

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024

Annual Budget 2024-2025

Annual Plan of Work 2024-2025

Crook County Natural Resource District

# DISTRICT INFORMATION

## Board of Supervisors



The Crook County Natural Resource District consists of a five-member board of supervisors. Three members are rural, one is urban, and one is at-large. They are elected by Crook County residents and serve a 4-year term. Supervisors are unpaid, elected volunteers who oversee the Conservation District, ensuring services provided meet the needs of the public. The CCNRD Board of Supervisors meet the first Tuesday of the month at 12:00 pm in the Sundance USDA Service Center. All meetings are open to the public.

### Board Members, left to right:

Wayne Garman, Wanda Burget, Lily Altaffer, Kim Fundaun, Casey Devish



### Staff, left to right:

- Bridget Helms, Office Manager
- Sarah Anderson, Program Coordinator
- Carmen Horne-McIntyre, Program Coordinator
- Jessica Halverson, Conservation Resource Coordinator

### Staff and Supervisors attended various trainings and meetings throughout the year:

- Monthly County Commissioner's Meetings
- WY Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention
- NRCS Local Working Group Meeting
- WY Conservation Districts Employees Association Training
- National Forest Advisory Board
- Cooperating Agency Meetings
- Crook County Citizen Input Meetings
- Black Hills Resilient Forest Partnership Meetings
- National Old Growth Amendment Meetings
- Black Hills National Forest, Forest Plan Revision Meetings
- Forest Health Workshops
- Wyoming Forest Leadership Team Meetings
- SD Soil Health Conference
- WY Nonpoint Source Task Force Meetings
- WY Department of Environmental Quality Water Quality Division Conference

**Locally-led conservation districts work closely with the federally-funded Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement projects. The NRCS provides the technical assistance needed to fulfill water and range improvement and forestry management programs, including mapping, planning assistance, engineering, and completing as-builts for projects.**

### NRCS Staff

Jason Nehl, Acting District Conservationist  
Sherry Burr, Soil Conservation Technician  
Jessica Van Woerkom, Program Support Assistant

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## Board Approval

WE, THE SUPERVISORS OF THE CROOK COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCE DISTRICT, AS DULY AUTHORIZED BY THE WYOMING CONSERVATION DISTRICT LAW, HEREBY APPROVE THE 2024-2025 ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK, AS A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR THE CCNRD BOARD OF SUPERVISORS & STAFF.



**Wayne Garman, Chairman**



**Lily Altaffer, Vice-Chairman**



**Kim Fundaun, Secretary**



**Wanda Burget, Treasurer**



**Casey Devish, Member**

# DISTRICT INFORMATION

**The Crook County Natural Resource District's mission is to provide coordinated leadership in resource conservation to educate, assist, and meet the needs of Crook County resource users.**

**The Crook County Natural Resource District's vision is to establish an awareness of natural resource concerns and provide landowners in Crook County with the appropriate education, technical skills, funding, and support to improve and conserve our natural resources for the present and the future.**



## Conservation District Law

State Statutes 11-16-103 entitled Legislative Declarations and Policy states the following:

(a) It is hereby declared that the farm and grazing lands of Wyoming are among the basic assets of the state; that improper land use 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 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 natural resources, protect the tax base, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this state.



