



LARAMIE RIVERS
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
*Long Range and Natural
Resource Management Plan*

2020 - 2024

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts require that Conservation District’s develop a Long Range Plan every five years. The Long Range Plan serves as a broad outline of Laramie Rivers Conservation District’s long-term priorities and goals. It also creates a common vision and direction for LRCD staff and Board of Supervisors for developing programs and activities that align with our mission.

In spring of 2019, Laramie Rivers Conservation District initiated an update of the District’s Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan. This process began with discussions in board meetings, examination of current Wyoming natural resource opinion surveys (reference cited on page 11), and vetting the public in an October Public Hearing/Open house. Following a 45-day public comment period and public hearing, the Laramie Rivers Conservation District approved the 2020-2024 Long Range Plan and Natural Resource Management Plan on December 19, 2019.

A record of Laramie Rivers Conservation District 2020-2024 Long Range Plan is on record in the Office of the Albany County Clerk.

Ruth Shepherd LRCD Chairman (Urban): _____

Bob Shine LRCD Vice-Chair (At-Large): _____

Carol Price LRCD Treasurer (Rural): _____

Larry Munn LRCD Supervisor (Rural): _____

Orville Johnson (Rural): _____

Authority

Laramie Rivers Conservation District is a legally organized Wyoming Conservation District by Wyoming State Statutes (W.S. 11-16-101 through 11-16-134) as a legal subdivision of the State of Wyoming, Department of Agriculture. Laramie Rivers Conservation District was formed in 1945.

Statute

W.S. 11-16-103. Legislative Declarations and Policy

(a) It is hereby declared that the farm and grazing lands of Wyoming are among the basic assets of the state; that improper land use practices cause and contribute to serious erosion of these lands by wind and water; that among the consequences which would result from such conditions are the deterioration of soil and its fertility and the silting and sedimentation of stream channels, reservoirs, dams and ditches; that to conserve soil, and soil and water resources, and prevent and control soil erosion, it is necessary that land use practices contributing to soil erosion be discouraged and that appropriate soil conserving land use practices be adopted.

(b) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of the soil, and soil and water resources of this state, and for the control and prevention of soil erosion and for flood prevention or the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water, and thereby to stabilize ranching and farming operations, to preserve natural resources, protect the tax base, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this state.

Laramie Rivers Conservation District 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.

District Description

Location

Laramie Rivers Conservation District boundaries conform to Albany County boundaries, encompassing an area of 4,305 square miles or 2,755,136 acres. Within the district, 1,820,093 acres (66.1% of the area) are privately owned; 684,911 acres are federal land (24.8%); and 250,133 acres are state, county, city, and school owned (9.1%) (Source: 2006 Equality State Almanac).

Elevations

Elevations in Albany County range from 12,013 feet at Medicine Bow Peak in the Snowy Range to 5,160' where the Laramie River leaves the county. Albany County has only two incorporated towns; the elevation of Laramie is 7,165' and Rock River is 6981'.

Watersheds

The Upper Laramie River watershed dominates the District's area. Other watersheds that make up a significant portion of the District are the Medicine Bow River (includes Rock Creek), the Little Medicine Bow River, and the Lower Laramie River (includes Sybille and Chugwater Creeks). Small portions of seven other watersheds are also within the District boundaries: Horse Creek, Upper Lodgepole Creek, Lone Tree-Owl Creek, Cache La Poudre River, and the Upper North Platte River (See map on page 6).

Climate and Vegetation

Most of the district is semi-arid; the precipitation amounts and temperatures are quite variable depending on the location's elevation and slope. Vegetation communities range from alpine to high desert as a result of elevation, climate, and precipitation patterns. The average temperatures in January range from 12.1 to 32.7 °F, and in July 51.3 to 71.5 °F. Because of the high elevation, winters are long, and summers are short and relatively cool. The wide range of temperatures and varied precipitation, occasional severe summer and winter storms, and frequent strong winds creates an environment that is often harsh and unpredictable.

Precipitation in the Laramie Basin averages between 10" and 14" annually and the average number of rainy days per year is about 26. Annual snowfall averages 42 inches (107 cm). The majority of arable irrigated land in the district receives only about 6" to 13" annually (based on our tracking of Laramie Regional Airport data over the past 15 years), with most occurring at the lower end of that range. Strong winds, water availability, frost-free period or growing season, which is about 90 days per year, all limit plant growth.

Land Use

Agriculture within the district consists primarily of ranching. The predominant livestock operations are cow-calf and yearling. Hay production consists of both alfalfa and grass hay with most irrigation provided by direct flow diversions from the Big and Little Laramie Rivers, Rock Creek and their tributaries (see list of watersheds on previous page).

Mineral extraction consists of minor oil and gas production, along with quarries for limestone and shale for cement production, and rock, sand and gravel for cement production, road base, and landscaping.

