



# SHERIDAN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 2020-2024 LONG RANGE PLAN

**M** ISSION STATEMENT  
TO PROTECT SHERIDAN COUNTY'S WATER AND LAND  
QUALITY THROUGH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, INFORMATION AND  
OUTREACH, MONITORING, AND PLANNING.

# STATEMENT OF APPROVAL

The Sheridan County Conservation District (SCCD) develops a Long-Range Plan every five years as required by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts. The Long-Range Plan serves as a broad outline of the SCCD's long-term priorities and goals. It serves as the guiding document for development of SCCD programs and activities and creates a common vision and direction for the Board of Supervisors. The Long-Range Plan is intended to respond to the changing natural resource needs of Sheridan County.

In 2019, the Sheridan County Conservation District (SCCD) Board of Supervisors initiated an update of the District's Long-Range Plan. SCCD also considered local knowledge and experience from their work with landowners and residents as the primary basis for establishing program goals and objectives. The District used a survey to better understand priorities and perceptions of Sheridan County residents. Surveys were distributed to individuals on the District's mailing list and other partners. Responses were also solicited through the website and other social media.

Following a 45-day public comment period, the Sheridan County Conservation District approved the 2020-2024 Long-Range Plan on December 3, 2019.

## ELECTED BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Susan Holmes  
At-Large  
Chair

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Edith Heyward  
Urban  
Vice-Chair

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Orrin Connell  
Rural  
Secretary/Treasurer

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Emerson Scott, III  
Rural

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Douglas Masters  
Rural

## DISTRICT STAFF

Carrie Rogaczewski    District Manager  
Jackie Carbert        Program Specialist

## USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Andrew Cassiday    District Conservationist  
Oakley Ingersoll     Range Conservationist



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# MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

## MISSION

To protect **Sheridan County's** water and land quality through assistance programs, information and outreach, monitoring, and planning.



## VISION

**Sheridan County** is a unique blend of production agriculture, strong communities, recreational opportunities, and scenic value. As demographics and land uses evolve, the SCCD strives to be a leader for addressing emerging natural resource challenges. SCCD provides tools for people to enhance land-use practices, foster a sense of stewardship, and encourage agricultural conservation strategies. Through information and outreach SCCD improves awareness of water and land quality and the relationship between food products and agriculture. Collaborative partnerships, financial accountability, and prudent management of records, grants and other funding sources will ensure long-term stability to support the staff and resources necessary for effective operation.

The function of the Conservation District is to take the available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them to meet the needs of the local landuser.

— Pete Nowak



# INTRODUCTION

## HISTORY

Early conservation efforts began in the mid 1930's as America was recovering from the dust bowl. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service, was formed in 1935 to provide assistance to landowners for application of conservation practices. President Roosevelt recognized the need to address the impacts of soil erosion and encouraged local coordination for conservation efforts. In 1939, federal legislation was passed enabling Conservation Districts to participate and intervene with government agencies under the premise that no federal government agency should act in the area of private lands conservation without local oversight.

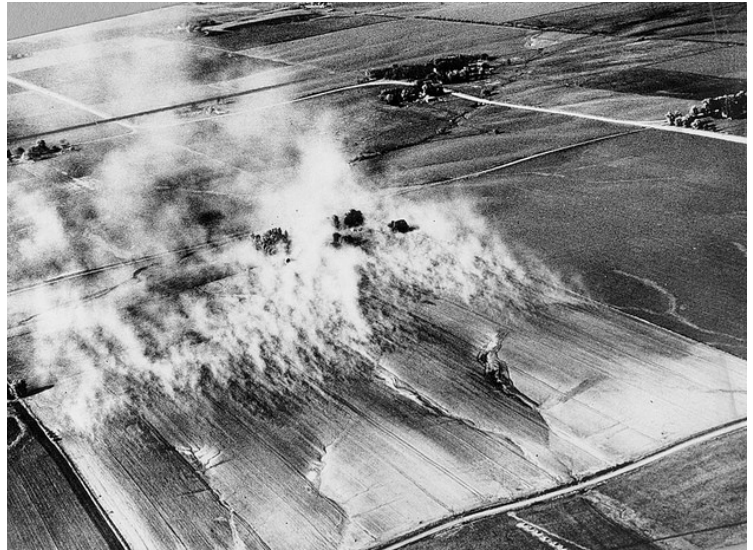
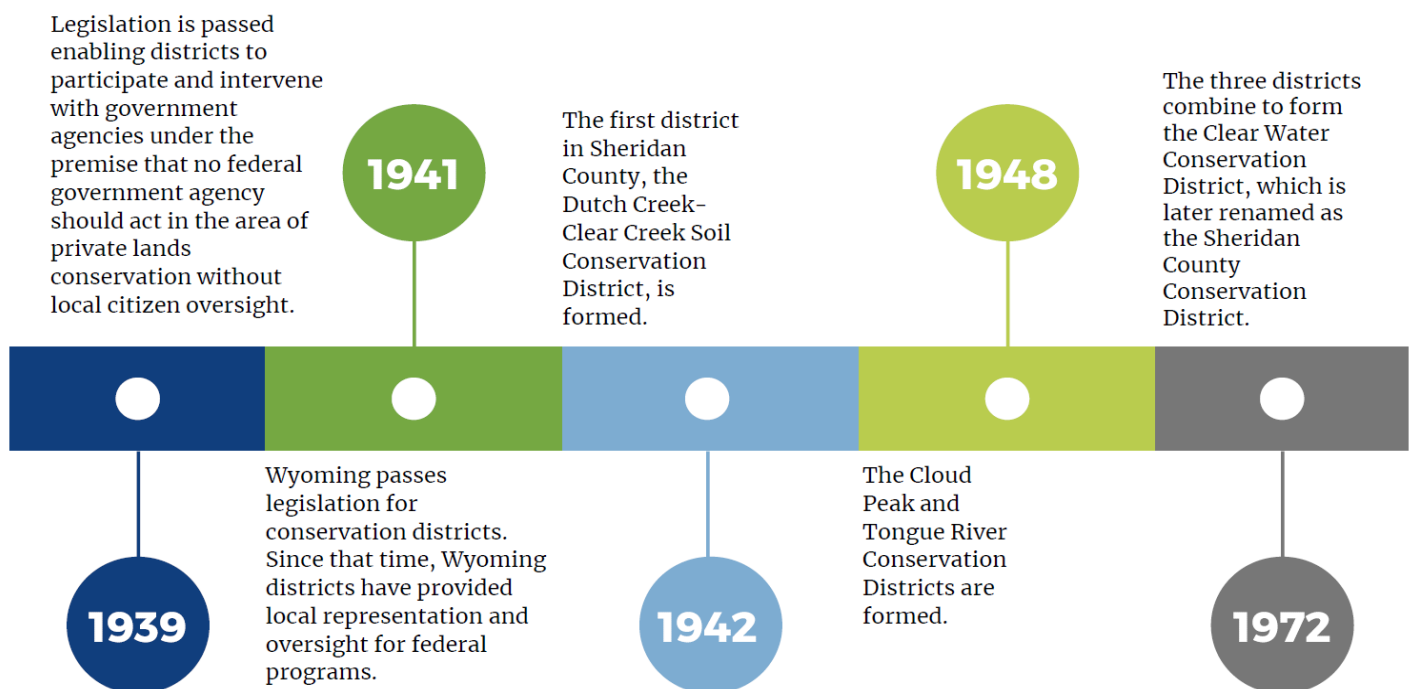