## Conservation District History

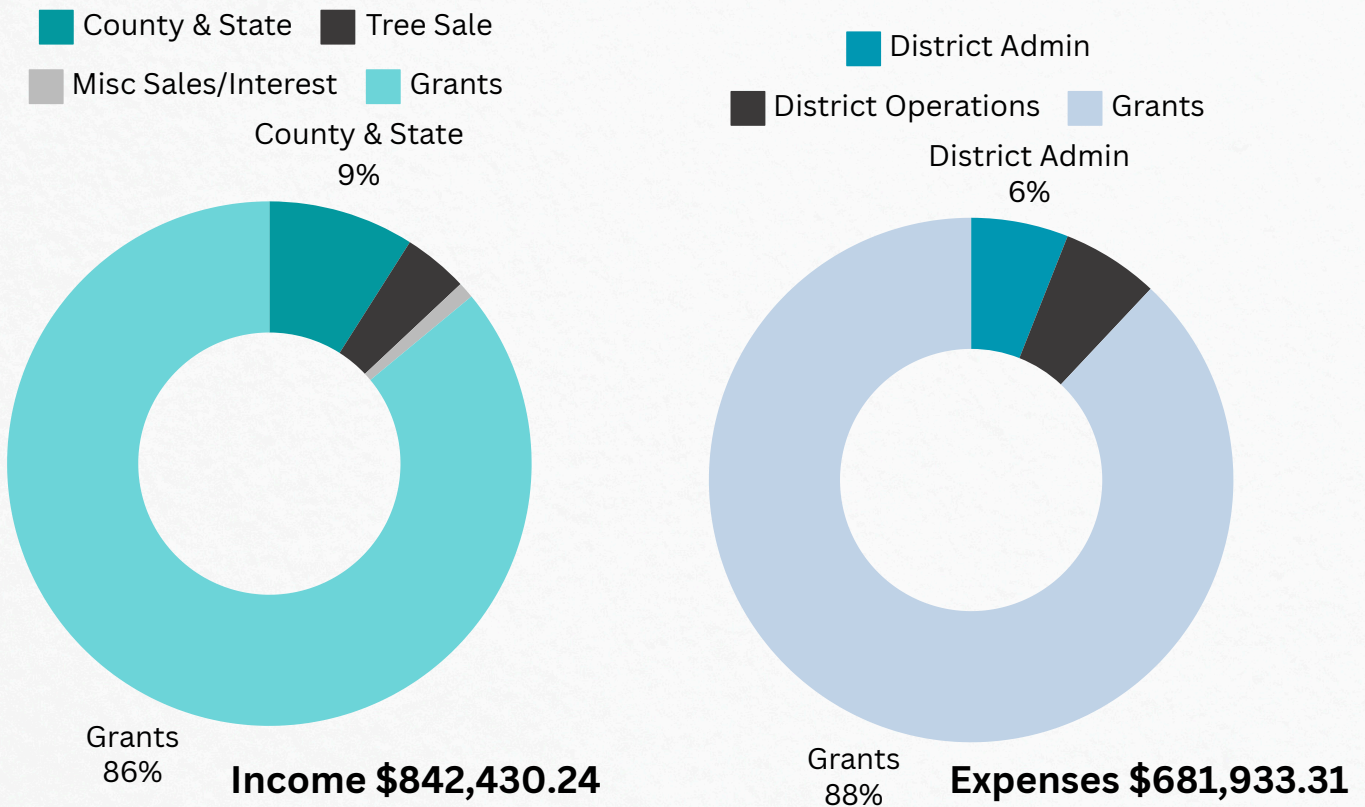
In 1941, the Wyoming State Legislature recognized the need for a local governmental entity that would assist landowners and resource users with conservation practices and provide leadership in natural resource management issues and efforts. As a result, legislation was enacted which enabled the formation of local Conservation Districts and the election of Conservation District Supervisors. The Wyoming legislation authorizing the establishment of Conservation Districts was signed by Governor Smith on March 5, 1941.

# FUNDING

Conservation districts in Wyoming are funded through a variety of sources such as mill levies, and state, federal and private grants. The CCNRD is **not funded** through a County mill levy. The CCNRD is primarily funded by awards received through competitive grant writing processes. Grant funding is utilized to initiate specific program activities; therefore, it is restricted funding that can only be used to conduct those activities specified in workplans within a designated timeframe. The CCNRD requests funding annually from the County Commissioners to support one part-time employee and to host events not funded by grants. All other employees are solely grant funded.

Although the CCNRD has a history of successful grants management, it has not been without challenges. Many grants operate on a reimbursable basis, meaning the CCNRD must front the cost of programs and other services it offers and be reimbursed upon proof of payment for expenditures incurred.

## 2023-2024 FISCAL YEAR SUMMARY



### The District administered the following grants in 2023-2024

- Muley Fanatics
- Nat'l Association of Conservation Districts Technical Assistance and Urban Agriculture Conservation Grants
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- WY Dept. of Agriculture Water Quality Grants
- WY Dept. Environmental Quality 319 Grant
- WY Game & Fish Department Grant
- WY Governor's Big Game License Coalition
- WY Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust
- State of Wyoming CAFA

# PROGRAMS

The CCNRD offers a variety of programs for county residents to install conservation practices. The CCNRD plays a key role in local, state, and federal land management planning processes, and participates in legislative and administrative initiatives to ensure that landowners and natural resources have an advocate. The CCNRD's programs, goals, and accomplishments are encompassed within this Annual Report.