Wind development and new transmission lines are emerging as major new industries in Wyoming. These can help keep agricultural operations viable, provide jobs, and help us achieve energy independence.

The majority of lands within the District are privately owned. With about 25% managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the (BLM). Local land users (agriculture, timber, recreation, and mining) are dependent upon the federal lands to varying degrees for commodity use and recreational enjoyment. Local economies derive a significant source of income from these public lands, from not only commodity extraction but also various recreation uses.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires all federal agencies to cooperate to the fullest extent possible with state and local governments. The District has taken an active role in developing working relationships with the various federal agencies through Memorandums of Understanding and seeking Cooperating Agency status on various federal planning documents.

Recreational use of public and private lands continues to increase. Hunting, fishing, floating, hiking, four wheeling, snowmobiling, skiing, road biking, mountain biking and sightseeing are recreational opportunities within the Laramie Rivers Conservation District. In addition to increased recreational use by people, we also see an increase in their dogs out on the land in public access areas.

The large portion of forested lands within the district were affected by pine beetles due to the majority of the Lodgepole pine forests being an even age (80-120 years) which provided conditions that were ripe for the wide-ranging beetle infestation. The worst of the pine beetle epidemic has passed at this point and the US Forest Service has revised the implementation of its forest plan to address the issue in a holistic fashion. The outcome of that plan is unknown at the time of this planning exercise.

In order to think about where we are going, it is important to think about where we have been. Below is a list of issues we have been working on and a list of issues we have noticed taking on more interest or importance since the last 5-year plan.

Ongoing Issues

- Agricultural viability
- Land conversion from agricultural to residential
- Wildlife – human conflicts, habitat loss/improvement, endangered species issues
- E. Coli contamination and listed streams (2012 303d list)
- Wildfires and the wildland urban interface
- Invasive weeds in Albany County
- Water conservation in household use and home landscaping
- Youth education in conservation and food issues
- Federal and state lands management for habitat, recreation, and local economies

Emerging Issues

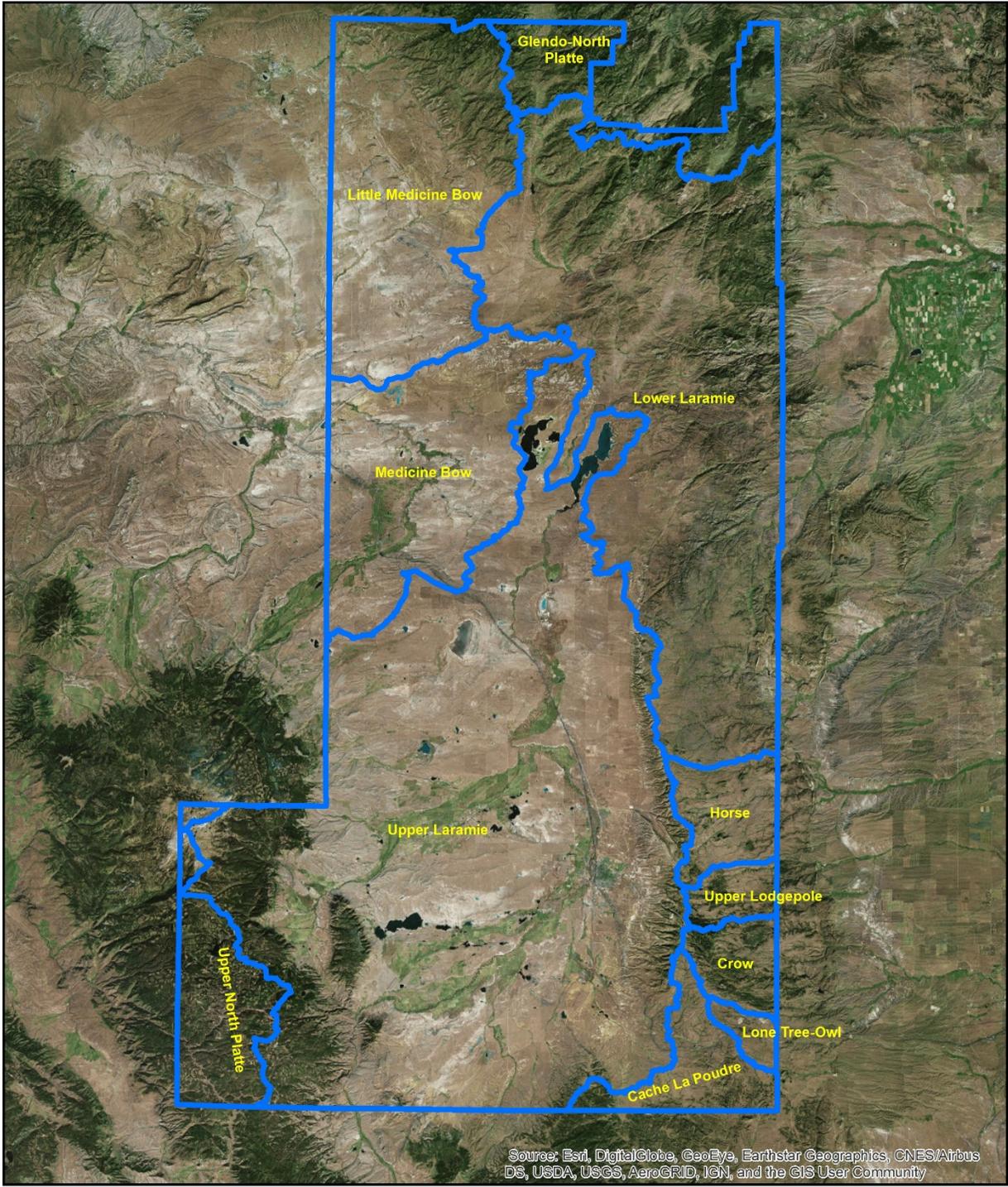
- Land exchange for Casper Aquifer protection, wildlife habitat, open space, and recreation
- Stream sediment issues in the Laramie River in and below Laramie (2018 303d list) – remedies can include many practices in town from individual landowners to city infrastructure, along with rural river work
- Holistic look (whole river) at river health and fish passages (not just project by project) for continued Natural Resource Trust participation
- Renewed interest in urban forestry/aging tree canopy in towns