Photo credit: nrcs.usda.gov

In 1941, the State of Wyoming passed legislation for Conservation Districts. Since that time, Wyoming Conservation Districts have provided local representation and oversight for federal conservation programs. The Dutch Creek-Clear Creek Soil Conservation District was formed in Sheridan County in 1942. The Cloud Peak and Tongue River Conservation Districts were formed in 1948. In 1972, the three districts combined to form the Clear Water Conservation District and included all of Sheridan County. Later, the name was changed to the Sheridan County Conservation District (SCCD) because of confusion over boundaries. In Sheridan County, the District has always been co-located with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In the early days, the District "Clerk" served as secretary/receptionist for the local NRCS office; over time the District assumed a more active role in program development and coordination.



## STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

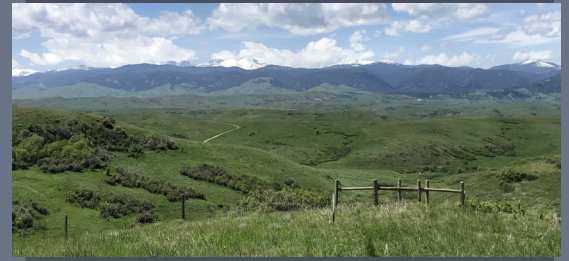
Recognizing that “farm and grazing lands of Wyoming are among the basic assets of that state (W.S. 103 (a)),” the Wyoming Legislature enacted legislation to provide for the formation of local Conservation Districts (11-16-101 through 11-16-134: Conservation District Law). Conservation Districts in Wyoming are local subdivisions of state government organized under the Wyoming Department of Agriculture. Wyoming currently has 34 Districts in 23 counties that make up the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD), which is headquartered in Cheyenne.

Each Conservation District is under the direction of a locally-elected Board of Supervisors. These supervisors are unpaid volunteers dedicated to providing local conservation guidance. Supervisors are local residents, elected by local citizens, to serve staggered four-year terms. Per Wyoming Statutes,, 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 within the county). As the voice for local conservation efforts, District supervisors establish and prioritize programs to address local natural resource concerns and serve as advocates for the implementation of practices that protect natural resources.

## PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Across the nation, Conservation Districts work in a close partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to address the natural resource priorities of their respective communities. As a result, programs vary from state to state, county to county, and district to district. In Sheridan County, as in many places, the SCCD and NRCS share the same office, personnel, equipment, and supplies to deliver a strong, local conservation program.

Programs currently offered by SCCD include: water quality monitoring and watershed planning, cost-share assistance for improvement projects, conservation seedling tree sales, oil recycling facilities, special projects including the I-90 Living Snow Fence and the Acme Power Plant Reclamation, and information and outreach.



“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 .”  
Wyoming Statute 11-16-103.

