~8 lbs

Cucumbers ~5 lbs

Turnips ~15 lbs

*It was noted that there was hail damage to some of the crops over a period of time this season



Albany County Plant Walks

LRCO assisted other local partners including UW Extension Master Gardeners, Barnyards & Backyards, and Wyoming State Forestry to organize and host public outdoor plant walks within Albany County. This helps to encourage community residents to learn about native and invasive plant species, as well as learn more about different types of conservation techniques. This year LRCO assisted hosting

2 plant walks with a

total of **45** attendees!



Conservation Expo

LRCDD hosts a bi-annual expo that focuses on conservation in Wyoming. After a few years away from the public, the District was happy to be back in action!

See you all again in 2024!

2022 CONSERVATION EXPO

Laramie Rivers Conservation District would like to invite our community members to join us for a full day of conservation education!

Please join LRCDD Staff and the following exhibitors for this **FREE** public event!

Questions? Please email or call us! info@lrcdd.net p. 307-721-0072

WHEN:
Saturday, April 16
9AM - 4PM

WHERE:
Activity Center @
Albany Co. Fairgrounds

Oh Yes! IT'S
FREE

Laramie's own **LC Catering** will be on site for food & drink purchases.
Breakfast & Lunch options available!

This event is proudly sponsored by:



15 EXHIBITORS

100+ ATTENDEES

10 VOLUNTEERS



Educational Booths & Stream Trailer

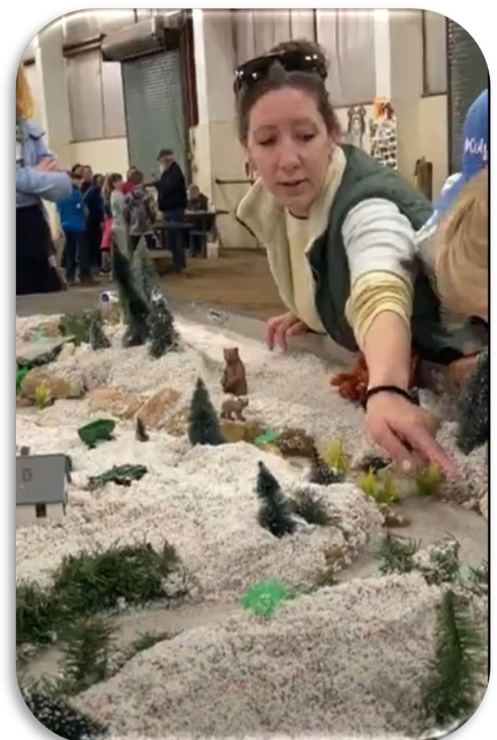
District staff participated in several educational events during the 21/22 fiscal year. Martin Curry, District Manager, and Natasha Dangler, Office Administrator, answered questions related to conservation techniques and best management practices at the local Albany County 4H Craft Bazaar.



We missed the kids! LRCD Office Administrator, Natasha Dangler, presented the District's educational Stream Trailer at the 2022 Ag Expo hosted by the Albany County Cattlewomen. Natasha was able to show how water flows through a river system in 36, twelve minute sessions over a two day period!

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*Albany County
Cattle Women*
STUDENTS IN 2 DAYS



RANGELAND RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Cost share programs

LRCO provides various types of cost share opportunities for anyone within the district seeking to improve conservation of natural resources on their land or their leased land. The District believes matching up to 50% of eligible project costs help incentivize private landowners to practice natural resource stewardship on their lands that in turn provides several public services such as providing healthier ecosystems and conserving natural resources for future use.

The District’s largest cost share program available for the public is the Rural Cost Share Program. This program specifically seeks to improve wildlife habitat, water quality, rangeland health, or reduce noxious weeds within the district. Specific examples of past projects that have received cost share funding from LRCO include:

- Cross fencing for rotational grazing;
- Fencing in sensitive habitats such as riparian areas to reduce livestock impacts;
- Upland water development to improve grazing pressure and distribution; and
- Developing Spring water to enhance wildlife and/or improve livestock distribution.

In FY 21/22, LRCO approved rural cost-share funding for six (6) livestock watering projects and an additional wildlife friendly fencing project. Below is a breakdown of the funding by project type.

