



Routt County Conservation District

3-Year Plan (2023 to 2025)

Overview

Organization of the Routt County Conservation District

The Routt County Conservation District (RCCD) is a tax exempt, special purpose district authorized by, and organized under, Colorado Revised Statutes Section 35-70-101 et seq. (the “Colorado Soil Conservation Act” or the “Act”).

History

The West Routt County Conservation District was formed on December 7, 1942. A few years later the East Routt Soil Conservation District was formed on June 23, 1947. The two districts were merged in 1972 and renamed the Routt County Conservation District. The RCCD covers most of Routt County.

Function of the Routt County Conservation District

RCCD was formed for the purpose of providing landowners with education and assistance in connection with conservation-related activities, including without limitation land stewardship, soil health, and water. The district partners with NRCS to identify local resource needs.

Mission of the Routt County Conservation District

To encourage stewardship of our natural resources which will ensure the preservation and sustainability of working landscapes through education, financial and technical assistance

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Routt County Conservation District

Lands within the District have experienced multi-year droughts in recent years. Additionally, significant growth in the County has been experienced. Impacts have been widespread extending to ag production; soil health issues; rangeland issues; needs for water management re-focus; watershed and forest health concerns; and others.

Natural Resource Data:

- Routt County covers 2,368 square miles in Northwest Colorado.
 - Land Use: Rangeland = 730,000 acres, non-irrigated cropland/pasture = 86,000 acres, irrigated lands = 63,000 acres, woodlands = 535,000 acres, recreation = 47,000 acres & other = 55,000 acres.
 - Land Ownership: federal = 775,000 acres, state and county = 69,000 acres and private = 672,000 acres.
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Natural Resource Priorities & Goals:

The top categories of focus for 2023-2025 have been identified as:

- Soil Health
- Water-related
- Rangeland
- Forestry

Each category will need an educational component.

Financial planning and to ensure ongoing financial security is also a priority.

The District will assist landowners and local government agencies by providing programs and services related to the above resource categories.

Natural Resource Information /Education Priorities and Goals:

RCCD will host an Annual Landowners Meeting as well as a Local Working Group meeting to discuss resource issues and seek input from landowners in the County. Education and outreach will include resources provided on the RCCD website as well as field days and peer-to-peer learning on pertinent topics.

Staffing Needs:

Currently RCCD has no employees. An acting District Manager was contracted in October 2021 on an annual basis and the contract was renewed and expanded in September 2022 for another year. A stated goal is to secure sustainable funding sources to ultimately support a full time staff.

Highlights of 2020 – 2022 Accomplishments:

1. Developed a professional grade website to use as a communication, education and resource tool.
2. Increased Board membership by two positions
3. Updated Bylaws
4. Brought District back into "In Good Standing" status
5. Developed lasting partnerships with conservation-minded agencies and entities.
6. Solicited local input at Annual Landowner Meetings and Local Working Group Meeting
7. Created and implemented two Soil Health Initiatives, one specific to RCCD (now in fourth year), and the other in partnership with the Colorado Department of Agriculture's STAR (Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resource) program (in its third year) including a research field to test soil moisture probes and edge of field water quality sampling
8. Worked with over 25 ranches to assist with improving soil health
9. Participated in local NGO and government programs including Wildfire Council, Yampa River Watershed Group, Integrated Water Management Plan, County Master Plan Update, Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District, Community Ag Alliance programs, CSU Extension programs, Ag Water Alliance Initiatives, Yampa Rendezvous Event
10. Provided education through a new brochure, new rack card, events, articles in publications, and at partner meetings
11. Purchased a 200 gallon pull behind weed sprayer and started a rental program for land owners
12. Obtained numerous grants to support RCCD programs
13. Initiated work on a best management practice Toolkit
14. Created a "who to call" resource guide for landowners to reference on website
15. Sponsored a Rangeland Judging and educational event for High School Seniors and teachers
16. Purchased two soil health test kits to loan to landowners

Overarching Conservation District Operational Goals & Objectives Next Three Years:

- Continue to nurture and grow partnership relations
- Re-establish the District as the lead agency in Routt County for land, water and air conservation and on-the-ground implementation
- Continue to explore ways to improve service to landowners and ag producers and especially new land purchasers
- Accelerate the implementation of conservation practices and climate smart solutions on working lands through provision of technical assistance and education
- Explore mill levy opportunities
- Involve young agriculture enthusiasts and provide support where possible.

