

ANNUAL REPORT



LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2023/2024



ALBANY COUNTY LAND USE & BUDGET

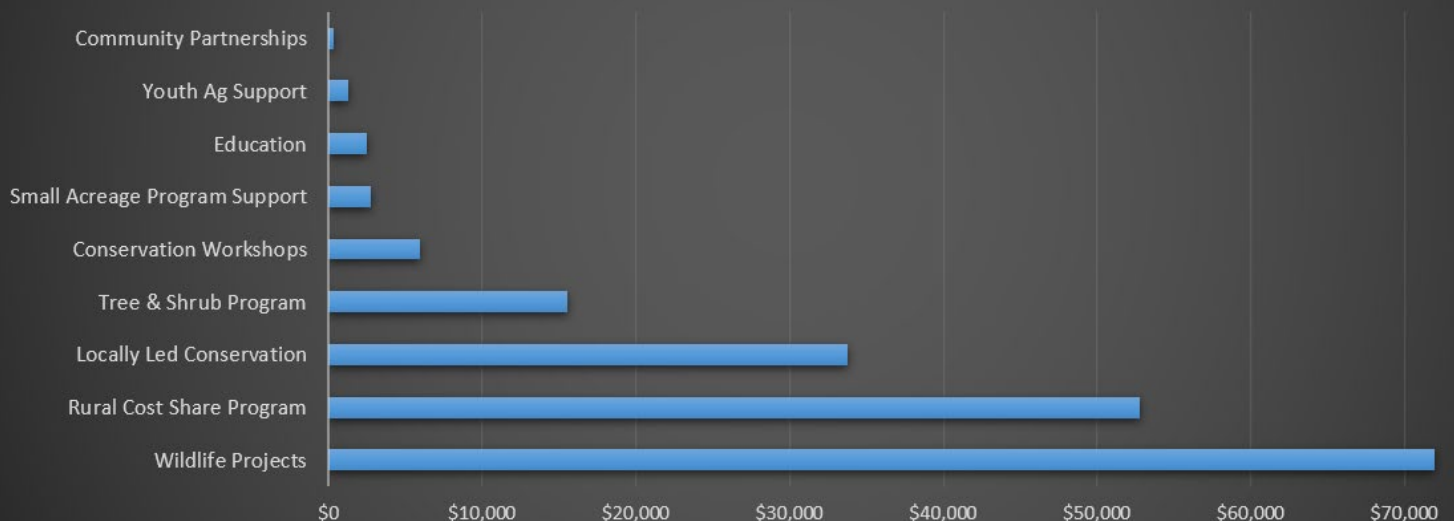
According to the *Albany County Comprehensive Plan* from 2007, Albany County’s agricultural land is a renewable resource that sustains many of our other natural resources and open lands. Agriculture is important to the county with the raising of livestock, primarily cattle and sheep, and haying as a 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.

Voters in Albany County continue to support a one (1) mil levy tax that first passed on a ballot initiative as 0.75 of a mil in 2004. After one-year, the Albany County Commissioners approved the full mil for the Laramie Rivers Conservation District (LRCD) in 2005.

FY23/24	REVENUE	FY23/24	EXPENSES
MIL LEVY	\$746,043	PERSONNEL	\$303,552
GRANTS	\$60,640	PROGRAMS	\$186,876
OTHER	\$42,675	OPERATIONS	\$56,820
TOTAL	\$849,358	TOTAL	\$547,249

(Approved on June 13th, 2024, by the LRCD Board of Supervisors)

FY23/24 PROGRAM ALLOCATIONS



LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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.

1945

LRCO 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, Laramie Rivers Soil Conservation District.

1954

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.

2012

The original name was changed to Laramie Rivers Conservation District after approval from the Secretary of State in February 2012.

Legal correspondence depicts that the district used the name Laramie Rivers Conservation District, LRCO, as early as 1984.

2020

LRCO celebrated 75 years in the business of promoting the health and wellness of Albany County's most precious natural resources.



MISSION STATEMENT

LRCO'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.

