



LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

ANNUAL REPORT FY2019/20



When conservation districts began after the Dust Bowl in the 1940s, 44% of the US population lived in areas with populations under 2500 people and farms comprised 22% of the population (including ranches, orchards, greenhouses). The Dust Bowl resulted from misguided agricultural practices, and the federal government responded by creating the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and encouraged states to create local conservation districts to connect rural communities with federal government conservation programs.

Now, rural America is 17% of the US population and of that, just 1.1% of the population are farmers [US

Census Bureau]. Farmland has decreased some, from 1 billion acres in 1950 to 950 million (or .95 billion) acres today. The most significant changes have occurred with the loss of prime ag lands to subdivisions and the consolidation of farms from six million in 1940 to 2 million today.

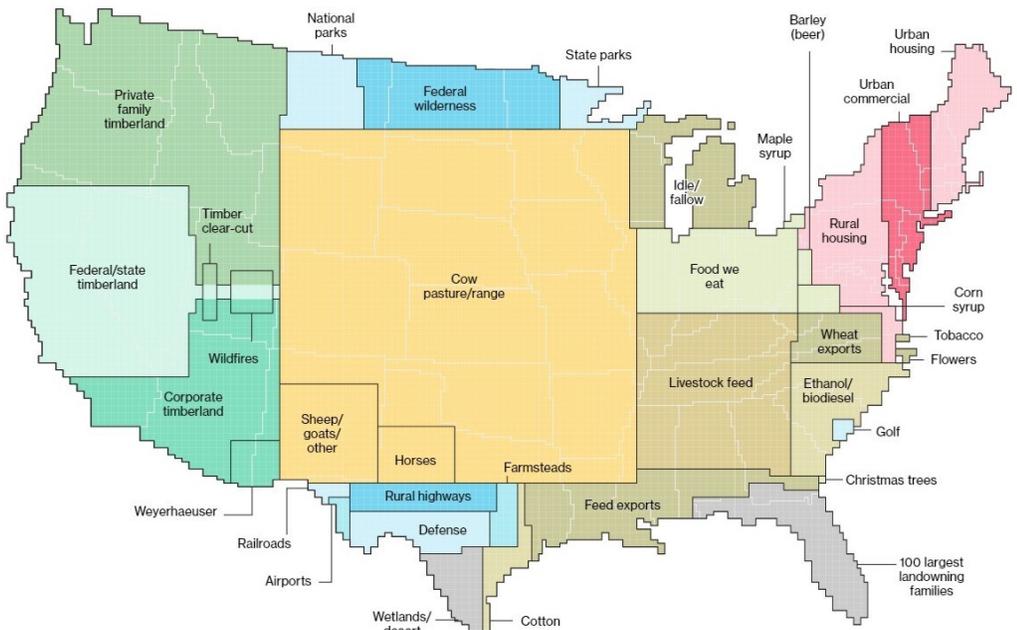
Conservation Districts continue working with ag producers since ag lands (including grazing land) account for around 50% of US lands. The impact that crop and meat agriculture have on the land is substantial due to the amount of land it involves. With ownership and stewardship (of leased grazing land) in the hands of 1% of the population, NRCS and Conservation District programs work with individual landowners on projects that mitigate or repair damage to the environment.

Beyond agriculture, the natural resources that contribute to our energy sector have significant impacts on the environment. The extraction, refinement, and transportation of natural gas and petroleum and the creation of electricity contribute to various air, water, and soil pollution levels. These natural resources are essential, but the industry is tarnished by a history that neglected the remediation of harmful byproducts. In many areas of the country, Conservation Districts play an important role in working with industries to mitigate environmental impacts. They also coordinate with federal, state, and local governments cleaning up former industrial sites.

Over the past decade, Conservation Districts have found themselves increasingly tasked with addressing urban areas' impact on the environment. With urban America now consisting of over 83% of the population, conservation districts have expanded their expertise to reach beyond the farming and energy industry populace and have created programs addressing the unique natural resource issues found in urban areas.

The Laramie Rivers Conservation District has its roots firmly in the ranching agriculture of Albany County but has recognized the need for additional areas of attention and has grown with the need. In August of 2019, a survey of rural and urban residents in Albany County provided a picture of what issues are important and where they would like to see LRCD direct cost-sharing funds directed. The top rural cost-share categories are **aquifer & water supply protection, invasive species management, wildlife habitat enhancement, and streambank restoration**. The top regular cost share issues are **protecting wildlife habitat, ecoscaping or xeriscaping yards, installing living snow fences, conservation education for all ages, and community beautification/improvement**.

