CONVERSE COUNTY

CONSERVATION DISTRICT

LAND USE AND

NATURAL RESOURCE

MANAGEMENT PLAN

RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION

The Converse County Conservation District, a political subdivision of the State of Wyoming, has statutory authority to develop and implement a resource plan that relates to the use, conservation, and management of soil, range, and water resources for conservation of soil and water resources (W.S 11-16-122). The Board of Supervisors for the Converse County Conservation District hereby adopts this Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan on November 13, 2025 and the record of said plan is in the office of the Converse County Clerk.

Sharon Lovitt

Shelly Falkenburg

Susan Downs

P. Stan Mitchem

Patricia Taboga

TABLE OF CONTENTS

History……..…..4

Customs and Culture……..…4

Local Conservation District Development…….…...4

State Statute Authority…….…….5

Funding……..……6

Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan……..…6

General Converse County Map with Land Ownership…….…...7

Converse County Conservation District Policies…….……8

A Continuing Process…….13

History

Converse County is located in the central eastern portion of Wyoming and contains over 2.7 million acres. The County is bounded on the north by Campbell County, on the northeast by Weston County, on the east by Niobrara County, on the southeast by Platte County, on the south by Albany County, on the southwest by Carbon County, on the west by Natrona County, and on the northwest by Johnson County. The southern part of the County contains portions of the Medicine Bow National Forest. The northeastern part of the County contains portions of the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Converse County was created on March 9, 1888, by the legislature of the Wyoming Territory. It was formed from land ceded by Albany County and Laramie County. Converse County was named for Amasa R. Converse, a banker and rancher from Cheyenne, WY. Mr. Converse was a partner with Francis E. Warren in a large ranch in the eastern part of Converse County. On May 18, 1888, Douglas was voted as the county seat. In 1911, Niobrara County was created from the eastern portion of Converse County. The southern boundary of Converse County was slightly modified by special election in 1955 and land from Albany County was added.

Customs and Culture

The customs and culture of Converse County have historically been driven by open rangeland used for livestock and agricultural production. Rangeland used by livestock and agricultural producers continues to be the dominant land use in the County. Utilization and appreciation of wildlife have also been important components of the County's long-standing heritage and practice. Hunting, along with non-consumptive uses of wildlife, continues to be an important part of the County's culture. In more recent years, development of energy resources including coal, oil, gas, uranium and wind has become increasingly important.

Local Conservation District Development

On a national level, soil and water conservation began in the United States in the late 1920's. America was suffering from alarming losses of topsoil caused by wind and water erosion. Conservation research stations were established, providing data which documented acres of non-tillable land, increased flooding and stream silting which was costing land users about $200 million each year.

The Soil Erosion Service was established in 1933, just before the first great dust storm blew out of the Great Plains, sending sand particles over Washington D.C. and 300 feet out into the Atlantic Ocean. Following the second great storm in 1935, 300 million tons of soil was believed to have blown off the Great Plains. Forty-one conservation projects and fifty Civilian Conservation Corp Camps began working on erosion control. The Soil Erosion Service became part of the Department of Agriculture and later became the Soil Conservation Service. In 1995, their name changed again to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

In 1935, the first Soil Conservation Service employee came to Wyoming and demonstration projects were initiated. This included land leveling, crested wheat and native grass seedings,

rangeland improvements, dams, wells, pipelines and irrigation systems.
It was then decided that to be more effective, there should be a link between the federal government and each local community. Two years later, Congress authorized each state to set up local conservation districts.
In 1941, according to Wyoming State Law, policy was declared to provide for the conservation of the soil and water, and to preserve all natural resources within the state. Conservation districts were formed to serve as the grass-roots link between the local community and the federal government.
There were three conservation districts originally formed in Converse County. In 1947, both the LaPrele District and the Glenrock District were formed. These two districts consolidated in 1963. The third district, the Upper Cheyenne River District was formed in 1951. In 1979 the three districts consolidated and became the Converse County Conservation District.

