

**Sublette County
Conservation District
Long Range Plan
2009-2013**

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Forward

The purpose of this document is to set the long range direction and objectives of the Sublette County Conservation District.

The Board of Supervisors of the Sublette County Conservation District, in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, has taken the initiative to take the lead and contribute their time, effort and expertise towards the goals set forth in this document. The District will be the local voice in the stewardship of natural resources of Sublette County.

The responsibilities of the District have increased dramatically over the past several years. Although traditionally the focus of the Sublette County Conservation District is agriculture, the District continues to receive requests for and perform subdivision reviews, provide assistance to small acreage landowners whose income is not derived from agriculture. The District also provides assistance to companies and consultants associated with oil and gas development; provides assistance to consultants retained by companies and provides assistance to absentee landowners. Our scope of work has broadened to include groundwater and surface water quality monitoring, conservation education, cooperating agency status in federal project issues and development of natural resource policy.

This document will serve as a guide for short term planning and monitoring of the District's progress, and the policies of the district with respect to its "Public Land Use Policy" on file at the Sublette County Clerks office

This is not a static document. It is to be reviewed on an annual basis to determine need changes and may be changed at any time based on need.

Sublette County

Land Ownership and Land Use

LAND OWNERSHIP

(* Source: Sublette Co. Assessor GIS)

Total Area	3,158,344 acres
Private	590,493 acres
State School Sections	*113,950 acres
Game & Fish Habitat Lands	8,958 acres
Bureau of Land Management	*1,269,857 acres
Forest Service	*1,162,789 acres
Bureau of Reclamation (Source: GIS Data Set)	4,452 acres
Other (includes street easements, city/county property, DOT, churches, etc.)	10,333 acres

LAND USE

Federal Rangeland	1,327,559 acres
Non-Federal Rangeland	543,210 acres
Hayland, Irrigated Pasture & Riparian	141,796 acres
Federal Forest Land	1,061,089 acres
Non-Federal Forest Land	28,398 acres
Other	7,842 acres
Water	8,038 acres
Permanent Snow Cover	6,714 acres
Rock & Tundra	33,698 acres

History

The Sublette County Conservation District was formed on October 15, 1986 when the members of the Big Piney Conservation District and the Pinedale Conservation District voted to combine into a county wide District.

At the request of the county ranchers, the original Big Piney and Pinedale Conservation Districts were legally organized in December of 1941 under Wyoming Statutes sections 11-234 to 11-250 known as the “Wyoming Soil and Water Conservation District Law”. They were the first and second Districts formed in Wyoming.

Conservation districts are organized to provide for the development, conservation and protection of natural resources. As a legal subdivision of the Wyoming State Government, the District Board of Supervisors consists of a policy making group which is elected by the people on general ballot. Five supervisors, each serving a 4-year term, perform their duties without compensation. The Sublette County Conservation District meets the second Tuesday of each month. Meetings are open to the public.

The districts culture and heritage is based on the resources that it is required to protect. The area is dependant on these resources to sustain local economies; it’s recreational and commercial traditions that are associated with the well being of the citizens of Sublette County.

The Sublette County Conservation District (SCCD) works in close partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to work with individuals; groups; and local, state and federal units of government interested in natural resource conservation and development. The SCCD and NRCS also work together on ranch planning, area-wide watershed plans, water quality monitoring activities and wildlife habitat enhancements.

The district’s culture and heritage is based on the resources that it is required to protect. The area is dependent on these resources to sustain local economics, its recreational and commercial traditions that it is associated with.

Information and Education

Sublette County's children are the future and need to be nurtured and given an opportunity to understand and appreciate the natural cycles that exist around them. The Sublette County Conservation District programs will include classroom demonstrations, sponsoring outdoor classrooms, field trips, youth conservation camps and educational projects. The District will keep abreast of new educational programs as they become available so that our children will have the best natural resource educational opportunities possible. Along with providing educational opportunities for Sublette County's children, the District will produce a monthly article in local newspapers that will offer information to the general public about District activities, events, and where the District will be going in the future.

OBJECTIVES/GOALS

- ◆ To provide the children of Sublette County with opportunities to learn about impact to natural resources and natural resource conservation
- ◆ To better inform the general public through a monthly article in local newspapers
- ◆ To maintain & update our web site
- ◆ To provide weekly snow pack updates throughout the winter and spring months
- ◆ To participate in planning activities of Public Land Management agencies by establishing partnership collaboration, communication and cooperation.