## Tree Sale

**589 conservation-grade potted trees and shrubs were sold to 80 Crook County residents.** This is the third year in a row the sale has been offered.

## Subdivision Reviews

Crook County requires that the CCNRD review and provide recommendations for proposed subdivisions. This process consists of a review of the plat and soils information from the USDA Soil Survey.

The CCNRD encourages resource conservation practices and offers recommendations on land use, including suitability for buildings and septic systems. The review and comments submitted with a Soils Report are provided for a nominal fee. **Four subdivisions comprising 15 lots total were reviewed in FY 2024.**

## Electronics Recycling

**At two fall 2023 events held in Sundance and Hulett, over 7,555 pounds of unwanted electronics were collected for recycling.** Batteries were also collected. After Christmas, string lights and extension cords were collected and transported for recycling in Rapid City. Sponsorships from the City of Sundance, Town of Hulett, Sundance State Bank, Powder River Energy, ONEOK, Neiman Enterprises, Pinnacle Bank and Blakeman Propane allowed free recycling for the first 100 pounds per person.

This brings the year-to-date total to over **69,000 pounds recycled.**



# WATER QUALITY

## Water Quality Monitoring

The CCNRD works to improve water quality in Crook County by focusing on impaired stretches of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek. Segments of these waterbodies are considered impaired due to their documented exceedances of fecal coliform, *E. coli*, ammonia, and chloride. Contact with pathogens in these waters can pose public risks; elevated levels of ammonia and chloride can also threaten aquatic life. The CCNRD has been awarded competitive grant funding from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), to reduce contaminants in targeted waterways, provide community outreach and education, and to monitor water quality improvements. In addition to monitoring

In conjunction with the Campbell County Conservation District, the Crook County Natural Resource District monitors and improves water quality in the Belle Fourche River drainage for the benefit of the public, livestock, and wildlife that call this area home.

In recent years, the CCNRD has begun using monitoring data and other metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of water improvement projects installed. Staff are also currently working with the state to determine potential nutrient sources leading to algal blooms in Keyhole Reservoir.



Monitoring mainly occurs in the primary contact recreation season. Monitoring areas include:

- 5 sites on the Belle Fourche River
- 1 site on Donkey Creek
- 1 site on Mule Creek
- 1 site on Wind Creek
- 1 site on Well Creek

In addition to dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, total dissolved solids, and flow, the CCNRD monitors a number of other parameters:

- *E. coli* and Total Coliform
- Chloride
- Nitrogen, Nitrate + Nitrite
- Ammonia
- Total Phosphorus



Courtesy of Sherrie Firkins-Google Maps

# WATER QUALITY

## Water Quality Improvement Program

The CCNRD's Water Quality Improvement Program utilizes funds to partner with landowners and producers on water development and enhancement practices.

These projects are designed to address landowner and producer's resource concerns, particularly as relates to improving alternative watering sources, grazing practices, and rangeland and riparian conditions. Improved water access and improved upland grazing conditions can reduce *E. coli* loading to nearby tributaries of the Belle Fourche River and Donkey Creek.

Two upland water development projects were completed on impaired segments of the Belle Fourche River in 2023. Cost assistance was provided for the installation of a solar powered pump, a well, three stock tanks, and 7,950 linear feet of livestock pipeline to provide alternative watering sources to streams and where no other watering alternatives were previously available at both sites. In addition to providing alternative watering sources, grazing rotation and distribution is expected to also improve as a result of the practices installed. One of the projects is located in a drainage to Keyhole Reservoir.

### SHADEBALL PILOT PROJECT

In fall 2023, the CCNRD began a pilot project to measure water savings from installing shadeballs in stock tanks. Shadeballs have been used by producers in the southwest and parts of Wyoming to reduce evaporative losses, reduce algal growth and clogging, and to moderate water temperatures in summer and winter seasons. If you are interested in learning more about this project and potential cost-share assistance to install shadeballs, and other water improvement practices, stop by the USDA Service Center in Sundance or give us a call!





# FOREST HEALTH AND WILDFIRE MITIGATION

## *Forest Health & Wildlife Enhancement*

The **CCNRD's Forest Health and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program** promotes thinning projects to deter disease and infestation; to enhance wildlife habitat by treating conifer encroachment; to selectively thin woodland areas to reduce raptor predation in core sage-grouse habitat; to encourage quality forage for deer and elk environments; to create healthier forested ecosystems; and to retain viable forests for future generations. The CCNRD completed **24 forest health and wildlife habitat improvement projects on 1,077 acres** during the timeframe of this report. The Wyoming Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust, Muley Fanatics Foundation, WY Game & Fish Commission, WY Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, are partnering with the CCNRD to help improve forest health and wildlife habitat in the County.