LRCO - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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.

Amanda Marney

BOARD CHAIR

Mandy, our at-large representative, currently serves as the Associate Dean and Director of the University of Wyoming Extension. She is passionate about empowering landowners to be good stewards of natural resources. LRCO is an excellent resource to make this happen. Mandy believes in the mission of LRCO to provide leadership for the conservation of Albany County's soil and water and all other natural resources.

Ruth Shepherd

VICE-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 early 1900's, and the Laramie valley has been Ruth's home since 1990.

Carol Price

SECRETARY/TREASURER

Carol, a rural supervisor, 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.

Larry Munn

SUPERVISOR

Larry is a retired UW professor of soil science and another rural supervisor. 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.

Zach Iddings

SUPERVISOR

Zach, rural supervisor, is the manager of a large Wyoming based agricultural operation with involvement in all aspects of beef production. He manages a number of ranches across the region including the Monolith Ranch owned by the City of Laramie and X Bar Ranch owned by WY Office of State Lands. Zach represents agricultural interests in Albany County and enjoys furthering conservation of Wyoming's natural resources.

LRCO – DISTRICT STAFF

LRCO employees are full-time specialists with responsibilities to implement the projects and programs for the district.

Martin Curry

DISTRICT MANAGER

District Manager, Martin Curry, previously served as the Resource Specialist with LRCO for over 14 years. Martin was born in Laramie and raised on ranches in Carbon and Albany County and graduated from Medicine Bow High School. Martin is a 6-year Navy veteran with a Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management degree from the University of Wyoming. Martin resides in Laramie with his wife and two grown daughters.

Holly Dyer

RANGELAND & WATERSHED
RESOURCE SPECIALIST

Holly began as the District's Rangeland and Watershed Resource Specialist in June 2022. Originally from Logan, UT, she moved to Laramie in 2015 to receive her M.S. Degree in agricultural economics from UW. Holly has a background in soil health economics, sage grouse policy, state trust land management, and farming and ranching. As the Resource Specialist, Holly enjoys working directly with all landowners to help them tackle any natural resource conservation project – big or small.

Natasha Dangler

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Tosha joined the LRCO staff in January, 2022. Her background includes a bachelor's degree in animal science from Purdue University. Natasha and her family enjoy exploring new places and learning all about Albany County's history!



NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) - STAFF

LRCD currently resides in the USDA Field Office building in Laramie, Wyoming.

The District partners with several local agencies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to accomplish natural resource goals and meet the needs of landowners and stewards within Albany County.



Chris Bovè

DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST

Chris is the Albany County District Conservationist for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Laramie Field Office. He began his career with NRCS in 2003 as a soil conservationist in Zillah, Washington, and for the past 20 years he has worked with ranchers, farmers, and foresters in Washington, Colorado, Wyoming, Arkansas, and North Carolina. Chris loves managing natural resources and tracking the results of quality management over time.

Jesús Lopez

SOIL CONSERVATIONIST

Jesús is the soil conservationist in Laramie, Wyoming and has been in that role since November 2018. He started his career in the summer of 2016 as a pathway's student. Jesús has worked with NRCS during his 8 years tenure in Powell, Wyoming (2016), Mayaguez, Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Area (2017-2018) and Sheridan, Wyoming (2018). Jesús is a native from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico where he completed his high school diploma. He received a bachelor's degree in agronomy at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus with a minor in soils.

Clay Thompson

CIVIL ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN

Clay previously worked at LRCD from 1991-2002 and then started with NRCS in 2002. He retired from NRCS in 2023 and now works part-time as an ACES civil engineering technician through the NRCS. Clay ranches west of Laramie with his family.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

LRCO has a range of goals that the District aims to accomplish each fiscal year by promoting healthy natural resource management through community outreach programs, education and other resources.

All District staff actively serve on committees, boards, and other public working groups to ensure that we stay updated on the most current natural resource concerns in our county.



The District also serves as a cooperating agency with several other local, state, and federal partners to collaborate on a variety of natural resource concerns.