PROJECT TYPE	NUMBER OF PROJECTS	TOTAL COSTS	TOTAL COST SHARE FUNDING PROVIDED	BENEFITS
LIVESTOCK WATERING	6	\$67,763	\$24,185	Improved grazing distribution for rangeland management
WILDLIFE FENCING	1	\$2,475	\$1,373	Replaced ~1/4mi fence with wildlife friendly design



Rangeland Monitoring and Grazing Plans

One service LRCD provides is to assist in long-term rangeland monitoring for local producers. Monitoring rangeland conditions is a critical component to understanding rangeland productivity and responses to climate or grazing conditions. Monitoring involves identifying and quantifying the existing plant communities in the same location at the same time of year, year after year. The data often reveals how management of the land is (or is not) driving plant communities to transition towards different productive states. LRCD assists producers with their rangeland monitoring upon request to help the producers better understand the impacts from their agricultural management strategies on rangeland condition. Overall, monitoring helps inform landowners and producers how best to manage their livestock in synergy with the natural rangeland ecosystem.

Currently, LRCD has **14 different sites** on **6 different ranches** throughout Albany County where they annually monitor rangeland conditions. In FY 21/22, LRCD added one additional site to the monitoring list, making it a total of **15 different locations**. The new transect location was determined in cooperation with USFS on one of their upland grazing allotments. This additional site should help the allotment user better understand how much of the forage is being utilized by their herd in the higher upland region, less easily accessible to the cattle. Understanding utilization rates better informs the producer on their herd stocking rates and grazing durations for various pastures included in their agricultural operation.

In addition to rangeland monitoring, LRCD staff provide grazing plans upon request. In FY 21/22, LRCD compiled 3 new grazing plans for various producers. This is a service LRCD provides, often in conjunction with the local Natural Resource Conservation Service office staff, to help promote responsible grazing strategies.



One of the producers who received a grazing plan intends to acquire a small herd of bison on their land. LRCD assisted in providing pasture design and stocking rates for their property – encouraging a rotational grazing strategy to help promote plant rest and regeneration over time. The other two grazing plans were provided to a small cattle producer on their leased pasture and to a landowner wanting to prevent overgrazing from their horses. Overall, the additional grazing plans distributed this fiscal year should help promote responsible grazing management for approximately 440 acres.

LAND USE PLANNING

County Notices

During FY21/22, LRCD reviewed a total of

eight (8) subdivision applications,
seven (7) proposed land use changes,
and **three (3)** conditional use permit requests.



Many of the subdivision requests had corresponding Conditional Use Permits (CUP) or Land Use Change (LUC) requests to align with the County's planning regulations. These requests predominantly asked for division of a single property into one or two smaller parcels within or adjacent to an existing subdivision. Currently, LRCD staff and the Board support infilling properties within existing subdivisions. There were no county notices that LRCD found concerning upon review.

LRCD also provides Albany County with technical support and educational information. The District addresses natural resource concerns when submitting review comments to Albany County notices by using Small Acreage Outreach resources including Barnyards & Backyards publications; Albany County Weed & Pest plant lists of concern, and other LRCD technical resources.