## *Wildfire Mitigation Projects*

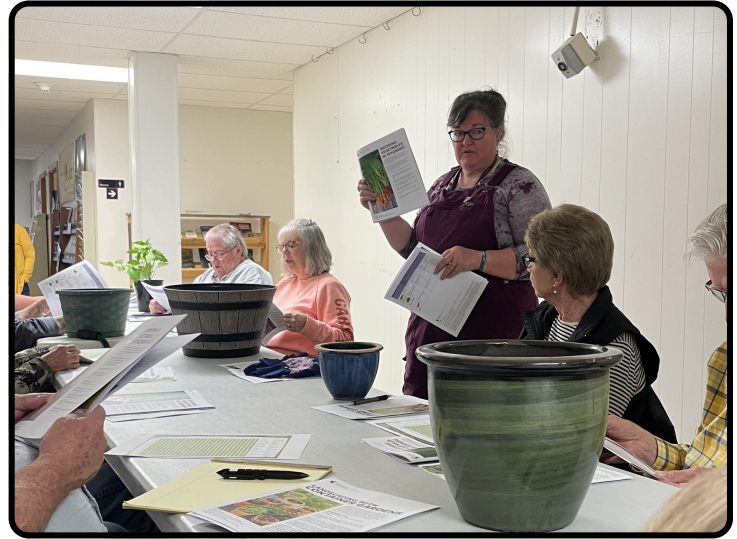


Crook County's Ponderosa pine and Rocky Mountain juniper ecosystem is a tinderbox if not properly maintained and managed. High duff layers and dense forests are common throughout the County. Coupled with fire prone species and steep terrain, conditions become ideal for catastrophic wildfires. The threat of wildfire is escalating as a result of reduced forest management and increased subdivision developments as new residents move to Crook County in unprecedented numbers. The **CCNRD's Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program** provides financial and technical assistance for projects that create defensible spaces around structures, opens the canopy layer by removing dense trees, and creates fuel breaks in targeted locations.

The CCNRD is currently working with the USFS Bearlodge Ranger District and Wyoming State Forestry Division to reduce hazardous fuels in a targeted area along Miller Creek and Lytle Creek roads. **During the timeframe of this report, 28 acres of fuel treatments have been completed. An additional 54 acres of fuel breaks, one defensible space, and 30 acres of fuel treatments have been designed, but not completed thus far.** Project completion is estimated for 2026.

# URBAN AGRICULTURE

Urban Agriculture is a broad term that can encompass many things but generally refers to city and suburban agriculture that takes the form of backyard, roof-top, school and community gardens. It's important because it allows for the development of a variety of environmental, economic and social benefits to the surrounding communities. CCNRD received a \$10,000 grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) to plan urban agriculture education and outreach programs that address community needs.



The CCNRD has teamed up with the UW Extension office to utilize their Learning Lab, an informative gardening site on the fairgrounds in Sundance. The Urban Ag grant CCNRD received has provided funding to make improvements to the geodome and hoop house located at the UW Learning Lab and to offer outreach programs related to urban agriculture.

A container gardening workshop featuring a Master Gardener was enjoyed by 15 gardeners and pickle-making classes by a local nutritionist/personal trainer was offered to small groups for hands-on experiences. Fruit trees were planted around the Learning Lab and berry bushes were planted in the new geodome planters in hopes of generating sustainability. This site was utilized for 4-H activities during the County fair. Other plants grown at the Learning lab will be used for education with students from the nearby elementary school and donated to the local food pantry.

A resource page was also created on CCNRD's website for urban ag-related resources and a survey was developed and posted to this site to help with further development in this topic.



# INFORMATION & OUTREACH

CCNRD staff visit the elementary school for classroom educational activities on natural resource topics. We also assist with the Campbell County Ag Expo and Black Hills Natural Resources Youth Camp as needed.

Staff focus on local issues by attending meetings on behalf of Crook County stakeholders, including as a cooperating agency with the USFS Black Hills National Forest on the Forest Management Plan revision and the National Old Growth Amendment; at National Forest Advisory Board meetings; Black Hills Resilient Forest Partnership meetings; and Wyoming Forest Leadership Team meetings.



