

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2022, via Zoom**

Attendees:

*Jim Cecil, CACD President - Republican River Watershed
George Fosha, CACD Director - Upper Arkansas River Watershed
Bob Warner, CACD Alternate Director - CO NACD Representative - NCF Trustee
Scott Jones, CACD Director - Colorado River Watershed
Nick Charchalis, CACD Director – North-Platte/White-Yampa River Watershed
Gary Thrash, CACD Director - San Juan Basin - CO NACD Alternate Representative
Dale Parker, CACD Interim Director - Lower South Platte Watershed
Brett Moore, CACD Legislative Liaison
Bobbi Ketels, CACD Executive Director*

Absent:

*Tyler Neely, CACD Vice President - Rio Grande River Watershed
Mike Cleary, CACD Secretary/Treasurer - Gunnison Dolores Watershed
Charlie Carnahan, CACD Director - Upper South Platte Watershed*

Guests:

*Gene Backhaus, NRCS
Les Owen, CDA
Cindy Lair, CSCB*

Call to Order:

*The meeting was called to order by **President Jim Cecil** at 7:36 AM after establishing a quorum.*

Director Gary Thrash** moves to approve the September 21, 2022 meeting agenda with the addition of an executive session. **Director Nick Charchalis** gives the second. **Motion Passes.

Prior Meeting Minutes:

President Jim Cecil** asked for a motion to approve the **September 2022** minutes. **Director George Fosha** moves to approve the September 2022 minutes. **Director Gary Thrash** gives the second. **Motion Passes.

Legislative Update – Brett Moore:

Brett noted that the Colorado election ballots have been mailed out. The next Legislative session is 82 days away. It starts Jan. 9, 2023. Brett attended the Fall Ag Council Meeting virtually. Nick Colglazier from Colorado Corn is stepping into his role and taking an active role and will reboot things with the Ag Council. They are looking at ways to be more effective through their website and other outreach options. Brett will keep both CACD and the Ag Council up to date with any issues of concern from either side.

Brett has also sat in on a couple of potential bills including one on ditch burning that prevents anyone from burning ditches on red flag days. CACD has been invited to attend those stakeholder meetings. The Pesticide Applicator Act sunsets this year. This bill will be important to the ag community including Districts that provide any pesticide services to their landowners.

NRCS Update:

Gene Backhaus provided the NRCS update. Clint is at a national leadership meeting in Detroit where they will be discussing how NRCS will be working through the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) funds they will be receiving. NRCS is planning to receive \$20B through this act. Not all of it will be in one year. Part of those funds will be dedicated to staff. Last year's funds were allowed to be carried over. Those funds are targeted for extensions on agreements. Those funds total about \$500k. This will help until they receive a spending bill from Congress.

Currently Colorado NRCS has about 233 employees. Based on the budgeting, this is where the National office is targeting Colorado NRCS' staff number.

NRCS is looking to move forward on their programs this year. They plan to move it up this year to avoid issues, like the CRP planning, to lessen the workload on the NRCS staff. They have heard discussions that FSA is planning to move up their sign ups earlier in the year for their planning. NRCS is planning a roll out of programs with at least 3 area level meetings. The roll outs are scheduled for early November. They hope to move things along faster than in the past.

Director Scott Jones mentioned that at their Watershed Meeting, the topic of having new NRCS employees visit landowners in their area to see what ranching and farming is about. The Districts in his watershed are going to be promoting that program as new hires come in. Gene acknowledges that when they hire people that do not have an ag background, it is a big issue to get the employee to understand what agriculture is about and show them the value in the work they are trying to do.

Gene added that Randy Randall is on detail as the Western Governors Association Liaison as well as the Drought Mitigation person under the Under-secretary for FPAC. Gene is on detail in Randy's position and Stephen Jaouen will be on detail in Gene's position.

