

Weston County Natural Resource District

Long Range Plan

2026-2031

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Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to set forth the long-range goals for the Weston County Natural Resource District (WCNRD). The WCNRD board of supervisors has taken the initiative to contribute their time, effort, and expertise towards the goals set forth in this document.

Conservation Districts are the only locally elected boards charged with the proper management of Wyoming's natural resources. The WCNRD will be the local voice in the stewardship of natural resources of the District.

WCNRD began the planning process for the Long-Range Plan in May 2026 at the local workgroup meeting with local conservation agencies and District members. Conservation concerns were discussed. WCNRD created a survey and invited the public to provide comments and suggestions for the Long-Range Plan and to identify natural resource issues or concerns 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 October 22, 2026 through December 6, 2026, and the district held a public meeting on November 10, 2026, to gather comments and suggestions on the draft plan.

This document will serve as a guide for short-term planning and monitoring of the District's progress, and the policies of the District with respect to its Land Use and Natural Resource Management Plan on file at the Weston County Clerk's office. This is not a static document. It is to be reviewed on an annual basis to determine needed changes and may be changed at any time based on need.

Land Ownership

Ownership	Acres
Private	1,110,577
Black Hills National Forest	6,241
Thunder Basin National Grassland	68,970
Bureau of Land Management	66,627
State School Sections	114,206
Local Government	2,316
Water	303

Source: *Suitewater*

History

The Weston County Natural Resource District was organized in 1960 and received certification from the Secretary of State on January 16, 1961, as the Beaver Skull Water and Soil Conservation District. The original boundary encompassed lands east of US HWY 85, north of US HWY 16 to Upton, and north along HWY 116 to Arch Cr Road, then north to the county line.

Since the District's creation, land within its boundaries has continued to grow through voluntary additions by landowners. It has also added land within the county that was previously encompassed in neighboring Buffalo Belle and Upper Cheyenne River conservation districts. This has created a patchwork district boundary, with just under one-quarter of the county remaining outside of district membership.

The Secretary of State of Wyoming approved a name change to the Weston County Natural Resource District on April 15, 1994. The name change was a recommendation at a local workgroup meeting.

District Operations

The District serves as the local lead on conservation efforts. The District coordinates with landowners and local, state, and federal entities to conserve the soil, water, vegetation, wildlife, and other natural resources of Weston County. The District leverages local funding to subsidize the budget and expand opportunities for conservation. The District also provides technical assistance to ensure projects are feasible and effective, bringing together the human, financial, and technical resources needed to address current and future challenges.

GOALS

- Maintain the credibility, recognition, and acceptance of the WCNRD
- Improve and expand conservation efforts and programs by seeking partnership opportunities
- Seek financial stability by diversifying funding sources
- Continue to expand the district boundary

Education and Outreach

A big part of protecting and advocating for our natural resources is educating the District's constituents about the natural cycles around them. District efforts include classroom instruction, demonstrations, field trips, natural resource camps, and educational projects.

GOALS

Provide accurate and timely information to all Weston County residents about District programs and natural resource issues.

Improve appreciation of natural resources and foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship through information and outreach programs.

Inform constituents through a quarterly newsletter

Maintain & update our website and social media with timely information and links to information deemed useful to the constituents of the District

Rangelands & Water

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. Livestock production is essential to the livelihood of ranching businesses and related industries in Weston County.

In areas with 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 relationships among soils, vegetation, and water. Water quantity and distribution are the main limiting factors in grazing distribution.

Threats to rangelands include erosion and conifer encroachment into meadows.

GOALS

- Work with United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State of Wyoming, and private landowners to coordinate rangeland improvement using collaborative methods
- Promote the use of science-based enhancements in rangeland management
- Promote and/or participate in reclamation and mitigation efforts associated with industrial development
- Work with state and federal land management agencies to promote flexibility in grazing management
- Reduce encroachment of trees into traditional rangelands

Forests

With the majority of forested acres in the District privately owned, Northeast Wyoming is unique in the western United States. This makes financial and technical support even more important in supporting proper forest management. Although commercial logging has occurred and continues in the Wyoming Black Hills, many forested acres have become dense and overstocked. This has contributed to heightened pest outbreaks and increased the incidence and severity of wildfires. Many of the communities and subdivisions in the county are in or adjacent to forested areas. In this wildland-urban interface (WUI), proper timber management, forest thinning, and defensible space against wildfire are major concerns.

GOALS

- Promote best practices in forest management to produce healthy forests with reduced susceptibility to disease, insect pests, and severe wildfire
- Encourage timber harvesting as a management tool to promote forest health
- Encourage conservation tree plantings to improve wildlife habitat, mitigate wind and snow issues, and to stabilize riparian areas

Wildlife

Wildlife is an important part of the culture of Wyoming and the Black Hills. Wildlife face many challenges in the region's arid environment due to habitat loss, limited water availability, and increased weather variability. The checkerboard ownership between private and public lands in the District makes cross-boundary conservation efforts even more important.

GOALS

- Provide assistance to constituents and land managers for improving wildlife habitat
- Facilitate cross-boundary projects to enhance efforts by both private landowners and public land managers to enhance wildlife habitat
- Promote responsible, locally coordinated science-based wildlife management
- Promote functional ecosystems and habitat characteristics for wildlife species
- Encourage ecosystem approach to wildlife habitat management, rather than individual species approach

Agriculture

The District is comprised of approximately 40,000 acres of cropland, with just over 10,000 acres of that irrigated. Nearly all of that is used to produce forage for on-farm use. So nearly all agricultural production in the District centers around livestock production. Much of this forage ground also provides late-season grazing for livestock.

GOALS

- Improve the quality and quantity of forage on rangeland and hayland
- Promote conservation practices that reduce soil loss and improve soil health.
- Encourage efficient water use in irrigation.
- Encourage active management of invasive and noxious weeds

Waste Management

The proper management of waste is an important part of protecting the natural resources in the District. This includes septic systems and the proper disposal of waste, including hazardous waste.

GOALS

- Raise community awareness about waste related issues and encourage active participation in waste management decisions
- Encourage the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials
- Increase opportunities for proper waste management
- Encourage municipal and county governments to provide levels of service adequate to meet the community's social, environmental, economic needs and obligations

Land Use Planning

Wyoming Conservation District Law provides for the conservation of the 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. The District provides a local voice, representing District members in federal, state, and local planning processes. As well as the natural resources found within the District.

GOALS

- Participate as a cooperating agency in federal planning process to provide a local voice
- Encourage proper development with consideration of potential impacts to natural resources.
- Encourage preservation and enhancement of the viewshed and recreational opportunities in Weston County

Resolution of Adoption

Adoption of the Weston County Natural Resource District 2027-2031 Long Range Plan

The Weston County Natural Resource District Board of Supervisors hereby adopts the Long-Range Plan on December 8, 2026, for the years 2027-2031.

David Tysdal
Rural, Chair

Tucker Hamilton
Rural, Vice-Chair

Emily Hartinger
Rural, Treasurer

Gene Norman
Urban, Supervisor

Tom Streeter
At-large, Supervisor