

# 2022-2026

## Weston County Natural Resource District Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan



Weston County Natural Resource District  
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Newcastle, WY 82701  
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[westoncountynrd.org](http://westoncountynrd.org)





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# Resolution of Adoption



Providing leadership in conserving the natural resources in Weston County by providing information, education, and technical assistance to meet the needs of our users.

1225 Washington Blvd, Suite 3, Newcastle, WY 82701  
307.746.3264 ext 111 westoncountynrd.org

December 28, 2021

This Long-Range Natural Resource Management plan will serve as a guide to establish programs each year and provide future direction to the District Board as program activities are planned over the next five years to meet the needs of the citizens of the Natural Resource District.

The Plan is intended to describe the Weston County Natural Resource District's mission, attributes, goals and objectives to enhance the natural resources through programs and involvement with local people.

A planning process for the Long-Range Plan was started in April 2021 at the local workgroup meeting with local conservation agencies and District members. We discussed the local conservation concerns and how we could address them. WCNRD emailed out a survey and invited members of the public to provide comments in person on suggestions for the Long-Range Plan and identify issues or concerns about natural resources in our county.


The district created a draft Long-Range Plan and advertised the plan for public comment.

The draft plan was available for public comment from November 9, 2021 through December 28, 2021 with a public meeting held on December 14, 2021 to gather comments and suggestions on the draft plan.


The Weston County Natural Resource District Board adopted the Long-Range Management Plan on December 28, 2021 to serve as a guide for the next five years.

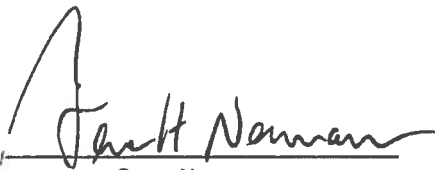
## ELECTED BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
David Tysdal  
Rural  
Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tucker Hamilton  
Rural  
Vice-Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Emily Hartinger  
Rural  
Secretary/Treasurer

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tom Streeter  
At-Large

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Gene Norman  
Urban

# Introduction

## History of Conservation Districts

During the 1930's, the Dust Bowl 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.

Sometimes agencies working with conservation ended up competing with each other. Local leadership was needed to coordinate conservation efforts and tie them into local conditions and priorities. Because of the need, then President Roosevelt developed a model Conservation District Law, for consideration by the State Legislatures across America.

In March 1941, the Wyoming Legislature passed the Conservation District Law, which allowed for the creation of Conservation Districts in Wyoming. Conservation Districts were to direct programs and provide services conserving local natural resources served by locally elected representatives. Wyoming has 34 conservation districts in 23 counties.

## History, Custom, & Culture

In 1885, the land northwest of Nebraska in Wyoming Territory was wild and uninhabited except for a few scattered ranches. Large cattle companies brought cattle to the area to graze on the open range.

The Weston County area was opened for settlement with the search and subsequent confirmed coal seam finds at Cambria around 1887. Cambria was a thriving coal town located north of present-day Newcastle. The coal was needed to feed the train engines coming into southern Wyoming. The railroad was brought into Weston County in 1889.

The county was named for J. B. Weston of Beatrice, Nebraska, who organized a small pack outfit in the year 1887 and visited the region of the reported coal out cropping. By September 1887, prospecting and development of the Cambria mines was well under way.

Weston County was originally a part of Laramie County when the latter was established in 1875. On March 12, 1890, Governor Warren approved an act passed by the last Territorial Legislature of Wyoming creating the County of Weston.

Under the Homestead Law, the miners of Cambria Coal Mine settled the prairie country in the hills, farming there in the summer and working the mines during the winter. It is estimated that 90 percent of the Black Hills area of Weston County was settled by mine workers.

The current and traditional principal economic activities include ranching and dry land agriculture, oil and gas production, services and retail trade, as well as forest products. The economy of the county is dependent on the activities related to the abundant natural resources occurring within the county.

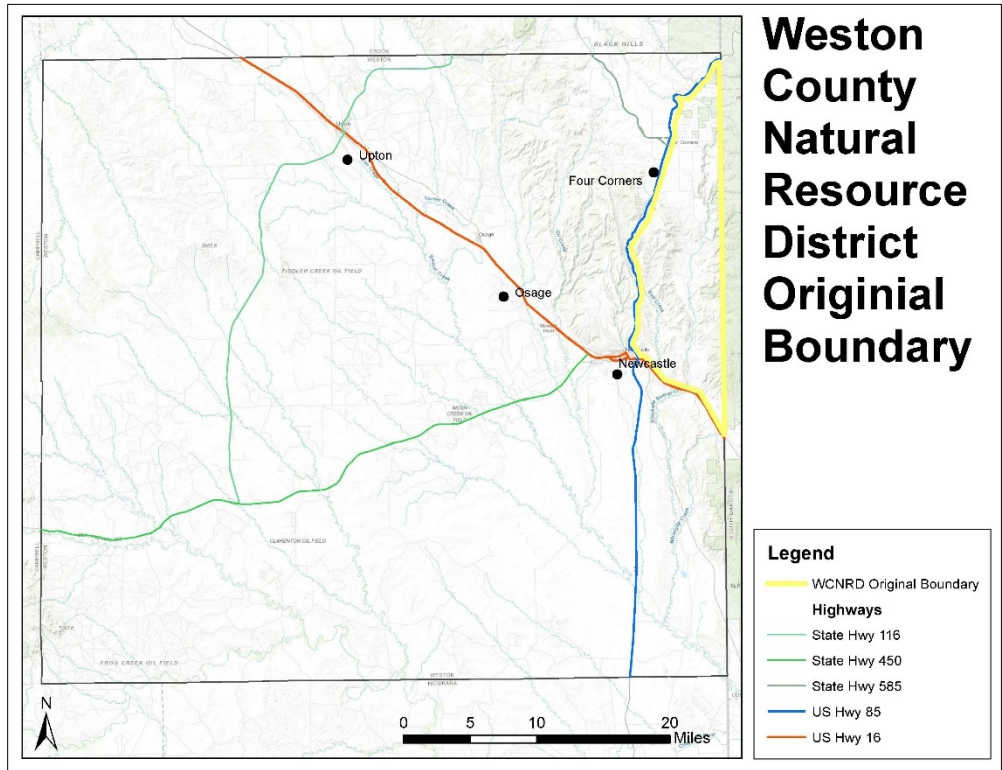
Agriculture has been an important component of Wyoming's economic identity and an essential part of Wyoming's culture and lifestyle. There are numerous outdoor recreation opportunities that include camping, hiking, fishing, boating, rock climbing, and hunting. In the winter months, the Black Hills provide snowmobile and cross-country skiing opportunities.



*Figure 1. Although electricity and solar power are becoming more common, you can still find windmills across Weston County as a source of energy to bring water up from a well.*

## District Overview

The Weston County Natural Resource District was organized in 1960 and received certification from the Secretary of State on January 16, 1961 under the name Beaver Skull Water and Soil Conservation District. A name change to Weston County Natural Resource District was designated on April 15, 1994 by the Secretary of State of Wyoming. The name change was a recommendation at a local long range public planning meeting. Figure 2 shows the original boundary of the District.



Since the creation of the District, land within the District boundary has continued to grow through voluntary addition by landowners. So, despite the fact that Weston County comprises approximately 2,400 square miles, or about 1.56 million acres, the current WCNRD boundary includes 1,163,904 acres. Leaving 355,786 acres still outside the District boundary. See Figure 3. Figure 4 shows a map of the current boundary of the District.