Director Gary Thrash asked Gene if NRCS is still having difficulties hiring engineers. Gene acknowledged that they are still having problems hiring engineers. He added that they hire engineers, they get trained and then move to the private sector where they can potentially earn more money and where the workload is not as large. NRCS Area Conservationists are working on plans to redistribute the engineering workload by putting together teams to go to offices and do what is called an "engineering blitz" to try to get the workload completed. This would be a rotation schedule. Part of that will require the office staff to pick up some of the preliminary workload by making sure all the data is there so the engineers can do the necessary design work. Finding answers to this issue is complicated and not easily accomplished.

CSCB Update - Cindy Lair:

Cindy Lair reported that her team is developing a face-to-face district employee training program. They have not provided this training since the covid shutdown. This training will take place in Broomfield on March 15 & 16, 2023. CSCB will pay for food and lodging, and they ask that Districts pay for mileage and salaries.

The next State Conservation Board meeting will be held during the CACD Annual Meeting. There will not be a Soil Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) meeting until Nov. 30.

The Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) is a national grant, and some required items were not spelled out in the contract. They have been advised that requirements for NEPA, Cultural Resources, wetlands designation and highly erodible lands must be completed. CSCB is working with the Delta Conservation District who has hired a former NRCS employee to assist with fulfilling these requirements. Headway is being made. She thanked Gene Backhaus for his assistance and patience during this process.

Cindy reported that John Miller has been hired to fill the Soil Health Coordinator position. John is currently the Western Slope Regional Field Specialist. CDA is reviewing the staffing chart for the soil health program. With the Climate Smart Commodities grant award, they will need more staff. Currently they are looking at having two Soil Health Coordinators, one on the Western Slope and one on the Eastern Plains. They hope to hire a couple of Soil Health Specialists that the SHC position(s) would supervise. But first the CSC grant will need to be in place. They are also looking at hiring a new Western Slope Regional Field Specialist.

CSCB has been working with the USDA team that is assigned to work with the entities that are receiving the Climate Smart Commodities grants. They have had a budget meeting to see how to pare down the original budget since it was decreased from \$30M (original ask) to \$25M. One item in the budget that USDA asked about

was the amount CDA had planned to give CACD for writing the checks to Districts and other entities that participated in the program. USDA would like this to be a per hour activity instead of the 10% admin fee originally proposed. Due to this, it does not make sense to have CACD do all the auditing and other responsibilities that go with these funds. She apologized for not being able to work with CACD on this grant. They anticipate that an agreement with USDA for the grant will be available in late January at the earliest.

CSCB is in the process of doing an after-action review for the STAR+ program. The \$2M in stimulus money is coming to a close. They are reassessing how much money they have in that budget with any excess that has not been spent where it was originally budgeted, will be used for another round of equipment grants. The funds are being released as they become available. This will be completed by December 31, 2022. Agreements must be modified to cover these additional funds being given to Districts for the equipment grants.

As mentioned at the last meeting, the CDA Marketing Division has an upcoming visit from the UK because of the Broncos football game scheduled to be played in the UK at the end of October. The visitor wants to talk agricultural trade in a roundtable meeting to talk about climate sustainability and what farmers and ranchers are doing in Colorado. They would like to hear about the STAR+ program and conservation practices. This meeting will be tomorrow.

Director Nick Charchalis thanked John and Cindy for attending their Watershed meeting. It was a highly informative meeting. He added that the STAR+ program is working well in his part of the state, especially with the water and weather issues. Soil health will be encouraged with crop rotations that do not usually happen there. The equipment grant funds have been helpful but equipment costs are extremely high. On the CSC money, CACD's goal is to keep CDs involved in all aspects of funding that comes around. He asked Cindy who gets the money from the CSC grant and how the money is going to be spent? Cindy replied that there will be an additional 25-30 CDs or other eligible entities that will be able to sign up in the next go round of funding that will pay up to 10 producers per CD that applies. There will also be the capacity building and equipment grants as in the first go round. Other significant things in the CSC grant includes contracting with CSU, which will be contracting with other land-grant universities in western states to help with research and implementation of the STAR program in the states of WY, NM, UT, ID, MT, and WA. Funds will be used to take the STAR program National and work with the Illinois STAR to help take the program nationwide to assure clear participation in soil health, water quality or whatever the resource need might be. It will become a tool for conservation districts to assist their landowners more directly. The more STAR is known nationwide, the more manufacturers will be interested in working with STAR for their own sustainability goals. **Director Nick Charchalis** added that he would like to see more marketing with local districts to get more producers involved. **Director George Fosha** asked Cindy if there is a good summary of all the programs offered on their website. Cindy noted that there is a soil health page under the Conservation Services Division.

