



FY22/23

ANNUAL REPORT

Laramie Rivers Conservation District

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.

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, 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. The original name was changed to Laramie Rivers Conservation District, the district's current name, after 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 0.75 of a mil in 2004. After one-year, the Albany County Commissioners approved the full mil for the Laramie Rivers Conservation District (LRCO).



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.

A letter from the Chair - August 2023

Hello Everyone,

First, I would like to express what a real joy it is working with my colleagues elected to the Board of Supervisors, as well as with our staff of three, whose enthusiasm for long established programs and future projects is unparalleled in most organizations. When we can and wherever possible we bring an attitude of progressive leadership to the High Plains.

As the City of Laramie embraces growth and works to secure sufficient water for its residents, agriculture plays an ever-increasing role in water management on the Big and Little Laramie Rivers. The Laramie Rivers Conservation District (LRCD) provides support for the North end of Albany County in partnership with the Medicine Bow Conservation District on Rock Creek. Not only is water vital for livestock operations, a major economic engine in the County, it has made this summer especially beautiful, providing healthy fisheries, wildlife forage, and landing sites for migratory and local bird populations throughout our river drainages.

As we recreate throughout the county, driving down the country roads, it is impossible not to enjoy the smell of freshly mown hay (sorry for anyone who suffers from hay fever!), but more importantly, agricultural lands are carbon sinks, capturing CO₂ in meadows and upland grasslands. The water used in flood irrigation recharges the rivers as they flow downstream, ultimately reaching the city residents of Laramie.

This serves to highlight LRCD's mission to work with landowners to replace spent headgates that have aged out, restore, or relocate ditch diversions to fit with the natural water flow, as well as restructure riverbanks throughout the system to better equate with stream hydrology prior to the tie hack era. (An amazing history of Western settlement, building The Railroad, but floating logs down the mountain streams did scour the streambanks). And with funding assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the engagement of engineers, we know how to address some of the past streambank scarring.

We live on the high-altitude plains of the Rocky Mountains, and we are so fortunate to have rivers cutting through this area. They are the future of LRCD's work, as well as our continuation of over 15 partnerships, including Albany County Cattlewomen & Albany County Stockgrowers, Rooted in Laramie, Pilot Hill, UW Extension's Barnyards and Backyards, and a partnership with the city on a community garden in LaBonte Park. LRCD's work will take it well into the future installing solar well pumps on stock tanks, planting living snow fences, and many more water development projects, all done in cooperation with Albany County's residents.

Thank you, everyone, for caring for our natural resources.

Ruth

Ruth Shepherd, LRCD Chair

LRCO - 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.

Amanda Marney, Vice-Chair. Mandy, our at-large representative, serves as the Senior Associate Director for 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.

Carol Price, Treasurer/Secretary. 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.

Zachary Iddings, Supervisor. Zach is newest, rural, board supervisor. He is also the manager of the Monolith Ranch, owned by the City of Laramie. The Monolith was purchased by the City in 1981 to assure a lasting source of drinking water for the residents of Laramie. Zach was appointed to the Board to replace Orville Johnson in November 2021 and represents agricultural interests in Albany County.

LRCO - DISTRICT 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 Dyer is the newest member of the LRCO team! Holly serves as the district's Rangeland and Watershed Resource Specialist. Originally from Logan, Utah, Holly has lived in Laramie since 2015 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 LRCO staff in January 2022. Her background includes a BS degree in Animal Science from Purdue University. Natasha, her husband, and their four children enjoy exploring new places and learning all about Albany County's history!

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) STAFF

Chris Bovè, NRCS District Conservationist. Chris was recently named 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 19 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.

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, contract NRCS Civil Engineering Technician. Clay previously served with LRCD from 1991-2002 before he accepted a position with the NRCS in 2002. He now works as a contracted project engineer. Clay ranches west of Laramie with his family.