LRCO has a steady focus on the needs of landowners and the natural resources within Albany County. We work to provide accessible natural resource education and technical assistance to all land stewards.

LRCO strives to promote and instill quality, best management practices that benefit and sustain our natural resources through grants, cost-share funding, and education.



PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

The District provides various types of cost share opportunities for anyone within Albany County seeking to improve conservation of natural resources on their land or their leased land. The three cost share programs provided to our landowners are: the Rural Cost Share, Soil or Water Analysis Cost Share, and the Living Snow Fence Cost Share Program. In each of these programs, LRCD matches 50% of eligible project costs, not exceeding specific program limits, to help encourage private landowners to practice natural resource stewardship. Often, these practices serve several public benefits such as promoting healthier ecosystems, air/water quality, and the conservation of energy or other natural resources for future use.

Rural Cost Share Program

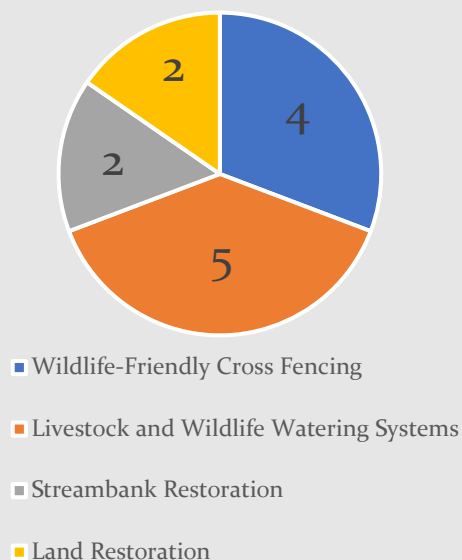
The District's largest cost share program is the Rural Cost Share Program. This program specifically seeks to improve wildlife habitat, water quality, rangeland health, or reduce noxious weeds within the district. Specific examples of past projects that have received cost share funding from the District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

- Cross fencing for rotational stocking and grazing management;
- Perimeter fencing to protect sensitive habitats including riparian areas or wetlands;
- Upland water development to distribute stocking rates more evenly across landscapes; and
- Developing spring water to enhance wildlife habitat and/or improve livestock distribution.

In FY23/24, the District increased their Rural Cost Share budget line item 22% from \$67,500 to \$82,500, to help meet increasing demand for this program. All but 3% of the budgeted funds were encumbered to various cost share projects, proving another successful year of promoting conservation of natural resources in the rural community.

To receive approval from the District's Board of Supervisors for District funding, all projects must benefit the public in some way. Livestock watering and cross fencing projects improve livestock grazing distribution across rangelands -- enhancing rangeland health and wildlife habitat. Streambank restoration projects have a direct impact to enhancing fish and other wildlife habitat, minimize streambank erosion, and improve water quality, while land restoration projects this past year included reseeding critically disturbed lands and fencing out sensitive wetland areas. These restoration projects helped reduce soil erosion, enhanced soil health and wildlife habitat, and helped prevent noxious weeds from spreading. In FY23/24, the 13 projects directly benefitted a total of 16,842 acres, converted 5.2 miles of fence to wildlife-friendly standards, and restored 1.2 miles of streambank.

Types of Rural Cost Share Projects Funded (FY23/24)





PROJECTS

13

16,842

TOTAL ACRES
BENEFITED IN
ALBANY COUNTY

5.2

MILES OF FENCING
CONVERTED TO
WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY
STANDARDS

1.2

MILES OF
STREAMBANK
REHABILITATED
& RESTORED

Living Snow Fence Cost Share Program

Each year, District staff works with landowners who are interested in participating in the Living Snow Fence Program. This program is designed to assist landowners (owning at least 5 acres) with the design and installation of living snow fences to protect homes, corrals, or roadways. If approved, the District will also issue a reimbursement of up to 50% (capped at \$1,000) once completed. This program is one of the most popular services offered by the District; however, due to limited staffing, the District can only install up to 8 projects each year and often has a waiting list for this program!

