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Weston County
Natural Resource
District

ANNUAL REPORT

WCNRD BOARD

David Tysdal
Chairman

Tucker Hamilton
Vice-Chair

Emily Hartinger
Secretary/Treasurer

Tom Streeter
Supervisor

Gene Norman
Supervisor

DISTRICT STAFF

Caleb Carter
District Manager

CONNECT WITH US!

✉ westoncountynrd@gmail.com

🌐 westoncountynrd.org

📷 [Instagram.com/westoncountynrd](https://www.instagram.com/westoncountynrd)

📘 [Facebook.com/westoncountynrd](https://www.facebook.com/westoncountynrd)

📍 1225 Washington Blvd., Ste 3
Newcastle, WY 82701

📞 (307) 746-3264 x4

MISSION

To provide leadership in conserving the natural resources in the Weston County Natural Resource District by providing information, education and technical assistance to meet the needs of the users

VISION

Develop engaged communities and landowners who take ownership of, and promote the conservation of, our natural resources for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations

LOCALLY LED CONSERVATION

The Weston County Natural Resource District (WCNRD) is a political subdivision of the State of Wyoming. It is governed by a five-member volunteer board, elected on four-year terms by district members.

The WCNRD provides technical assistance, educational programs, and funding for natural resource conservation to land users, agricultural producers, foresters, homeowners, and local governments. Since 1961, the district has delivered voluntary, locally-led conservation solutions to natural resource concerns.





1941

State Legislature passed an enabling act, which established conservation districts in Wyoming.

1961

Beaver Skull Soil and Water Conservation District is formed

1971

Portion of Buffalo Belle Conservation District added to Beaver Skull Soil and Water Conservation District

1973

Portion of Upper Cheyenne River Conservation District added to Beaver Skull Soil and Water Conservation District

1988

District members vote in favor of a 1mil tax

1994

The District name is changed to the Weston County Natural Resource District, based on a suggestion from a local work group meeting

2003

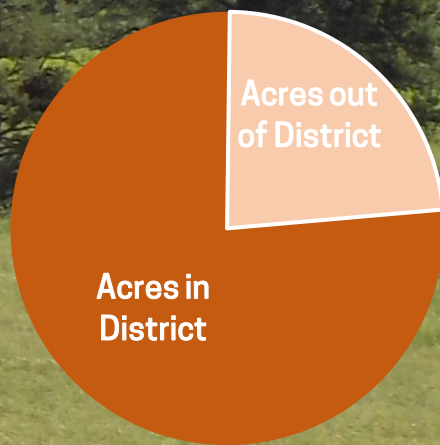
Board passes rule that makes funding for cost share projects only available to district members paying into the mill levy

District Boundary

A CHECKERBOARD SITUATION

In 1961, the original Weston County Natural Resource District boundary comprised lands east of HWY 85, north of HWY 16 to Upton, and north along Arch Cr. Rd to the county line. At the time of formation, landowners inside this area could opt out, while landowners outside this area could opt in.

Since this time, the district boundary has grown through voluntary land additions. Obviously, this has led to a checkerboard boundary.



Currently, the district encompasses a little over three quarters of lands within Weston County.