In 2019 -2020, LRCD worked on many projects that addressed and funded these issues of importance to Albany County residents. For this report, each staff member picked a project they thought highlighted their year and addressed key conservation concerns.



Map Source: Bloomberg News - Here's How America Uses Its Land/Dave Merrill and Lauren Leatherby/July 31, 2018

Jelm Area Laramie River Streambank Restoration - by Tony Hoch

This project is exemplary for what conservation districts do best – bring together partners. In 2017 The Laramie River above Jelm saw an oxbow breached on private land that included a Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) for fishing access. The oxbow breach resulted in the potential drying out of a cottonwood gallery that contained an eagle’s nest and many other wildlife values, as well as the drying out of irrigated hay meadows for the small private livestock producer.

The private producer signed up with NRCS for an EQIP contract to address erosion concerns at the river breach, and to enhance the abandoned oxbow for pond and wetland values. LRCD Sponsored a Wyoming Water Development Commission Small-Water Development grant to refurbish a derelict headgate and bring an abandoned ditch system back online for the hay meadows, and LRCD sponsored a Wyoming Natural Resource Trust grant to fill in with streambank restoration between the headgate and the oxbow breach. The WGFD also chipped in for fish habitat improvements in the project area.

This project crosses private land and public land with public access, addresses concerns related to erosion, agriculture, fisheries, terrestrial wildlife, as well as birds. It is a collaboration between private landowners, local state and federal agencies, with clear public benefits. There were some delays related to the Mullen Fire, but we fully expect to see this project completed and functioning in summer of 2021.



Completed toe wood and bank revegetation in a segment of the Laramie River above Jelm, August, 2020

Small Water Development Grant Project - by Martin Curry

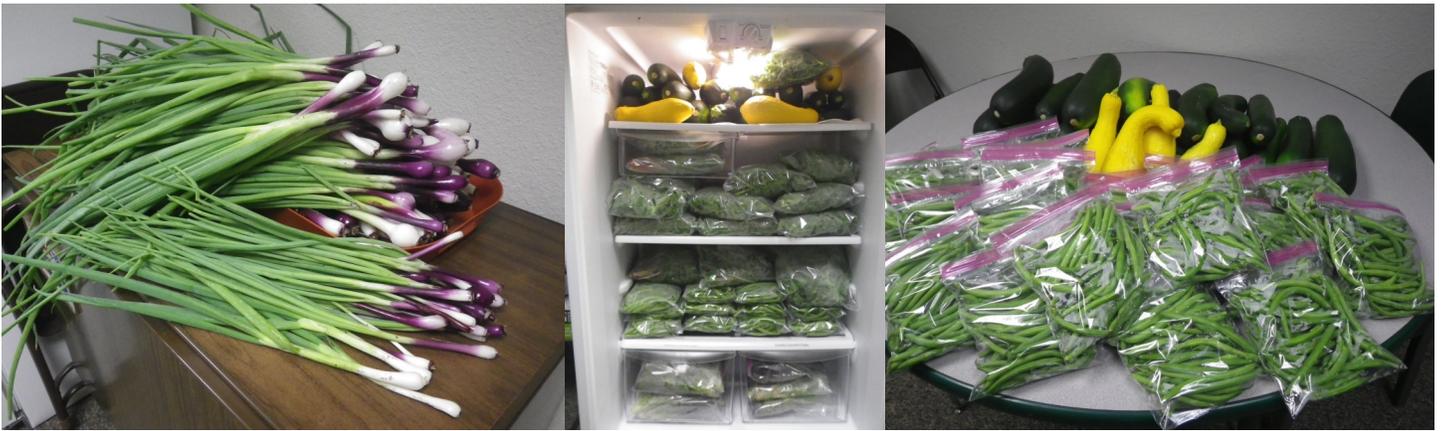
Partnership: NRCS, Wyoming Water Development Office (State), LRCD and landowner

Development of livestock watering locations is a Best Management Practice. Have improved watering locations allows the manager/owner to better manage the grazing that occur on the range/pasture.