ROUTT COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Natural Resource Goals & Objectives

Long Range Plan for: 2023 – 2025

Natural Resource Issue: SOIL HEALTH

Why is this issue a concern and what is the location: Soil Health is a pillar of Conservation Districts. RCCD’s Soil Health Initiative in Routt County is consistent with the Colorado Department of Agriculture state-wide initiative to help gardeners, farmers and ranchers build drought resiliency, improve water quality, sequester carbon and reduce soil erosion through cost effective and sensible soil management practices.

Three Year Goal(s): Continue both the RCCD Soil Health Initiative and the STAR program. Continue to expand the programs to more ranchers as well as build a meaningful database and baseline on the condition of the regions soils. As prescriptions are continually implemented and monitored, successful practices will rise to the top and be able to be applied to others. Drought resiliency will be an important goal.

PROGRAM YEAR	MEASURABLE ANNUAL OBJECTIVES	COOPERATING AGENCY/GROUP	TIME AND FUNDING NEEDED	SOURCE OF FUNDING
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Monitor practices implemented in previous years and report on what works and what does not B. With outside expert, develop methodologies specific to Routt regarding increasing plant diversity & overall soil health improvements (cover crops, interseeding, etc.) C. Share results/provide education to other landowners D. Focus on new land purchasers to provide educational tools on conservation practices E. Hold field days to demonstrate & promote soil health 	CDA/STAR, NRCS, CSU Ext, CSCB, CAA, UYWG, RC Gov’t, Understanding Ag, City of SS	Capacity support (staff); Funds to finance field days; Monetary support for lab costs; Funds to hire outside expertise	STAR Plus Funds; NRCS, City of SS, YVCF Grant, UYWCD Grant, TBD
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Development of a Base-line Soil Health Map for Routt County B. Assist land owners in testing their soil health and interpreting test results – promote use of RCCD soil test kits (loaned out) C. Assist land owners with implementation of their Soil Health Management Plans D. Explore carbon trading opportunities 	CDA, NRCS, CSU Ext, CAA, UYWG, Farmer’s Union, CCA, RC Gov’t	Capacity support (staff); Funds to finance field days/education; Monetary support for lab costs	NRCS, City of SS, YVCF Grant, Mill Levy, TBD
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Promote and pursue continued Soil Health education projects B. Provide on-the-ground assistance to landowners to improve soil health C. Assist landowners in implementing their Soil Health Management Plan D. Measure, monitor, report 	CDA, NRCS, CSU Ext, CAA, UYWG, RC Gov’t	Capacity support (staff); Funds to finance field days; Monetary support for lab costs	NRCS, City of SS, YVCF Grant, Mill levy, TBD

ROUTT COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Natural Resource Goals & Objectives

Long Range Plan for: 2023 – 2025

Natural Resource Issue: RANGELAND HEALTH

Why is this issue a concern and what is the location: Rangeland makes up a large portion of Routt County’s agricultural land. Ensuring that these lands remain healthy is vital to conservation in Routt County. Helping producers develop and implement Grazing Management Plans are essential to maximizing successes and opportunities presented by grazing.

Three Year Goal(s): Increase the implementation of conservation practices and climate smart solutions on rangelands that promote rangeland health and drought resiliency through technical and financial assistance.

PROGRAM YEAR	MEASURABLE ANNUAL OBJECTIVES	COOPERATING AGENCY/GROUP	TIME AND FUNDING NEEDED	SOURCE OF FUNDING
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. In collaboration with Partnering Organizations, provide Outreach & Education services on the benefits of Grazing Management Plans, Weed Control, and Riparian Restoration B. Develop additional educational components and support for landowners including a summary of financial resources available (e.g. NRCS programs) C. Increase the number of Grazing Management Plans on rangeland D. Increase technical involvement in and financial support of Youth Programs such as 4H, FFA, Ranging Judging, Envirothon 	Colorado State Forest Service, Routt County, Trout Unlimited, CSU Extension, NRCS, CAA, USFS, BLM, Upper Yampa Watershed Group	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Funds will be required from partners, grants, fundraising, & other outside sources</p> <p>TBD</p>	<p>NRCS, USFS, BLM</p> <p>UYWCD grant; other grants, fundraising & outside funds as available</p>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Build on education to promote healthy rangeland practices B. Work with local landowners to develop and maintain existing grazing plans C. Develop a strategy to incorporate other climate smart solutions such as avoiding rangeland conversion, constructing grass banks, regenerative agriculture practices, utilizing exclosures to reduce grazing pressure in riparian areas, enhance wetlands. D. In collaboration with Partnering Organizations, partner in projects that improve Range Health. 	see list above	Same as above	<p>NRCS, USFS, BLM</p> <p>other grants & outside funds as available</p>
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Continue to implement the developed strategy to promote healthy rangeland 	see list above	Same as above	Same as above

ROUTT COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Natural Resource Goals & Objectives

Long Range Plan for: 2023 – 2025

Natural Resource Issue: WATER QUALITY and QUANTITY

Why is this issue a concern and what is the location: In the past, RCCD has been active in water issues and fills a distinctive niche due to its ability to work with land owners and ag producers as well as being part of a statewide network of conservation districts.