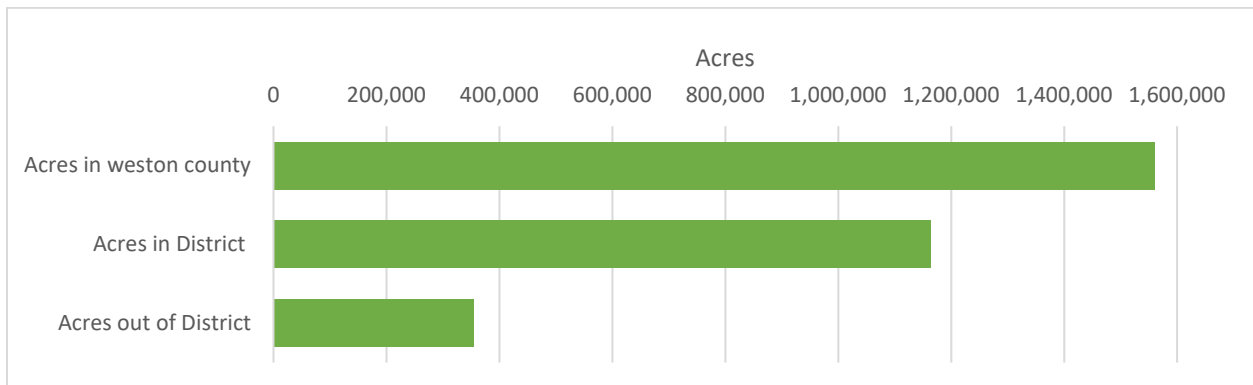
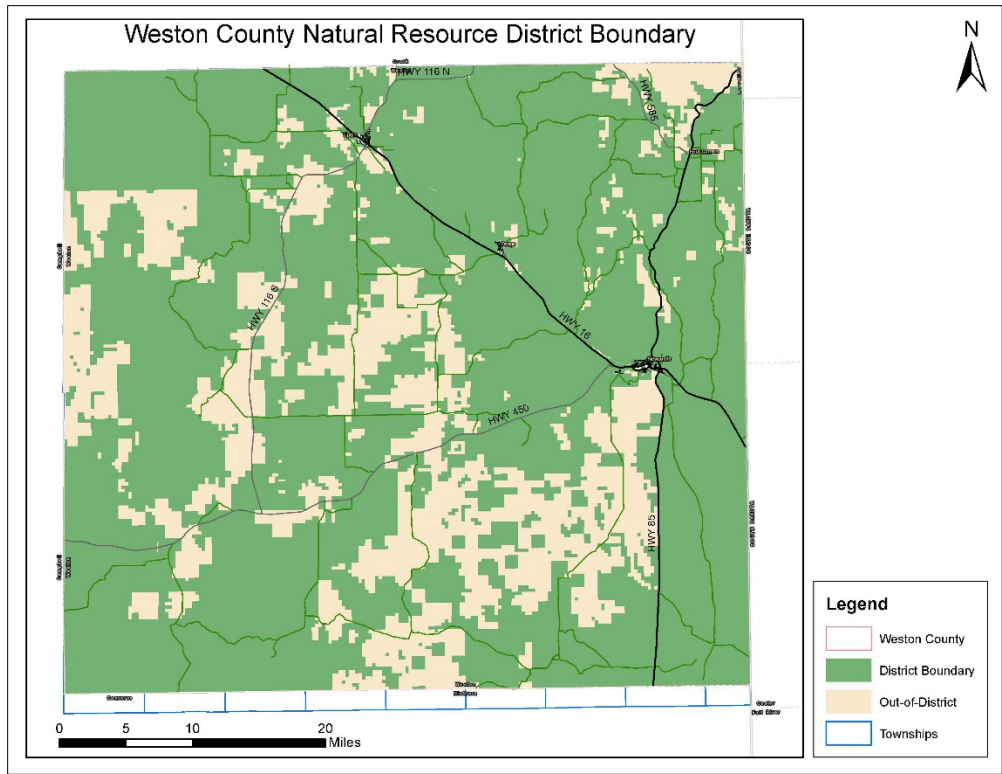


Figure 3. See a comparison between the number of acres in Weston County vs those currently in the District Boundary.



The District has a mill Levy which is used to support district administrative expenses as well as cost share programs and educational and outreach efforts. The district also leverages these funds to obtain additional funding through both local, state, as well as federal grants. The District board voted in 1994 that only tax paying members of the District would benefit from District programs.

To take advantage of District programs, a landowner must first add their property to the District. Any land in Weston County lying outside District boundaries can be added by the landowner(s) to the District at any time on a voluntary basis. If you are interested in what the district can do for you or would like to join the District, please contact the office at (307) 746-3264 ext. 111.

**Structure and Organization**

The Weston County Natural Resource District is a local governmental subdivision of the state as defined and established by Wyoming Statute (11, Chapter 16-101 through 11-16-134: Conservation District Law). It is one of 34 Districts across Wyoming in 23 counties, and part of the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) headquartered in Cheyenne, WY.

The WCNRD is governed by a locally elected Board of Supervisors. They are unpaid volunteers and provide local guidance in addressing conservation issues. Supervisors are residents of the district elected by local citizens to serve staggered four-year terms. Per Wyoming statute, the supervisor positions include three rural, one urban, and one at-large. Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month and are open to the public.

**Board of Supervisors**

- David Tysdal            Chair
- Tucker Hamilton      Vice Chair
- Emily Hartinger       Secretary/Treasurer
- Gene Norman          Supervisor
- Tom Streeter           Supervisor



## District Staff

Caleb Carter                      District Manager

## USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Personnel

Paul Eitel                      District Conservationist  
Tanner Jenks                      Range Specialist  
Austin Sommerville              National Wild Turkey Federation Cooperative Forester  
Chris Campton                      NRCS Technician (Serves District, based in Sundance)

## Mission Statement

Providing leadership in conserving the natural resources in Weston County by providing information, education and technical assistance to meet the needs of our users.

## Programs, Education and Outreach

The WCNRD shares office space, vehicles, equipment, and supplies, with the local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This collaboration allows for a strong, local conservation program. Programs offered by WCNRD include cost share programs for natural resource enhancement, forest thinning, fuels mitigation, septic maintenance, water quality testing, conservation tree seedling sales, books for local libraries, among others.

Education and outreach efforts include a variety of programs for both adults and children. The objectives of outreach efforts are to inform district members about new and upcoming programs as well as to educate the general public on current and ongoing conservation issues.

Educational programs for children are done year-round, including participation at the Weston County Ag Expo, the Black Hills Natural Resource Youth Camp at Mallo, presentations to classrooms, water quality monitoring with school kids, presentations at the library, and more. Adult education efforts include workshops, a quarterly newsletter, the District website with information about current programs and activities, as well as informational booths at the fair and other community events.

## Partners

WCNRD Staff represent the District on a variety of committees, organizations, and partnership efforts including the Thunder Basin National Grassland Working Group, Wyoming State Forestry Good Neighbor Authority, Newcastle Tree Board, the Northeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative, and others as needed.

Partners that the WCNRD works with include the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD), Wyoming Game and Fish (WY G&F), Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT), Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC), the Black Hills National Forest, the Medicine Bow-Route National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Weston County, City of Newcastle, Town of Upton, Inyan Kara Grazing Association, The Newcastle Tree Board, and others as needed. These partnerships have helped to enhance efforts by all involved in implementing effective and broad conservation efforts in Weston County.

## Funding

The majority of WCNRD’s funding comes from the 1 (one) mill voter approved county levy. The levy was first approved in 1988, with the latest approval occurring in 2003. Other sources of income include state, county, city, and town appropriations, the sale of conservation trees, and other conservation items, as well as local, state, and federal grants.