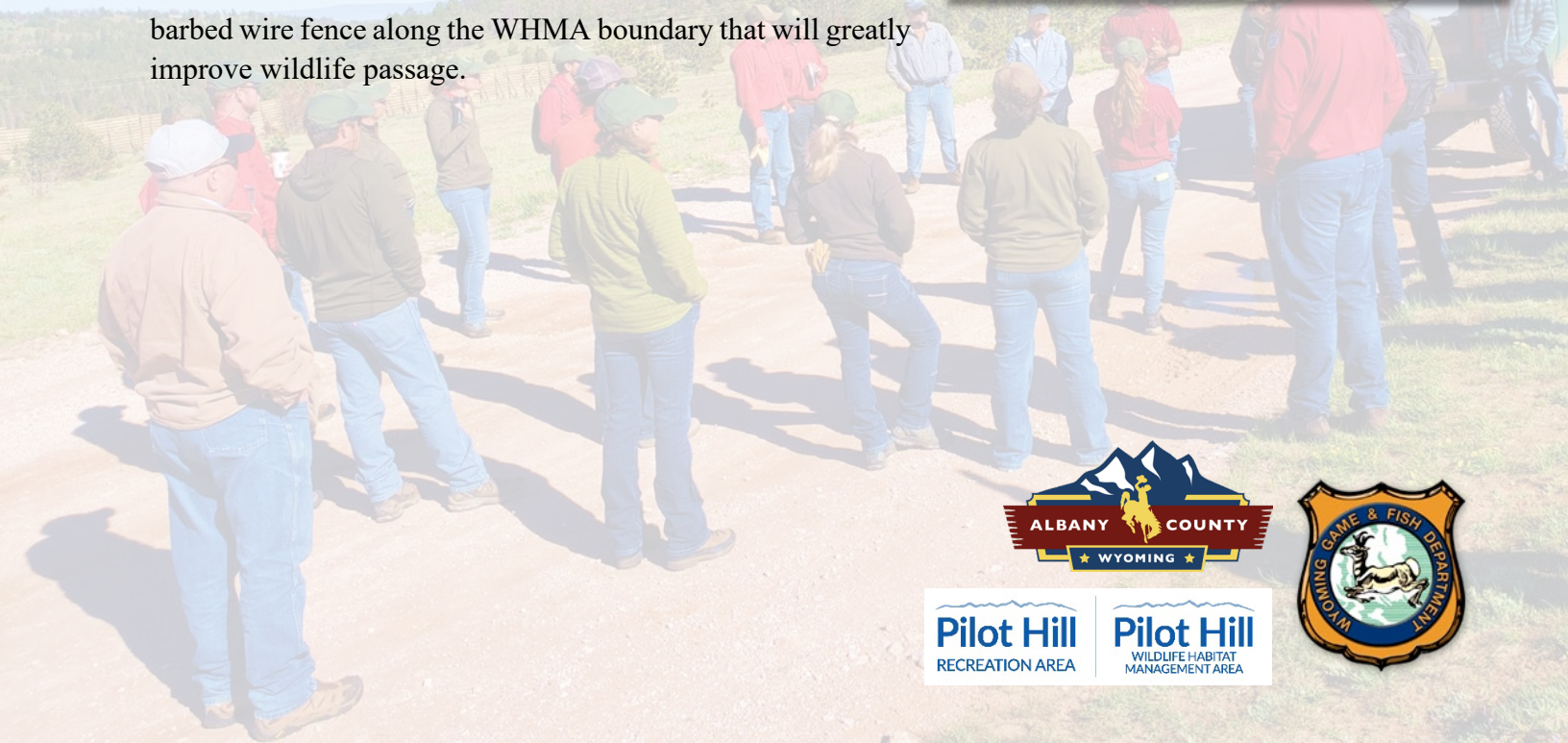


Pilot Hill Work Day

LRCO is a charter member of the Pilot Hill recreation site east of Laramie. In this capacity, the District contributes annually to projects most closely related to the District's mission.

This year LRCO contributed **\$5,000** toward aquifer protection and the Wildlife Habitat Management Area in partnership with the WGFD and Albany County Commissioners.

This year, LRCO Staff participated in a combined effort to remove a total of **2.60 miles** of three and four strand barbed wire fence along the WHMA boundary that will greatly improve wildlife passage.



WATER RESOURCES

Wyoming Watershed Conference update

All LRCD staff attended the 2022 Watershed Conference in June. The conference brought together statewide conservation district offices, water professionals, scientists, and engineers to discuss Wyoming's water quality and quantity issues.



The Watershed Conference hosted in the surrounding Riverton, WY area included a handful of tours and endless discussion with various stakeholders. One main topic was that of Harmful Cyanobacteria Blooms (HCBs) and their prevalence across Wyoming. While HCBs are a natural phenomena, recreationists, producers, and water managers are trying to better understand these blooms as they can have a direct negative impact on recreation, tourism, and drinking water.

The afternoon tour included a site visit to the Bull Lake Dam to witness and discuss the rehabilitation of this structure. Overall, the Bull Creek Reservoir is the first and biggest structure located at the beginning of the Midvale Irrigation District's water source for downstream irrigators. Touring the irrigation district's office and various diversion structures throughout their area helped provide LRCD staff with perspective on the levels of maintenance and funding sources various irrigation structures may need over time.

Irrigation – Restoration projects

LRCO received funding from the **Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resources Trust Fund** in June, 2020. **\$30,000** is targeted to rehab two (2) of five (5) irrigation diversions located on the South Fork of the Little Medicine Bow River in core sage grouse brood-rearing habitat. **\$45,000** is dedicated to the remaining three (3) diversions. A contractor was selected in October 2021 and work began in mid-January, 2022. The main priority for this project was to reestablish wet meadow habitat for brood rearing sage grouse. This project is expected to be completed in the early fall of 2022.



Ongoing Water Quality Improvement Efforts

LRCO also received approval from WY Department of Environmental Quality and Environmental Protection Agency's 205(j) funding for a local study. While the grant has been approved, paperwork is still pending. The grant awarded to LRCO was for **\$40,000** to study the best method to release all the sediment stored behind the current Oasis Ditch Diversion.

Water quality monitoring is a LRCO responsibility that they regularly conduct each year. However, due to both the Big Laramie and Little Laramie Rivers being listed as impaired waterbodies for exceeding the Environmental Protection Agency's maximum E.coli levels in 2018, LRCO did not conduct additional water quality monitoring in FY 21/22. The decision to not continue water monitoring was made due to LRCO being short staffed and due to the fact that there were no significant management changes made within the watershed that may indicate the E.coli levels decreased.