This season, District Staff and volunteers successfully planted **8** living snow fences with a total of **875** trees and shrubs!



Analysis Cost Share Program

LRCO also has funding available for soil, forage/feedstuff, and rural water well analyses for Albany County residents. This program provides an incentive for residents to understand their local natural resources by cost sharing on expenses for analysis at professional laboratories. In FY23/24, the District funded two analyses: one for hay quality and the other for soil testing.



Community Enhancement Grant Program

In 2022, LRCO implemented a brand-new community grant program! The Community Enhancement Grant was initiated to help alleviate the costs for beautification projects within Albany County.

LRCO hopes to promote projects that benefit both the public and natural resources. Projects that address soil, water quality, energy conservation, wildlife habitat or that beautify the natural landscape along public corridors will be given priority.

Reimbursable funding is available for projects up to \$5,000.



ANNUAL TREE & SHRUB SALE

Each year, the District provides a shrub and tree sale for Albany County to select from a variety of conservation-grade saplings to plant on their properties. The sale also includes some tree survival aids including weed barrier fabric, fertilizer tablets, compost bins, and other products that aid in successfully growing trees.

In FY23/24, 3,889 trees and shrubs were sold to 72 different landowners in Spring 2024. The annual tree sale is launched online in mid-February and most products are sold out within the first two weeks. The District orders trees and shrubs from regional nurseries and sells them to the community at-cost to help promote successful plantings that improve wildlife habitat and conservation of water.

3,889
trees & shrubs
SOLD



RESTORATION PROJECTS

The District also serves Albany County residents and landowners by submitting and managing other grants on behalf of landowners. The staff works closely with program managers from various organizations including the WY Natural Resource Trust Fund and WY Water Development Office to submit applications for potential funding. Staff attend meetings throughout the year to testify and answer questions the various funding committees may have. If approved, the District coordinates and manages the legal contracts, receives signatures, and submits all necessary documentation and reporting on behalf of the landowner to ensure the success of the project.

LRCO has been the sponsor for the Bow Fiddle Stream Restoration project near the town of Centennial, Wyoming. This project was approved by the WY Water Development Office for funding in FY22/23 but was completed this fiscal year. The project's purpose was to install stream stabilization treatments in the Little Laramie River, to reduce erosion, and stabilize streambanks while improving fish habitat for approximately 1.7 riparian acres. The project was successfully completed by May 15, 2024. Since then, the District submitted all required invoices and reports on behalf of the landowner, and is expecting the pass-through reimbursement payment from the Wyoming Water Development Office Small Water Program upon completion of agency review.



Stream restoration efforts on the Bow Fiddle near Centennial, WY.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

RANGELAND MONITORING, GRAZING PLANS, AND SEED MIX RECOMMENDATIONS

One service LRCD provides is to assist in short- and 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, on a regular basis. 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 producers better understand the impacts from their agricultural management strategies to the rangeland condition. Overall, monitoring helps inform landowners and producers how best to manage their livestock in synergy with the natural rangeland ecosystem, avoid over-grazing pastures, and promote healthy rangelands and successful agricultural operations.

Currently, LRCD has 15 different sites on 6 different ranches throughout Albany County where they monitor rangeland conditions. Once gathered and analyzed, District staff provide the data and results to the landowners. Comparing the data across time helps the landowners better understand how much of the forage is being utilized by their herd. Understanding utilization rates better informs the producer on their herd stocking rates and grazing durations for various pastures included in their agricultural operation. Upon request, the District may provide recommendations for different management strategies to better meet the landowner's goals and grazing plans. In FY23/24, the District's Resource Specialist provided 2 grazing plans for ranchers.

In FY23/24, the District staff provided 30 custom seed mix recommendations for various landowners across the county seeking to restore their properties to native grasses. This is up from 19 that were provided the previous year. Although the District does not distribute native seed, it provides a list of various distributors found within the region and also offers rental of their seeding equipment.