### Current SCCD Outreach Activities:

~Ag Week butter making/food origins with Kindergartners (March-April) ~ Enviroscope ® Pollution demonstrations with Sagebrush Elementary Outdoor Lab Fourth Graders (May) ~ Small Acreage Workshops and Library Display (May) ~ Third Thursday and other community event booths with Stormwater Plinko Board and Water Wall (Summer) ~ Water quality sample kits with Sheridan Community Land Trust/Science Kids Unplugged program (September) ~ Water Wall Water Cycle Demonstrations with fourth graders at the Sheridan County Cattlewomen’s Ag Expo (September) ~ Macroinvertebrate sampling field demonstration with Sheridan College (September) ~ Other newsletters, website/facebook, and tours/workshops



SCCD Board members and staff represent the District on a variety of committees, organizations and partnership efforts including the Bighorn National Forest Plan Implementation Steering Committee, the Bridger Plant Materials Center Board of Managers, the Big Goose Watershed Control Plan Implementation Committee, the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, the Sheridan Tree Board, the Sheridan County Comprehensive Plan Update Citizen Advisory Committee, the Tongue River Initiative, the Northeast Wyoming Invasive Grasses Work Group and others, as needed.

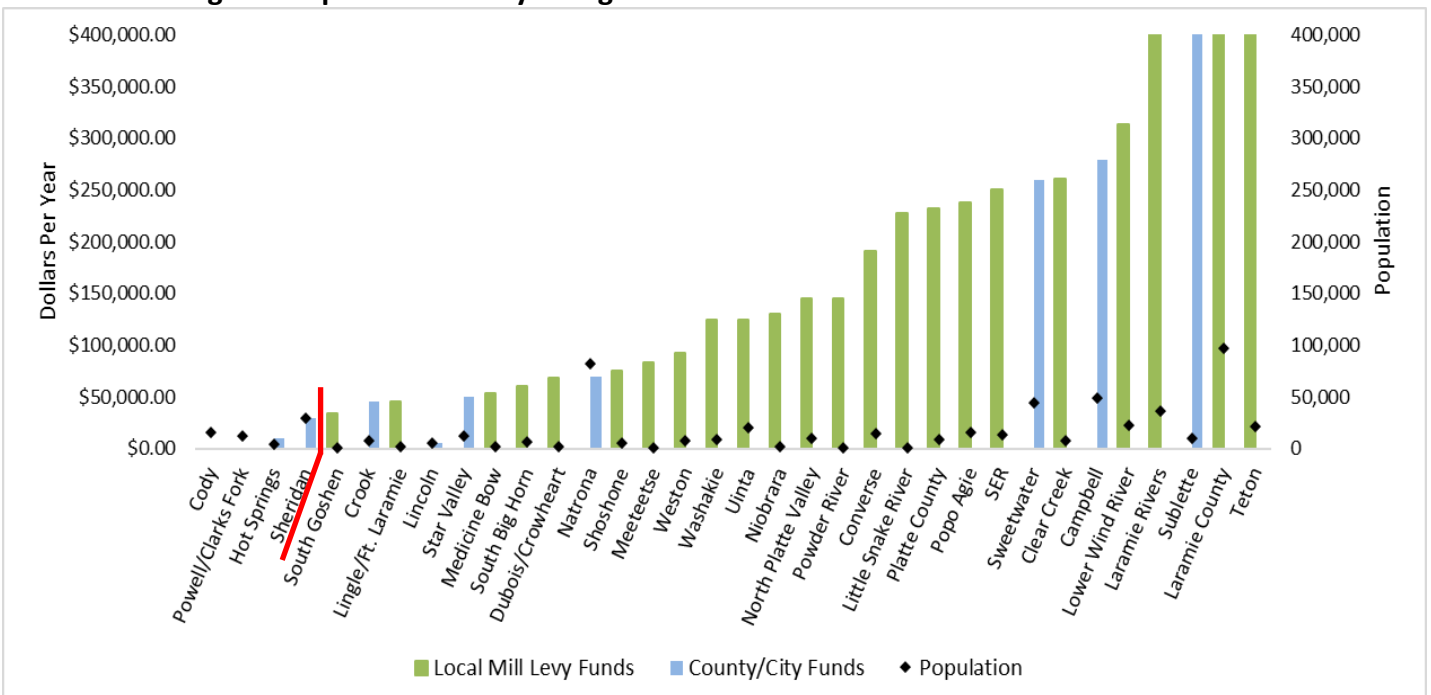


The SCCD also partners with other groups and organizations, including the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD), Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ), the Wyoming Game and Fish (WY G&F), Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT), Wyoming Water Development Commission, Sheridan County, the City of Sheridan, the Towns of Dayton, Ranchester, and Clearmont, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Sheridan Community Land Trust (SCLT), the Sheridan Tree Board, the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce, the Bighorn National Forest, the Bridger Plant Materials Center and others. These partnerships have resulted in a sound and effective conservation program for Sheridan County and its residents.