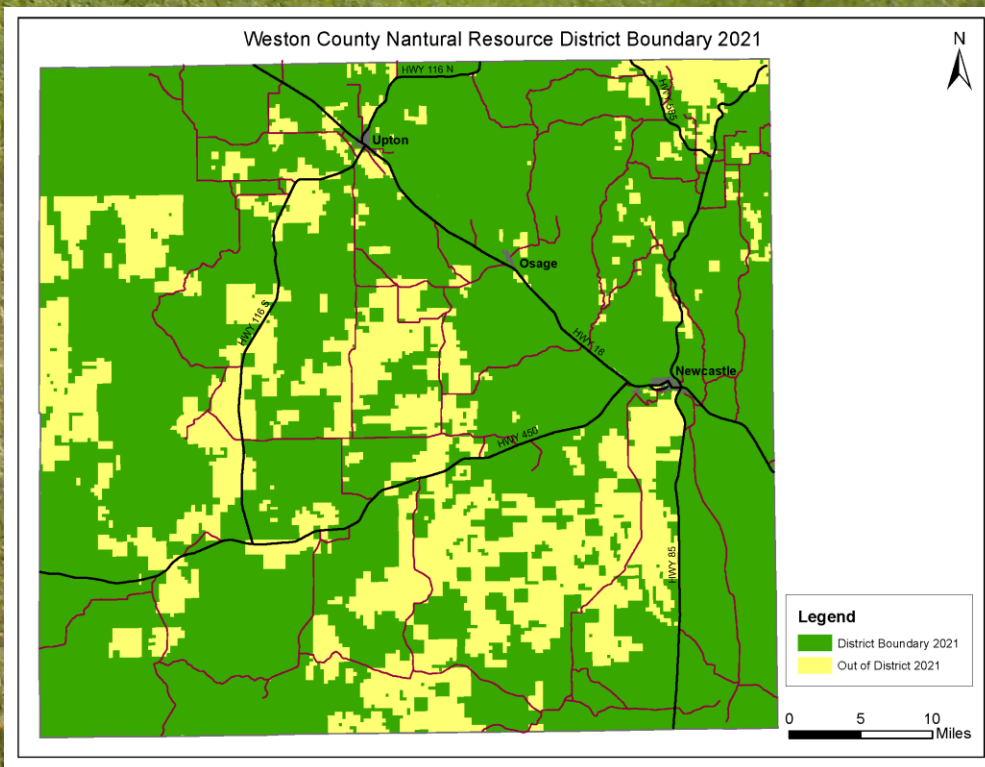
***LOCALLY LED,
LOCALLY FOCUSED
CONSERVATION!***

**SUPPORT CONSERVATION,
JOIN THE DISTRICT**

Joining the district not only qualifies members to take part in district programs, but it also helps to support conservation efforts in Weston County.

If you are interested in joining the district, please contact us for more information.

Taxes paid to the district are equal to approximately \$9.50 per \$100,000 of valuation of an individual's property



District Operations



TELLING OUR STORY

As with any publicly funded entity, telling our story is always an important activity. The Weston County Natural Resource District's unique situation with the checkerboard boundary makes it even more important as we try to educate landowners about who we are, what we do, and how they can support, and participate in, local conservation by joining the district.

The District made a more concerted effort this year to get the word out to the general public by having more of a presence at events and by working to increase name and logo recognition. The District paid for logoed apparel for District staff as well as board members. This helps staff and board members represent the District at meetings and events as well as when making property visits.

REPRESENTATION

The board and staff represented the district at the following meetings and events:

- WACD Area 1 meeting
- NRCS Local Working Group meeting
- Thunder Basin National Grassland Working Group
- University of Wyoming Extension Small Acreage Initiative Team
- Newcastle Tree Board
- Black Hills Forest Resiliency Partnership Committee Meetings
- Northeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- Northeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative Steering Committee

New Website

The WCNRD also began work on a new website that will provide an online store feature for district members to purchase trees and other items for sale through the district online. We are excited about adding this convenience for our customers, as this will greatly improve the accessibility of our sale items. Look for this new feature to be released in the fall of 2023





Area meeting: Forestry tour

The district hosted the 2022 Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts Area 1 meeting in the fall. This meeting is an opportunity for area business meetings and for updates from Wyoming NRCS and Wyoming Department of Ag.

This meeting also typically consists of a tour of a project site. In 2022, the District hosted a tour of property which had been using a variety of management tools to maintain the health of the forest. This was a great opportunity for those districts that don't do much forestry work to see firsthand the importance of the work in the Black Hills area.



It also provided an opportunity to address concerns with changes to NRCS policy on forest project practices. NRCS removed pile and burn as a slash treatment option on NRCS projects and the District has been working with Wyoming NRCS to get this back as a treatment option.