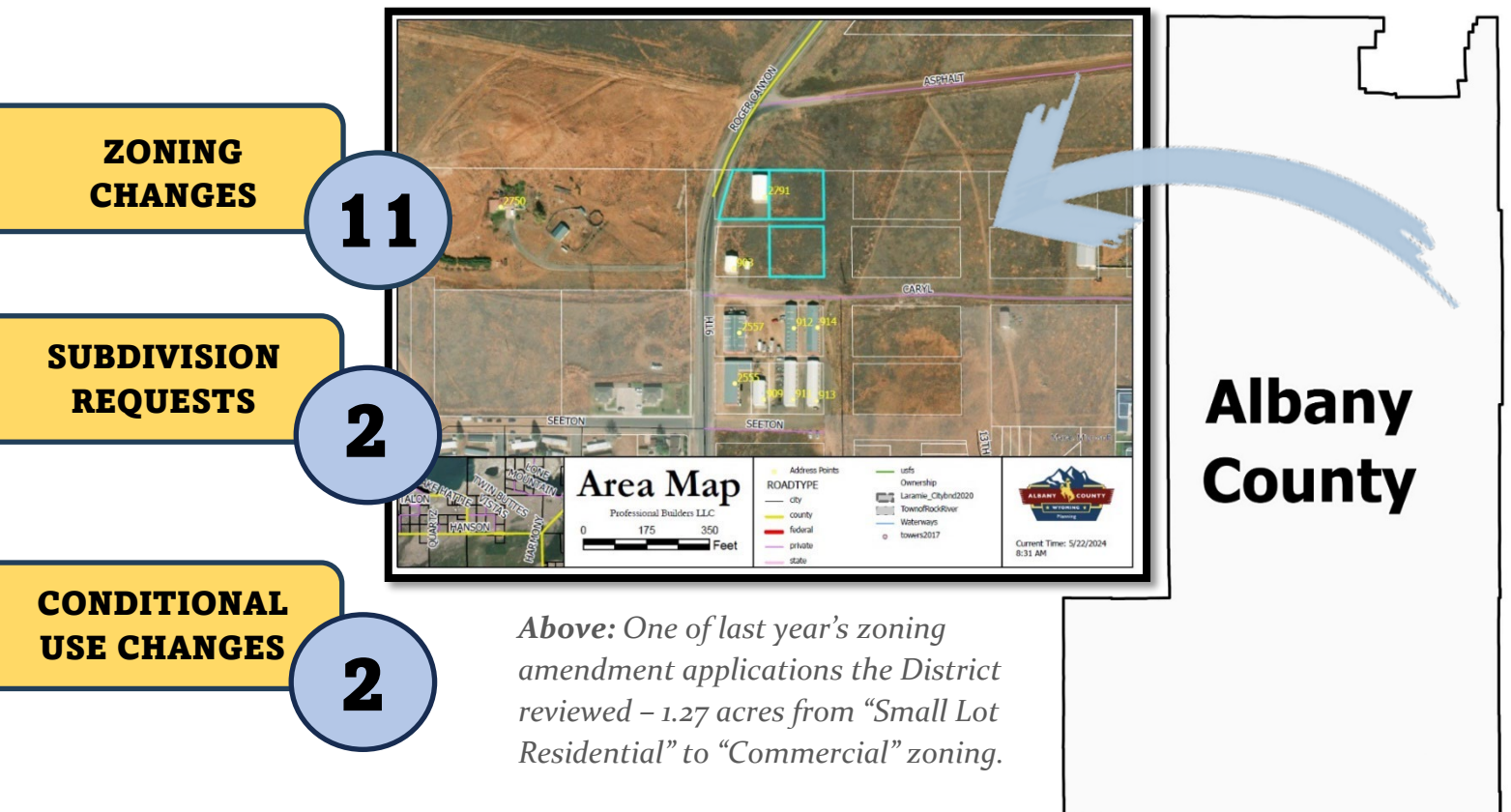


LAND USE PLANNING & COUNTY NOTICE REVIEWS



Current Wyoming State Statute requires all conservation districts to provide comment on proposed subdivision requests; however, LRCDC reviews and provides comment on all county notices including conditional use permits, zoning amendments, and subdivision requests. The number of Albany County notices the District received for review was up slightly compared to the previous fiscal year. During FY23/24, the District reviewed 15 total county notices as compared to 11 from the previous year. Of the 15, eleven (11) were zoning change requests, two (2) were subdivision requests, and two (2) were miscellaneous conditional use permitting or variance requests.