State Statute Authority

Converse County Conservation District (CCCD) is a local government and a political subdivision of the State of Wyoming as defined and established by the Wyoming Statutes at Title 11, Chapter 16 et seq., entitled "Wyoming Conservation District Law".

Converse County Conservation District is guided by the Wyoming State Legislature-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.

Converse County Conservation District is under the direction of a locally elected volunteer Board of Supervisors. Supervisors are local residents, elected by local citizens on the general ballot, to serve staggered four-year terms. Under Wyoming State Statute, three positions are rural (residing outside city/town limits), one position is urban (residing within city/town limits) and one is at-large (residing anywhere in the county). Elected supervisors may appoint Associate Supervisors for their expertise and interest in specific areas. Associate Supervisors provide valuable input but are not voting members of the board.

Funding

Converse County Conservation District receives a 1 mill levy from the taxpayers of Converse County. CCCD has received this funding since it was approved on the November 1996 General Ballot and a petition recall is in effect. The District remains accountable for the funding provided by the Converse County taxpayers and ensures that all CCCD programs are carried out in a fiscally responsible and professional manner.

Upon meeting the list of annual requirements for both the Wyoming Department of Agriculture and Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts, CCCD receives a base funding stipend of $8,823.50 each fiscal year.

CCCD also seeks out grant funding opportunities whenever possible to carry out special projects. These grants make it possible for CCCD to develop beneficial partnerships and to undertake natural resource projects with state and federal agencies.

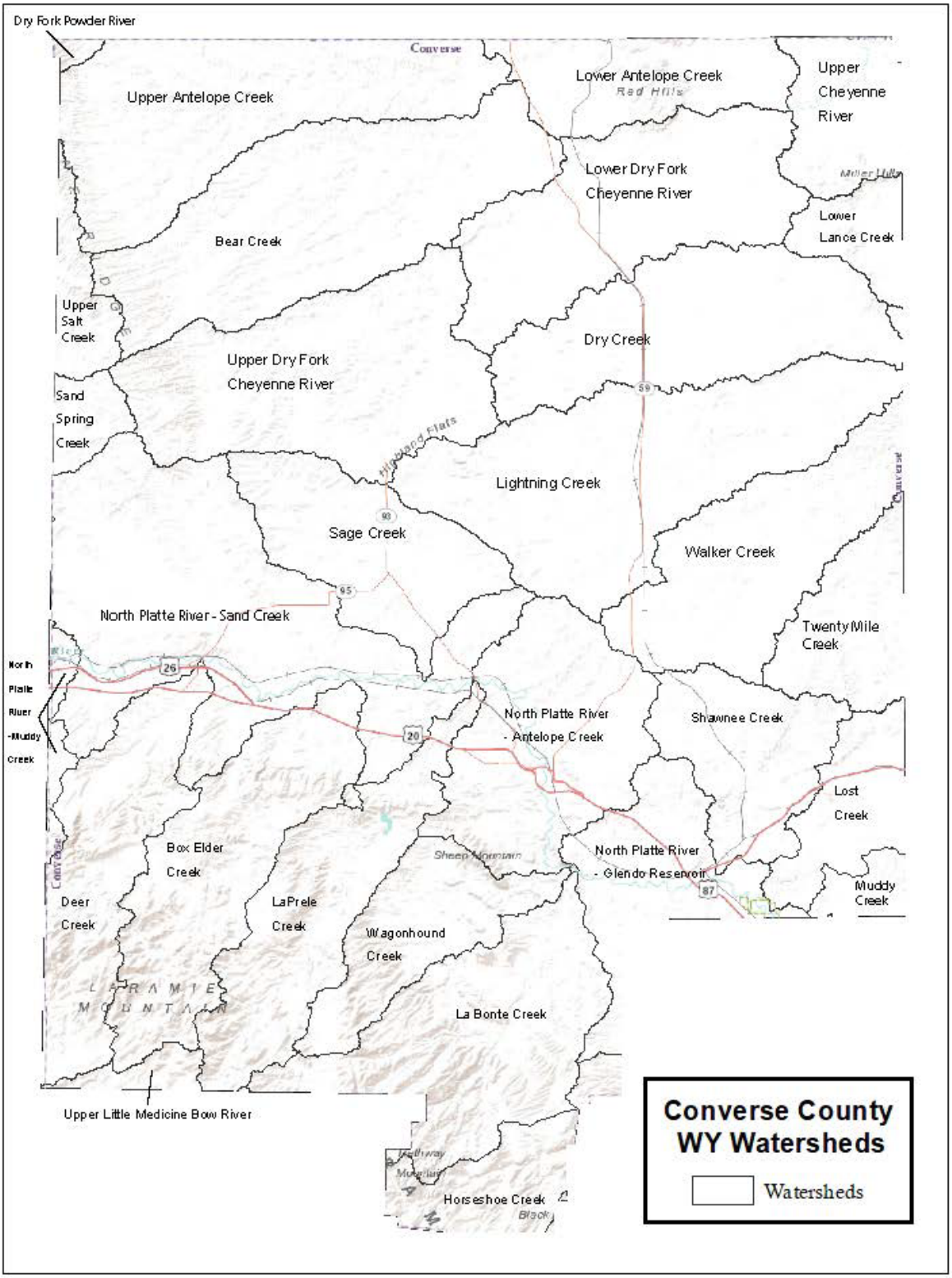
Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan

The purpose of this document is to set forth the Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plans of the Converse County Conservation District. This Plan is to guide policy with respect to soil and water natural resource conservation and enhancement as needed and is intended to provide a framework for local, state and federal agencies in land use planning that affect the resources in the District. Additionally, the Plan is meant to safeguard the historic, traditional, conceptual and future conservation measures of these resources against all encroachments that may jeopardize their sanctity and beneficial use.

The predominant land use in Converse County is agriculture but much has changed over the years. The CCCD Board of Supervisors has had to meet the challenge of adapting with that change in order to remain effective stewards of our natural resources. As the only locally governed natural resource public agency with a locally elected board, this District will be a local voice for the management and enhancement of our County's natural resources.

Converse County Conservation District expects to (1) engage with the federal government, such as BLM and Forest Service through coordination, and to (2) be given early notification of any opportunities for cooperating agency status by all federal agencies as part of the NEPA process.

CONVERSE COUNTY WATERSHED MAP



Converse County Conservation District Policy

An important element of this Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan is to identify policies related to the surface and subsurface management of the federal and state natural resources on land in Converse County. These interests include but are not limited to, farming, ranching, oil, wind, mining, recreation, wildlife and all other activities related to and reliant upon the availability of natural resources.

As Converse County Conservation District works to make decisions about the use of natural resources, both positive and negative impacts of resource development must be taken into account to ensure that the water needs and uses, soils and other natural features and the economic, cultural and natural resource values that are important to the local constituents are considered.

- Maintain and improve the soil, vegetation and watershed resources in a manner that perpetuates, sustains and expands the beneficial uses of such resources while maintaining healthy ecosystems, fully supporting public safety, the customs and economic stability and viability of our industries and the general welfare of the citizens of the District.

- Require federal or state agencies to coordinate with Converse County Conservation District prior to taking official action, scoping a project, or issuing a report on a proposed action. The agencies may accomplish this in part by providing Converse County Conservation District, in a timely manner, with the proposed purposes, objectives, and estimated economic impacts of such action.

- Require all land management agencies to consider adjacent private lands, watersheds, ecosystems, and area management in planning on those areas of their jurisdiction. These agencies should consider the social, historical and economic conditions as well as customs and culture of their management areas.

- Request all governmental agencies to legally and logically respect the integrity of the Converse County Conservation District Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan.

- Provide information on state and federal planning decisions in addition to this Plan via written or oral comments or positions with the option to develop additional alternatives to be considered by the appropriate agency.

