

MINUTES
Uintah County Conservation District
Regular Meeting, November 12, 2024
Location: Western Park Room 2
302 East 200 South, Vernal, Utah

ATTENDANCE:

Conservation District Chair Bryan Bell

Conservation District (CD) Supervisor

Todd Thacker, Vice Chair
Johnathan McKee, Supervisor
Jim Slaugh, Treasurer
Steve Hanberg, Supervisor

Conservation District Supervisors, Absent:

Conservation Partners Representatives:

Cheyenne Reid, USU Extension

Department of Agriculture and Food:

Darrell Gillman, UDAF

Conservation District Staff:

Andrea Merrell

Guests: Scott Chew, Representative Utah State
Legislature; Terrell Thayne, GIP Coordinator; William
Merkley, Manager Uintah Water Conservancy District;
Colorado River Authority Mark Stilson, Principal
Engineer, and Tom Bruton, UB Outreach Specialist;
Sarah Clancy ARDL Program Manager

SUMMARY OF CONSERVATION DISTRICT ACTION

MEETING – CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bryan Bell called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY

Mark Stilson, Principal Engineer, and Tom Bruton, Uintah Basin Outreach Specialist, with the Colorado River Authority (CRA) attended today's District Board meeting to acquaint the Supervisors with the mission and current objectives of the CRA. The CRA is a Utah state agency and was established in 2021. This agency has been given the authority to negotiate Colorado River agreements on behalf of the state.

Mark used a Power Point presentation to explain the CRA has a Board of Directors. He showed pictures of each member of the Board of Directors and explained what stakeholder group they represented. Dan Larsen from the Roosevelt area is on the Board of Directors representing the Uintah Basin. There are also four Advisory Councils whose purpose is to provide data, information, and input to the Board of Directors. Duchesne, Daggett, and Uintah counties are part of the Central Advisory Council. William Merkley is co-chair of the Central Council. In addition, there is an Agriculture Council made up of agricultural producers from around the state. Steve Hanberg is chair of the Agriculture Council.

The objective of the CRA is to protect, conserve, use, and develop Utah's waters of the Colorado River system. They are working to protect Utah's right to use water from the Colorado River Basin through interstate negotiations. He said the news media has reported on expiring laws related to the Colorado River. We need to understand they aren't talking about the 1922 Colorado River Compact as it doesn't have an expiration date. The two laws expiring are the 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan. He discussed current negotiations between the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basin states and the sticking points that are preventing completion of an agreement. Some of the key sticking points that have a direct impact on the Upper Basin states are the timing and volume of releases from Lake Powell, as well as the magnitude and distribution of reductions in water use during drought conditions. Currently there is less water coming into Lake Powell because of ongoing drought. The Lower Basin states have increased the amount of water taken from Lake Powell and Lake Mead. There are disagreements about how reductions in water used from the Colorado River should be distributed between the Upper and Lower Basin States.

Mark stated the purpose of meeting with the Supervisors is to help them understand the issues, the risks, and what is being done to protect Utah's water resources in the Colorado River. He said that most diversion rights are pre-1922, but most

storage rights are post 1922. He wants to come back often to keep the Board informed of CRA's progress and to get Supervisors' input as to the efficacy of the conservation programs the CRA are enacting. For more information, the Supervisors can also visit their website at cra.utah.gov.

There are several conservation programs the Authority is using to achieve measurable water use reductions from the Colorado River system. The first program he talked about is the System Conservation Pilot Program. This program is designed to compensate agricultural, industrial, and municipal participants for voluntary and temporary reduction in water use in the Colorado River system. He gave an example of agricultural producers participating in this program. He said there are 30 participants in this program: mainly in the Price River Basin. Most of them are implementing rotational fallowing to achieve the required reduction in irrigation water use. Each participant receives approximately \$500/acre on enrolled acres. Mark explained the method used to calculate the incentive payment.

He discussed an ongoing study which determined Utah needs to get more measurement devices installed to enable the CRA and Division of Water Resources to compile more accurate water use records for the State. There are federal funds that will be available over the next few years to provide funding to install new equipment and upgrade older gauges and measurement devices.

Another program called Agricultural Water Resilience and Demand Management Pilot Program is a complex, multi-faceted program being developed to plan for and respond to drought conditions while maintaining viable agricultural communities. Under this program there are five objectives with different initiatives under each objective to obtain temporary, voluntary, compensated, and protected reductions in irrigation water use. One of the objectives is to obtain on-farm water use improvements. An initiative under this objective is the Ag-Drip/USU Pilot Projects. In Uintah County, an agricultural producer installed subsurface drip tape in a small field. It was installed after the 2024 irrigation season. It's first year of operation will be this Spring. Mark gave additional examples of funding sources and developing projects under this program.

AGRICULTURE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT LOAN PROGRAM

Sarah Clancy told the Supervisors she is the Program Manager for the Agriculture Resource Development Loan Program (ARDL) and the Rural Rehabilitation Loan Program. She used a Power Point presentation to review each of these programs. She began by reviewing the Rural Rehabilitation Loan Program. She said this is a loan of last resort. To be eligible to apply for this loan, the applicant must have applied to three loan programs and been declined. Currently available funds are low on this program.

She reviewed the ARDL program by informing the Supervisors of the current loan interest rates which range from 2.75% to 3.25% depending upon the amount being borrowed. There is a one-time administrative fee of 1% based on the loan amount they use. The minimum loan amount is \$5000. Farmers, ranchers, and irrigation companies are eligible to apply. Irrigation companies are not required to provide collateral to secure their loan. Acceptable collateral for all others is real estate, water shares, or chattel. Chattel can be vehicles, equipment, or center pivots. Water rights cannot be used as collateral. The water right has to be in the form of a water share; in other words, something that can be sold. Email address is loans@utah.gov. Any emails sent to this address will go to all four employees in the department.