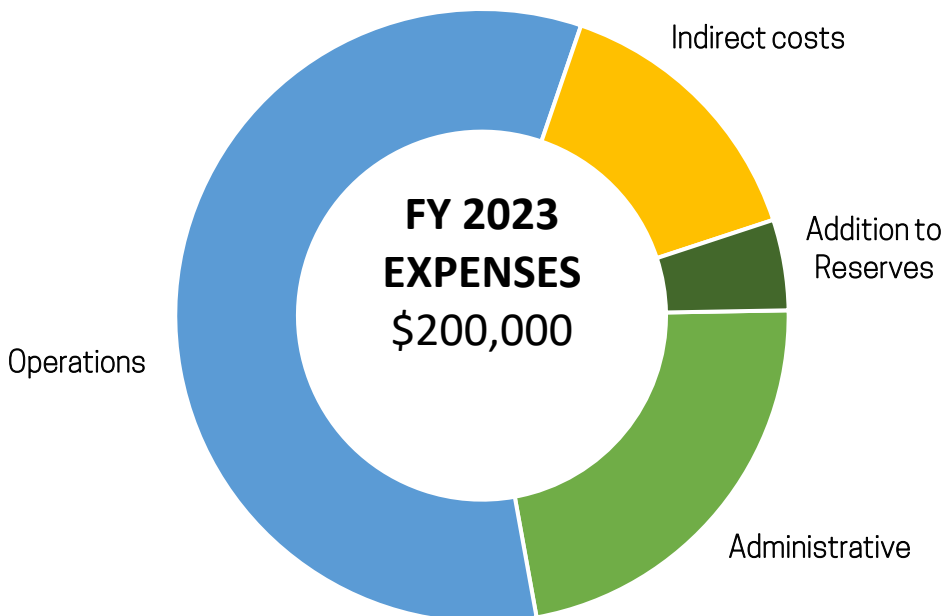
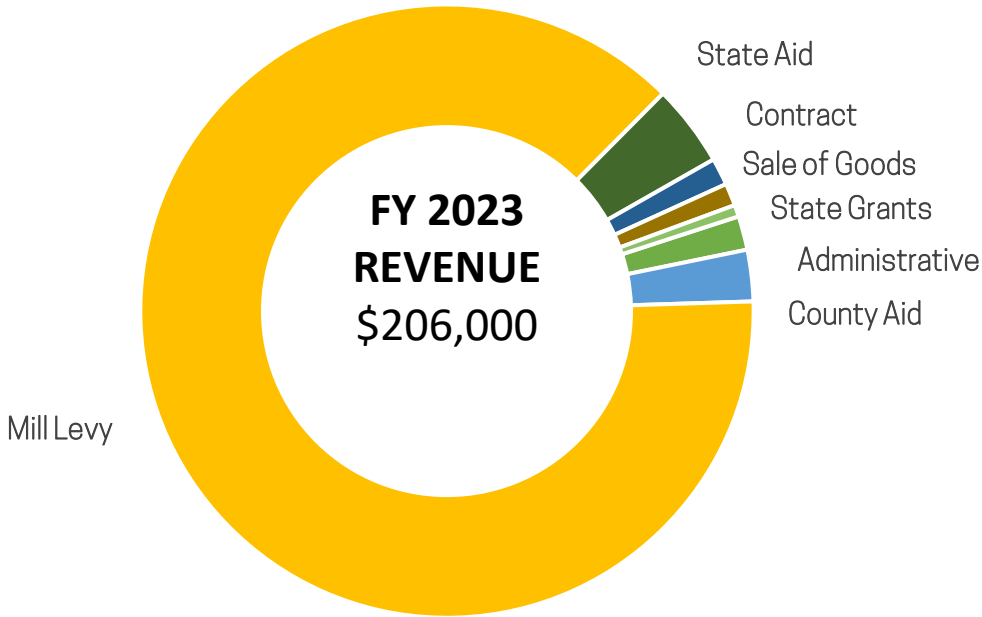
This represents continued efforts by the District to ensure that state and federal policies are in the best interest of our district members.



FISCAL YEAR 2023

TRANSPARENCY OF PUBLIC FUNDS

As a publicly funded entity, the district strives to use the district members' tax dollars responsibly. The district works hard to maintain transparency and to fund programs that benefit the district members and the natural resources of Weston County.