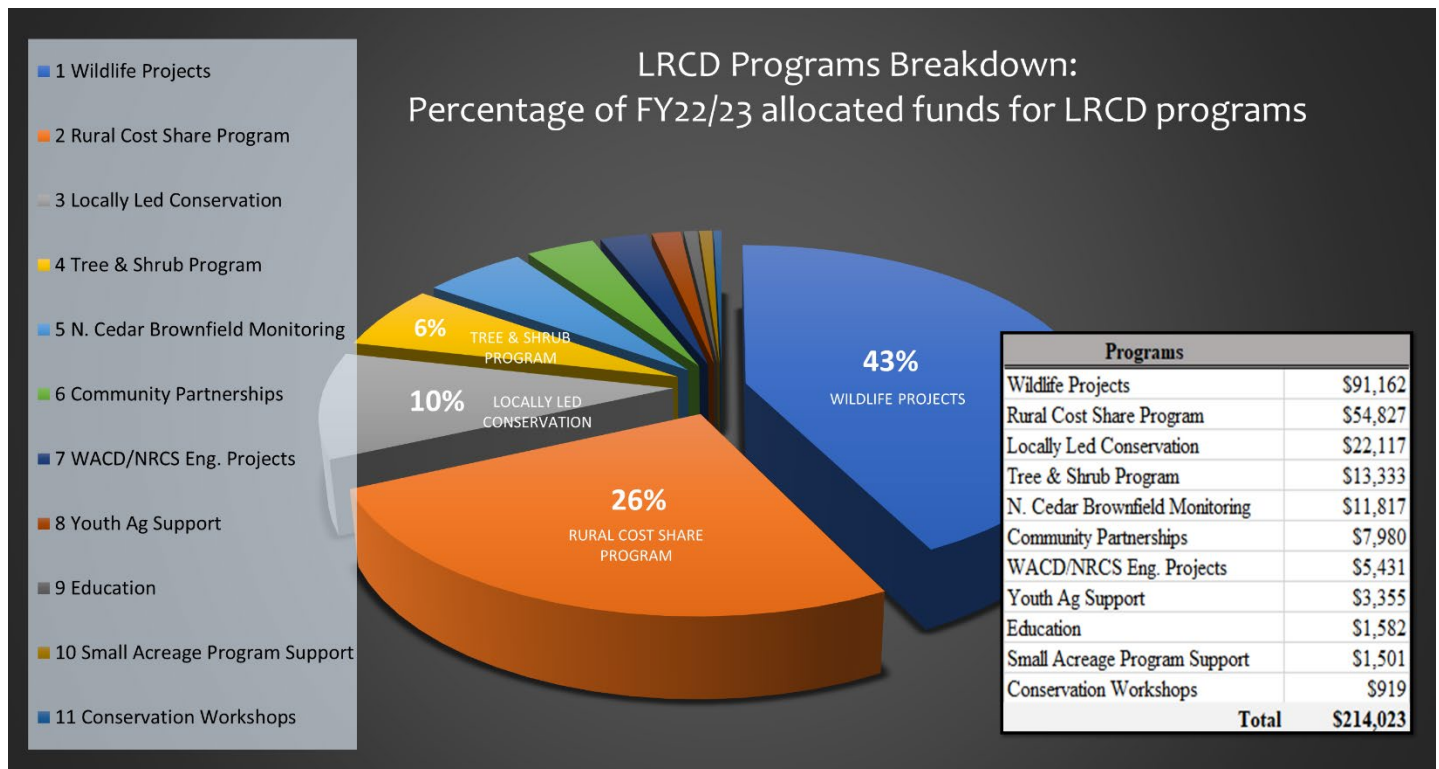
LAND USE AND BUDGET INFORMATION

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.

(Albany County Comprehensive Plan, June 2007)

FY22/23	INCOME	FY22/23	EXPENSES	GRANTS	TOTAL
MIL LEVY	\$680,091	PROGRAMS	\$214,023	WWDC Small Water	\$35,000
OTHER	\$29,436	PERSONNEL	\$318,644	State Grant - WD of Ag	\$8,824
GRANTS	\$137,367	OPERATIONS	\$53,862	Wildlife/CRM Grants	\$91,568
		CAPITAL OUTLAY	\$1,051	WACD/NRCS Tech Funds	\$1,975
TOTAL	\$846,893	TOTAL	\$587,580	TOTAL	\$137,367

(Approved on July 18th, 2023, by the LRCD Board of Supervisors)