UDAF UPDATES

Darrell had no updates from Utah Department of Agriculture and Food to report.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Andrea Merrell passed out copies of the minutes for the October 15, 2024, Uintah Conservation District (UCD) Board Meeting. The Supervisors reviewed and discussed the minutes. **Action Item: Johnathan McKee made a motion to approve the meeting minutes as presented. Jim Slaugh seconded the motion. The voting was unanimous and the motion passed.**

SUPERVISOR REPORTS

Steve Hanberg reported that he spent time at the field in Pelican Lake where the subsurface drip system is being installed. He shared information he has gathered about this project. He has seen that prairie dogs are a problem. For some reason when they encounter the drip tape, they will chew it. The landowner plans to conduct an irrigation trial with the subsurface drip field and a center pivot irrigated field. The crop is alfalfa. The two fields will be irrigated with the same amount of water, fertilized the same, all tillage and other operations will be the same so they can make a side-by-side comparison. Steve recommended the Board arrange to tour this project next summer.

UINTAH COUNTY EXTENSION BUSINESS

Cheyenne reported she applied for a water quality grant through Utah State University. She reported a Hay and Forage Symposium will be held in St. George, Utah February 5 and 6.

NRCS BUSINESS

Jeremy Maycock was unable to attend today's meeting. No NRCS Business.

REPORT ON UACD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Bryan reported that the main message he got while listening to the keynote speaker, Michelle "the Farm Babe" is that he needs to be on Facebook. She stressed how important it is to use social media to tell the true story of agriculture and combat all the misconceptions that are on social media.

Darrell related issues discussed during the conference that will be addressed to the Legislature at the upcoming session. He also related there were many presentations given on small agricultural operations such as small intensive gardens, petting zoos, and other small operations emerging in urban settings.

Sarah commented on urban agricultural projects she is familiar with: Wasatch Community Gardens located in the Wasatch Front area. This organization works with women who are experiencing homelessness. It is helping them rebuild their lives. They also rent garden boxes to recent migrants and refugees to grow their indigenous crops. She said there is an emerging initiative called Sentinel Landscapes that is happening at Camp Williams.

FINANCIAL REPORT

- A. **Balance Sheet/Bank Statement Review.** Andrea gave each Supervisor a copy of a Balance Sheet dated November 12 and the Checking Account Reconciliation for October. For the savings account Andrea reported the interest earned and the balance as of October 31.

For the checking account, she compared the reconciliation details and the bank statement for October. She reported no checks were written during October, but check #238 written September 24 cleared. She reported the check number, the amount, and the payee for this check. Then she reported there were two deposits made in October and reported the deposit date, the amount, and source of income for each deposit. She compared the ending balance as shown on the Reconciliation Detail and the MACU bank statement.

- B. **Comparison of Actual Expenses to Budget.** Andrea gave each Supervisor a copy of a Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual statement covering the period from July 1 to October 31, 2024. All accounts are within the budgeted amount and no amendments need to be made to the budget.

Action Item: Steve made a motion to accept the financial report as presented. Todd seconded the motion. Voting was unanimous and the motion passed.

INCOME AND EXPENSE REPORT

- A. **Income:** Andrea reported she sold one roll of weed barrier on October 29. She also reported on the total rolls of weed barrier sold from July 1 to October 29 and what amount of profit the District received.
- B. **Action Item--Expenses:** Andrea reported she had four invoices, receipts, or requests for payments to review with the Supervisors, and request their approval to pay. The first invoice is from Duchesne Conservation District for the purchase of six rolls of weed barrier. The second request is from Duchesne Conservation District for Uintah CD's share of the Utah Association of Conservation District's (UACD) service award gift. The third invoice is from National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) for FY2025 membership contribution. The fourth receipt is to reimburse Bryan Bell for the auction items he purchased on behalf of Uintah CD to donate to UACD Auxiliary for the Scholarship auction at the recent UACD Annual Convention. The Supervisors reviewed all these invoices. **Action Item: Todd made a motion to approve payment of the two invoices to Duchesne Conservation District and to reimburse Bryan Bell as presented. Steve seconded the motion. Voting was unanimous and the motion passed.**

The Supervisors discussed the amount to pay NACD for the District's FY2025 membership contribution. **Action Item: Steve made a motion to pay NACD the same amount in FY2025 as the District did in FY2024. Johnathan seconded the motion. Voting was unanimous and the motion passed.**

SERA

There are no upcoming meetings requiring SERA approval.

ARDL PROPOSAL

There were no ARDL applications to present at this meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Terrell Thayne reported he is accepting applications for funding under the Grazing Improvement Program through the end of the year.

Representative Scott Chew discussed water issues affecting the Uintah Basin. He informed the Supervisors that the Wasatch Front communities are looking for sources to divert and bring water to their growing populations. The State is also looking for water to put in the Great Salt Lake. As agricultural producers and leaders in water resource management for the Uintah Basin, they need to keep up with the work being done by the Colorado River Authority and be aware of proposals to the Legislature affecting water supplies in the Uintah Basin.

Cheyenne told the Supervisors the Uintah Basin Water Summit is scheduled for January 15, 2025 in Roosevelt.

Meeting adjourned by Chair Bell at 3:30 p.m.

Motion by Jim and Seconded by Todd