Many of the zoning change requests were to change from agricultural to either commercial or residential zones. Typically, the District Board prefers to see working agricultural lands remain as such. However, the population growth and commercial expansion within Albany County seemed to be adjacent to other residential and/or commercial properties and follow pre-existing corridors. There were no county notices that LRCDC found concerning upon review.



ANNUAL DISTRICT TRAINING

LRCO was pleased to host the 2023 Area II Meeting of Conservation Districts. 8 Districts representing southeast Wyoming were in attendance, along with representatives from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), as well as the new Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) Executive Director, Holly Kennedy.



In 2023, The Department of Audit set new requirements and certifications for elected officials. All special districts and entities that are managed by an elected official are required to complete this training. LRCO volunteered to host a public training session for this new mandatory certification.

18 public attendees representing 7 Special Districts within Albany County were present.

Wyoming Elected Officials Audit Certification Training

Hosted by Laramie Rivers Conservation District

September 14th, 2023

Located in the Mary Mead Room at the Hansen Teaching Arena, HW 230, Laramie, WY

Please note: This is a 1-day training with approximately 6 hours of video recordings provided by the Wyoming Department of Audit. DOA staff will *not* be onsite to answer questions. This is a self-directed training hosted by your local conservation district.

Schedule of Events:

9:00 am	Employment Law (60 min)
10:00 am	Records Archive Requirements (51 Min)
10:55 am	15 Min. Break
11:10 am	Uniform Municipal Procedures Act (73 Min)
12:30 pm	Lunch – attendees can leave and grab lunch in Laramie on their own. (Must sign out/in on attendance sheet)
1:30 pm	Elections/Special District Elections (29 min)
2:00 pm	District Boundary Reporting (17 min)
2:20 pm	Administrative Procedures Act (23 min)
2:45 pm	15 Min. Break
3:00 pm	Open Meetings Act (54 min)
3:55 pm	Public Officials Ethics Act (12 min)
4:15 pm	Public Records Act (34 min)
4:45 pm	Training Complete

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

The District received water quality grant from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture in 2022 that has allowed the District to apply funding toward educational workshops within Albany County. LRCD hosted three educational, public workshops that focused on water quality.

1

The first workshop focused on non-point source pollution education and an overview of the water quality monitoring that LRCD has previously conducted on the Big and Little Laramie Rivers.



2

The second workshop highlighted the effects of storm water run-off and best management practices for urban users. This workshop also highlighted the Laramie River Restoration project.



3

The final workshop consisted of a project tour on the Monolith City Ranch and highlighted four irrigation projects that focused on water quality and conservation.



OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Each year, LRCD partners with several local clubs and agencies to host workshops that promote outreach and education for small acreage landowners. LRCD Staff assist with organizing, promoting and advertising these events, as well as actively participate as educators and trainers. This season, the Small Acreage Team hosted four public, educational workshops in Albany and Laramie counties.

Healthy Trees: Pruning workshop

March 23, 2024



24 public attendees



27 public attendees

NATIVE PLANT WALK



NATIVE PLANT WALK



Nature Journaling

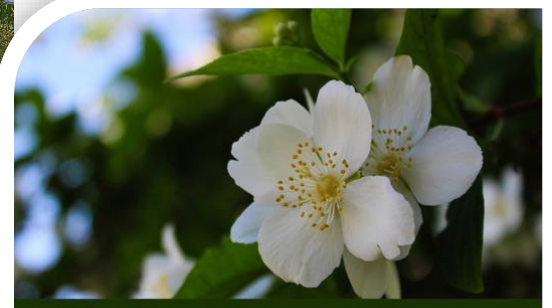
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING Extension



30 public attendees



26 public attendees



Hardy Trees Tour (and some shrubs!)