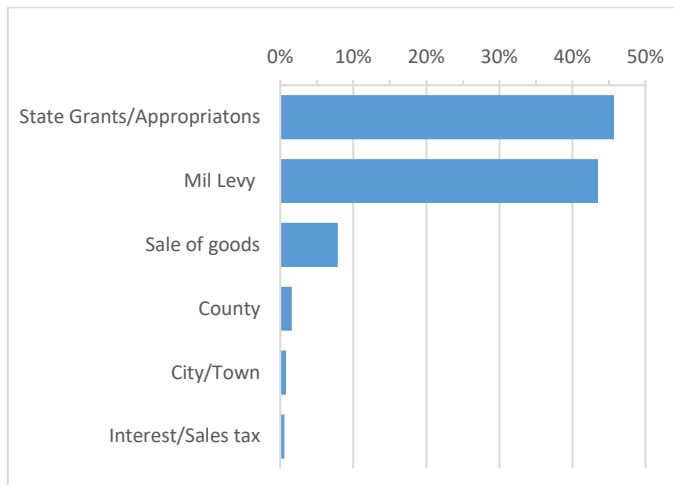


Figure 5. Total Average Income FY2017-2021 (\$297,966)\*

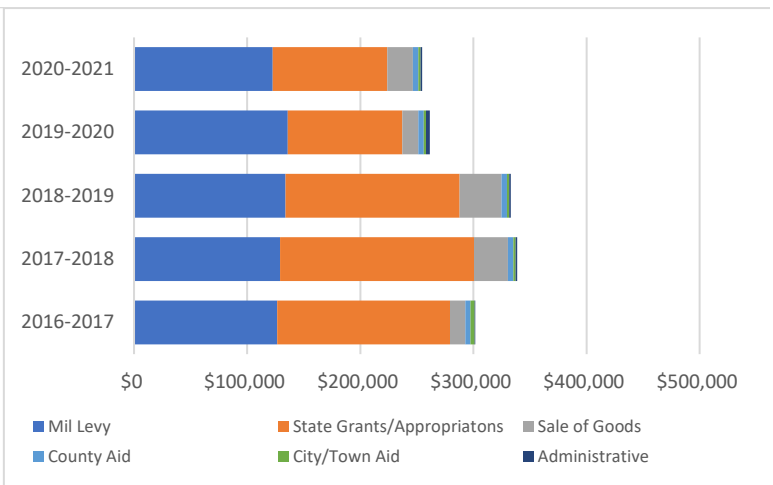


Figure 6. Total Income FY2017-2021\*

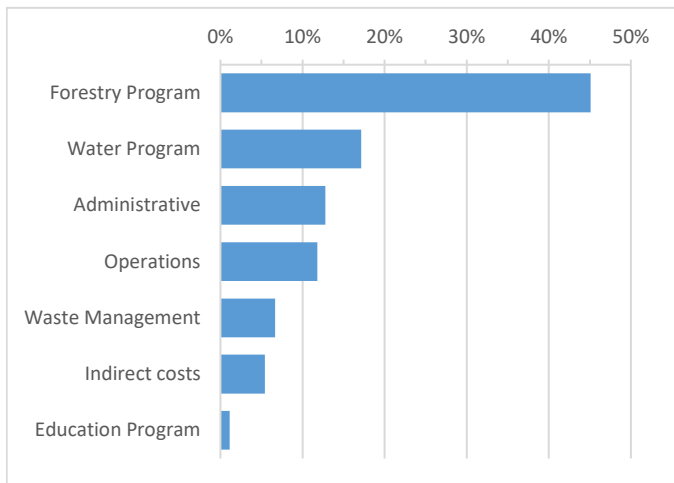


Figure 7. Average Annual Expenses: FY2017-2021 (\$336,052)

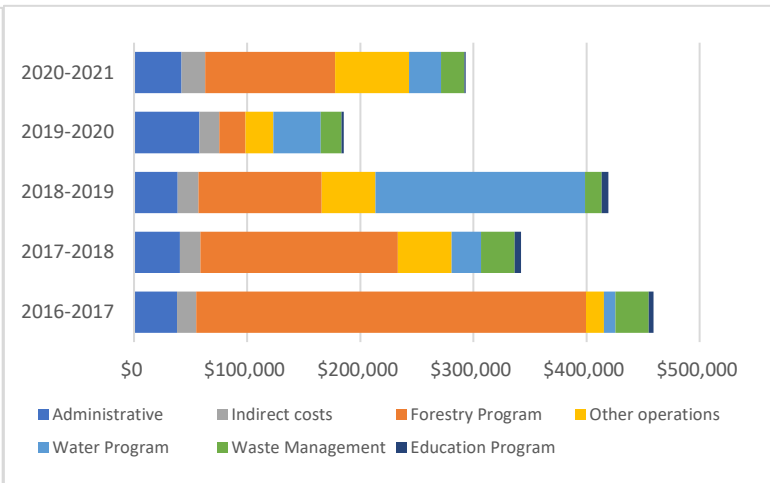


Figure 8. Total Expenses and Category FY2017-2021

\*Does not account for an average of \$130,000 carried over each year

Expenses are divided up between administrative expenses which includes expenses to operate the district such as office equipment, supplies, and salary. Indirect costs include expenses for taxes, benefits, and insurance. The remainder of expenses show the division of funds across program areas.

A lot of the District’s funds over the last several years have gone to forest health programs, primarily thinning projects. This was due to funding from Wyoming State Forestry aiding in the fight against the mountain pine beetle epidemic. At times spending on water development projects has also been high as the district has assisted on large projects on the National Grassland with the U.S. Forest Service and the Inyan Kara Grazing Association.

## Natural Resources

### Elevation

Elevation ranges from 6,480 feet in the northeastern corner of the District to 3,620 feet in the southeastern corner. The elevation is 4,334 feet at Newcastle and 4,235 feet at Upton. Most of the area is 3,800 to 4,800 feet in elevation.

### Climate

The topography of Weston County leads to a diverse climate. The Black Hills dominate the horizon to the east, crossing slightly into Wyoming. Precipitation here ranges from 16-37 inches annually (USDA, 2006). It is dominated by ponderosa pine forests with Black Hills spruce found in the higher elevations above Mallo. This area provides important wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities as well as logging, and seasonal livestock grazing.

The remainder of the northeastern corner of the county is dominated by the foothills of the Black Hills. This area averages 14-24 inches per year (USDA, 2006) and encompasses the 4 Corners Area and Mallo. This area includes some forested land but is primarily rangeland. Other land uses include dryland forage production, livestock grazing, and wildlife habitat.

The remainder of the county is rolling plains. The Newcastle, Osage, and Upton areas are part of the Northern Plains region which averages 9-27 inches of precipitation annually (USDA, 2006). Observations put the average precipitation for this area around 14 inches annually.

### Soils

The area encompassed by the District is comprised of gently sloping to rolling plains and terraces, foothills, and the Black Hills uplift. In general, the foothills of the District include shales, sandstone and limestone formations with soils that are moderately deep to shallow and medium textured. In the area above the foothills, the red bed area is made up of broken soft red siltstones and limestones. The soils are deep to shallow. North and east of the red bed is an area of darker and moderately fine textured soils. South of the foothills are shallow, fine-textured soils on shales.

A soil survey of Weston County was completed in 2006. This involves mapping and delineating differences in the predominant soils as well as features such as slope, vegetative cover, streams and cultural features. Information derived from the soil survey is used to assist landowners in preparing plans for soil conservation on local farms and ranches. Urban residents, industry, and units of government also use soil survey maps and interpretations to determine the suitability of soils for various users.

The completed Weston County Soil Survey book is available free of charge at the District Office to any interested parties. In addition, the NRCS has created the Web Soil Survey online and many landowners have been directed to make use of this website. The site provides detailed information and color maps on soils throughout the country. Users can search their local property and print detailed reports on soils, land uses, expected vegetation and many other factors. The site can be accessed at [www.websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov).

### Vegetation

A majority of Weston County is rangeland. The vegetation most commonly found on rangeland is western wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needleandthread, blue grama, little bluestem, sideoats grama, threadleaf sedge, prairie junegrass, inland saltgrass, and alkali sacaton. The predominate shrub species are big sagebrush, silver sage, and greasewood.

The majority of the farmland in the District is under dry land farming. However, there are areas in the District which do benefit from irrigation. Irrigation occurs along Stockade Beaver Creek in the eastern part of the county, the Cheyenne River in the southwest corner, Skull Creek in the center of the County, and Beaver Creek in the southeast. Production on the dry land farming is variable due to soil type and annual fluctuations in precipitation. Common forage crops grown include Alfalfa, alfalfa/grass mix, grass, oats, winter wheat, and barley.

Center pivots and flood irrigation are the predominant types of irrigation, but not all irrigated land has a dependable water supply to assure optimum yields. The most commonly grown crop under irrigation is alfalfa; however, corn and wheat are also planted to a lesser extent.

Forested area makes up over 116,000 acres, with most of the forested acres found in the northeastern quarter of the county near Newcastle, Four Corners, and Upton. A smaller area of about 1,500 acres is also present in the southwestern corner of the county near Rochelle. Of the forested acres, 66%, or about 76,000 acres, are privately owned. Ponderosa Pine is the dominant tree species and has the greatest commercial value. Other tree species common to the area are bur oak, quaking aspen, plains cottonwood, willow, box elder, and Rocky Mountain Juniper.

### Watersheds

Weston County has two major watersheds. The Cheyenne River watershed encompasses most of the county, while the Belle Fourche River watershed comprises a small area in the northwest part of the county and a small amount along the northern border.

The Cheyenne River enters the District in the southwest part and leaves in the south-central portion of the District. The main small streams that flow into the Cheyenne River include: Salt, Soldier, Stockade Beaver, and Whoop-Up Creeks on the eastern border; Beaver, Oil, Skull Creek, and Mush Creeks in the east-central part; Raven Creek in the northwestern part; and Lodgepole, Black Thunder, Little Thunder, and Hay Creeks in the south-central part.



Figure 9. Beaver Creek

Buffalo Creek and Cold Springs Creek drain into the Belle Fourche watershed to the north.

Currently, there aren't any streams listed on Wyoming DEQ's 303(d) List of impaired streams. In the past years Poison Creek was listed for naturally occurring oil seeps. It was remediated by Wyoming Oil & Gas Commission and removed from the 3030(d) list.

### Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife is an important component of the natural resources in Weston County and a variety of game and non-game animals are found in the District. Major game animals are whitetail deer, mule deer, antelope (pronghorn), and elk. There is also a small band of bighorn sheep that resides on the Wyoming-South Dakota border east of Newcastle.