On November 29, 2023 the CCNRD was joined by the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust for a community discussion about conservation easements. Thirty people attended the presentation followed by a question and answer session.

CCNRD staff attend Crook County Citizen Input meetings, local working group meetings, and special district trainings.

The CCNRD developed a website in March 2023. It has become a great way to communicate information with our constituents. CCNRD also utilizes a Facebook page to share information.



Every month CCNRD staff attend the Crook County Commissioner's meeting to provide an update to the public and Commissioners on District activities and upcoming events.

The CCNRD shares informational displays at the Courthouse display case several months each year to highlight programs and upcoming events.

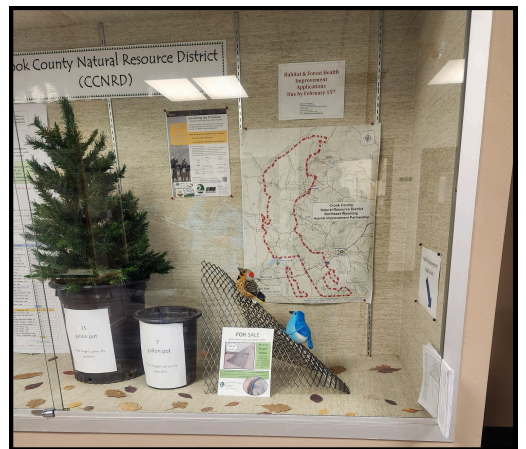
The CCNRD sets up a booth at the Crook County Fair to share program opportunities, updates, and applications.



# 2023-2024 SUMMARY

## District Operations

In fiscal year 2024 the Crook County Natural Resource District (CCNRD) received \$70,000 in support from the Crook County Commissioners. The CCNRD also received grant funding from: National Association of Conservation Districts Urban and Community Conservation and Technical Assistance Grant Initiatives, WDA Water Quality Program, WDEQ Nonpoint Source Pollution Program, State of Wyoming Community Assistance Funds Adjacent to National Forest Program, and Wyoming Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust. Staff and Board Supervisors attended the WACD Convention, hosted a NRCS Local Work Group meeting, attended Black Hills National Forest Advisory Board meetings, Cooperating Agency meetings for the National Old Growth Amendment and USFS BHNH forest plan revision.



## Information & Outreach

- Conservation easement community discussion
- County Fair booth
- Courthouse displays
- Educational presentations at Sundance Elementary School
- Campbell County Ag Expo
- Black Hills Natural Resources Youth Camp
- County Commissioners meeting updates
- Hosted NRCS Local Work Group meeting
- Website and Facebook updates
- Container gardening class



## Programs

- Electronics Recycling in Sundance and Hulett - 7,555 pounds collected
- Nine sites monitored for water quality in the Belle Fourche River drainage
- Tree sale - 589 trees sold to 80 residents
- Two water quality BMP projects resulting in installation of a solar powered pump, a well, three stock tanks, and 7,950 linear feet of livestock pipeline
- Hazardous fuels reduction projects - 28 acres of fuel treatments completed; 54 acres of fuel breaks, 1 defensible space project, and 30 acres of fuel treatments designed
- Wildlife and forest Health improvement - 24 projects benefitting 1,077 acres; 210-acres of projects remaining to be completed.



# ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK 2024-2025

CCNRD's 2024-2025 Annual Plan of Work provides the reader with an understanding of the Crook County Natural Resource District's goals and objectives for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

The Annual Plan of Work serves as a road map for the upcoming year to help the Board of Supervisors and staff reach our goals and objectives. The CCNRD strives to meet the overall objectives outlined in the CCNRD's five-year, long-range plan, as well as the County's Natural Resource Management Plan.

The Crook County Natural Resource District is not mill levy funded and relies heavily on grant opportunities to fund our programs. This means that our programs are subject to change based on grant sponsors goals for their funds. CCNRD Staff works diligently to pursue grant funding in core program areas which include Education and Outreach, Water Quality, Forest Management, Waste Management, Oil, Gas and Mineral Development, Cropland and Rangeland Management, Sustainable Living, Wildlife Management, and Legislation.



