

April, 2023



## The Mountain Meadow

A quarterly publication from the  
Sublette County Conservation District



Photo Credit: Milford Lockwood

April Showers Bring May Flowers.... And Calves!

## Highlights In This Issue

- SCCD - What We've Been Up To
- SCCD - Spring Expo - Survey
- NRCS Update - Additional Funding and a Fond Farewell
- SCCD - Great Conservation Idea
- WDA Update - Rangeland Health Assessment Grant Program
- SCCD - SCCD's New Water Resource Specialist
- UW Extension Ag. & Natural Resources Extension Educator - Rebreeding First-Calf Heifers
- SCCD - SCCD's Newest Range Specialist

*"By working with local people who understand local problems,  
the best conservation measures can be accomplished."*

# What We've Been Up To

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## From the District Manager's Chair

Mike Henn, District Manager

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Wyoming was well represented at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) annual meeting in New Orleans, LA with 11 people attending from around the State. Sublette County had two attendees Coke Landers and me. Coke was representing the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) as a Wyoming voting delegate. I was representing WACD on the Public Lands resource policy group and the National Conservation District Employee Association as the Southwest Region Alternate Director. I am not going to lie it was nice to leave Sublette County in February with below zero temperatures and snow to attend the meeting where the lows were in the 50's and highs approaching the mid 70's. After a week though everyone was ready to go back home to snow and cold, as we determined it to be population control!

At the convention policies were brought forth by State's and worked on by the Board of Directors some made it into NACD policy, and some did not like how laws or policies are created here locally. National leaders and partner organizations gave us updates that affect conservation districts. WACD's Vice President Ryan Fieldgrove from Buffalo was elected as the NACD Southwest Regional Vice President and will represent the Southwest region at the national level.



Looking forward with the snow we currently have sitting on the landscape Mother Nature has set us up for a banner year, if she doesn't turn the spigot off too soon. Enjoy your "spring" and as always feel free to stop by and say hi or ask us about any natural resource questions you may have.

# Spring Expo Survey

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Sublette County Conservation District



**WE ARE SORRY!  
SCCD WILL NOT  
BE HOSTING THE  
2023 SPRING  
EXPO THIS YEAR.**



**We want to hear from you!  
Please fill out our survey regarding this event!**

**CLICK HERE TO TAKE OUR SURVEY!**

<https://forms.gle/zg9Jkx5jWnEFjwcdA>  
[ts=64188c18](https://forms.gle/zg9Jkx5jWnEFjwcdA)

# NRCS Update

## Additional Funding and A Fond Farewell

Jennifer Hayward, District Conservationist



Additional funds will be entering existing WY NRCS Conservation Programs over the next three years because of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed in fall of 2022. These programs cover structural practices, management incentives as well as conservation easements. Specific practices are eligible for this funding which are targeting conservation projects which are considered beneficial for climate resilience. While a list of eligible practices and projects are available now, additional practices are anticipated to be added for consideration next year. If you have a conservation project in mind, please contact the office so we can begin planning for onsite evaluation this year in order to be prepared to consider it for financial assistance.

Shirleena King served as the office assistant and receptionist at NRCS for 11 years. She has served our customers with kindness, thoroughness, and excellence. She has moved on to a different job and is sorely missed by her co-workers and producers which she served. We all wish Shirleena all the best as she pursues the next chapter of her working career. We are also welcoming Michaela Dover, who will be working as the office assistant, in late March.



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Great Conservation Idea

Melanie Purcell, Wildlife & Habitat Program Manager

"This opportunity is still available, and we want to hear from you!"



DO YOU HAVE A  
SMALL BUT GREAT  
CONSERVATION  
IDEA? WE WANT TO  
HELP FUND YOUR  
PROJECTS!



THINK OUTSIDE THE  
BOX!



## GREAT CONSERVATION IDEA



### Grant Assistance Program



Cost-share up to  
\$2500

Cost-share can be in-kind  
volunteer labor



Accepting Year-Round  
Applications. Apply  
Today!

Information and application  
materials are available by  
visiting the SCCD website  
[www.sublettecd.com](http://www.sublettecd.com)



Who can Apply?

Open to any youth  
and/or adults, teams,  
schools, clubs,  
churches, businesses,  
or other groups

Application Questions: Sublette County Conservation District  
[mpurcell@sublettecd.com](mailto:mpurcell@sublettecd.com)  
307-367-2364

Grant Assistance  
Program Sponsored  
by:

Pinedale Anticline Project Office



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## Great Conservation Idea Grant Assistance Program

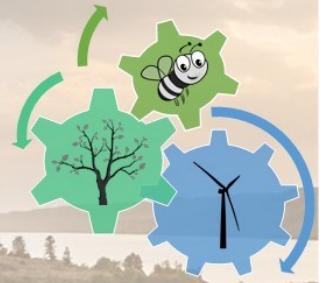
### What is it?