Common predators are the fox, coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion. Upland game occurring in the District are rabbits, sharptail grouse, sage grouse, wild turkey, and chuckar partridge.

Cold and warm water fisheries are available and are used extensively. However, there are limited fishing areas that are open to the public, so the ones that are available receive significant use. Game fish such as rainbow, brook and brown trout and tiger muskie inhabit our cold waters. The warm water fish include bass, walleye, crappie, and perch.

Big game hunting, particularly for deer and antelope, is a vital part of our local economy and hunting and fishing in general is a traditional part of life in the county.

## Mining and Energy Development

In the past, Newcastle has experienced several economic booms and busts primarily related to mining, and oil and gas exploration.



Figure 10. The coal-mining town of Cambria, 1908. Weston County was named for John Weston, who discovered coal there in 1887. *Wyoming Tales and Trails*

Weston County has a variety of mineral resources that include coal, bentonite, oil, and gas. The mineral industry provides economic resources to the county. The Cambria Coal Mine operated until the Great Depression of the 1930's. Oil was discovered in 1880 but did not become important until the Osage Oil Field discovery of 1918. Gas and oil now are transported out of the area by truck and pipeline. An oil refinery is located in Newcastle. The presence of bentonite deposits near Upton and elsewhere in the county led to one of the first commercial bentonite operations in the United States. Bentonite used to be processed at a plant located west of Upton but was closed in 2002.

## Weston County Demographics

In 2020, the population of Weston County was estimated at 6,838 people. This is a drop of 5.4% since the 2010 Census (US Census, 2021). Half the population is present in the City of Newcastle, while the town of Upton consists of 15% of the population of the county. The remaining 35% live in rural and unincorporated areas of the county.

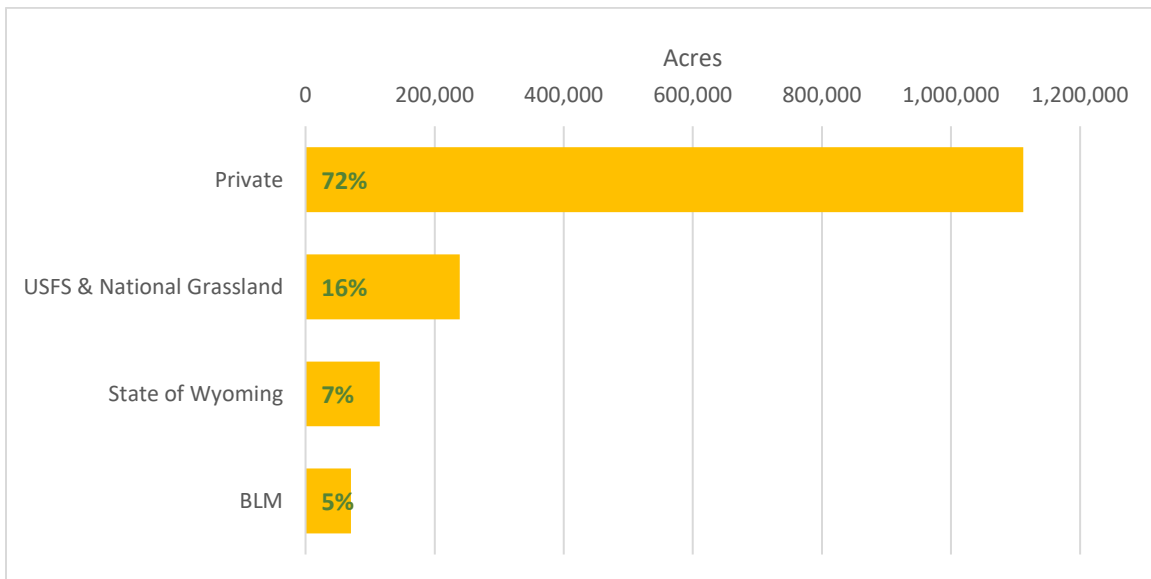


Figure 11. Total acres and percentage of land ownership in Weston County.

Figure 10 shows land ownership percentages in Weston County. Approximately 72% of the land in Weston County is privately owned. With the remainder broken up between the US Forest Service at 16% (which predominately consists of the National Grassland), the Bureau of Land Management at 5%, and the State of Wyoming at 7%. While municipal and county property is not shown, it accounts for less than 1% of land ownership. Figure 11 shows a map of land ownership in Weston County.

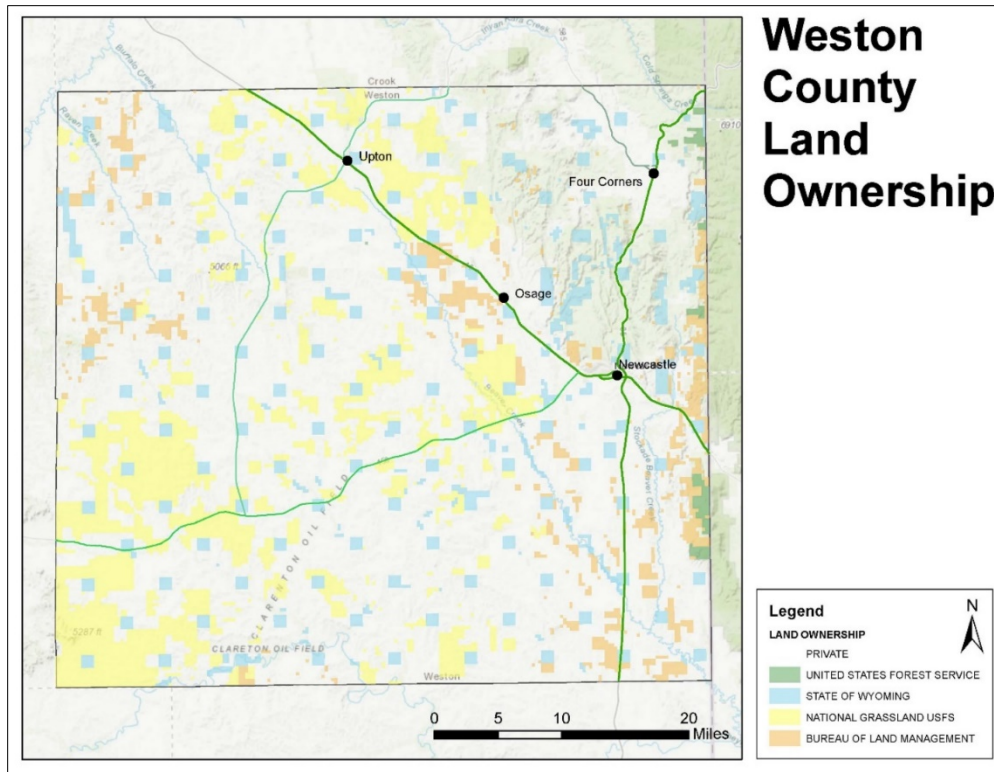


Figure 12. Land ownership in Weston County by the State of Wyoming and Federal Agencies.

### Agricultural Land in Weston County

Weston County is seeing a decline in agricultural land while the number of agriculture operations is increasing, as depicted in Figure 13. Figure 14 indicates that the increase we are seeing is in smaller operations consisting of 50 to 499

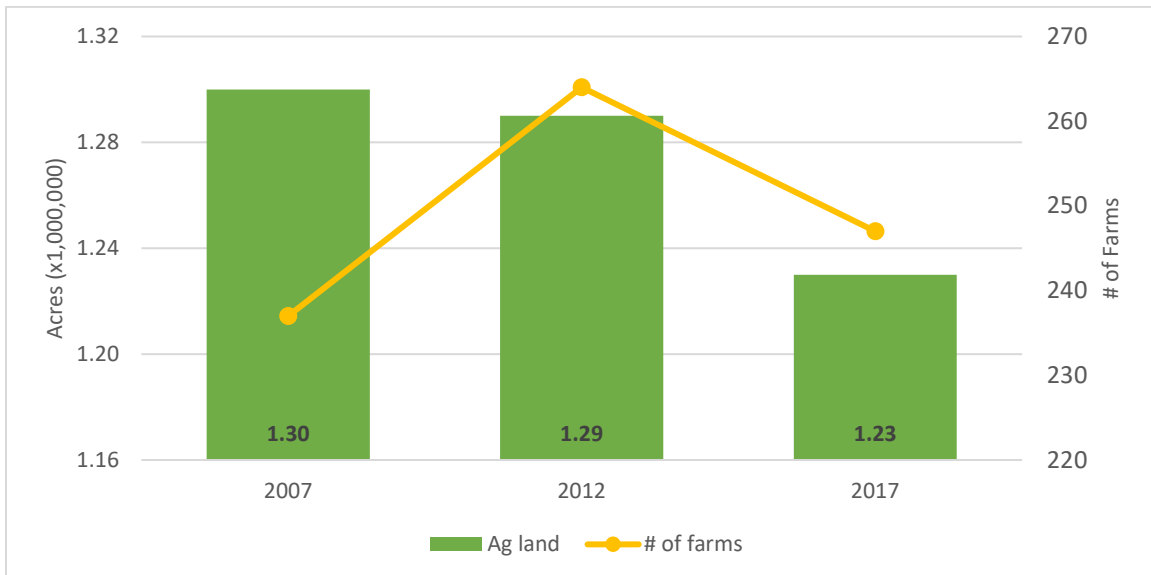


Figure 13. Trends in agricultural land and number of agriculture operations in Weston County from 2007 to 2017

acres and less than 50 acres. While operations over 500 acres are steadily decreasing. And, as would be expected, the average farm size is also declining. This is consistent with trends being noted across Wyoming and the Western United States.