CDA Update – Les Owen:

Les Owen updated the Board on cooperating agencies and planning. Yesterday he met with the National BLM and cooperators on grazing regulation revisions. The process started back in 2020. They have not received much information on what will be in the Rule itself. There are some concerning generalities that they have been made aware of. When it gets closer, there will be a public comment period on the Rule and the EIS. Colorado BLM is working on the Big Game Corridors Resource Management Plan amendment. This will impact all BLM offices in Colorado. When this plan came out, it was thought to restrict only oil and gas development, but the scope will probably increase to other uses as well.

Cooperating agencies were able to submit comments on the EIS for the Wolf Rule. The original press release for the Wolf Rule stated they were looking at two alternatives. One is a 10J, an experimental population rule that covered the entire state. The second alternative is a 10J rule that covered part of the state as well as a 10A 1A permit that covered another part of the state should there be an established population of wolves in the state of Colorado. The benchmark for that is 2 breeding pairs producing at least 2 offspring for 2 consecutive years. With the issue of cattle that were killed in Meeker, it gives evidence that there is another pack of wolves in the state.

If we get to where that benchmark is reached, that meets the definition of population and that area will be carved out of the 10J, experimental rule, and lethal control will be off the table in that area. The EIS of the draft rule should be published soon.

Director Nick Charchalis commented that when the issue is in your backyard, it is a whole different deal. He feels people should push back on the \$2M discussion that has produced nothing.

NACD Update – Gary Thrash and Bob Warner:

Gary stated that the registration for the **77th NACD Annual Meeting** is now open. It will be held in **New Orleans on Feb. 11 - 15, 2023**. The Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts will host it. Gary suggested that Colorado throw their hat in the ring to host another meeting. The NACD Resource publication is out. He has reviewed it and thinks it contains some valuable information. The 2023 Farm Bill is on the Washington agenda. At the March fly-in, they plan to have conservation associations provide their input for the Bill. NACD helped get the IRA funding for the NRCS and US Forest Service programs. The WOTUS rule will be on the Supreme Court agenda most likely early next year. The EPA is finalizing the rule in December. The 2023 Friends of NACD application period will be launched. The **2023 Envirothon** competition will be in **Oxford, OH July 24-30, 2023**. The **68th Annual Stewardship** week will be in April and will focus on **“One Water.”** The next NACD Summer meeting will be in Bismarck, ND and a regional meeting is being planned for Lake Tahoe, NV. Bob encouraged board members to speak with Gary and ask him to consider continuing his activities with NACD.

CACD Programs:

Camp Rocky: Bobbi stated that there will be some facility changes at the Camp next year. CACD will be able to get a total of 7 cabins. She has confirmed that Noah will contract again to run the Camp. Corbin is unable to give Bobbi an answer on whether the Mennonite Camp will be able to supply camp supervisors again this year. None of the larger buildings used for things like family reunions will be available for Camp Rocky. As it stands, we will need two supervisors per cabin and each cabin would house 6 campers. We might look at a motel in Divide that could be used and then have participants bussed to the Camp. Instructors at the Camp feel that 10 students per group (4 disciplines) is the best situation.

Envirothon:

A meeting is scheduled next week with one of the CSU partners in Teller. Bobbi and Rose feel it would be a good idea to get CSU involved. CSU seems to be interested. CACD would continue to be the non-profit running the financials and fundraising and CSU would take over as the program manager. They would continue to use the partner volunteers. Rose, Tyler, and Bobbi will be on the call with CSU.