DISTRICT OPERATIONS

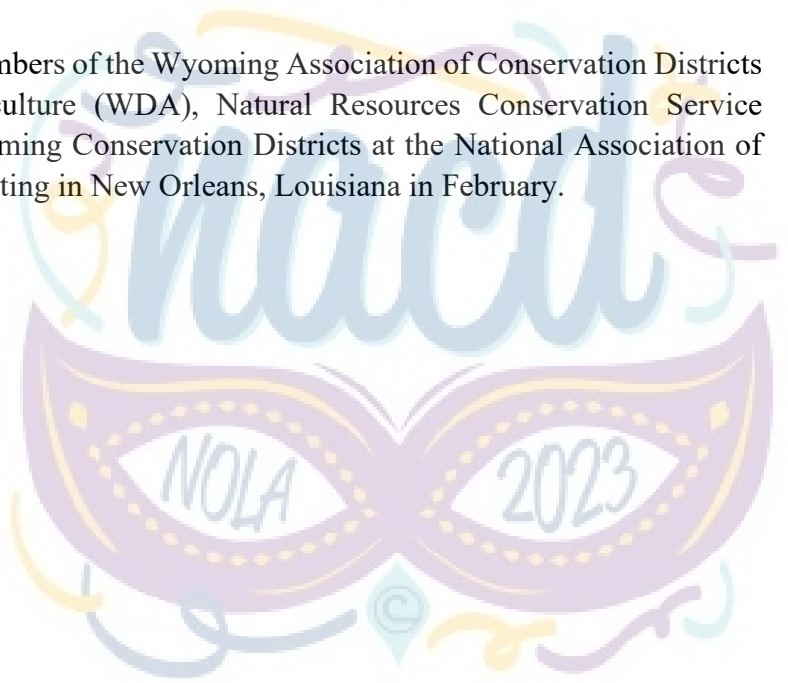
This year has been a FULL year of team building and training! All LRCD Staff have officially been in their respective roles for a year now. Martin, Holly & Natasha have spent the last fiscal year building relationships with each other, as well as past and present landowners within our communities. It's been a whirlwind of a year, but we are truly excited for the vision we have as a team going forward!



The District has a steady focus on the needs of landowners and the natural resources within Albany County. Whether you are 8 or 88 years old, we aim to provide foundational natural resource education and technical assistance to all land stewards.

NOLA! 2023

District Staff had the privilege of joining members of the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD), Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as well as a number of other Wyoming Conservation Districts at the National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana in February.



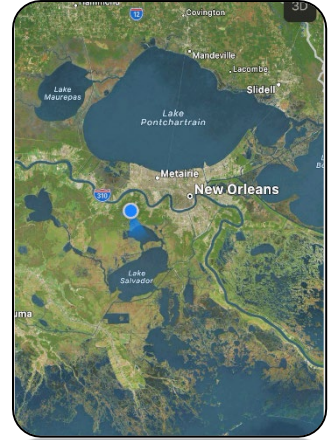
Wyoming was well represented at the National Convention in New Orleans, LA. Members of WACD, WDA, NRCS, LRCDC, and four (4) other Wyoming conservation districts were present at the 2023 meeting.

NOLA! 2023 continued



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Strategies to Engage, Educate, Recruit, and Retain Next-Gen Conservationists
Studio 3/4 - 2nd Floor
- Success in the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program
Studio 9 - 2nd Floor
- Locally Led Water Banking to Protect Irrigation Water
Studio 9 - 2nd Floor
- Soil Health, Resources, Assessment, and Management Centering Soil Health: Innovative Drivers to Effective Transition
Studio 9 - 2nd Floor
- Non-Operating Landowners: An increasing population hungry for knowledge to assist in critical management decisions
Studio 7/8 - 2nd Floor
- One Water: Collaborations to Protect Water from Source to Sea
Studio 1/2 - 2nd Floor
- Leadership and Conservation Development
Studio 3/4 - 2nd Floor
- ConserveAZ Portal - Facilitating Districtwide Planning
Studio 9 - 2nd Floor
- E Pluribus unum - Building and Leading a Diverse Team
Studio 7/8 - 2nd Floor
- Watershed Planning with Ohio's Caesar Creek Collaborative
Studio 9 - 2nd Floor



District staff networked with over 1,000 individual attendees representing 55 states and territories at the convention. Staff learned about the massive sedimentation loss within the Mississippi River system, as well as coastal land-loss that occurs from erosion and massive weather events on the coastline shores. Chief Terry Cosby, Secretary Tom Vilsack and Retired General Russel Honoré were present to speak at the convention. Attendees spent the week attending multiple meetings and break out sessions to gain a better understanding of natural resource concerns as well as improvements across the country.



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 was 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 \$30,000 in public funds over five (5) years of continuous monitoring obligations for this project. The district completed its 5-year obligation for monitoring ground and soil conditions in 2023. The new landowner will continue to work with WDEQ on any future monitoring efforts.

- \$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
- \$5,742 (2023) fifth, and final, year monitoring requirement.