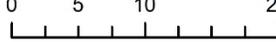
“Roadmap” for this plan:

Goal 1: Programs we control or are closely involved in, as where we do something on the ground

Goal 2: Education and outreach programs

Goal 3: Internal administration and development



<p>Legend</p> <p> Hydrologic Unit 8</p> <p>0 5 10 20 Miles</p> 	<p>Nad 83 UTM 13</p>  <p>W N E S</p> <p>Designed by: MEC March 18, 2019</p>	 <p>LRC D Watershed</p>
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Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: Improve water conservation and development, wildlife habitat, soil health, natural resources, water quality and work for responsible management of private and public lands.

Objective 1: Provide technical assistance to support implementation of natural resource stewardship practices to conserve resources, improve ecosystem function, and help to ensure viability of production agriculture.

- Continue to promote Best Management Practices through technical assistance and cooperation with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- Promote agriculture producer use of the Rural Cost Share program providing technical and financial assistance with implementing conservation practices.
- Continue offering rangeland improvement equipment for landowners to rent at affordable rates (seeder and pipe welder).
- Work with producers, using rangeland data, to improve fencing and grazing management practices as requested.
- Expand efforts in vegetation monitoring with landowners and agencies through utilization of updated monitoring methods and ArcGIS mapping programs for use in land use management.
- Continue to cooperate with local, state and federal agencies on wildlife and conservation issues that can protect and benefit landscapes and species as well as private landowners.

Objective 2: Advocate and work on projects with local, federal and state land use officials with attention to conservation and protection of natural resources, disaster mitigation, and healthy ecosystems on a larger scale.

- Participate and/or advise federal land agencies regarding land use planning, paying attention to the balance of ecological and economic needs and encouraging the consolidation of small land-locked parcels into larger, more practical public land units.
- Work with the public and appropriate governmental entities to conserve lands that will benefit water resources, wildlife, open spaces, the local economy and quality of life.
- Work with agencies to ensure access and responsible use of state and federal lands, while respecting the rights and expectations of paying lessees of these lands.

Objective 3: Implement, oversee, and monitor water quality protection and improvement projects, water conservation and development, and other pertinent natural resource management and improvement projects on public and private lands.

- Use watershed studies in order to identify and develop water storage opportunities and to improve and expand existing irrigation systems.
- Work with the Dept. of Environmental Quality to address impaired reaches of the Big and Little Laramie Rivers; work with private land owners, and use rural cost share program and other outside funding to implement practices that will protect and improve habitat and water quality.
- Promote water conservation through improved irrigation practices, and the promotion/planning of water-wise landscaping. Work with the County, the City of Laramie, the University and other interested parties to protect water quality and wildlife habitat around the growing City of Laramie.