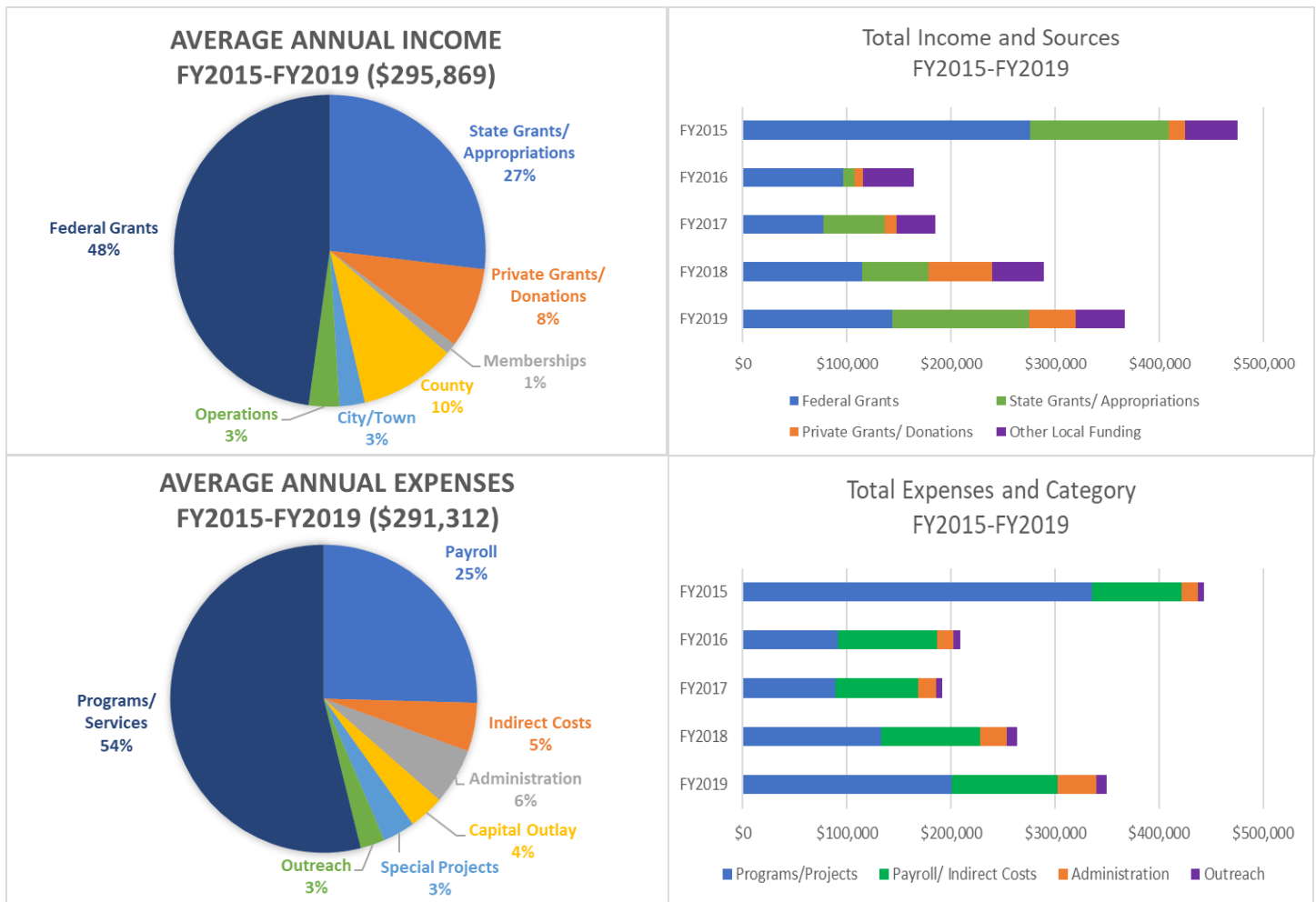
## FUNDING

Funding for Conservation Districts varies statewide. Because of the variability in funding among Districts, there is a disproportionate relationship between local funding and the populations served. Of all the Districts in the State, SCCD falls within the bottom five for funding from local sources, but in the top six for population. In 1987, the Wyoming Legislature authorized Conservation Districts to impose a tax of up to 1 mill, subject to approval by voters. Since that time, several Wyoming Conservation Districts have secured mill levy funding. The mill levy question has been on the ballot in Sheridan County four times from 1990-2008; all

### FY2018 Funding and Population for Wyoming Conservation Districts



Only funding up to \$400,000 is shown. Amounts for Laramie Rivers, Sublette, Laramie County, and Teton County exceed \$400,000.



attempts failed by a margin of approximately 60-40%. While the SCCD has not ruled out the possibility of another mill levy attempt, the current focus is on expanding potential funding through private sources.

The majority of SCCD’s funding comes through federal, state, and private grants, which are restricted to specific projects and programs. Annual appropriations from Sheridan County and local municipalities is less than \$50,000 per year; a local membership program provides between \$3,000.00 and \$5,000.00 annually. Funds from tree sales, other service fees, and travel scholarships are a small percentage of the budget. Programs and services, including implementation of improvement projects, water quality monitoring, tree and oil recycling program expenses, constitutes the largest annual expense. Payroll expenses would also include time spent on these programs. Annual budgets are largely dependent on the number/cost of projects and the associated income from state and federal grants. Other funding sources and expense categories are relatively consistent among years.





# RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

## POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The SCCD includes all 2524 square miles (1,615,360 acres) of Sheridan County. In 2018, the estimated population of Sheridan County was 30,223, which was a 3.8% increase from April 2010. (U.S. Census, 2018). Approximately 59% of the population is concentrated near the City of Sheridan with another 7% being within the incorporated towns of Ranchester, Dayton, and Clearmont (U.S. Census, 2018). The remaining 34% lies within the unincorporated and rural areas of Sheridan County. Approximately 65% of Sheridan County is privately owned. Public lands include the Bighorn National Forest (24%) and Bureau of Land Management (3%), the State of Wyoming (7%), and other county and municipal government lands (SuiteWater, 2019).