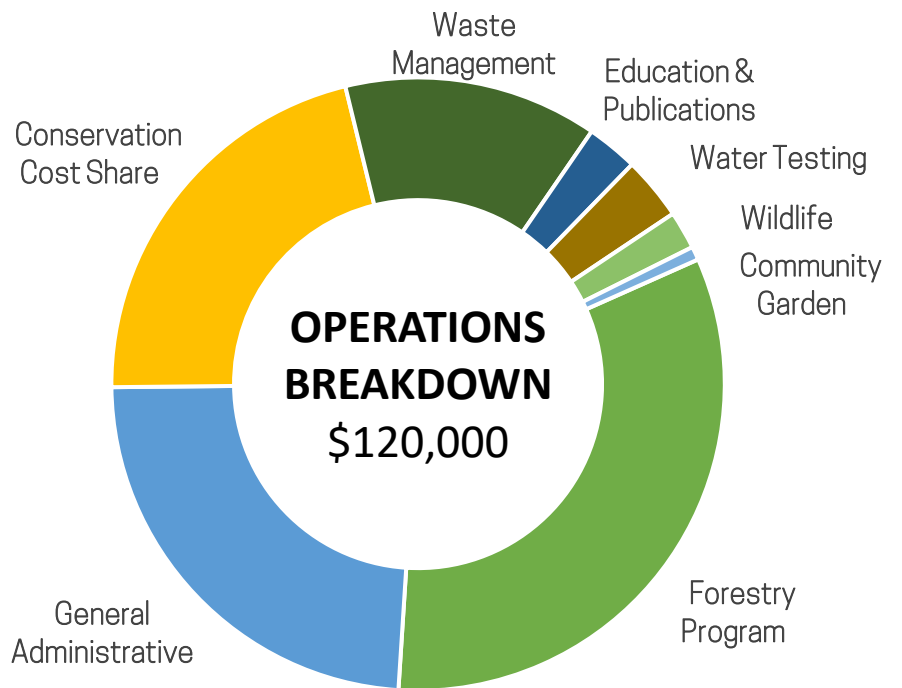


LOCAL FUNDING SUPPORTING LOCAL CONSERVATION

The district's primary funding source is the mill levy. This funding covers the administrative expenses as well as many of the programs the district offers. These funds are also used as match towards grants to bring in additional funding to further conservation efforts on the ground.



July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023





1 solar conversion

2 new wells

2 Low water crossings

6 Stock tanks

10 Septic Maintenance Cost Shares

12 bat boxes

14 well water and cistern tests

25 wildlife escape ramps

28 trail junction signs

90 acres of fuel mitigation

270 acres of forest health

411 educated at WCNRD programs

4,400 feet of cross fencing

5,044 trees sold

7,000 acres improved

9,000 pounds

Fiscal Year 2023 By the Numbers

BUT THAT ISN'T WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Too often we focus on the numbers. They are easy to quantify and flashy. But conservation isn't about the numbers. It is about relationships, the environment, and preserving our natural resources for the next generation. And while we the Weston County Natural Resource District promote local conservation through local leadership and local funding, the truth is, there would be no conservation at all without you!

Our programs are voluntary and designed to meet the needs of our district members. We work hard to be good stewards of the public funding we are provided. As you look at the numbers, and as you read over our accomplishments from the past fiscal year, look for the relationships that made the numbers possible. And remember, you were a part of this too. And, together, we can continue this into the future.

If you have ideas, questions, or concerns, please reach out! We would love to hear your comments. And, again, thank you for your continued support!

Sincerely,



Caleb Carter
District Manager
Weston County Natural Resource District

ved
nds of hazardous waste collected
11,335 feet of Pipeline

Rangeland Health and Water Resources

IMPROVING WATER DISTRIBUTION

The Conservation Cost Share program is a 50% cost share up to \$5,000 that provides incentive for landowners to implement natural resource conservation practices improving water quality and quantity, soil erosion, energy conservation, and wildlife habitat.

In 2023 the District assisted 6 landowners in improvement projects benefiting over 7,000 acres and totaling:

- 2 new wells
- 11,335 feet of Pipeline
- 6 Stock tanks
- 1 windmill to solar conversion
- 4,400 feet of cross fencing
- 2 low water crossings

WYOMING SMALL WATER PROGRAM

The Small Water Project Program is a grant program administered by Wyoming Water Development to support water development projects that have public benefit, with a 50% cost share up to \$35,000. The district currently has 4 projects in various stages of completion.

This was year two of a large project located on the Thunder Basin National Grassland. This project saw over 9,000 feet of pipeline added in FY 2023. This project is increasing water distribution across the community pasture, to better distribute grazing. The full project will consist of over 33,000 feet of pipeline and 6 stock tanks covering US Forest Service and State lands. Other projects consist of stock pipeline and tanks, a new well and a spring development.