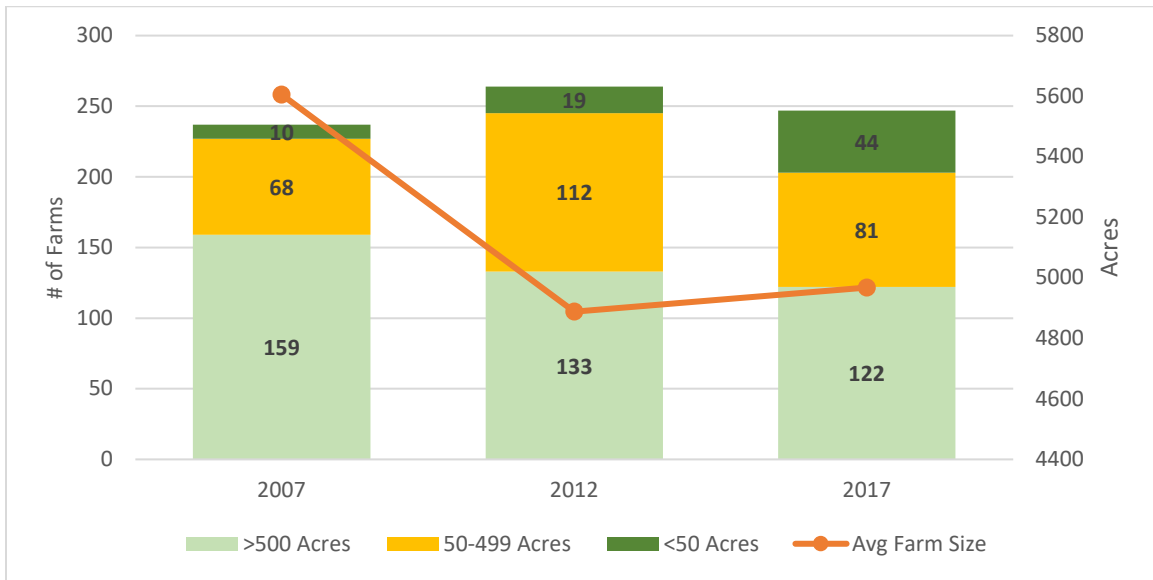


Figure 14. Total farm operations in Weston County from 2007-2021 and the trend in average farm size

Rangeland comprises the majority of the Agricultural land in Weston County, at 94%, or over 1,150,000 acres. The remainder is cropland comprised of primarily dryland and irrigated forage production. Irrigated land in Weston County totals just over 4,000 acres. Both irrigated and dryland crop production is predominately centered around forage production for livestock.

## Land Use Planning Process and Legal Framework

Weston County Natural Resource District's Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan was developed to assist the District in providing natural resource programs that are most important to the local people within Weston County. This plan identifies the natural resources, concerns and issues associated with each of the resources, and the goals and objectives that have been identified to address those concerns and issues.

The purpose of the Management Plan is to provide a guide for the planning and accomplishment of work by the district and its cooperating landowners/users and agencies. This plan will include the work and goals for the Weston County Natural Resource District for the period January 2022 through December 2026. The goals and objectives will be accomplished through sponsorship of district programs and through partnerships with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local citizens.

This plan may be modified during its time frame to reflect new or pressing natural resource issues or concerns brought before the District Board for consideration. This plan has undergone a 45-day public comment period to solicit comments and suggestions from our constituents.

### Land Use Plan

Locally elected governments and elected officials have far ranging and important responsibilities to their constituents, described by state statutes as protecting their "health, safety and welfare." That responsibility includes specifically interacting with federal agencies on all federal issues impacting the local community, county, or conservation district(s). To give the locally elected government the strongest voice it can have during this "government-to-government" interaction, local governments can adopt "local land use plans" or "resource plans" to set local policy regarding the use and management of federal lands and the adoptions of federal policies, programs, and other types of federal decision-making. These local land use policies are not zoning and do not regulate the use of private lands. This plan is intended to protect the local citizens' use of and access to federal and public lands and resources.

Federal agencies and departments are mandated by various federal statutes to engage local governments in federal decision-making processes related to federal plans, policies, and programs that will impact the local land use, management of natural resources, the citizens, and the local tax base.

### Local Land Use Planning Defined

When people think about local land use planning, they often think about the documents used by local governments to determine zoning, public services, and facilities, transportation, etc. But these plans apply primarily to land already managed by the government entity. But many rural counties and conservation districts have also adopted a separate document with reference to land and natural resource management on federal lands, reflecting local government positions on federal decisions.

While it may seem odd that local government could have a say in decisions made by federal land management agencies, there is a process created to help facilitate this process. Note that the local land use plans cannot dictate specific actions but can provide local government the opportunity to provide feedback and guidance on federal plans, policies, and programs.

### District Statutory Authorities and Land/Natural Resource Planning Authority

Wyoming's Conservation Districts were created in 1941 and Wyoming Conservation District Law (WY Stat § 11-16-122) is codified in Article 11, Chapter 16 of the Wyoming statutes (District Law). District Law describes, among other matters, the powers, purposes, and duties of a conservation district. The law clearly states that conservation districts are legal subdivisions of the state of Wyoming. Wyo. Stat. §§ 11-16-102(a)(v), 11-16-113(c).

District Law provides authority for conservation district land use or resource plans. Wyoming Statute (W.S.) § 11-16-122(b)(xvi) gives conservation districts authority to:



(xvi) Develop and implement comprehensive resource use and management plans for range improvement and stabilization, conservation of soil, water, and vegetative resources, control and prevention of soil erosion and for flood prevention or the conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water within the district, which plans shall include range management provisions and shall specify in detail the acts, procedures, performances and avoidances necessary or desirable to carry out the plans, including the specification of engineering operation, fence and stockwater developments, methods of cultivation, the growing of grass and other vegetation, cropping and range programs, tillage and grazing practices, and changes in use of lands.

(xix) Manage, as agent of the United States or any of its agencies, and enter into agreements with the United States or any of its agencies, or this state or any of its agencies, to effect cooperation with the United States or any of its agencies under United States Public Law 566 approved August 4, 1954, or amendments thereto, in connection with the acquisition, construction, operation or administration of any land utilization, soil conservation, erosion control, erosion prevention, flood prevention projects, conservation of water, water utilization, disposal of water in watershed areas and other water projects within its boundaries.

Conservation districts also have authority to develop long term strategic plans and watershed plans. See Wyo. Stat. §§ 11-16-103(b), 11-16-122(b)(v)(xvi)(xvii).

Also, W.S. § 11-16-122(b)(xxvi) empowers a conservation district to:

Make, amend and repeal rules and regulations not inconsistent with this act, to implement its purposes and powers.

W.S. § 11-16-103. The Legislative declarations and policy, which provide the reasons that the Wyoming Legislature Enacted Conservation District, law are as follows:

(a) It is hereby declared that the farm and grazing lands of Wyoming are among the basic assets of the state; that improper land user 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 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 reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect public lands and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state.

## Planning Process

The WCNRD develops a long range plan every five years to stay up to date on current natural resource issues and to outline long-term goals and objectives to address these issues. This serves as a guiding document in the development of the District's programs and activities. It is meant to respond to changes in the natural resource situation in Weston County. It also serves as a common vision for the Board of Supervisors and staff.

To evaluate current natural resource issues facing the District, a survey was circulated at the 2021 Local Long Range Planning meeting held in Weston County in April 2021. The survey was also included in the quarterly newsletter in April and an online option was also made available on the District website and through social media. A summary of responses is presented in Figure 15 showing a ranking of natural resource issues. The plan was also open for a 45-day public comment period as required by the Wyoming Administrative Procedures Act (W.S. 16-3-101).