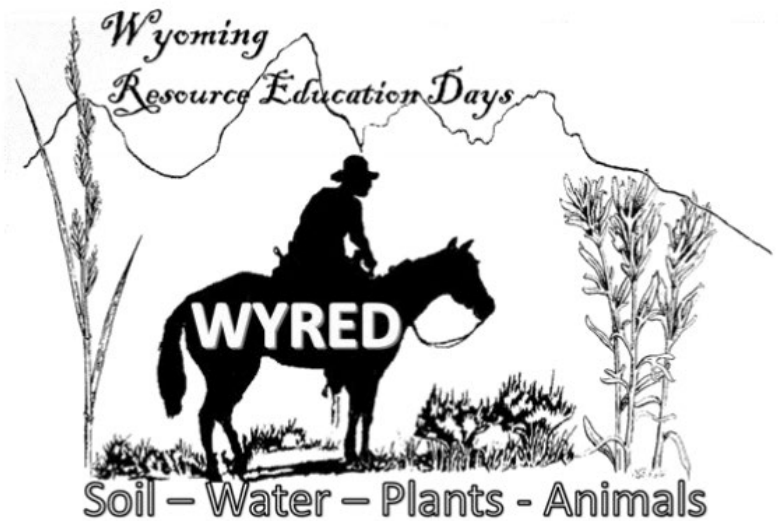
July 27th 9:30 - 11:30 am



2024 WYRED!

The Wyoming Society for Range Management (WYSRM) held the first Range Camp in 1976 in Buffalo, WY. In 1993, Range Camp coined its name, WYRED - Wyoming Youth Resource Education Days, and aside from 1995, has occurred every year since!

LRCD has been involved with WYRED since 2007. The District hosted our first camp that same year and has been participating as educators and students since!



Wyoming (Youth) Resource Education



Fast forward to 2023 and 2024, where staff and trainers have come and gone, but the camp remains steadfast and dedicated to natural resource education within the great state of Wyoming! Every year the camp is hosted in a different region of the state. Martin Curry, LRCD District Manager, has volunteered as a camp organizer and range educator during his tenure with the District. For the past two seasons, our Watershed and Rangeland Resource Specialist, Holly Dyer, has participated and competed, first as a student in 2023, and again as a professional during the 2024 camp. Holly continues to grow in her knowledge of native grasses, forbs, and overall best management practices for range health.



LaBonté

Community Gardens

The District has historically partnered with other local groups including the City of Laramie Parks Department and University of Wyoming Extension Office to provide a public community garden for interested gardeners. The garden is located at LaBonté Park.

In FY23/24, the District rented out 7 of the plots to locals.

The District also participated as a host for the 2023 Big Event – a dedicated volunteer day organized by the University of Wyoming.

The District had 9 volunteers who helped clean up and winterize the community garden at LaBonté Park.



2024 marked another successful year of hosting the bi-annual Albany County Conservation Expo!

38
BOOTHS

328
ATTENDEES

representing all areas of conservation including wildlife & habitat management, gardening & food production, alternative energy, small acreage land ownership, natural resource conservation, and much more!





Albany County Tire & Refrigerator Disposal Voucher Program

LRCO is proud to promote the County's Landfill Voucher Program!

The District provides annual funding to the Albany County Planning Department to help sponsor the local tire and refrigerator disposal program for Albany County residents. This program enables residents to drop off tires and refrigerators at the Laramie landfill free of charge, during specific dates, and helps to promote healthy land stewardship and county-wide cleanup efforts.

Historical funding provided by LRCO



COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

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

Albany County Stockgrowers and Cattle Women's Associations
Albany County Fair Board/Fairgrounds
Albany County Government
Albany County Weed and Pest
Albany County 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
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)
Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDO)
WYRED





Laramie Rivers Conservation District

Conserving Albany County's natural resources since 1945.



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This Annual Report was approved by LRCD Supervisors on August 21st, 2024