WATER TESTING

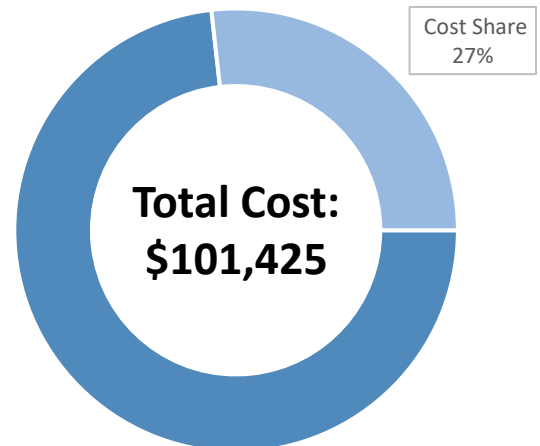
The district offers a bi-annual well water testing day every spring and fall. This program encourages district members to test their well water regularly. There are also many people in the county who haul water to their property. This water is then placed into a cistern and used for drinking, washing, etc. We also encourage the testing of the water coming out of the cisterns to ensure they are being cleaned and maintained properly.

STAY "WELL" INFORMED!

More information on proper well maintenance and upkeep of your cistern can be found at our website at westoncountynrd.org/well-water-testing

One of the biggest challenges for many agricultural producers in the region is the lack of functional water distribution. Pasture size is often dictated by water availability, often resulting in large pasture size which limits proper management and lead to reduced grazing utilization. Using pipelines to improve water distribution can help improve grazing uniformity and can also allow pastures to be divided for better grazing rotation.

CONSERVATION \$\$ INVESTMENT



The District's investment in the Conservation Cost Share program brought in a nearly 3-fold investment in conversation projects by landowners and lessees.

WATER TESTING FY 2023

The District offers a 70% cost share on well water testing, and three test options, including:

- Full domestic plus bacteria
- Bacteria only
- Livestock and irrigation suitability

In FY 2023 the District assisted in testing water from 14 wells and cisterns in the county. This program is supported by water quality funds from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.

Wildlife Habitat

Bat Habitat Improvement

There are several bat species native to Wyoming. In recent years concern for bat populations has increased across the country, as well as in Wyoming. A combination of disease and habitat loss and degradation has led to some species being listed as endangered.

The WCNRD began hearing more concerns about bats and their populations, as well as where bats were roosting. Many shared instances where bats were roosting in shops and barns, as well as in their homes and in the eaves of the high school.

Bat Houses

Interest grew in providing bats with more appropriate and safer roosting sites. After doing research and gaging interest, the WCNRD purchased bat houses based on recommended specifications from Wyoming Game and Fish. Twelve of these bat houses were distributed in the summer 2023 via a 70% cost share and placed around the county.

The WCNRD will follow up with landowners about their experience and continue to collect information about people's experiences with bats. When and where they are seeing them, population numbers, possible roosting sites as well as any evidence of bat use of these sites. Stay tuned for more information as this program continues.

Local Area Bat Box/Roost Reporting

If you would like to share your own experiences, please visit our website at <https://westoncountynrd.org/all-about-bats/> and click on our General Bat Reporting Form today!



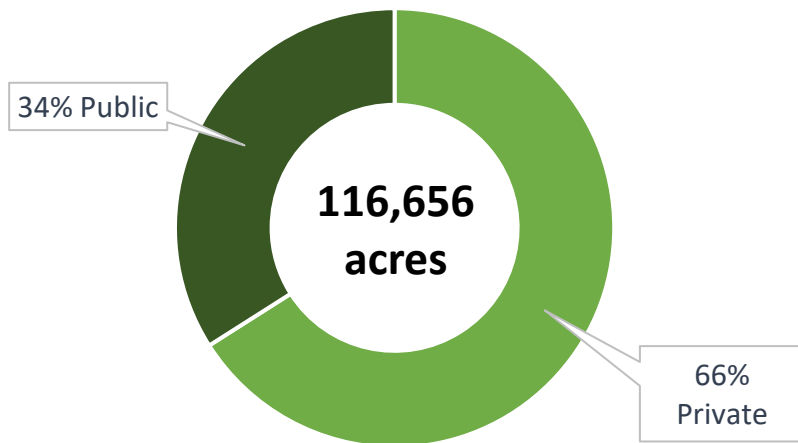
WILDLIFE ESCAPE RAMPS

The WCNRD provided 25 free wildlife escape ramps to landowners to place in stock tanks. Ramps were made by Newcastle High school Vo-Ag classes.