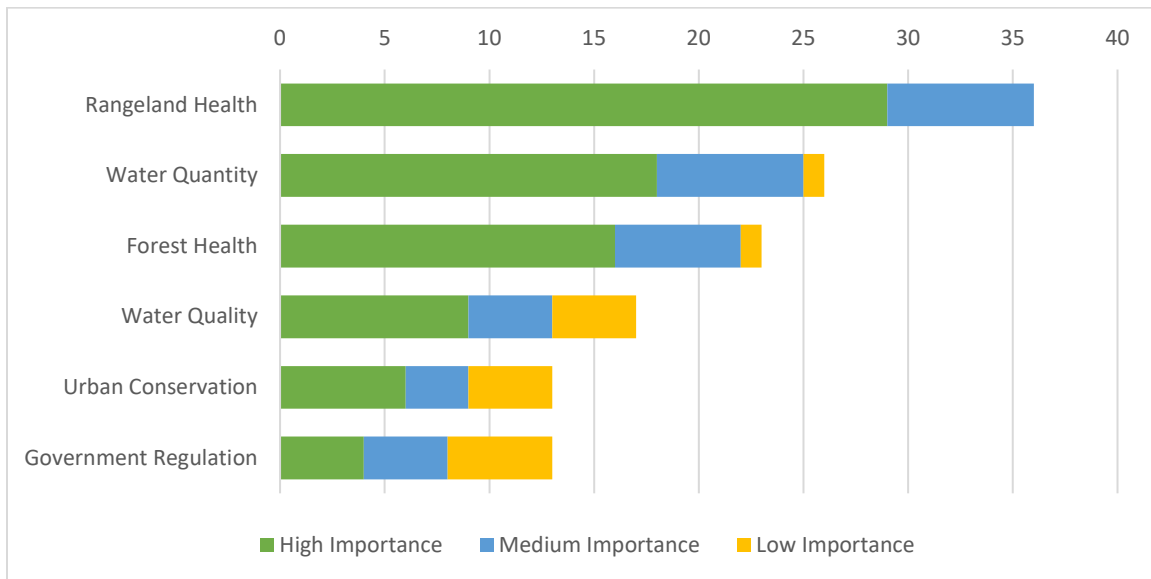


Figure 15. Survey results showing the ranking of importance of the natural resource issues facing Weston County

Because the duties assigned to the Conservation Districts are many and varied, it is necessary for the District to analyze resource needs and issues and develop a long-range management program for the conservation and development of the natural resources within the District.

The purpose of this plan is to provide the District guidance while developing their annual Plan of Work goals and objectives in meeting the needs of the district members and the issues facing the district. It is also to serve as guidance when working as a cooperating agency or during the coordinating process with federal agencies.

### District Operations

The District is designated as the local lead in conservation issues. It is important the District take on the responsibility of leading local conservation efforts and coordinate with local, state, and federal entities to ensure conservation practices are implemented appropriately and effectively and to work together for the conservation of the soil, water, vegetation, wildlife, and other natural resources of Weston County.

As the District works with public funds, it is important for the District to provide services within its statutory authority in a fiscally credible manner. While the District has funding through a mill levy, seeking additional funding through state and federal grants, as well as local sources, will allow an expansion of current efforts and a way to leverage these funds.

## GOALS

1. Maintain the credibility, recognition, and acceptance of the WCNRD through competent personnel and timely and professional service.
2. Improve and expand conservation efforts and programs by seeking partnership opportunities with local, state, and federal entities.
3. Seek financial stability by diversifying funding sources.
4. Continue to increase membership in the District.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide staff with adequate training and resources in order to provide timely and professional service.
- Provide adequate information and training to enable Board members 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.
- Reach out to potential partners, i.e. local governments, state and federal agencies, and stay up to date on their current conservation needs and ongoing efforts. Look for opportunities to partner on conservation projects when goals align.
- Foster regular and positive relations with local media sources including the News Letter Journal, The Weston County Gazette, KASL Radio, and others.
- Collaborate with NRCS and outside technical resources to increase WCNRD's capacity to lead conservation efforts in Weston County.
- Increase WCNRD's logo and name recognition in the community and awareness of District programs through incentives, promotional items, sponsorships, and presence at public events.
- Pursue direct, local funding from local governments including Weston County, City of Newcastle, Town of Upton.
- Pursue new and unique sources of funding to continue and expand current conservation programs.

## Rangeland Health

About 75 percent of the District is rangeland and more than 80 percent of the farm income is derived from livestock, principally cattle. Most ranches are cow-calf-yearling enterprises. The production of livestock is necessary to the livelihood of the ranching businesses and related industries in Weston County.

In the areas that have similar climate and topography, differences in the kind and amount of vegetation produced on rangeland are closely related to the kind of soil. Effective management is based on the relationship between the soils, vegetation, and water. Water quantity and distribution, improving native vegetation, improving riparian areas, livestock management, soil erosion, and sustaining wildlife habitat are all major concerns for rangeland health.

## GOALS

1. Best Management Practices (BMP's) for the improvement and continued use of all rangelands to sustain agriculture productivity are implemented within the District.
2. Successful reclamation of disturbed range and pastureland sites.
3. Provide expertise and guidance to promote healthy rangelands.

## OBJECTIVES

- Promote productive and sustainable range management through incorporation of BMPs, proven grazing principles, and improved grazing practices.
- Support monitoring efforts of rangeland conditions to assist with management decisions.

- Promote and educate landowners on conservation practices that improve range condition, livestock management, and wildlife habitat.
- Work with Weston County Weed and Pest, through financial support, education, and programs, to identify and manage noxious weeds and other pests.
- Reverse the encroachment of ponderosa pine and juniper into rangeland meadows and encourage meadow regeneration.
- Encourage demonstration projects on sagebrush to enhance habitat for sage grouse and other wildlife.
- Request state, and federal agencies work with local government in the development of management plans.
- Provide technical expertise and incentives for landowners/developers to reclaim disturbed range and pastureland sites.

### Water Resources

Water is the key to life and improving both water quality and quantity are important components of the conservation districts mandate. One of the most limiting factors in effective livestock grazing, as well as wildlife, distribution in Weston County is access to reliable water sources. There are many springs and stock water reservoirs across the county, but in dry years, even these have proven at times to be unreliable. A big part of the District’s efforts have been in developing more reliable water sources by converting windmill powered wells to solar power, adding pipeline to increase distribution of stock water, as well as the drilling of new wells.

### GOALS

1. Increase the efficient use of the District’s waters through education, technical assistance, Best Management Practices (BMPs), and coordination.
2. Expand water availability for livestock and wildlife.
3. Provide leadership to maintain or improve the quality of water within all watersheds in the District

### OBJECTIVES

- Improve water reliability and availability for livestock and wildlife through pipelines, spring developments, solar conversions, and new wells.
- Promote BMPs that maximize stream bank stability, habitat restoration, and riparian health.
- Provide cost-share funding for on-the-ground natural resource conservation BMPs projects.
- Support sediment control measures to reduce non-point source pollution.
- Provide water quality monitoring when necessary.
- Participate in watershed studies and plans.

### Forest Health

Though there has been and continues to be commercial logging in Weston County, much of the forested acres have become dense and overstocked. This has led to pest outbreaks, including mountain pine beetle, as well as increasing the incidence and severity of wildfires. Proper timber management, forest thinning, and defensible space against wildfire are major concerns in these areas.

Newcastle, Upton, and Osage are all included within the forest area. These urban areas, as well as numerous subdivisions in forested rural areas near Newcastle and Upton, require defensible space protection and face the same concerns with disease and insects as traditional forested land.

### GOALS

1. Promote best practices in forest management to produce healthy forests with reduced susceptibility to disease, insect pests, and severe wildfire.
2. Encourage conservation tree plantings to improve wildlife habitat, mitigate wind and snow issues, and to stabilize riparian areas

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide technical assistance and financial incentive to landowners to properly thin forested acres.
- Provide technical assistance and financial incentive to help landowners develop defensible space to protect structures and property from wildfire.
- Provide an annual conservation tree sale to district members to encourage affordable tree plantings for windbreaks, living snow fences, riparian area stabilization, and other conservation plantings.
- Provide planting survival aids such as fabric mulch and tree protectors for purchase.
- Provide general tree planting and care information and assist with tree selection and design assistance for conservation tree plantings.
- Encourage and support community tree planting and beautification projects through annual, competitive grants.
- Work with the local government to support urban tree plantings and maintain the health and vitality of urban trees.

### Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife is an important part of the culture of Wyoming and the Black Hills. In Weston County, hunting and fishing are an important way of life, as well as the ability to view wildlife in their natural habitat.

Wildlife habitat occurs on private, state, and federal lands within the District and there are many threats to wildlife habitat. Wildlife face many challenges including reliable water sources and dwindling habitat due to meadow encroachment, and overgrown forests, and loss of sagebrush habitat areas.

In general, wildlife in the State of Wyoming is managed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). Wildlife species that are on the Endangered Species List as threatened or endangered are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Much of the wildlife and endangered species reside at least part of the time on private land, making conservation efforts by private landowners extremely important in preserving wildlife habitat.



## GOALS

1. Conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitat and fisheries within the District.
2. Enhance efforts by state and federal agencies in managing wildlife.
3. Promote practices that improve wildlife habitat in district programs, plans, and projects.

## OBJECTIVES

- Cooperate with landowners and agencies in wildlife habitat improvement projects and management.
- Work as liaison between private landowners and state and federal agencies.
- Encourage ecosystem approach to wildlife habitat management, rather than individual species approach.
- Stay up to date on endangered species nominations and designations
- Provide education and information concerning changes in status of endangered species.
- Support conservation plan initiatives as an alternative to an endangered species listing.
- Support opportunities for increased public hunting and fishing access, either through expansion of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Walk-In Program or through the maintenance/creation of fisheries on public land.
- Support predator control efforts to protect wildlife and property.

### Forage Production

While cultivated land is a small portion of the agricultural land in Weston County, the land is used predominantly to produce forage for livestock. This is an important component of agriculture in Weston County, especially in years with

high hay prices. An even smaller portion of this ground is irrigated. But there are obstacles faced when irrigating much of the irrigated ground. Not all irrigators have access to reliable water sources and some sources are compromised by high salts during much of the growing season. In some places, irrigation infrastructure is degraded and unusable.

Other concerns include wind and water erosion of soils. These can be mitigated by the use of conservation practices including wind breaks, cover crops, no-till or reduced tillage practices, and more.

## **GOALS**

1. Promote conservation practices that reduce soil loss and improve soil health.
2. Encourage efficient water use in irrigation.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Provide technical assistance and incentive to landowners to assist in implementing erosion mitigation practices.
- Assist landowners in assessing water quality and developing irrigation strategies that best utilize water resources when available and appropriate.
- Provide technical assistance and incentive to landowners to plant cover crops.
- Encourage permanent cover plantings on marginal dryland planting sites.
- Provide rental equipment for no-till practices.

## **Energy/ Mineral Development**

While energy and mineral resources continue to provide Weston County with economic benefit, they occur without regard to land ownership, whether private, federal, or state. The District recognizes that in order to maintain the custom and culture of the region responsible and effective energy development is important.

## **GOALS**

1. Encourage suitable mineral and energy resource exploration and development in the County, while conserving rangeland, soil, fish and wildlife habitat, visual and water resources.
2. Ensure mineral development is in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations with consideration given to protect the water, soil, and rangeland natural resources.
3. Support coordinated efforts between the local, state, and federal agencies in the inventory, evaluation, and development of mineral resources.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Ensure compliance with all existing local, state, and federal laws regarding oil, gas and mineral exploration and/or their production, to conserve rangeland, soil, and water resources.
- Enforce reclamation actions to ensure that the site-specific reclamation plan is appropriate for the soils, vegetation, and climate
- Support mitigation that is closely tied to actual impacts, such as replacement grazing forage for displaced grazing permittees or range/vegetation improvement projects to mitigate impacts on rangeland resources and wildlife habitat.

## **Waste Management**

State and federal law govern the standards for managing landfill sites and industrial development that generates various waste products. While the District has a direct interest in ensuring that the soil and water resources are protected. To accomplish this objective, the District will actively participate in waste management issues including landfills, cleanup of industrial sites, as well as other related waste management and land management decisions regarding the management and cleanup of waste.

## **GOALS**

1. Raise community awareness about waste related issues and encourage active participation in waste management decisions.
2. Encourage the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials
3. Increase opportunities for proper waste management.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Provide information and education programs on the benefits of recycling, composting and proper hazardous waste management.
- Provide information on permitted septic system installation and alternatives.
- Educate the community on proper storage and disposal of hazardous waste materials and sponsor annual Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day.
- Encourage municipal and county governments to provide levels of service adequate to meet the community's social, environmental, economic needs and obligations.
- Encourage reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials.
- Coordinate local programs and activities to encourage recycling and composting.
- Continue to work towards expanding and improving the existing recycling program.
- The District may participate in development decisions to ensure that soil and water resources are protected and conserved.

## **Land Use Planning**

Wyoming Conservation District Law provides for the conservation of the soil, and soil and water resources of Wyoming. As well as the other natural resources of the state in order to stabilize farming and ranching and to protect the tax base and the general welfare of the people of Wyoming.

Maintaining open space and considering natural resource conservation in land use planning is also very important. Ensuring open space for continued agricultural production as well as in preservation of the viewshed that brings so many people to visit the region are both important considerations. Land use planning that accounts for conservation of natural resources is also important as more and more people move into the Black Hills and surrounding areas within the District.

Preserving open space for agriculture will help to preserve agriculture and it's impacts on the local economy. Providing local opportunities for the enjoyment of the outdoor through recreation can help to strengthen the local economy through tourism and also provide the opportunity to increase the general public's appreciation for and understanding of our natural resources.

## **GOALS**

1. Cooperate and coordinate with both state and federal agencies as well as private landowners to protect the natural resources of the District.
2. Encourage proper development with consideration of potential impacts to natural resources.
3. Encourage preservation and enhancement of the viewshed and recreational opportunities for residents of Weston County as well as tourists.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Request cooperating agency status for Weston County Natural Resource District on issues that affect the natural resources where the District has expertise.
- Provide written documentation to the Weston County Planning Board on soil suitability, erosion control, sedimentation, and flooding problems for proposed subdivisions in the county.
- Support identification, early detection, and control of noxious weed infestations and encourage implementation of county weed control policies.

- Protect and enhance the quality of water by promoting permitting and proper management of septic systems.
- Advocate open spaces concepts and principles and the retention of agricultural lands in production.
- Work with local, state, and federal entities to preserve, promote, and develop new, public access areas for recreation including hiking and biking trails, fishing and hunting access areas, and

### Education and Outreach

While educating District members about new programs or conservation opportunities is a component of the District's outreach efforts, the larger scope of the District's education and outreach program is much larger. Part of conserving our natural resources includes educating residents as well as the upcoming generations about the importance of our natural resources and their conservation. In an effort to foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural resources all around them. Thus, creating an appreciation and a sense of stewardship, even if they are don't take part in the District's conservation programs themselves.

#### **GOALS:**

1. Provide accurate and timely information to all Weston County residents about District programs and natural resource issues.
2. Raise awareness within the general public of the District's efforts and ongoing conservation programs and projects.
3. 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
- Provide educational presentations to school children and youth groups on natural resource issues and conservation programs and projects through classroom activities, field days, tours, displays, etc.
- Provide educational presentations on conservation programs and efforts to local community groups.
- Identify and provide information through workshops, newsletters, website, and social media on topics specific to small acreage landowners and urban residents.
- Reach out to educators and offer materials and resources for teaching about natural resource issues in the classroom.



## Resources

United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, 1990. Soil Survey of Weston County.

US Department of Agriculture. National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017 US Census of Agriculture Statistics for Weston County, Wyoming. 1997-2017 Quick Stats from <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>. Accessed October 2021.

US Department of Commerce. Census Bureau. 2020 Census.  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>. Accessed October 2021.

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2006. *Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin*. United States Department of Agriculture Handbook 296.

# Appendix

## 2021 Survey Results

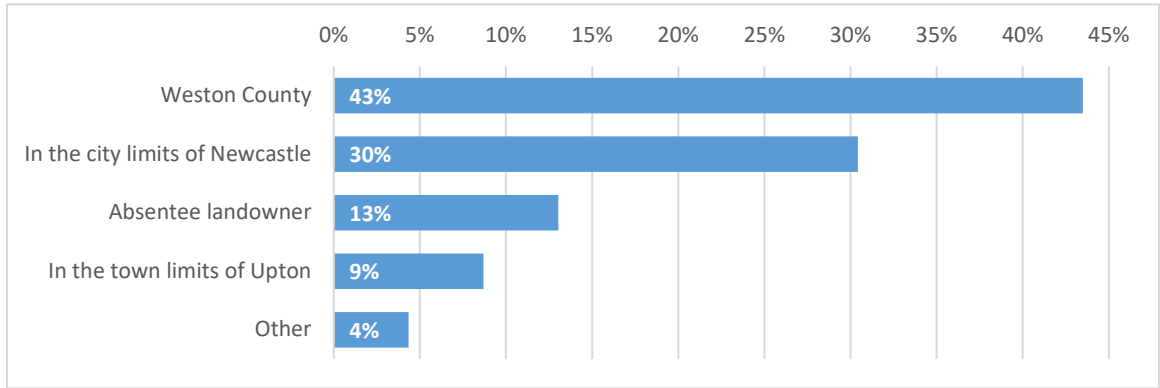


Figure 16. Survey Q1: Where do you live? Shows where people live by percentage of survey respondents.