*Background: current construction and business development in the rehabilitated area (looking east).
Above: Early view of the Yttrium Plant (looking north) prior to cleanup.*

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

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 matches up to 50% of eligible project costs to help encourage private landowners to practice natural resource stewardship on their lands that provides several public services such as healthier ecosystems and conserving natural resources for future use.

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 grazing;
- Fencing in sensitive habitats such as riparian areas to reduce livestock impacts;
- Upland water development to improve grazing management and distribution; and
- Developing spring water to enhance wildlife and/or improve livestock distribution.



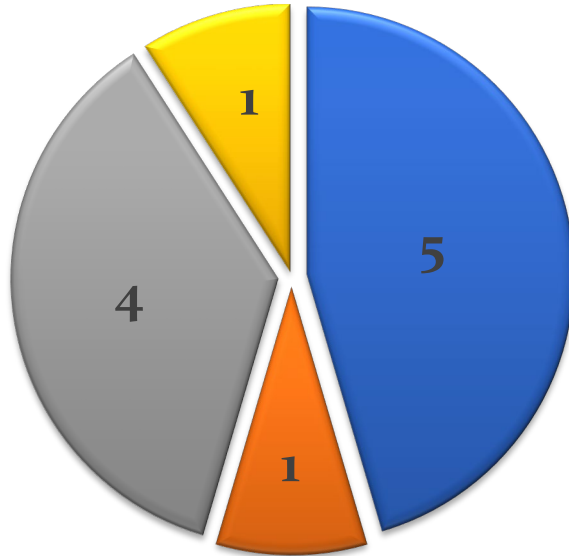
Overall, each of these projects have public benefits associated with them. Livestock watering and cross fencing projects improve livestock grazing distribution across rangelands -- enhancing rangeland health and wildlife habitat. Irrigation projects increase the reliability of transporting irrigation water to crops or livestock while windbreaks are often built to manage snow drifts and improve human safety in rural areas.

Water development cost share project on private land.

Cost share programs continued

In FY 22/23, the District allocated \$67,500 of their annual budget towards funding rural cost share applications. This year was the first year the District has exhausted the budgeted amount for rural cost share projects – funding eleven (11) different projects. The chart below shows the types of projects that were funded in FY 22/23.

**Types of Rural Cost Share Projects Funded
(FY22/23)**



- Livestock Water Development
- Irrigation improvements
- Wildlife-Friendly Cross Fencing
- Windbreaks and Fence Enclosures



Wildlife friendly fence conversion, cross-fencing cost-share project

July 2022 - June 2023



11 projects

\$67,500 allocated

13,377 acres benefitted

**8,800 feet of fencing
converted to wildlife friendly standards**

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. LRCD provides planning, supplies and labor for the planting of board-approved living snow fences and windbreaks within Albany County.



This year, LRCD District Staff successfully planted **six (6)** living snow fences with a total of **300** trees and shrubs!



LRCD also knows when trees just won't grow! LRCD 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. The District 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.



Above: Martin Curry, District Manager, and Resource Specialist, Holly Dyer, install weed barrier for a living snow fence cost-share project.

LRCO Tree & Shrub Program

The Laramie Rivers Conservation District Tree Program enables farmers, ranchers and other local 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. In addition to seedling and potted trees and shrubs, the district also offers TransFilm®, a wind protectant specially designed for evergreens, as well as fertilizer packets for already established trees.



LRCO Staff prep and distribute trees at the annual tree & shrub sale.



Restoration projects

LRCO received a total of \$75,000 in funding from the **Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resources Trust Fund** in June, 2020. Of that funding, \$30,000 is targeted to rehab two (2) of five (5) irrigation diversions located on the South Fork of the Little Medicine Bow River. The remaining \$45,000 is dedicated to the additional three (3) diversions. A contractor was selected in October 2021 and began work in mid-January 2022. The main priority for this project was to reestablish wet meadow habitat for brood rearing sage grouse and was completed in the fall of 2022.



*Background: Mature sage grouse peruse through the meadows.
Foreground: Diversion #2 before and after restoration work.*



Diversion
#1



Diversion
#2



Diversion
#3



Diversion
#4



Diversion
#5

Restoration projects continued

LRCO also received approval from WY Department of Environmental Quality and Environmental Protection Agency's 205(j) funding for a local study. The grant \$40,000 grant was awarded to LRCO to study the best method to release all the sediment stored behind the current Oasis Ditch Diversion. LRCO received the paperwork to move forward with the study and intends to hire a contractor in FY23/24 to complete the report.



Background and foreground: photos taken in 2022 of the Oasis diversion site.