As a response to having impaired waterbodies, LRCO intends to begin drafting a base plan in the upcoming fiscal year outlining how the district intends to decrease E.coli levels in the Big and Little Laramie Rivers. Additionally, two LRCO staff members, Martin Curry and Robert Stine, successfully completed their recertification of their water quality monitoring training in FY 21/22.

FORESTRY & WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Mule Creek RMJ thinning

LRCO worked closely with the WGFD to manage **\$220,000** in pass through funding over a two-year treatment period to thin Rocky Mountain Juniper (RMJ) encroachment on the Mule Creek Ranch in northern Albany County. This project focused on habitat improvement for elk and mule deer on the Laramie range.

Thinning out RMJ populations can drastically improve the diversity and growth of other native species by releasing additional water resources in the area. Removing juniper will help to encourage aspen regeneration, making the habitat more desirable for wildlife like elk and muledeer. This conservation practice can also potentially mitigate future wildfires once mature aspen growth occurs.



Rocky Mountain Juniper growing in an open area.



LRCO TREE PROGRAM

The Laramie Rivers Conservation District Tree Program enables farmers, ranchers and other landowners to obtain trees at nominal cost. The purpose of the program is to encourage landowners to plant effective wind barriers to protect buildings, feedlots and cropland as well as additional uses for erosion control and other conservation and reforestation practices.



District staff set up, organize, and prepare the barn space for the sale.



District Manager, Martin Curry, gives instructions to a UW Conservation Corps student volunteer.



Due to the recent wildfires across the western region, our local tree suppliers were not able to meet all of the demands for evergreens from conservation districts across Wyoming. LRCO experienced difficulty in acquiring a higher number of evergreens than we originally anticipated. However, this season's sale still featured a popular variety of hearty, draught tolerant trees and shrubs including Caragana, Rocky Mountain Juniper, Colorado Blue Spruce, wild rose and native plum.

The District also offers a variety of tree survival aids (TSAs) to the public. TSAs can be beneficial when planting new seedlings in this harsh, arid, county. TSAs include fertilizer, Transfilm, tree-tubes, weed barrier, and hydro-source.

Natasha Dangler, LRCO Office Administrator, and a public volunteer, Sandra Frost, work to arrange preorders before the tree sale.

Living Snow Fence Cost Share Program

District services include technical assistance and expertise on deciding when and where living snow fences are most effective. The Living Snow Fence (LSF) Cost Share Program promotes planting living snow fences and windbreaks as conservation tools. LRCO provides planning, supplies and labor for the planting of board-approved living snow fences and windbreaks within Albany County.



This year, LRCO District Staff and their families successfully planted six (6) living snow fences with a total of **408** trees and shrubs!



LRCO also knows when trees just won't grow! LRCO developed a ranking sheet to help identify the benefits of planting a living snow fences. Properties are ranked according to the project's ability to address a natural resource concern and if there is more than one public benefit. Our resource specialist can also help to determine what obstacles and challenges may lie in the future when it comes to planting and growing trees in Albany County.

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS & PARTNERSHIPS

Laramie Rivers Conservation District works with the following agencies and organizations to serve their goals and objectives and to help protect and enhance the natural resources for the benefit of the residents of Albany County.

Albany County Stockgrowers and CattleWomen's Associations
Albany County Fair Board/Fairgrounds
Albany County Government
Albany County Weed and Pest
City of Laramie – Natural Resource Planning Committee
Conservation Corps – UW Student Group
Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR)
Laramie County Conservation District (LCCD)
Laramie Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC),
(representing FEMA and Homeland Security)
Medicine Bow Conservation District
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Pilot Hill Wildlife Habitat Management Unit
Private Individuals and Landowners
Rooted in Laramie
Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District (SER)
Society for Range Management (SRM)
The Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
US Forest Service – Cooperating Agency LaVA
US Fish and Wildlife Service – Safe Harbor Agreement
University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service –
Small Acres/Barnyards and Backyards
Wyoming State Forestry
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD)
Wyoming Conservation District Employees Association (WCDEA)
Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA)
Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT)
Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD)
WYRED
Snowy Range Recreation Area
4 Rivers Equipment - Laramie
West Laramie Fly Store
Laramie's Basecamp

LRCDD would sincerely like to thank all of our partners past and present.

We could not accomplish all that we do in Albany County without their continued partnerships and support!

~Thank you!



2022 LRC Board of Supervisors:

Left to Right: Carol Price, Secretary/ Treasurer;
Bob Shine, Vice-Chair;
(back) Larry Munn, Supervisor
(front) Ruth Shepherd, Board Chair; Zach Iddings, Supervisor



2022 LRC Staff:

Martin Curry, District Manager
Holly Dyer, Resource & Watershed Specialist
Nataша Dangler, Office Administrator



Laramie Rivers Conservation District

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