The Sublette County Conservation District (SCCD) provides this program as a financial source for your small but "Great Conservation Idea". We look for ideas that benefit natural resources and which generate small but well thought out projects that might otherwise wither for lack of an appropriate funding source. Project must show a public education or public benefit component. This is an opportunity to help fund those small conservation projects that have a difficult time competing against larger, more expensive projects. This conservation assistance cost-share fund will reimburse 50% of project costs up to \$2500. Project costs are reimbursable and applied based on actual receipts submitted.

### How do I apply?

1. Download the application materials at [sublettecd.com](http://sublettecd.com)
2. Submit application to SCCD, **applications are accepted year-round!**
3. A review team evaluates the projects and makes recommendations, then the SCCD Board of Supervisors approves whether the project is funded or not.

Contact Melanie Purcell by phone at 307-367-2364 or email, [mpurcell@sublettecd.com](mailto:mpurcell@sublettecd.com) with any questions.



### What types of projects are funded?

This program has helped fund a variety of projects including:

- riparian enhancement
- community beautification
- tree, shrub and flower plantings
- bee pollination
- natural resource education opportunities.

These are only a few potential items under the umbrella of great conservation ideas, so come tell us yours!

### What is cost-share?

A 50% cost-share component is required on this grant. This means that we will match you 50% of your project costs up to \$2500 on a \$5000 project. Cost-share can be cash or in-kind.

### What does in-kind mean?

In-kind is an exchange of goods or services other than money. For example, volunteer "on the ground" labor may be used as match at a rate of \$10/hr.

### Who can get funding?

Sublette County groups or individuals including:

- Residents
- Landowners
- Businesses
- Service organizations
- Schools
- Clubs/Groups
- Other entities interested in conservation.

Pinedale Anticline Project Office



# Rangeland Health Assessment Grant Program (RHAP)

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Justin Caudill, Wyoming Department of Agriculture

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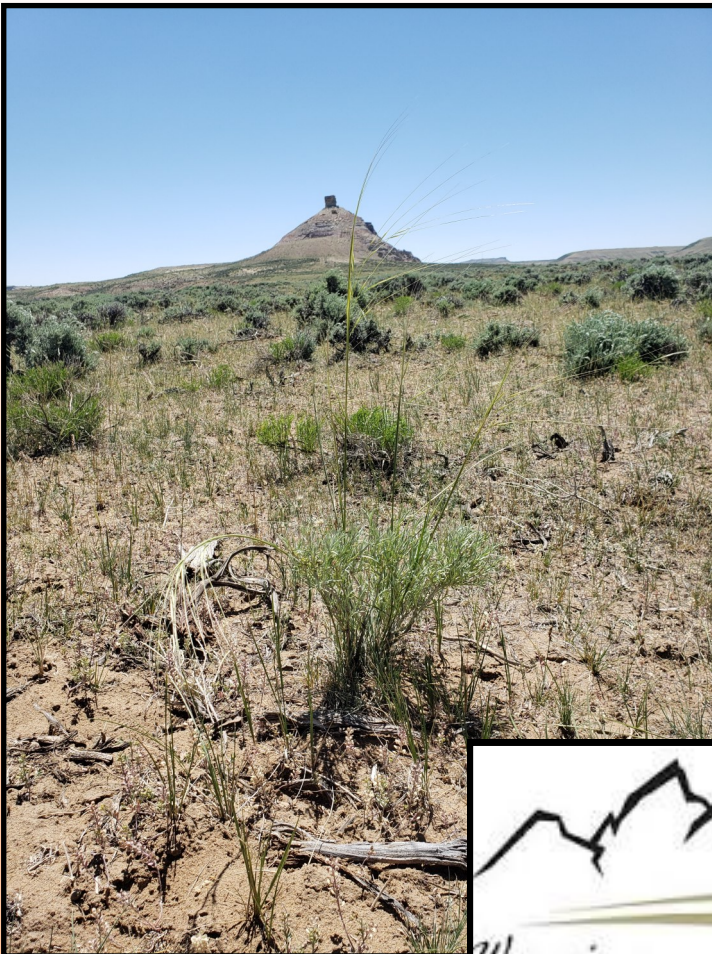
The Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) is a program administered by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture. The program was developed with the sole purpose of collecting credible data in the assessment of Wyoming Rangelands with funding being offered for on the ground projects in 2011. The programs efforts are focused on joint cooperative monitoring between Ranchers/permittees and federal and state land management agencies, all being involved in the design of the project, receiving education related to methodologies, establishment or confirmation of monitoring locations, along with the collection of the data. To date there have been seventy-three projects funded received \$1,150,299 in program funding for monitoring efforts. These projects have led to over 9,672,451 acres of federal, state, and private lands being cooperatively monitored. These projects have generated a combined total In-Kind/Match of \$971,980 equaling an 84% match.