NRCS Demonstration Project:

The first progress report is about due. The participating Districts are submitting their reports. Bobbi will submit a report through **easygrants**. The easygrants system will require 4 people to be set up. George, Mike, Bobbi, and Jim will be the four directors on the system. Bobbi has received two reimbursement requests for the program from two of the participating CDs. A couple of districts will not be starting their projects until spring of 2023.

The \$30k education grant: The only thing expensed out of these funds was \$500 for a District workshop. The remaining funds will be for Camp Rocky and the Annual Meeting. A bill will be submitted to NRCS after the Annual Meeting is over. Gene told Bobbi to work with Cindy Einspahr but copy him and Petra so they can make sure it gets to the correct person.

Annual Meeting:

Bobbie has speaker requests out to a few individuals to fill a slot in the General Session and a couple of breakouts. She reported that sponsorships are still low right now. There are other groups running programs about the same time as the CACD meeting. Bobbi has increased the room number for the room block. The hotel room block ends on Nov. 7. Registration is open until November 15th. Early bird registration is extended until Oct. 25 (\$250). Regular registration is \$275. A late registration fee will most likely be added. There is a final date

for the hotel meal counts. Bobbi will register all Board members that will be attending but she does need their meal choices. She reminded Gene that NRCS gets six complimentary registrations because of the sponsorship and cooperative agreement. CSCB staff will be registering individually. Bobbi will also let Cindy know when she, Les and Clint will be on the schedule to speak at the meeting.

CACD FINANCIAL SUMMARY: 09-30-2022

Beginning Balance in checking on 09-1-2022, \$ 145,031.22

Checks/Payments Cleared -\$15,486.36, Deposits & Credits Cleared \$ 47,859.11

Statement Ending/Cleared Balance in Checking as of 09-30-2022 \$ 177,403.97

Total Uncleared Transactions = -\$ 19,804.67

Ending Register Balance as of 09-30-2022 \$ 157,599.30

Reserve Total \$41,075.15 *In US Bank Checking Acct

2021 Estimated Funds Rolled Over & Designated for 2022 Youth Programs **\$9,500.00**

NOI as of 09-30-2022 \$107,024.15

Credit Card Beginning Statement Balance as of 9/06/22 \$ 8,915.53

Charges Cleared \$330.77 Credits/CC Payments Cleared \$8,915.53

Credit Card Ending Statement Balance as of 10/07/22 \$330.77

Total District Dues Paid as of 9/30/22 \$46,700.00 (membership invoiced (74) \$88,800.00-budget\$60K)

Total District Dues Paid as of 9/30/21 \$57,000.00 (down by \$10,300.00)

Grand Total District Dues PD in 2021 \$58,750.00 (budget \$60K)

UARRP Activity 07-31-2022 YTD:

Closed Out – Zero Balance – Final Year-end Report due December 2022

NRCS previous Grant Closed out as of 5/25/22 \$0.00 balance

NRCS new Grant as of 6/30/22 \$30,000.00 \$500 expended as of 9/30/22 *1 District

NRCS Demonstration Project – 7 district projects approved \$75K – \$0 expended as of 9/30/22 – expires 9/30/23

P&L NET REVENUE -\$14,333.41

Bal Sheet Net Revenue -\$14,333.41

Increased Expenses: NWSS, NACD, Camp Rocky, Atty Fees

Decrease Income: District Dues

9:00 The Board entered EXECUTIVE Session. 9:44 The Regular October Board meeting resumed.

Director Nick Charchalis moves that CACD send a letter to all Colorado Districts stating CACDs position on the 2022 Camp Rocky and those that have inquired directly to CACD, have a CACD Board member follow up with a phone call to those Districts. **Director George Fosha** gives the second. **Motion Passes.**

Other:

Bobbi gave a brief history of Camp Rocky as she knows it. November 2nd will be the next Legislative call.

Meeting Adjourned by Director Nick Charchalis at 9:51 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bobbi Ketels

CACD Executive Director