Forest Health

MANAGING FOR HEALTHY FORESTS

Forests in Weston County are composed primarily of ponderosa pine. Ponderosa requires regular thinning to maintain healthy, vigorous stands. Which also helps to fend off insect and disease attacks and reduce wildfire severity.



With over 116,000 forested acres consisting of over 65% private land in Weston County, the district's cost-share programs are important in helping private landowners manage their forested lands.

THINNING

The District partnered with Crook County Natural Resource District in applying for funds through the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. Other partners included the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mulie Fanatics, and Wyoming Game & Fish.

FY 2023

- Assisted with over 270 acres of thinning and meadow encroachment

FUEL MITIGATION

The District has also partnered with the Weston County Fire Protection District to provide cost-share to mitigate fuels on forested properties. While typically smaller projects, often consisting of just 1 to 2 acres, the benefit of creating defensible space and reducing fuels around subdivisions and other inhabited forested lands is critical in reducing wildfire risk on rural properties.

FY 2023

- Five projects completed consisting of over 90 acres treated
- The district provided 6 fuel mitigation plans. These help landowners plan their fuel treatment in the most effective manner.



FENDING OFF DISASTER

The last big mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Black Hills occurred from about 2012 to 2014. And the last major wildfires in the region occurred in 2000 (Jasper), and 2012 (Oil Creek). But the Fish Fire just north of Newcastle in 2022 was a stark reminder that continued management is necessary to help maintain healthy forests and to hold off disaster. And, operating on an average 15 to 20-year rotation, the next pine beetle epidemic is not too far off either.



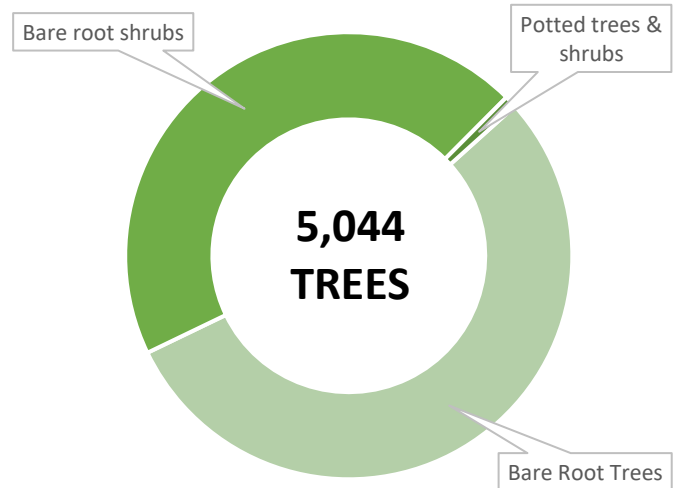
COMMUNITY TREE GRANT

The town of Upton used the community tree grant to continue expansion of the windbreak and noise barrier along City Park, which borders HWY 116.



2023 TREE SALES

Every year the District offers a tree sale to provide a cost-effective opportunity for residents to purchase trees and shrubs in bulk for windbreaks, living snow fences, noise barriers, riparian plantings, etc. The 2023 tree sale was the largest since 2014.



The Community Tree Grant is offered annually to encourage tree planting and beautification on public lands in the county. The 60/40 cost share helps offset costs of the planting purchase of including trees and shrubs, landscape fabric, fencing, etc.

Waste Management

2022 HAZARDOUS WASTE DAY

For more than a decade now, the district has offered an annual hazardous waste collection day. Through this program the district has been able to keep thousands of pounds of hazardous waste out of the landfills in the county. The District contracts with a company out of Colorado to handle and properly dispose of the hazardous waste. Volunteers assist in the collection and organization of the items brought in.

2022 COLLECTION DAY TOTALS

ITEM	AMOUNT
Fluorescent bulbs	190 lbs.
Pesticides	210 lbs..
Inorganic acids	216 lbs..
Inorganic base	180 lbs..
Mercury containing bulbs	30 lbs..
Alkaline batteries	240 lbs..
Lithium batteries	22 lbs..
Cadmium batteries	33 lbs..
Latex paint	2,991 lbs..
Electronics	2,913 lbs.
Aerosol cans	170 lbs.
Paint thinner	1,529 lbs.
Flammable liquids	250 gal
Oil, antifreeze, etc.	110 gal

The WCNRD also coordinates with the Newcastle Police Department to collect expired prescription drugs as part of the hazardous waste day.