RHAP's short-term goal is to sustain viable levels of federal land grazing by providing credible data to assist federal land agencies in completing permitting and NEPA analysis, and to enable agencies and permittees to defend against challenges to grazing permit renewals and management plans. While the long-term goal is to develop a monitoring plan to assess trends in rangeland health and assure credible data is utilized in making sound management decisions on the land. Through RHAP projects permittees have increased opportunity to become more involved in adaptive management discussions and decisions, due to the educational experiences and increased communication with governmental agencies. These discussions can lead to longer lasting outcomes because decisions are based on jointly collected scientifically defensible data.

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For the past six years the WDA has been receiving RHAP project Updates and Final Reports containing constructive and encouraging comments from permittees and federal staff describing a vast array of outcomes and insights related to their project involvement. To read these comments and learn more about the RHAP program please go to the following link <http://agriculture.wy.gov/divisions/nrp/rangeland-health>, and or contact Justin Caudill by phone at 307-350-5480.





# SCCD's New Water Resource Specialist

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Adrienne Kirkwood, Water Resource Specialist



I joined the Sublette County Conservation District in March of 2023. After earning my B.S. in Natural Resource Management from Kansas State University 1999, I moved to Western Wyoming. Wyoming's mountains and rivers found a way into my life as I pursued careers in ski patrolling, river guiding, snowmobile guiding and many seasonal resource management positions such as: range technician, river ranger, vegetation management and wildland firefighter with the USFS, NPS and BLM. Currently, I'm pursuing a master's degree in Natural Resource Management through the University of Idaho. I'm very excited to explore and learn about Sublette County and all that it has to offer. In my spare time, you may find me skiing, running rivers, camping, fly-fishing, cooking or gardening.



# Rebreeding First-Calf Heifers

Dagan Montgomery, UW Extension, Sublette County

Whether you keep back your own heifers or purchase from an outside source, most ranchers have faced the challenge of breeding back a heifer that has just had her first calf.

First-calf heifers typically calve at about 24 months of age, assuming the goal is to breed for the first time at 12-14 months. Reproduction is four times more impactful and profitable than any other production trait. Failure to rebreed can have a major economic impact, as a significant amount of time and money has already been invested in the animal.

To continue weaning a calf year after year, a cow needs to become pregnant within 60 to 85 days after calving. The time between calving and rebreeding is longer in heifers than in mature cows; certain conditions can extend the postpartum interval.

During pregnancy check, many ranchers find that an overwhelming amount of their open cows, up to one-third of the opens in a herd, are first and second-calf heifers. Shortening the postpartum interval as much as possible can help ensure a two-year-old heifer rebreeds in time.

## Higher energy demands

At her first calving, a two-year-old heifer is still growing. She does not yet have her complete set of adult teeth and is not as efficient at grazing as a mature cow. In giving birth to her first calf, she has just undergone one of her greatest physical challenges. Calving and lactation are enormous demands on her growing body.

Rebreeding for a second calf is the lowest of her physiological priorities. She first must use her resources to stay alive and continue growing herself. Secondly, she must provide milk for her calf. Only after these needs are met will she reallocate remaining energy for reproduction.

Because of these greater energy demands, two-year-olds require a higher level of nutrition than older cows. Ideally, heifers should be at least 66% of their mature weight when they are first bred and about 85% of their mature weight at their first calving as a two-year-old. It is crucial to be sure that heifers receive adequate nutrition, especially during their last trimester.



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## **Maintaining BCS**

Wyoming's harsh winters and frequent dry years can make it difficult to rebreed heifers. Especially under range conditions growing heifers may struggle to find adequate forage under range conditions. During these periods, provide protein supplementation and feed quality hay if it is economically and practically feasible for your operation.