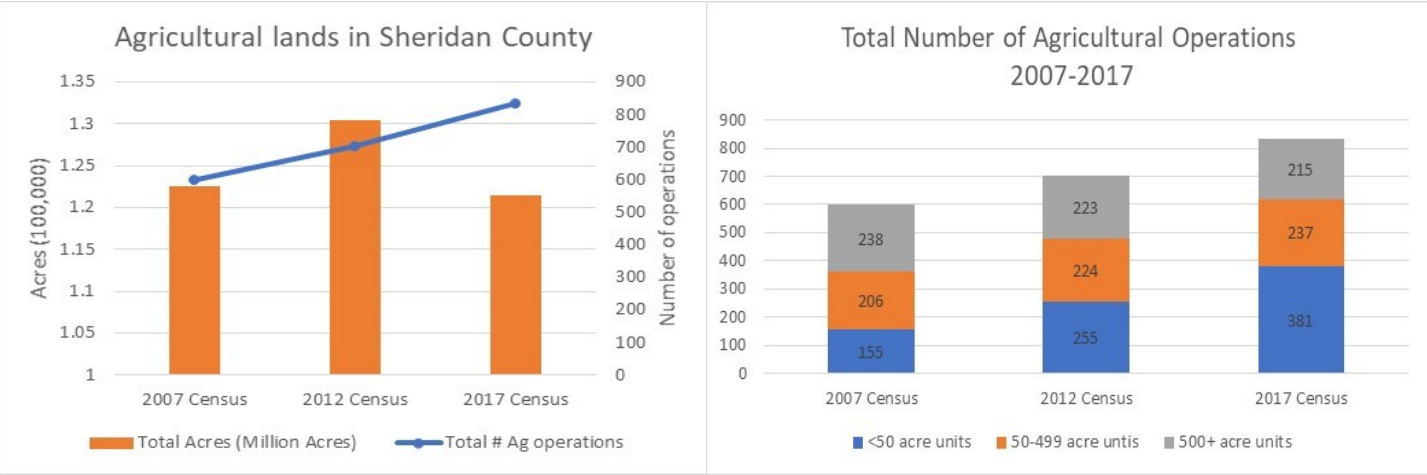
## LAND USES

Sheridan County includes a variety of land uses and natural resources. There are four major watersheds in the County, including, the Little Big Horn, the Tongue River, Clear Creek, and Powder River, the largest of which is the Tongue River Watershed. The Tongue River watershed includes the Goose Creek (including Big Goose and Little Goose) and Prairie Dog Creek watersheds. Domestic water supplies for the City of Sheridan and the Towns of Dayton and Ranchester are provided by Big Goose Creek and the Tongue River, both of which originate in the Big Horn Mountains.

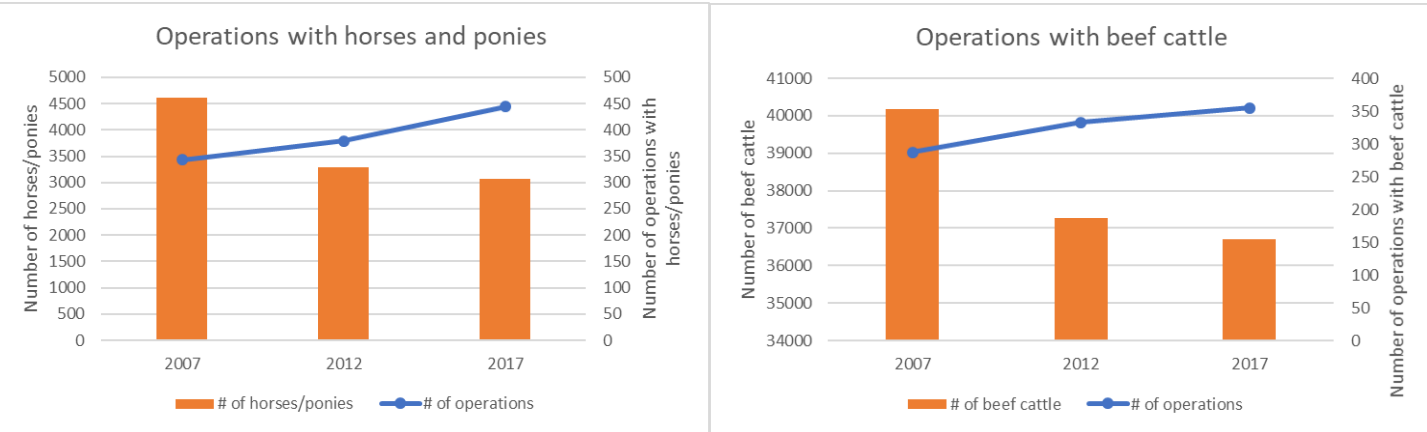
The area along the Big Horn Mountains, in the western part of the County, lies within the 20" Mountains precipitation zone (USDA, 1995). This area includes the Bighorn National Forest and provides valuable wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities as well as being used for some logging and seasonal livestock grazing. Other land uses in the foothills area include irrigated hayland, irrigated cropland, and dryland pasture, livestock grazing, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The central part of the County lies within the 15-19" Northern Plains precipitation zone (USDA, 1995) and includes the City of Sheridan and the Towns of Dayton and Ranchester. The areas around the City of Sheridan and the Towns of Dayton and Ranchester, in particular along Little Goose Creek and Big Goose Creek and the Tongue River, are dominated by urban and rural residential uses. These valleys also include irrigated haylands, livestock grazing, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The north central and eastern area of the County is within the 10-14" Northern Plains precipitation zone (USDA, 1995). The Town of Clearmont is within this area and the region is dominated by rangeland and livestock grazing. There is some irrigated hayland and pasture, as well as recreation and wildlife resources.