Soil Conservation

In the interest of soil conservation, both private landowners and developers of any land in Converse County should make every effort to conserve the natural resources at all times. Landowners and developers are encouraged to utilize the resources of the Converse County Conservation District. This is especially important during excavations and other disturbances, such as trenching, ditching, and pipeline laying operations that extend below the topsoil strata, but also includes activities such as exploratory development and water wells.

- Coordination between landowners and developers/contractors during these disturbances is required to ensure proper soil conservation measures are followed.

- Provide proactive support for corrective and conservation practices and programs to conserve, protect and beneficially develop the soil resources in the District.

- Encourage land managers and land owners to seek technical assistance to mitigate surface disturbance to facilitate soil conservation and re-establishment of native or other desired vegetation.

- Support the use of the completed Soil Survey to maintain productivity, minimize erosion, protect private and public water reserves, water quality, limit severe and critical erosion by restricting or mitigating surface disturbance to minimize soil erosion and to restore degraded areas.

Water Resources

Water resources are fundamental to the economic future and the quality of life in Converse County. Surface water has been and continues to be a critical water source for agriculture, towns, electrical generation, and recreation. Historically, ground water has been used for domestic, commercial, and agricultural purposes. For the foreseeable future, increased ground and surface water sources will be necessary to meet the demands of new and existing users including municipal, domestic, commercial, industrial, agricultural, fire suppression, and energy development and production. The quality of water resources needs to be protected while providing for increased use.

Many crops, particularly hay crops in Converse County, are enhanced by irrigation to improve productivity and irrigated crops are integral to production of livestock feed. Irrigation is derived from rivers, streams, dams and ditches, and wells. The North Platte River and associated creeks and streams provide key sources of irrigation water. The Medicine Bow National Forest Douglas Ranger District manages and controls the surface where the headwaters and watersheds of some of these streams originate. Dams are critical for holding early season runoff and for providing water late in the irrigation season.

- Support maintenance, protection and/or enhancement of existing water quality in the context of watershed management and development.

- Provide proactive support for conservation practices and programs to conserve, expand, extend and develop beneficially the water resources of the District.

- Provide technical assistance and cost-share dollars for the design and implementation of wells, windmills, solar pump systems, livestock and wildlife drinking tanks and irrigation conveyance structures.

- Watersheds must be managed for water quality and quantity.

- All management plans and land use practice modifications proposed by governing agencies premised on water quality and quantity issues shall be coordinated through Converse County Conservation District and shall be consistent with the protection and preservation of private property rights.

Agriculture

Agriculture in Converse County makes an important social and economic contribution to the economic base of the County and is important to long-term economic stability. Alfalfa and other hays, livestock, consumer meat production, pasture for grazing, as well as open spaces for viewing and hunting are very important products. In addition to traditional agriculture, specialty products (such as a local farmer's market) contribute socially and economically.

- Promote the agricultural productivity of Converse County.

- Provide information and cost-share programs to increase agricultural productivity.

- Encourage active management of agriculture lands to ensure their health for current and future generations.

Livestock and Wildlife

The production of livestock in Converse County is necessary to the area economy, tax base and the livelihood of the ranching/farming businesses and related industries and it is also vital to the well-being and continued health of natural resources on federal, state and private lands. CCCD shall strive to protect our ranching/farming heritage, as it is a primary foundation of the custom and culture of the District.

- Support opportunities for livestock grazing on private, state and federal lands. This includes advocating for the protection of equitable property rights, science-based land stewardship, and promotion of Best Management Practices for the improvement and continued use of all rangelands within the District.

- Work with landowners and land managers to increase productivity of rangeland to increase and/or maintain AUMs at maximum sustainable levels on rangeland. Any grazing AUMs that are placed in a suspended use category should be returned to active use when range conditions improve.

- Encourage wildlife management practices that sustain wildlife resources and habitat without measurably degrading other multiple use activities or private property rights.

- Promote and coordinate water distribution system installation and infrastructure improvements to benefit all wildlife and livestock health and welfare within the District.