The simplest way to monitor a heifer's nutrient level is her body condition score (BCS). On a 1 to 9 scale, try to keep heifers at a 5 or 6—in other words, in moderate to good weight with few, if any, ribs showing and some rounding to the back and tailhead. (A helpful resource for this can be found at [https://www.wyoextension.org/publications/Search\\_Details.php?pubid=1918](https://www.wyoextension.org/publications/Search_Details.php?pubid=1918) )

A common misconception is that keeping a first-calf heifer at a lower BCS (below a 5) will lead to a lower birthweight calf and, therefore, fewer calving difficulties. However, this is not true. Birth weight is influenced more by genetics than BCS and will only decrease slightly if a heifer is kept underweight. Not only can a low BCS worsen calving difficulty and weaken the heifer, but it can also jeopardize her ability to breed back.

## **Breeding early**

Another opportunity to shorten the first-calf heifers' postpartum interval and increase the rebreeding rate involves breeding virgin heifers 20 to 30 days earlier than mature cows, if possible.

It can take 20 to 30 days longer for a two-year-old to come back into estrus than an older cow. Breeding a heifer to calve a few weeks before the main herd gives her more time to recuperate and increases the odds of a timely rebreeding the following year.

Heifers that calve late are more likely to fail rebreeding and are more likely to continue calving late throughout their life, leading to lighter calves at weaning. However, earlier calving can be challenging for western Wyoming ranchers. Forage may not be readily available in late winter/early spring, and many operations are already calving in the snow and may not be able to feasibly calve out heifers even earlier. But if more intense management is achievable and feed sources and facilities allow for it, this is an option.

## **Weaning Early**

Another option to help the heifer maintain good weight before being bred for the second or third time, and one that several ranchers already utilize, is the early weaning of first and even second calves. Calves can be successfully weaned as early as 8 weeks old. Removing the calf from the heifer this early greatly decreases the demands on her body by removing the need to produce milk.

This helps her gain or maintain weight to be at a BCS of 6 at the start of breeding and will reduce forage needs. However, as you can imagine, this is very labor intensive and would require health and feed inputs, as two-month-old calves cannot really be let loose to graze range and expected to fair well.

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## **Weaning Early Continued**

But if it can be made to make sense, weaning young calves can be a sort of “last ditch effort” for high-value replacement heifers that would not otherwise be able to make the breeding season in good condition.

A much more feasible method for early weaning would be to wean at 4 to 6 months, assuming the mature cow herd is weaning/shipped at 7 months or so. This still will provide a few more months of rest and recovery for heifers that still need to grow themselves. They should be able to reach the following spring’s calving date at better BCS than if the 1st calf from the previous year was left on her well into the fall.

Calving at a good BCS the following year will help them rebreed that breeding season. It is just important to remember that the benefits from weaning a calf 2 or three months early won’t be seen until the following year.

## **Herd separation**

If possible, bred heifers can be kept and managed as a separate herd due to their higher nutritional demands and increased care requirements, especially if you plan to breed and calve earlier. Separating the herd allows you to devise a specific feeding regimen for heifers if needed and to keep an eye out for body condition, health concerns, and calving difficulty. This also helps if you plan to use a specific bull on heifers due to genetics, calving ease EPDs, etc.

Typically, 80% of calving difficulty a rancher deals with will be in first-calf heifers. Heifers that experience prolonged labor of an hour or more will be far less likely to rebreed in good time than heifers that are assisted. If it is reasonable for your operation, separating heifers will allow you to decrease unnecessarily long births and ensure a higher rate of successful rebreeding for their second calves.

Some ranchers like to keep heifers with mature cows so that they learn the lay of the country and how to travel. Even in these situations, keeping the heifers separate during winter feeding can help with managing their needs before being turned out with the mature herd in the spring.

## **Conclusion: Every Ranch is Different**

As with any management method on the ranch, replacement heifer management is something each ranch will have to address and decide on individually. Some of this advice may be a great way to mitigate difficulty in rebreeding heifers, while some may not pencil out or may just be impractical depending on the operation’s demands, facilities, and layout.

At the end of the day, if nothing else, simply paying attention to the overall BCS of replacement heifers and trying to keep them from becoming too thin leading up to calving and breeding will go a long way towards improving the rate of heifer breeding success.