In this case, livestock were watering out of Sand Creek. The development of two new upland year-round watering locations allows the producer to feed/calf their livestock off of the riparian area. This is important for riparian health, water quality and livestock health for example calves falling in the creek, cows slipping on the ice, et



This project resulted from the LRCD 2016 Upper Laramie Watershed Study and was funded in part by the Wyoming Water Development Office “The purpose of the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) Small Water Project Program (SWPP) is to participate with land management agencies and sponsoring entities in providing incentives for improving watershed condition and function. Projects eligible for SWPP grant funding assistance include the construction or rehabilitation of the following: Small Reservoirs, Wells, Solar Platforms, Pipelines and Conveyance Facilities, Springs, Wetland Developments, Environmental Projects, Irrigation Works, Windmills, Rural Community Fire Suppression Systems, Recreational Projects. Activities should improve watershed condition and function and provide benefit for wildlife, livestock and the environment. Projects may provide improved water quality, riparian habitat, habitat for fish and wildlife and address environmental concerns by providing water supplies to support plant and animal species or serve to improve natural resource conditions”



The Giving Garden - by Trish Penny

Seven school gardens and five greenhouses prepped and ready for planting, and then COVID-19 hit, canceling all of the student gardening programs for the season. It seemed a shame not to put those gardens to good use. Being aware that many of the student population and their families had been laid off or working only part-time and were struggling to make ends meet. At about the same time, First Lady Jennie Gordan introduced the Wyoming Hunger Initiative aimed at creating a united effort against food insecurity across the state. This was perfect timing for putting those gardens to good use. Albany County School District 1 and Laramie Rivers Conservation District joined forces and placed all the school gardens and greenhouses into vegetable production. Laramie Garden Club donated transplants, and Laramie Local Foods provided some other seeds that we lacked because of the nation's seed shortage. We planted, harvested, cleaned, and packaged vegetables distributed at various summer lunch sites across the district. There were no restrictions placed on who was eligible for the produce; it was open to the entire community. We even had a few people that would come by the gardens to collect produce that was ready to harvest in between distribution times. Having grown up on a farm, I have to admit that it is easier to grow several acres compared to several small school gardens. We had to be cautious because any failure could significantly affect the amount of produce we could provide. The produce distribution project was brimming in generosity, compassion, and thankfulness.

- ◆ 218 pounds of carrots
- ◆ 101 pound of green beans
- ◆ 14 pounds of tri-colored beans
- ◆ 56 pounds of red beets
- ◆ 7 pounds of radish
- ◆ 47 pounds of cucumbers
- ◆ 29 pounds of purple onions
- ◆ 117 pounds of while onions
- ◆ 19.5 pounds of turnips
- ◆ 5 pounds of tomatoes
- ◆ 83 bags of green leaf lettuce
- ◆ 20 bags of Swiss Chard
- ◆ 28 bags of kale
- ◆ 12 bags of collard greens
- ◆ 12 bags of turnip greens
- ◆ 6 bags of beet greens
- ◆ 23 bags of spinach



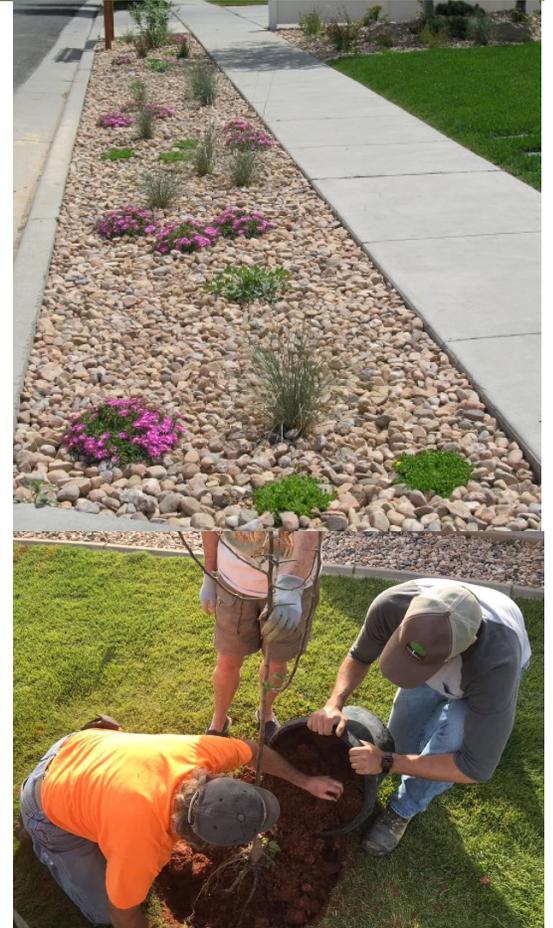
Focusing on Urban Conservation – by Laura McGinley

Urban Conservation addresses the unique natural resource issues within city environments while managing natural resources and systems to benefit people and nature. Clean water, protection from flooding, healthy air, interactions with plants and wildlife contribute to human health and well-being. For many, the most direct way they can care for the environment is caring for their yards. Conservation goes hand-in-hand with good yard design and maintenance practices. But landscapes are not a one-size-fits-all matter, and every property is different because of environmental reasons. Location, soil type, sun and wind exposure, and previous condition of the landscape all affect design choices. Personal factors like how the land is going to be used, how much time a person has to work on it, and how experienced they are also important considerations.