Ongoing Water Quality Improvement Efforts

Water quality monitoring is a responsibility that the District considers 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, LRCD did not conduct additional water quality monitoring in FY 22/23. The decision not to monitor this season was made due to the fact that there were no significant management changes made within the watershed that may indicate the E. coli levels have decreased. Regardless, LRCD's resource specialist (Holly Dyer) successfully completed her water quality monitoring training hosted by Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality in FY 21/22 and is now qualified to conduct water monitoring.



Above: Holly Dyer, Rangeland & Watershed Resource Specialist, attended water monitoring training with DEQ in 2023. development cost share project on private land.

As a response to having impaired waterbodies, LRCD has continued to work on a watershed report in FY22/23, outlining future intentions to decrease E.coli levels in the Big and Little Laramie Rivers and how to address other natural resource concerns. This report should be finalized in the upcoming fiscal year.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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, on an annual 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.



Background: Scenic view of northern Albany County.

Above: LRCD and NRCS staff perform grass clippings as part of their rangeland monitoring program.

Rangeland Monitoring and Grazing Plans continued

Currently, LRCD has **15 different sites** on **6 different** ranches throughout Albany County where they annually monitor rangeland conditions. Rangeland monitoring help landowners and lessees better understand how much of the forage is being utilized by their herd in various pasture environments. Understanding utilization rates better informs the producer on their herd stocking rates and grazing durations for various pastures included in their agricultural operation.



Above: Martin Curry, LRCD District Manager, assists Jesus Lopez, NRCS Soil Scientist, and LRCD Watershed and Rangeland Resource Specialist, Holly Dyer, with identifying rangeland grasses.

Land Use Planning - County Notices

During FY22/23, LRCD reviewed a total of

seven (7) subdivision applications,
two (2) proposed land use changes,
and **two (2)** conditional use permit requests.



Many of the subdivision requests had corresponding CUP or LU 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 new construction within already existing subdivisions. There were no county notices that LRCD found concerning upon review.

LRCD also provides Albany County with technical support and educational information. LRCD 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.



OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Water Quality Workshops

The District received a Water Quality grant from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture in 2022 that has allowed the district to apply funding toward educational workshops within the county. District Staff hosted the first workshop in May, 2023.

The initial workshop focused on non-point source pollution with an educational watershed component that targeted all audiences. Guest speakers included Triston Rice, the WACD Watershed Coordinator; Alex Jeffers, Nonpoint Source Program Coordinator with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ), as well as Tony Hoch, retired and former LRCO Water Quality Specialist. The workshop was well attended and planning for the next two workshops is well underway!



Water Quality Workshop

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3RD, 2023

5-7PM @ the ALBANY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



A drawing for two \$25 Murdoch's gift cards to follow workshop! Must be present to win.



Register by scanning the code above!
Or visit www.lrcd.net

What is non-point source pollution?

a FREE event sponsored by LRCO to learn about the many different ways we can help protect our watershed

www.lrcd.net

307-721-0072

info@lrcd.net

Above: Triston Rice, Watershed Coordinator for WACD, gives a presentation about the Laramie watershed at the first Water Quality workshop in May, 2023.

Public Educational Events

District staff participated in several educational events during the 22/23 fiscal year.

LRCO is a proud Grassland Elevation Sponsor of the *Wild and Working Lands Film Festival* in partnership with the University of Wyoming Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources.

Staff hosted an informational booth at the film festival this year, which brought in over 200 public attendees to the Gryphon Theatre in Laramie!



LRCO also hosted an educational booth, and Martin Curry, LRCO District Manager, answered questions at the Small Acres Tree Workshop at the Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center in March, 2023.



Left: LRCO Staff speak to local residents and answer questions about tree care and maintenance in Laramie's harsh climate.

Public Educational Events continued

326

STUDENTS IN 2 DAYS!



LRCO Resource Specialist, Holly Dyer, and Office Administrator, Natasha Dangler, presented the District's educational Stream Trailer at several different events this year. One event included the 2023 Ag Expo, hosted by the Albany County Cattewomen. Holly and Natasha were able to show how water flows through a river system at thirty one (31), twelve-minute sessions over a two day period!



Overall, District Staff presented to over **430** Albany County students this year!

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 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)
WYRED

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 support!

~Thank you!

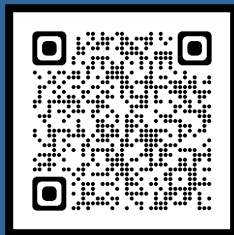


Laramie Rivers Conservation District

Conserving Albany County's natural resources since 1945.



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