Soils

The soils of the District are many and varied. This variety stems mainly from the differences in parent material and the range in precipitation. Annual rainfall ranges from about 7 inches in the LaBarge area to greater than 20 inches in the mountains. Soils of the Green River Basin, Wyoming Range, and the Bondurant area are developed largely from alkaline sedimentary rock. Soils east of the Green River from the US Forest Service boundary south to the Boulder area are developed from more acid igneous and metamorphic materials of the Wind River Range. The deepest soils tend to be in valleys within the foothills. Mountain soils tend to be shallow to moderate depths to gravel or bedrock (20-40") due to high levels of salts in the subsoil or high water tables. The irrigated soils of the District are largely on stream terraces and bottom lands. Major management concerns are the application of water and fertility and to prevent loss of and maintaining and enhancing its fertility.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Soil survey is in progress and scheduled for completion in 2010
- ◆ Produce a resource inventory of soils information useable for a number of different applications including but not limited to:
 - Ranch and farm conservation plans.
 - Land assessment evaluation tool to be used by the County Assessor to assist in the determination of the productive capacity of agricultural lands
 - Project and subdivision proposals by County Planning and Zoning Administration

- **Identification of potential flood hazard areas**
- **Identification of potential gravel sources**
- **Identification of sensitive riparian areas**
- **Identification of soils as baseline data for mapping ecological sites**
- **Reclamation plan development by oil and gas companies**
- **Used in design of improved irrigation systems, including sprinkler systems**
- **Identification of construction properties of soils, including road base material, sources of sand, gravel and topsoil**
- **Identification of soil suitability for building site development, including buildings with and without basements**
- **Identification of soil suitability for sanitary facilities, including septic tank absorption fields**
- ◆ **Enable decision makers, such as land owners, county officials and federal officials to make decisions based on sound scientific knowledge of land capabilities and suitability limitations**
- ◆ **Provide GIS-compatible digital files of soil maps, soil characteristics and suitability ratings for various uses**
- ◆ **Provide an electronic version of the published report , for use by government agencies and the public.**

Vegetation

The predominant land use in the District is rangeland. Seventy percent of all non-federal land in Sublette County is classified as rangeland. Rangeland in the District includes the following four precipitation zones: 7-9 inch zone, 10-14 inch zone, 15-19 inch zone, and 20 inches and over zone. The rangeland landscape is predominantly a sagebrush steppe. Livestock grazing is the major agricultural use of rangeland. It also provides critical habitat for vast numbers of antelope, elk, moose, mule deer, sage grouse and other game and non-game species.

When combined with public land rangelands it creates an extensive habitat for livestock, wildlife and watersheds.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Conduct tours and promote demonstration plots at Soda Lake and plantings on private and public lands to evaluate the suitability of various grasses; for the improvement of early spring pastures on private lands, to enhance habitats for livestock and wildlife
- ◆ Work with US Forest Service, BLM, State of Wyoming and individual landowners to coordinate habitat improvement by using Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) techniques
- ◆ Promote various methods of brush management for habitat and rangeland improvement
- ◆ Improve grazing distribution and flexibility by promoting and assisting livestock producers with stock fencing and water developments
- ◆ Encourage control and management of invasive and noxious weeds on grazing lands
- ◆ Promote and participate in development related reclamation and mitigation

Agriculture

There are approximately 141,796 acres of irrigated pasture and hayland in the District. Native hay is the principle crop grown under flood irrigation. This hay varies widely in composition from high quality introduced grasses to stands comprised entirely of rushes and sedges. The average hay yield for the District is slightly over one ton per acre for flood irrigated and 3 tons per acre under sprinkler. Alfalfa or alfalfa/grass mixes are typically grown under sprinklers and after harvest irrigated hay lands are utilized for fall winter and spring grazing for livestock and provide year round habitat for some wildlife species, irrigation provides the bulk of riparian habitat in the area.

About 3,000 acres of alfalfa are grown in the District and is primarily marketed through livestock that utilize public rangeland the balance of the year. Over the past ten years and continuing at the present time, the use of sprinkler irrigation is increasing. A maximum of two cuttings can be harvested which usually yield between 1 to 2 tons per acre per cutting.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To improve the quality and quantity of forage on pasture and hayland by recommending the most efficient methods for each producer
- ◆ To improve flood irrigation systems through on-field reorganization, timely infrastructure replacement with more efficient functionally and ecologically sound in-stream diversions
- ◆ Promote and develop additional storage in an effort to provide adequate irrigation water for pasture and hayland
- ◆ To seek to amend the Wilderness Act to allow for the development of water storage facilities and ensure such designations are made within the requirements of the act. The District will not support such designations if they prevent the development or storage of existing water rights
- ◆ To encourage control and management of invasive, noxious weeds

Water

Water is one of the most valuable resources in Sublette County. Snowfall in the Wind River, Gros Ventre, and Wyoming ranges, along with more than 1,000 glacial lakes located on the western slopes of the Wind River Range are the source of the District's abundant water supply. Water flows from the county through the Green, Big Sandy and Hoback Rivers. The geology of the area provides for excellent groundwater storage and late season stream flows. Surface water in Sublette County is in satisfactory condition. Area Rivers and streams provide irrigation water to approximately 142,000 acres of irrigated hay and pasture lands, support wildlife habitats, high value sports fishery and associated riparian and wetland areas, domestic supplies, and supports industry and development activities.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To establish baseline water quality data which will include physical, biological and chemical parameters. The sampling area within Sublette County includes the New Fork watershed, a portion of the upper Green River watershed and a portion of the upper Hoback River watershed.
- ◆ To move water from the source to pasture and hayland as efficiently as possible
- ◆ To find better and more efficient ways to store water
- ◆ To encourage public land managers and landowners to manage for healthy, diverse, well-functioning watersheds
- ◆ Encourage livestock producers to use best management practices associated with animal feeding operations near live streams or other water bodies

Forests

Privately owned forests in the District consists of narrow strips of Lodgepole Pine, Cottonwood and Willows along creeks, and patches of Aspen and Pine in the uplands. Forests are primarily used for recreation, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing and timber harvesting.