Three Year Goal(s): Work with land owners and ag producers to help them navigate the myriad of regulatory mandates; the multitude of water programs and agencies; and the potential sources of funding available to them to meet their water-related goals. Partner with other local, state and federal agencies and entities to maximize the value to landowners.

PROGRAM YEAR	MEASURABLE ANNUAL OBJECTIVES	COOPERATING AGENCY/GROUP	TIME AND FUNDING NEEDED	SOURCE OF FUNDING
2023	<p>A. Work with the Upper Yampa River Watershed Group based on findings of their continued work on best practices to reduce nutrient and sediment loading</p> <p>B. Develop drought resiliency tools and related educational components</p> <p>C. Co-lead the upper basin portion of the IWMP master project list titled “Yampa River Recommended Practices” manual</p> <p>D. Attend local and regional water-related meetings</p> <p>E. Continue to solicit input at the Annual Landowners and Local Working Group meetings held by RCCD</p>	NRCS; Community Ag Alliance; UY Watershed Group; CSU Extension Office; Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District; Y/W/G Basin Roundtable & IWMP; FOY; YVSC; RC Government	Board member time; Capacity; TBD	UY Watershed Group grant; UYWCD; outside funds as available TBD
2024	Continuation of items from previous years.	(see list above)	TBD	NRCS & outside funds as available; fundraiser; mill levy
2025	A. Identify additional water concerns through the Annual Landowners meeting and other input to develop pertinent programs/projects for year 3. Nurture partnerships	TBD	TBD	NRCS funds; outside funds as available; mill levy

ROUTT COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Natural Resource Goals & Objectives

Long Range Plan for: 2023 – 2025

Natural Resource Issue: FOREST HEALTH

Why is this issue a concern and what is the location: A healthy forest sequesters carbon while also storing and filtering water, providing habitat for wildlife, and builds resilience to drought and wildfire.

Three Year Goal(s): Accelerate the implementation of conservation practices and climate smart solutions on forestlands that promote forest health and drought resiliency through technical and financial assistance.

PROGRAM YEAR	MEASURABLE ANNUAL OBJECTIVES	COOPERATING AGENCY/GROUP	TIME AND FUNDING NEEDED	SOURCE OF FUNDING
2023	<p>A. In collaboration with partnering organizations, provide Outreach and Education services on the benefits of a Forest Management Plan, Wildfire Mitigation, Fuel load reduction, Mulching, Weed Control, Riparian Restoration</p> <p>B. Explore opportunities to implement a virtual fence demonstration project in partnership with the US Forest Service.</p> <p>C. Participate in the Wildfire Mitigation Council efforts to develop a collaborative and strategic approach to treat forestry related resource concerns.</p>	Routt County Wildfire Council; US Forest Service; CO Forest Service; NRCS; CO Fish & Wildlife	Ongoing TBD	UYWCD grant; NRCS funds; grants funds; outside funds as available
2024	<p>A. Promote the implementation of conservation practices that improve forest health and utilize Field Days to demonstrate those practices.</p> <p>B. Explore the sale of drought tolerant native tree seedlings</p> <p>C. Develop a strategy to incorporate other climate smart solutions such as biochar, regenerative agriculture practices, wetland/riparian enhancement, reforestation, and timber and logging management.</p> <p>In collaboration with Partnering Organizations, partner in projects that improve Forest Health.</p>	(See list above)	(Same as above)	NRCS funds; grant funds; outside funds as available
2025	Continue to implement the developed strategy to promote healthy forestland	(See list above)	(Same as above)	NRCS funds; grant funds; outside funds as available

ACRONYMS:

RCCD Routt County Conservation District
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
UYWG Upper Yampa River Watershed Group
UYWCD Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District
CSCB Colorado State Conservation Board
CAA Community Ag Alliance
Y/W/G BRT Yampa White Green Basin Roundtable
LWG Local Working Group
USFS U.S. Forest Service
CO FS Colorado State Forest Service
BLM Bureau of Land Management
CSU Colorado State University
CDA Colorado Department of Agriculture
FOY Friends of Yampa
YVSC Yampa Valley Sustainability Council
City of SS Steamboat Springs
RC Gov't Routt County Government