Agriculture remains the largest land use and includes 1,213,820 acres (1897 square miles) in 833 operations. Since 2007, the number of acres represented by agriculture operations has decreased, although the number of operations has increased. In particular, the number of operations and acres represented by units of less than 50 acres has continued to increase while the number of operations that encompass more than 500 acres has decreased (USDA Ag Census, 2017).



Agricultural lands in Sheridan County include a combination of irrigated hay and/or crop land, irrigated and dryland pastures, and livestock grazing. The most common livestock in Sheridan County include beef cattle and horses, though there are also sheep/goats, hogs, chickens, and others. Since 2007 there has been a decrease in the total number of horses/ponies and beef cattle, though the number of operations with those animals has increased (USDA Ag Census, 2017).





## NATURAL RESOURCE PRIORITIES

The SCCD sought local input for the plan through surveys distributed through the SCCD mailing list and social media. A total of 98 surveys were returned; 49 were returned via postal mail, 39 through the on-line platform, and 10 through social media posts. Of the respondents 54% were from the Goose Creek Watershed, 28% were from the Tongue River Watershed, and 7% were from the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed. Only 11% of the respondents were from large acreage producers; 28% were City/Town residents and 20% identified themselves as small acreage with livestock.

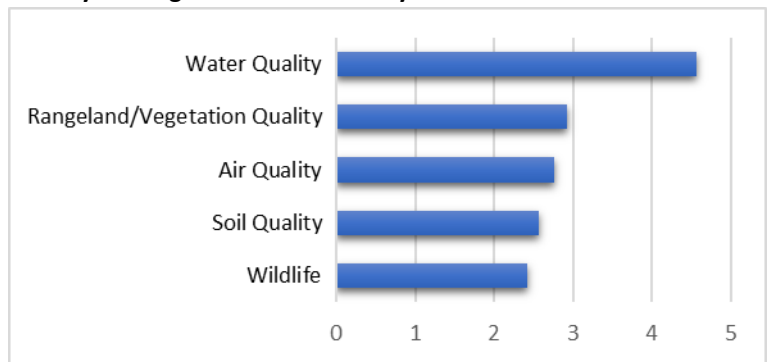
Water quality and rangelands ranked as the highest natural resource priorities. Weeds/invasive grasses, streambank erosion, septic systems, and stormwater runoff were listed as the top natural resource impacts that SCCD should address through programs. Water quality monitoring was the highest-ranking SCCD program, followed by cost-share assistance programs and outreach.

The Board reflected upon the response summaries and information from previous years, including workload analyses, project requests and funding patterns. SCCD strives to reflect local concerns, which consistently identify water quality as a high priority for programs and services. Information and outreach through a variety of mechanisms remains an important priority. Recently, there has been a greater emphasis on weeds/invasive grasses because of the identification of *Venttenata* and Medusahead. The increased community awareness of these issues is reflected in the ranking of impacts SCCD should address.

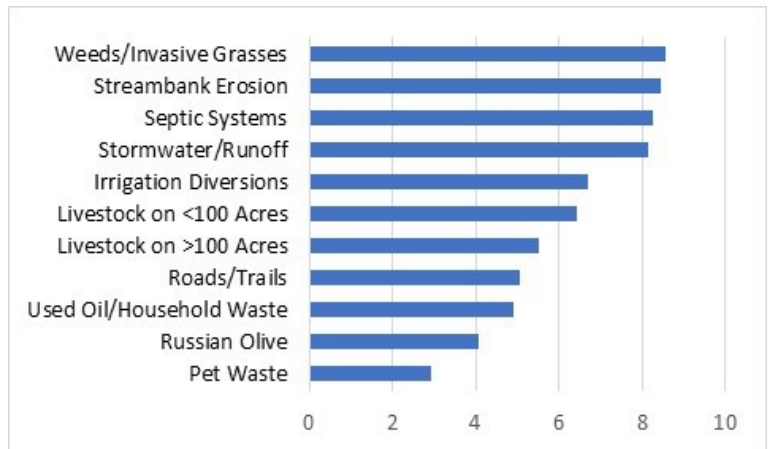


Sheridan County Conservation District  
Long Range Plan, 2020-2024

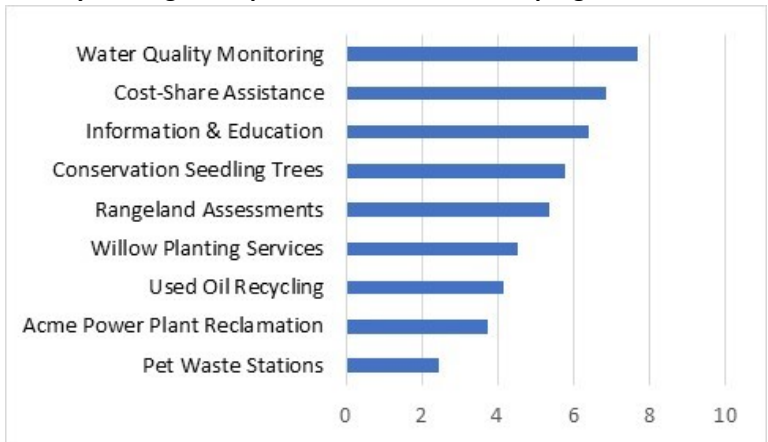
Survey ranking for Sheridan County Natural Resource Priorities