The bulk of the forestland in the Bridger Teton Nation Forest is used for recreation, livestock grazing and wildlife. The loss of timber harvesting as a forest management tool has contributed to poor forest management that has negatively affected the economic stability of Sublette County and has reduced water yields. The opportunity for increased infestations and catastrophic fire has increased.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To provide landowners with soil information, sources of planting stock, species recommendations and technical help in managing private forests and timber lands
- ◆ To encourage federal and state agencies to use timber harvesting as a sound, scientific management practice
- ◆ To encourage federal and state agencies to make more areas accessible to the public for personal use of forest products and timber harvesting

Habitat

Livestock, wildlife, and watershed are dependent upon properly functioning habitats. Properly functioning habitats are those that contain the proper balance of species diversity and structure.

OBJECTIVES/GOALS

- Participate in and promote monitoring of habitats to establish condition and trend
- To promote appropriate mitigation of habitat losses
- To ensure that on-site mitigation opportunities have been exhausted prior to project off-site mitigation.
- To promote habitat improvements, in conjunction with, or prior to proposed development to reduce overall habitat loss and impacts of such loss
- Where opportunities exist, work directly with industry to form partnership in order to jointly address natural resource management in the district.

Wildlife

Wildlife is abundant in the District and important to the local economy and heritage. Species include antelope, deer, elk, fox, coyotes, moose, big horn sheep, black bears, grizzly bears, wolves, and mountain lions. Waterfowl, raptors, and game birds, inhabit the area. High value fishing opportunities abound in the areas many lakes and streams. The existence of this diverse and high value wildlife resource provides blue ribbon recreation and tourism opportunities which are an important aspect of the areas economy.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To provide assistance to land owners for improving wildlife habitat on private lands
- ◆ To encourage management of large carnivores that attempt to minimize livestock human conflicts, while providing recreational opportunities.
- ◆ To promote responsible locally coordinated science based wildlife management
- ◆ To participate in wildlife management planning processes such as wildlife species introductions and reintroductions, wildlife feeding, big game herd objectives, and wildlife monitoring.

A properly functioning habitat benefits wildlife, livestock, and watersheds. It also reduces impact of development by reducing wildlife disturbances both the initial movement away from disturbance and the duration of such disturbance

Mineral Development

Mineral development is the primary contributor to the economy of the district. The last few years has seen unprecedented growth in the production of oil and gas and related activities.

Properly managed and mitigated mineral development is not in conflict with the districts goals and objectives.

Mitigation funds and projects associated with development may provide opportunities to forward the goals and objectives of the District.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To the extent possible, participate in development decisions that affect the interest and responsibilities of the district.
- ◆ Promote and participate in the monitoring of habitats to establish condition and trend.
- ◆ Promote and participate in the monitoring of rangelands, air and water quality in order *to establish condition and trend.
- ◆ Promote the establishment of additional water and air quality monitoring stations.

District Operating Policies

The Sublette County Conservation District has a number of policies to guide the District Supervisors and staff in carrying out their responsibilities.

1. The District Supervisors recognize and fully accept their responsibility for carrying out administrative, financial, and other resource management objectives of the District.
2. The District will establish cooperative or collaborative relationships and partnerships with all individuals, organizations, and agencies having an interest in, or a responsibility for, natural resource conservation, watershed enhancement, or other District related programs.
3. The District will enter into formal agreements such as Memorandum of Understanding or other agreements with local, state, and federal agencies to establish cooperation collaboration as necessary in order to participate in planning and project implementation.
4. The District will prepare an Annual Plan of Work to serve as a guide in implementing its projects and programs for that fiscal year. This plan will be periodically reviewed throughout the fiscal year.
5. The District will prepare an Annual Report (based on the Districts fiscal year) in which the Districts activities and accomplishments will be noted.
6. The District will encourage all cooperators to develop a conservation plan to permit application of needed practices in an orderly manner.
7. The District will constantly monitor all new state and federal legislation in order to determine if and how the legislation effects the Districts projects, programs and cooperators.
8. The District has a “Public Information Release Policy” which describes the procedure for release of data

**Adoption of the
Sublette County Conservation
District
Long Range Plan
2009-2013**

On August 12, 2008 the Board of Supervisors for the Sublette County Conservation District, as duly authorized by the Wyoming Conservation District Law, hereby adopt this Long Range Plan for the years of 2009-2013

Darrell D. Walker, Chairman

Brad Bousman, Vice Chairman

Craig Scharf, Secretary/Treasurer

Colin Barney, Member

Les Burrough, Member