A effective property plan should:

- ☼ Manage stormwater runoff to control erosion, prevent pollutants from hardscapes from entering the watershed, and reduce storm drains' flooding.
- ☼ Address site-specific problems such as poor soils, especially windy or shady, weed infested, steep slopes, etc.
- ☼ Provide shade of structures in the summer to increase cooling and decrease cooling costs and resource use.
- ☼ Improve soil health.
- ☼ Manage invasive plants and pests.
- ☼ Provide wind, sound, sight, and barriers.
- ☼ Provide wildlife habitat for all species of urban creatures.
- ☼ Save water through efficient irrigation and rain harvesting and assist in recharging groundwater
- ☼ Increase biodiversity and establish a healthier ecosystem that is less susceptible to devastating infestations and diseases.
- ☼ Maximize vegetation and contribute to the community canopy/ urban forest to reduce carbon, clean air pollution, and cool the environment.
- ☼ Utilize plants and grasses with attention to appropriate variety selection and proper maintenance techniques.



There are different terms used for environmentally friendly design such as xeriscaping, ecoscaping, water-wise, or smart-scapes. However, they all integrate landscape architecture methods with environmental science to create landscapes that are as beneficial as they are beautiful.

I have spent the better part of the past two years learning the best practices for designing landscapes in our high plains climate to help residents with their properties. Elements like permeable surfaces, utilization of good mulch choices and groundcover plants, appropriate plant/shrub/tree/grass selection, integration of hardscapes that direct stormwater, weed eradication and control, and other planning techniques are all instrumental. When assisting residents with design plans, plant selection, and funding through our cost-share program, I enjoy helping Laramie residents with being good neighbors and good stewards of the land.



FY 19-20 INCOME

Mill Levy	\$557,921
Other	\$24,800
SUBTOTAL	\$582,721
Grants	\$395,123
TOTAL	\$977,844

GRANTS	
Wildlife/CRM	\$343,750
WWDC Small Water Projects	\$30,000
WACD/NRCS Engineering funds	\$10,000
WY Dept. of Ag	\$8,823
WACD Water Quality grant	\$2,550
TOTAL	\$395,123

FY19-20 EXPENSES

Personnel	\$346,316
General Operation	\$57,750
Capital Outlay	\$247,545
Programs	\$294,110
TOTAL	\$945,721

Personnel	
Payroll	\$239,552
Indirect payroll costs	\$86,264
Contract Services	\$11,000
Board Expense	\$9,500
TOTAL	\$346,316

General Operations	
Office Supplies & Equipment	\$36,250
Vehicles & Travel	\$6,500
Insurance	\$8,000
PT Summer Staff	\$7,000
TOTAL	\$57,750

Capital Outlay	
Farm & Field Equipment	\$2,000
Office Computers	\$1,500
New Building Fund	\$290,610
TOTAL	\$294,110

Programs	
Education	\$14,000
Community Gardens	\$4,000
Tree Program	\$15,500
Regular Cost Share	\$16,000
Rural Cost Share	\$45,000
Locally Led Conservation	\$10,000
Range Judging	\$750
Youth Ag Support	\$2,000
Small Acreage Program Support	\$1,100
State Science Fair	\$500
Ag Expo	\$700
Conservation Workshops	\$1,000
WACD/NRCS Engineering projects	\$19,500
N. Cedar Brownfield Monitoring	\$7,495
Wildlife projects	\$110,000
TOTAL	\$247,545



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Larry Munn - Rural/12 yrs. • Bob Shine - At-Large/6 yrs. • Orville Johnson - Rural/2 yrs.
Ruth Shepherd - Urban/8 yrs. • Carol Price - Rural/6 yrs.

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

5015 Stone Rd. Laramie WY 82070

STAFF

Tony Hoch - Director/18yrs. • Trish Penny - Education Coordinator/17 yrs.
Martin Curry - Resource Specialist/14 yrs. • Laura McGinley - District Clerk/9 yrs.