Objective 4: Support and implement conservation through many smaller scale projects including noxious weed control, junk removal/community clean up/beautification efforts, energy efficiency and water conservation throughout the county on multiple smaller scale projects

- Expand the district's Living Snow Fence program through promotion and education efforts.
- Continue collaboration with Albany County Weed & Pest addressing noxious weeds in Rock River area, and other smaller communities and explore new problem areas to address in the county.
- Work with City and County officials, the Laramie Chamber Business Alliance, and landowners in obtaining market studies, funding, volunteers, and plans to improve Laramie's entryways and corridors, for the sake of local economy and citizen's quality of life.
- Facilitate the implementation of the above projects through technical guidance and cost sharing assistance when appropriate.
- Promote the Regular Cost Share program with residents and businesses to provide assistance with projects that conserve natural resources, affect community beautification and nuisance abatement in a voluntary fashion.
- Continue working with schools and other community organizations to help establish programs and infrastructure/materials to help ensure a strong conservation ethic in tomorrow's natural resource stewards.
- Promote awareness of noxious weeds and other potentially invasive plants through articles and public notifications, and with guidance in our cost share programs, as opportunities arise. Promote weed control in City of Laramie and surrounding residential areas.

GOAL 2: Engage and inspire the community in making informed decisions that are conscious of resource conservation, the health and safety of the community, and our local economy.

Objective 1: Inspire and support an ethic and understanding of resource stewardship in Albany County.

- Continue participating in the Wyoming Small Acreage initiative through workshops, articles, and one-on-one meetings for land use planning.
- Continue organizing and promoting workshops that address natural resource and conservation issues.
- Continue providing informative articles for tri-annual newsletter, Barnyards & Backyards magazine, local newspapers and other publications as requested.
- Continue promoting tree conservation through hosting the district’s annual tree sale, producing educational publications and videos, and assisting residents with tree health issues, and participating in other urban tree planting initiatives.
- Continue cultivating the bi-annual Conservation Expo through expanding relationships with similar agencies, organizations, institutions and businesses.
- Continue providing education for K-12 students in conservation topics including: water & soil health/erosion, watersheds and riparian corridors, wildlife & habitat, sustainable agriculture, invasive species, and alternative energy.
- Assist Albany County K-12 teachers with developing natural resources conservation curriculum for students.
- Advocate energy conservation, recycling, and composting through articles, publications, education, and local events.
- Promote use of the LRCD Water & Soil Analysis Cost Share program to raise awareness and provide information for sound decision making for Albany County residents

Objective 2: Increase visibility of LRCD’s activities and programs in the community.

- Explore opportunities to take LRCD message to civic groups, service clubs, recreation clubs and individuals throughout Albany County.
- Pursue volunteers for LRCD projects and events from student groups and interested residents.
- Seek opportunities for advertising, news coverage of LRCD activities and events, and LRCD sponsorship of high-visibility community events and workshops.
- Encourage staff involvement in suitable community committees, groups and supervising boards.
- Promote staff and board participation at community events and meetings that relate to LRCD mission.
- Maintain LRCD’s demonstration Xeriscape and Community Gardens at LaBonte Park. Look for opportunities for other display and/or educational gardens.

GOAL 3: Increase the LRCD’s ability to implement its mission through making continuous improvements in management, staff enrichment, and the visibility of the LRCD in the community.

Objective 1: Strive for excellence in areas of fiscal responsibility, transparency, and overall operation of the District.

- Keep board and staff instructed in bookkeeping/accounting methods and reporting to assure fiscal responsibility.
- Ensure that LRCD has the tools/equipment, facilities, staffing and vehicles necessary for accomplishing goals.
- Continue improving LRCD website to keep the community informed, able to access reports and district information, and to provide valuable advice on conservation practices.
- Expand into other appropriate social media, like Instagram as appropriate.
- Maintain an ongoing dialog with other elected officials at the local and state levels.

Objective 2: Cultivate an involved, knowledgeable, and motivated staff.

- Foster opportunities for staff and board training and education.
- Remain informed of State, Regional and National conservation issues, policies and procedures through attendance of Area/State meetings on annual basis and Regional/National if practical.

Objective 3: Pursue plan and means of maintaining and/or upgrading LRCD equipment and facilities.

- Continue to work to put cleaned up brownfield to highest and best use
- Work with landowner to make property on Stone Rd. fit the LRCD needs until enough capital can be saved to purchase or build a new facility.
- Save cash to build or purchase a proper office/shop facility that meets all of LRCD’s needs by 2025

References considered in defining issues to be addressed in the context of our mission statement:

Freedman, KS, 2019, *Public Opinion Poll on Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming, 2018*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources

Freedman, KS and Nicole Korfanta, 2014 *Public Opinion and Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources

Boelter, Ann, and K.D. Mays, 2004, *Public Opinion in Wyoming on Conserving Agricultural Lands and Open Space*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources

University of Wyoming Surveys conducted by Small Acreage Issue team to identify issues important to Albany County Landowners

LRCO’s conversations with the public, elected officials and informal polls

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Laramie Rivers Conservation District published a notice in the Laramie Boomerang newspaper on October 2, 2019 stating that comments were being accepted on the LRCO Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan, and an advertised Public Hearing was held on the Plan on November 20, 2019.

No public comments were received on the Long Range Plan.