

# Wyoming CONSERVATION

## History

The Dust Bowl during the 1930s made the need to conserve natural resources, particularly soil, very clear. Agencies ranging from land-grant universities to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration researched and implemented conservation practices throughout the nation. Eventually, the Soil Conservation Service, now named Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was created under the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 to develop and implement soil erosion control programs.

Occasionally, agencies working with conservation competed with each other. Local leadership was needed to coordinate their efforts and tie them into local conditions and priorities. Because of this, the president of the United States developed a model conservation district law for consideration by the state governments. In March, 1941, the Wyoming Legislature passed an act which established conservation districts in the state. Conservation districts were to direct programs protecting local renewable natural resources. Wyoming has 34 conservation districts in 23 counties.

Conservation districts are subdivisions of state government, much like school boards. Each district is governed by a board of five supervisors. Supervisors are local residents who serve voluntarily. All are elected by local citizens and, by statute, three are rural, one is urban, and one is at-large. They are elected to staggered four-year terms with two positions available at a general election and three positions at the next general election. These staggered terms improve the stability and consistency for conservation district programs. Supervisors may come from many different occupations but, by law, all supervisors must be Wyoming residents.

## Wyoming Conservation Districts

The mission of Wyoming conservation districts is to provide leadership for the conservation of Wyoming's soil and water, protect the agriculture resource base, promote the control of soil erosion, develop and protect the quality and quantity of Wyoming's water, provide assistance to reduce the siltation of stream channels and reservoirs, foster wise use of Wyoming's water and all other natural resources, preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, protect the tax base, and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the citizens through a responsible conservation ethic. Nationally, and in Wyoming, conservation districts usually operate under the following general policies:

- Conservation should be led by local citizens.
- The final responsibility for conservation lies with the landowner.
- Landowners have legitimate operating goals.
- Conservation districts are responsive to landowners, operators, and the community as a whole.
- The best agricultural land should be maintained for agriculture.

*The Laramie  
County  
Conservation  
District tree  
planting  
crew uses  
a machine  
to plant  
seedlings.*



# DISTRICTS



*Michelle Cook  
of the Campbell  
County  
Conservation  
District  
samples water  
on Stonepile  
Creek.*

Each district puts its focus on issues important to resource concerns in the county.

Some activities districts in the state are working on include:

- Water quality monitoring and watershed planning;
- Implementation of best management practices (septic system remediation, animal feeding operation assistance, pet waste management, etc);
- Seedling tree sales and living snow fence/windbreak programs;
- Work with local, state, and federal agencies;
- Forest planning, rangeland management, wildlife habitat improvement, and endangered species issues;
- Natural resources education programs;
- Small-acreage education and assistance.

## Getting involved

People are the key to conservation district success. Volunteers, whether serving on district boards or participating in a watershed cleanup, are important because:

- Local people offer extensive expertise and personal interest regarding the best ways to take care of their own natural resources,
- Effective management of natural resources at the local level reduces the need for outside intervention and regulation,
- Districts often have minimal budgets and may not be able to meet their conservation goals without volunteer help,
- Volunteers in education can help youths learn to be responsible stewards of the land.

## Contacting your local conservation district

If you do not know the name of your district or the location of its office, there are several ways you can find this information:

1. Go to the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts Web site at [www.conservwy.com](http://www.conservwy.com) to find out if your local district has a Web site or for contact information.
2. Look in the government section of the phone book under:
  - State government: For listings of local government entities. Many districts share the name of your local county.
  - Federal government: A field office employee of the NCRS Service or the Cooperative Extension Service can tell you how to contact your district.



*Rex Lockman discusses wildlife habitat with young people at the 2004 Laramie County Conservation District youth conservation camp.*

*Michelle Cook is the district manager at the Campbell County Conservation District and can be reached at (307) 682-1824 or [icd@vcn.com](mailto:icd@vcn.com).*