Survey ranking for natural resource impacts SCCD should address



Survey ranking for importance of current SCCD programs



Since 2017, SCCD has been coordinating a community effort to reclaim the site of the former Acme Power Plant, which operated from 1910 to 1976 along the Tongue River. The project involves many partners and will address significant contamination over the long-term. Though survey respondents ranked the Acme project as one of the least important (just above pet waste stations), the low ranking is not consistent with the water and land quality benefits the Board attributes to the project. Future outreach efforts need to emphasize these benefits as well as details about funding and technical resources, most of which are being provided through state and federal grants and programs.



# REFERENCES CITED

U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Agriculture Statistics Services. 2017 Census of Agriculture Statistics for Sheridan County, Wyoming. 2007-2017 Quick Stats from <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov>

U.S. Department of Commerce. Census Bureau. 2018 Population Estimates for Sheridan County Wyoming from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 1995. Map of precipitation zones used in ecological site descriptions.

Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts. 2019 Suitewater Mapping and Data Tool from <http://suitewater.wygisc.org>





# PLAN DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

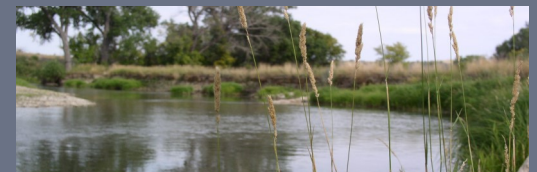
The SCCD develops a Long-Range Plan every five years to outline the long-term priorities and goals of the District. This plan serves as the guiding document for development of District programs and activities and is intended to respond to changing natural resource needs in Sheridan County. It helps to create a common vision and direction for the Board of Supervisors and staff.

The Long-Range Plan includes goals, objectives, and potential action items for three categories: District Operations, Natural Resource Information and Outreach, and Natural Resource Programs. The potential action items for each category are not intended to be a complete list of activities and typically do not include on-going or existing programs. Rather, they include items the Board wanted to consider and/or emphasize.

The major part of the local program in Sheridan County consists of providing technical and financial assistance for natural resource improvement projects. However, success depends upon the ability of the SCCD/NRCS partnership to deliver the program. The infrastructure needed to deliver the program includes personnel and funding resources but also awareness of the programs through partnerships and public outreach. Along with direct assistance for a project, information and outreach is a necessary component of any conservation program. It is necessary for the SCCD to help the public understand the relationship between the programs and natural resources. If people recognize the water quality benefit from relocating a set of corrals or replacing a septic system, the credibility of the program improves.

The SCCD Board of Supervisors is committed to providing the residents of Sheridan County with the best possible conservation program. This Long-Range Plan provides the Board with the vision and guidance necessary to address priority conservation needs in Sheridan County. The SCCD Board will evaluate the Long-Range Plan on an annual basis during the development of the Annual Plan of Work. The Annual Plan will define the specific activities needed to meet the goals and objectives in the Long-Range Plan. Public needs can and do change over time. The SCCD will strive to understand public concerns and respond according to those changing needs.

The SCCD sought local input for the plan through surveys distributed through the SCCD mailing list and social media. Comments were considered throughout the planning process. The plan was subject to a 45-day comment period required by the Wyoming Administrative Procedures Act (W.S. 16-3-101).



“The conservation of natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of the national life . . .”

— Theodore Roosevelt



# PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: DISTRICT OPERATIONS

**GOAL:** Maintain the credibility, recognition, and acceptance of the SCCD through competent personnel; collaborative partnerships; and financial stability

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide adequate information, training, and professional development to enable Board members and staff to make informed decisions, develop policy, and convey a consistent message
- Uphold a sense of accountability and responsibility among current and prospective Board members and staff through being prepared for Board meetings, involved in District activities/events, and informed about local, state, and national affairs
- Recognize opportunities to support and partner with local governments, state and federal agencies, and other entities, including: Sheridan County, City of Sheridan, Town of Dayton, Town of Ranchester, Town of Clearmont, USDA-NRCS, WDA, WACD, WDEQ, WGF, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Bighorn National Forest, UW Cooperative Extension, Sheridan College, WWNRT, TNC, SCLT, DSA, TU, Bridger Plant Materials Center, and others to expand SCCD's capacity to implement programs and outreach
- Foster positive, regular, media relationships, including Sheridan Media, Sheridan Press, Bighorn Radio Network, County 3 News, and others to promote programs and improve awareness
- Collaborate with NRCS and outside technical resources to increase SCCD's capacity to lead conservation efforts in Sheridan County
- Use incentives, promotional items, and sponsorships in public events to increase SCCD's logo and name recognition among the community
- Pursue direct, local funding from local governments including Sheridan County, City of Sheridan, and Towns of Ranchester, Dayton, and Clearmont
- Augment traditional grant funding sources (CWA 319, WDA WQ) with other creative approaches that expand the scope and type of projects/assistance offered

## POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

- Establish and implement a schedule/format to summarize WACD updates and other information for Board members and staff
- Incorporate information/technology from training and professional development participation into District programs and activities
- Establish and maintain schedule for record management, including consistent updates to databases for aggregate information, file reviews with appropriate action according to the records retention schedule, annual appointment with shredding company, and/or state archives
- Continue to pursue use of interns and/or seasonal employees to assist with monitoring and other activities
- Develop a detailed fundraising strategy for specific projects and activities with additional emphases on private foundations, potential donor solicitations, and community support such as "Dining for a Cause" or "Pint Night".



The foundation of a local conservation program encompasses the human, financial, and technical resources needed to address current and future natural resource challenges. SCCD serves the local community and assists other government agencies, including NRCS. Board Supervisors and other personnel serve as local representatives of the entire County and are accountable to their constituents.



# PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

**GOAL:** Improve appreciation of natural resources and foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship through information and outreach programs

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide useful and up-to-date technical information on natural resources, practical and/or creative land management practices and technologies, funding programs, projects, deadlines, and other announcements through high quality newsletters, an updated website, and social media
- Demonstrate soil and water quality concepts, the value of production agriculture, and other conservation themes to local youth, educators, and parents through classroom activities, field days, displays, tours, and other activities
- Provide presentations/seminars on water quality, land management practices, improvement opportunities, and other conservation topics through local community groups (i.e. Sheridan College, Chamber of Commerce, Stockgrowers, Cattlewomen, Rotary, Realtors etc.)
- Identify and address specific information needs for small acreage landowners and urban residents to prevent problems that occur with conversion of agriculture land to residential development
- Include relevant topics such as topsoil management, horse/livestock grazing management, small acreage challenges, agriculture-food/products, water quality, horse health, irrigation water management for small acreages, urban impacts, and others, in newsletters, on websites, and social media

## POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

- Identify ways to better utilize the Barnyards and Backyards materials/ programs and UW Extension
- Continue the annual partner recognition program, including publication of the names and reasons recipients were chosen
- Develop and submit press releases for District projects and successes (including grant awards)
- Consider pursuing a spot in the Sheridan Press "Outdoor Page" column
- Expand regular participation in community events, specifically Dayton Days and events in other rural communities



Information and Outreach increases awareness on potential impacts to natural resources, facilitates positive changes in land management practices, and encourages participation in programs. Information and Outreach materials need a thoughtful, direct, and proactive approach that focuses on quality more than quantity. Effective communication among partners and collaborative efforts will ensure delivery of a consistent message. Urban and residential audiences need to be able to recognize conservation practices occurring around them, even if they are not direct participants in a program.

# PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: NATURAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS

**GOAL:** Improve water and land quality and meet evolving natural resource needs through a diverse local conservation program

## OBJECTIVES

- Coordinate watershed monitoring, planning and improvement efforts through implementation and/or updates to Watershed-Based Plans and/or TMDLs on Tongue River, Goose Creek, and Prairie Dog Creek
- Provide assistance on watershed improvement projects including livestock confinement and feeding grounds, septic systems, riparian improvements, urban/residential runoff, irrigation diversions, stream/bank re-vegetation stabilization, and other programs as deemed appropriate through local watershed planning efforts
- Provide assistance on range projects that improve ecological condition, and rangeland health/productivity through grazing management and/or animal distribution through stock water development, fencing, or other practices
- Provide assistance on other projects that improve species composition, habitat and forage quality in riparian corridors and uplands through removal and treatment of Russian olive, annual grasses, and other invasive species
- Promote tree planting for conservation purposes (windbreaks/living snow fences, erosion control, wildlife habitat, dust/noise screens) through the local tree program and partnerships with Wyoming State Forestry, Wyoming Department of Transportation, and Sheridan Tree Board
- Promote recycling of used oil through partnerships with local municipalities and rural recycling facilities
- Facilitate long-term assessment, reclamation, and redevelopment planning for the former Acme Power Plant through coordination of the Acme Working Group and other partners and participation in the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality Voluntary Remediation Program and US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfield Programs

## POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

- Assist with the rehabilitation of Goose Creek through the City of Sheridan
- Participate in implementation of the Big Goose Watershed Control Plan and other projects that protect surface drinking water sources
- Identify and address specific conservation needs for urban/rural residential constituents
- Secure funding to assist with elements of the Acme effort that are ineligible for WDEQ and USEPA programs
- Integrate WWDC Small Water Project Program funding into current project grant sources
- Investigate opportunities to incorporate DNA Source Tracking and other technology discussed at the Wyoming Watershed Conference and other training into water quality and BMP effectiveness monitoring
- Incorporate better use of “before” and “after” photo comparisons to document improvements



Technical and financial assistance programs enable landowners to implement land use practices to improve water and land quality. This involves more than just agriculture producers; urban and rural subdivision residents also have an impact. Healthy lands not only provide benefits to water quality, but also improve forage quality for livestock and offer valuable wildlife habitat.