# DISTRICT OPERATIONS

## GOALS ACTIONS

- Information and training for Board and Staff
- Department of Audit training requirements
- Partner opportunities
- Newspaper, social media, website
- Find grant sources to expand projects
- Monitoring legislative issues

- Base funding criteria fulfilled
- Monthly County Commissioner updates
- Attend federal, state and local meetings
- Submit budget to County & Dept of Audit
- Staff evaluations
- Annual Plan/Annual Report/Long Range Plan
- Subdivision soils reviews
- Host Local Work Group meeting
- Website and social media updates
- Host WACD Area meeting
- Participate as cooperating agency in federal programs

## Ongoing Activities

### MONTHLY:

- Attend County Commissioner Meetings
- Pursue new grant funding opportunities

### QUARTERLY:

- Grant reporting

### ANNUALLY:

- Attend WACD Convention
- WCDEA Employee Training
- Area 1 Meeting
- Local Work Group meeting



# PROGRAMS

- G** • Wildlife: To provide the education and the resources needed to promote wildlife habitat and population management in Crook County.
- O** • Cropland & Range Management: To enrich landowners' knowledge, skills, and aspirations to improve natural resources for the future of agriculture, wildlife habitat, public health, and overall sustainability.
- A** • Forest Health: To conserve and improve the health of both public and private forests in Crook County.
- L** • Water Quality: To conserve and improve the quality and quantity of water in Crook County for multiple use.
- S** • Urban Agriculture: to promote urban agriculture in Crook County communities.
- Tree Sale: To provide conservation grade trees and shrubs.
- 
- A** • Pursue grant opportunities as they arise for future program funding.
- C** • Protect and expand wildlife habitats by working with federal, state, and NGOs to support mitigation in priority areas.
- T** • Increase capacity by acquiring grant funding for forest health improvement projects and wildfire mitigation in targeted areas.
- I** • With WDEQ, conduct evaluation of progress made in reducing E. coli, fecal coliform, ammonia, and chloride concentrations in impaired sections of the Belle Fourche River drainage and update watershed implementation plan. Continue Shadeball Pilot Project.
- O** • Continue water monitoring program. Improve understanding of sources contributing to harmful algal blooms occurring in Belle Fourche River Watershed.
- N** • Provide cost share assistance for BMP projects in the Belle Fourche River Watershed. Build watershed collaboration with the Campbell County Conservation District.
- S** • Develop urban agriculture programs.
- Provide direct technical assistance to NRCS IRA, CSP and EQIP contracts .



# PROGRAMS

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- Waste Management: To increase local awareness of waste management issues and to encourage the development of sustainable local waste management systems.
  - Outreach: To establish an awareness in Crook County regarding what the CCNRD can do for the people and the land.
  - Information: To initiate and coordinate educational and informational programs that promote conservation practices of Crook County's natural resources.

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S**
- Host electronic recycling events in Crook County communities
  - Search for new recycling and hazardous waste disposal opportunities
  - Host educational workshops
  - Provide educational activities at elementary schools
  - Youth fair activities
  - Fair booth & activities at the county fair
  - Courthouse displays
  - Website updates
  - Facebook page updates
  - Provide educational articles for the newspaper





# ANNUAL BUDGET 2024-2025

Cash on Hand June 30, 2024 \$ 345,799.96  
 Grant Reserves & Savings June 30, 2024 \$ 25,315.59  
**Total Cash & Grant Reserves June 30, 2024 \$ 371,115.55**

## Income

County & State Funding \$ 78,824  
 Subdivision Reviews & Misc. Sales \$ 2,700  
 District Programs \$ 40,000  
 Sponsorships & Reimbursements \$ 2,500

## Expenses

District Administration \$ 70,586  
 District Operations \$ 71,150

**Total District: Income \$ 124,024 Expenses \$ 141,736**

Water Quality Grants \$ 338,011 \$ 342,836  
 Small Acreage Grants \$ 1,000 \$ 11,144  
 NACD/NRCS Grants \$ 226,203 \$ 242,315  
 Forest Health Grants \$ 1,113,884 \$ 1,114,782

**Total Grants: Income \$ 1,679,098 Expenses \$ 1,711,077**

**Total Income \$ 1,803,122**  
**Total Expenses \$ 1,852,813**

\*Grant expenses exceed grant income due to funds received at time of grant award. These funds are held in Reserves.

### The District has applied for or has been operating with the following grants in 2024

- NACD TA Grants
- WY Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust- North Sand Area
- State of Wyoming CAFA- North Sand
- WDA Water Quality Grants
- Wyoming DEQ 319 Grant
- Partners for Fish & Wildlife Grant
- NRCS Collaborative Cooperative Grant