SEPTIC MAINTENANCE

The district offers an annual cost share on septic maintenance. The purpose of this program is to encourage landowners to properly maintain their septic systems. Properly maintained septic systems help prevent contamination from improperly functioning systems from reaching ground or surface water sources. The program offers \$100.00 to homeowners as a reimbursement after a cleaning is completed.

- In FY 2022 the District provided 10 septic cost share reimbursements.



Land Use Planning

PLANNING AND RULE MAKING

One of the roles of the district is to represent its members in working with state and federal agencies. The district operates as a cooperating agency on plan revisions and in the rule-making process. The WCNRD provides comments to help ensure that plans meet the needs of the residents of Weston County and to protect the rights of property owners and public land users.

In FY 2023 District staff have participated as a cooperating agency on the following plan updates:

- BLM Resource Management Plan update
- Black Hills National Forest plan revision

COMMENT LETTERS

The district also provides comments on proposed rules submitted by state and federal entities. These comments reflect our mission, per state statute to preserve the natural resources of the county, to stabilize ranching, promote the health and safety of the people of the state, and to protect the tax base. In FY 2023 the District submitted comments on the following:

- Fiberoptic line installation in Northeast Wyoming
- Waters of the US proposed rule change

OTHER PROJECTS

Technical assistance & GIS mapping

The district provides technical assistance to landowners on natural resource projects including pipelines and new wells but also on forestry projects. To ensure that the projects are functional and meet objectives. This also includes GIS mapping for projects as well as custom property maps that can assist landowners in their management plans.

AERIAL IMAGERY

Another project the district has been working on is a partnership with Wyoming State Forestry to stitch together historical aerial imagery of Weston County. These photos are from the 40's and 50's and stitching them together will allow them to be georeferenced within Arc Map and then compared to current conditions. This will be a valuable tool in accessing current conditions such as forest stand development and woody encroachment into grasslands. Below is an example of the finished product.



NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

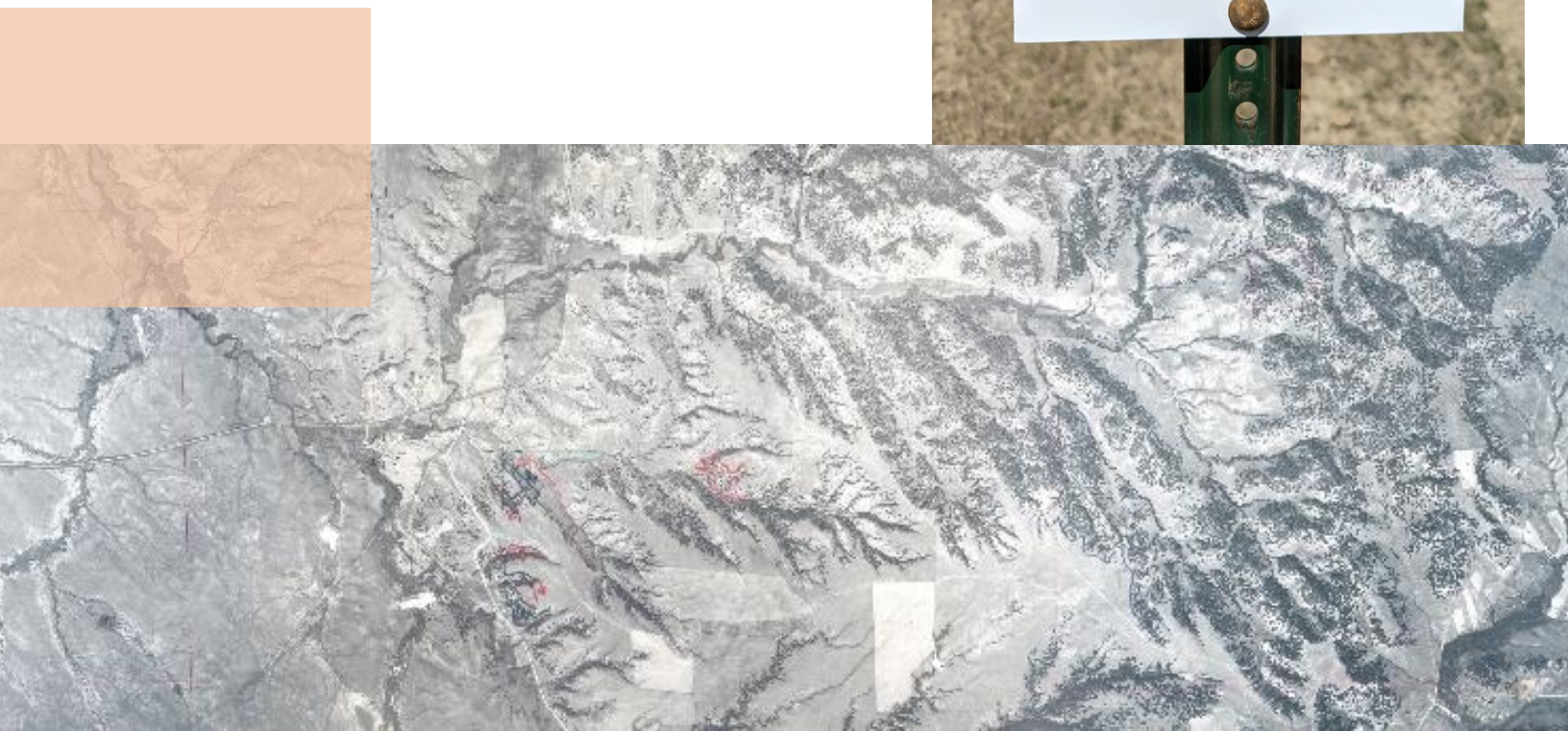
The WCNRD partnered with Crook County Natural Resource District, Campbell County Conservation District, and Converse County Conservation District to write a forestry resolution encouraging Wyoming NRCS to:

- Restructure their Resource Conservation positions
- Hire a State Forester to provide oversight and guidance on forestry program specifications and standards across Wyoming's forest ecosystems.
- Enter into a cooperative agreement with Wyoming State Forestry Division to share technical expertise on accepted forestry practices to manage forest ecosystems
- Reinstate pile and burn as a slash treatment option, or separate piling and burning, so as to allow landowners to pile without burning
- Create a forestry subcommittee to provide guidance to the Wyoming State Technical Committee

Flying V Trail Signs

The board also continued support by granting funds to Bent Sprockets Inc. to update trail signs at the Flying V Trails. The new trail junction signs include additional trails that have been added, as the trail system has greatly expanded since the last signs were placed in 2019.

Today, the trail system consists of over 17 miles of trails, both single track as well as two-track trails. The new trail signs were part of a larger project to improve problem areas due to erosion and overgrowth as well as to improve trails design and make them more accessible for adaptive riders.



Education & Outreach

EXPANDING EFFORTS

Another big goal for this year was to expand on the District's education program. This included offering classes through the Eastern Wyoming College Community Ed Program as well as participation in community events including arbor day, ag day, offering an open house, and informational booths, etc.

The District also continued its current efforts:

- Quarterly newsletter, the Conservation Clamor
- Quarterly mailings of the Barnyards and Backyards magazine to district members.

District Manager Caleb Carter also wrote two magazine articles for the Barnyards and Backyards magazine:

- Drip systems provide efficient landscape irrigation
- Rehab—for disturbed pastures

Interns!

The district was also able to get two interns in FY 2023. This helped to increase capacity within the District while also providing them with experience in natural resource management. Both interns worked with the District over the summer of 2022, and one was able to stay on with the WCNRD over the school year through the Newcastle High School Internship Program.

Our interns helped manage the community garden, began new programs, and assisted in mailing newsletters and magazines. They also assisted in inspecting projects and learned about the purpose, process, and results of the various conservation projects implemented by the district.




Arbor Day 2023: members of the Newcastle Saddle & Sirloin FFA club help plant trees at the Weston County Community Garden.




FY 2023 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS


 **115** 4TH GRADE AG DAYS

 **110** BLACK HILLS NATURAL RESOURCE YOUTH CAMP

 **71** Eastern Wyoming College
Community Ed Classes
*Fuels mitigation, Shade trees
Fruit trees, pruning, windbreaks*

 **14** Presentations to Ag
Classes

 **49** Information Booths
*Weston County Fair
Madness on Main
Office Open House*

 **24** Management Succession
Classes
*2 classes held in Weston and
Crook Counties*

 **32** Arbor Day

OVER 400 REACHED!!



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