- Promote the use of wildlife escape ramps in livestock watering tanks.

Outreach and Education

Converse County Conservation District continually strives to garner the support, understanding and backing of our community and partner agencies. CCCD participates and has a more active role in local, state and federal relationships.

- Promote and provide the use of educational tools to inform the public about natural resource issues and projects.

- Provide adequate information, training and professional development to enable Board members and staff to make informed decisions, develop policy and convey a consistent message.

- Promote cooperation with CCCD cooperators, organizational partners and entities such as town councils, county commission, state and federal agencies.

- Provide useful and up-to-date technical information on natural resources, practical and/or creative land management practices and technologies, program funding and current projects through the District's website, newsletter and brochures.

- Continue to support NACD Soil Stewardship programs.

Endangered Species

The keystone of good environmental stewardship lies in a healthy resource base. Endangered and threatened species, as well as all plants and all animals, depend on the intricate balance of stable ecological, economic and social functions of the immediate local community.

Due to the increasing number of species of concern at both the federal and state level, and the presence of potential threatened or endangered listing for widespread species such as the sage-grouse, Converse County Conservation District encourages proactive efforts that might prevent a listing decision. If these efforts are unsuccessful, coordination with CCCD on the impacts of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) actions is required by the laws and regulations of the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

- Coordinate with federal agencies in all decisions and proposed actions, including NEPA procedures for an EA or EIS, which affect the District regarding sensitive, threatened, or endangered species recovery plans, introductions or reintroductions, habitat conservation plans, conservation agreements or plans or candidate conservation agreements.

- Encourage efforts by private, state, and federal entities that proactively implement conservation measures through Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, Candidate Conservation Agreements, or similar methods in an effort to help avoid an ESA listing decision.

- Support delisting of species once population goals set out in recovery plans are achieved.

Energy and Mineral Resources

The area generally north of the North Platte River in Converse County contains a wealth of energy related minerals. In addition to the major energy producing mineral resources from coal, oil, gas, and uranium, there are also small deposits of non-fuel minerals.

While some of the minerals are owned by the surface owner, there are vast areas of separate ownership of the mineral and surface rights. A large portion of the minerals are federally owned, creating split estate concerns with private property owners. Every effort should be made to minimize the conflict created by this separate ownership.

Water is an essential component of oil and gas development during both the drilling and hydraulic fracturing processes. Drilling and completing a typical deep well require between 2.1 to 3.4 million gallons per well. This water comes primarily from either the North Platte River or water supply wells which are mostly located on rural properties.

- Balance both positive and negative impacts of resource development.

- Monitor water resources for industrial use in the County.

- Manage watersheds for both water quality and quantity.

Federal Lands

Currently, the US Forest Service manages 259,284 surface acres and the Bureau of Land Management manages 129,947 surface acres, or a total of approximately 14% of the County's 2.7 million acres.

Active federal lands management within Converse County must be based on sound science, appropriate economic data, local values and common sense. The Medicine Bow National Forest, the Thunder Basin National Grassland, and BLM lands have the capability under proactive management to achieve healthy ecosystems while providing clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and economic benefits and stability.

- Encourage active management of our forests and grasslands to ensure healthy and vibrant forests and grasslands for current and future generations.

- Encourage future timber harvest, thinning, and fuel reduction projects on federal and state managed lands as a necessary means to reduce the potential for unnaturally intense wildfires and to restore vibrant and healthy ecosystems to these areas. One example already in action is the Converse County Firewise program. This program encompasses areas of Esterbrook, Cold Springs Road, Deer Creek and Boxelder.

A Continuing Process…

Converse County Conservation District recognizes that this Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan is dynamic and adaptive and will be updated as needed. It will require the cooperation, work and dedication of many District residents and partners. The ongoing planning will include consideration of historic, current and future land uses in CCCD. This Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan shall be the basis for enforcing FLPMA and NFMA consistency requirements for public land management.