UNIVERSITY  
OF WYOMING

Extension  
Sublette County

# SCCD's Newest Range Specialist

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Justice Miller, Range Specialist



Hello, my name is Justice Miller. On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, I started my career as a Range Specialist for Sublette County Conservation District. I am ecstatic to be here in Sublette County, get out in the field, and see everything this beautiful country and her people have to offer. I am originally from Osage, WY in Weston County, and I grew

up in Gillette, WY. My college career is a bit “non-traditional”. I started college as a welding major at Gillette College, but some prior injuries provoked me to look into something that “wouldn’t have me standing all day on crutches”. That is how I got into rangeland management. Sheridan College, a sister college of Gillette College at the time, offered an Associate’s in Range Management, and that is exactly what I did. I first received my Associate of Science in Range Management, and then transferred to the University of Wyoming. There, I received my Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management in December of 2022.

My passion for the range began with me working as a ranch hand for the Ogalalla Land and Cattle Co. based out of Douglas, WY. There, I truly realized the importance of a healthy landscape. I later decided to expand my experience and follow a more scientific pathway. I got hired on as a range intern by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture to work for the Forest Service on the South Zone of the Shoshone National Forest based out of Dubois, WY, where I got to see the application of my education for the first time. I did all sorts of monitoring like range readiness, utilization, long-term vegetation monitoring, and even implementing Ecological Site Descriptions.

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Last summer, I worked as a research assistant/range field tech for the USDA-ARS and the University of Wyoming in the Thunder Basin National Grassland. With this position, I gained even more knowledge and experience in the world of range. I learned even more monitoring techniques, but that isn't what I find to be the most important thing to come out of that summer. The Basin is where



I really started to look beyond the monitoring and start developing hypotheses and ideas. I wasn't only focused on 'the what' with my job, but 'the why' and that is what I believe makes a good scientist and range specialist.

In my first two months with the District, I have been belly deep in data organizing and analyzing for a couple different projects I will eventually be spearheading. I have also helped collar cows for our Vence project and done a little bit of welding. There are not enough words in the English language to describe how excited I am to get outside, be on the ground, and become familiar with the amazing county all along side a good crew and a great conservation district.

# Kid's Corner

## SPRINGTIME

Unscramble each of the words on the right side of this page, then copy the letters from the numbered boxes to the boxes below to find the hidden phrase.

LIARP

		4		22	

RDSIB

		11			

SUDB

13		12	

COORLLUF

		23			3		21		

FOSRELW

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SAGRS

		1		

RENGE

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MHRAC

				7	

MYA

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NIRPSG

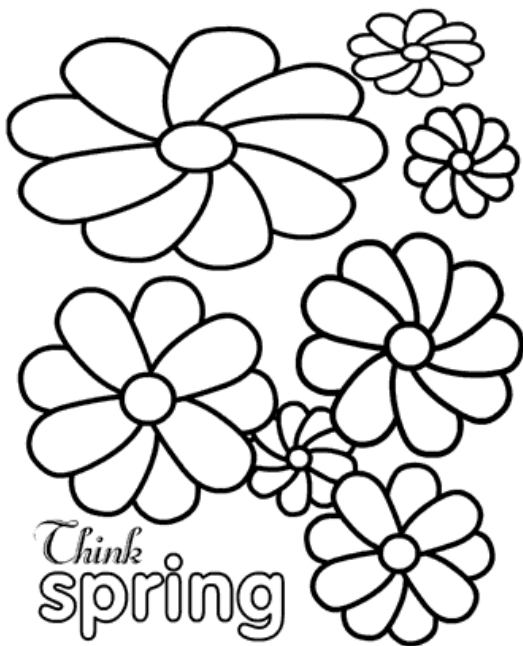
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NUS

6		

MARW

9		19		



## POPULAR SPRINGTIME PHRASE

1	2	3	4	5	

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13	14	15	16	17	

18	19	20	

21	22	23	24	25	26	27	

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# Who Are We?

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## **Sublette County Conservation District Board of Supervisors**

Coke Landers-Chairman

Darrell Walker-Vice Chairman

Dave Pape-Sec/Treasurer

Meghann Smith

Milford Lockwood

## **Sublette County Conservation District Staff**

Michael Henn, District Manager

Traci Berg, Administrative Coordinator

Melanie Purcell, Wildlife & Habitat Program Manager

Shari Meeks, Range Program Manager

Justice Miller, Rangeland Specialist

Keller Hyde, Rangeland Technician

Adrienne Kirkwood, Water Resource Specialist

## **Partners: USDA / NRCS Staff**

Jennifer Hayward, District Conservationist

Karen Clause, Multi-County Range Management Specialist

Joey Galanti, Ecological Site Specialist

Dillon Gray, Autumn Boxum, Taylor Kepley, Jenna Platt-Soil Survey Team

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*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's Target Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. The USDA is an Equal Opportunity Provider, Employer and Lender.*



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