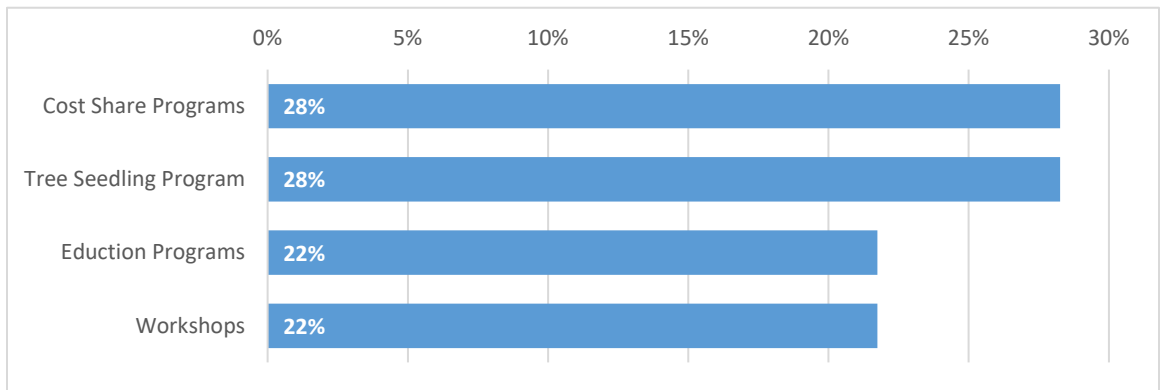


Figure 17. Survey Q2: Did you participate in or have knowledge of the following programs/services offered by the WCNRD?

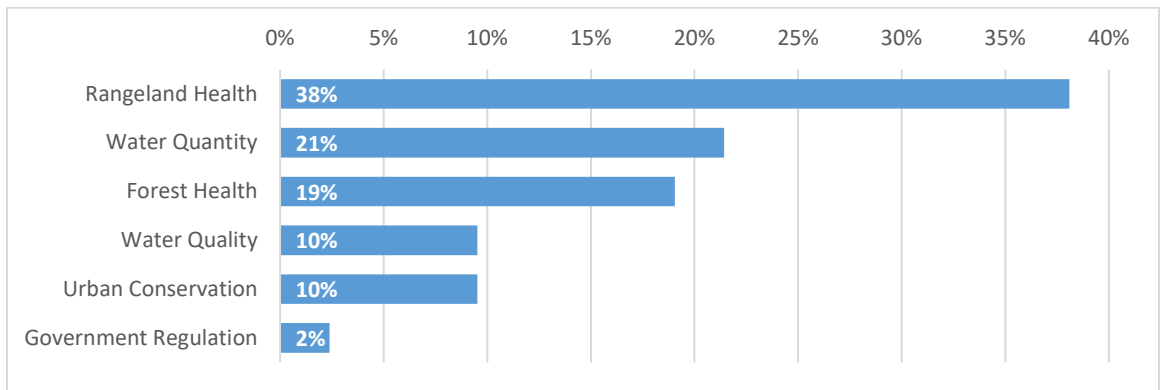


Figure 18. Survey Q3: Please rank the 5 most important natural resource issues facing our community

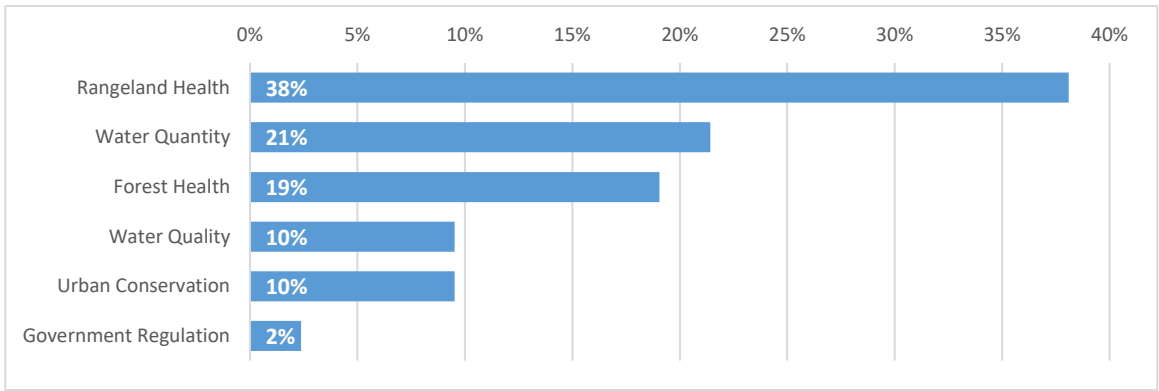


Figure 19. Survey Q4: What natural resource programs are you most interested in?

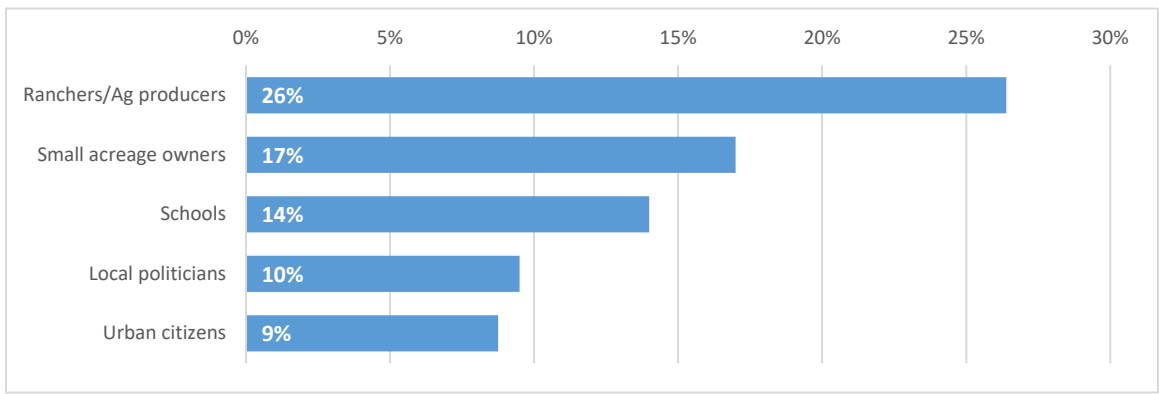


Figure 20. Survey Q5: Please rank the most important groups you feel the WCNRD should reach with education/services

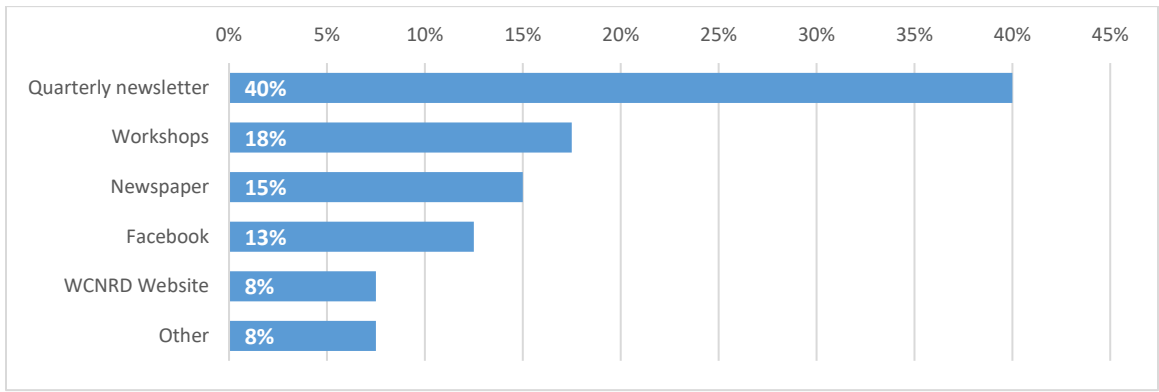


Figure 21. How do you receive information from WCNRD?

