USDA NRCS

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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2011 Colorado Congressional District Report

Mission Goals

- High Quality, Productive Soils
- Clean and Abundant Water
- Healthy Plant and Animal Communities
- Clean Air
- Adequate Energy Supply
- Working Farm and Ranch Lands

FY 2011 Farm Bill Program Activities Summary

Congressional District 1

There was no Farm Bill Program Activity in this district in FY 2011.

Statewide Initiatives Summary

- Improved air quality by conservation practice implementation of 42 contracts on 15,765 acres
- NRCS in Colorado assisted with 17 contracts on 2,086 acres for Organic Farmers and those in transition to organics
- Improved wildlife habitat for lesser prairie chicken and sage-grouse on 13,712 acres and provided more than $420,000 in financial assistance

See Statewide Activities Summary on Page 3.

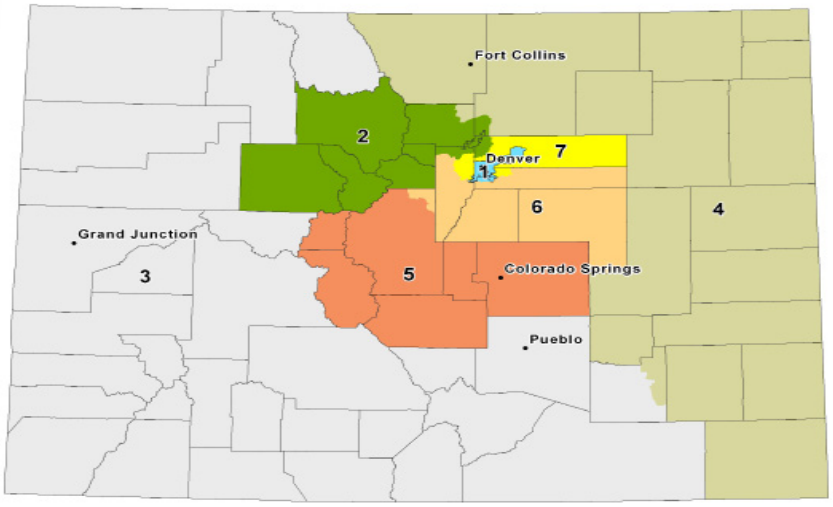
Sources: NRCS Protracts and Funding Manager's Records for Easements, 10-4-11

December 2011

Diana Degette

Colorado's U.S. Representative District 1

Colorado 112th Congressional Districts



NRCS...Who We Are, What We Do

Inspired by a shared passion for conservation, NRCS collaborates with farmers, ranchers, conservation districts, state and local conservation agencies, tribal governments, rural communities, businesses, and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands.

Working side-by-side with these customers, we identify natural resource concerns, such as soil erosion and water quality issues, and develop customized conservation plans for addressing these concerns in an effort to restore and protect those resources.

Colorado has some 66.3 million acres of land, of which 49 percent are farms and ranches. Colorado's agricultural lands are desirable landscapes, yet complex ecosystems.

NRCS provides within its programs and activities the variety of flexibility needed to help Colorado's farmers and ranchers conserve their natural resources.

As a result of NRCS assistance, private landowners have applied conservation practices such as windbreaks, conservation tillage, irrigation water management systems, filter strips, rotational grazing, and planting trees, to Colorado's millions of acres of cropland, grazing land, and wetlands.

CTA Conservation Technical Assistance

CTA is one of the most fundamental conservation programs NRCS uses to accomplish its goals. CTA provides voluntary conservation technical assistance to land users, communities, units of state and local government, and other Federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems.

NRCS employees in Colorado work with ten grassroot watershed associations and 76 local Conservation Districts to serve as the primary building block in its efforts to get the best conservation on the ground. Colorado has leveraged this program to make great strides to:

- Deliver science-based technology to our customers
- Provide a local presence in the communities with our conservation partners
- Ensure one-on-one assistance in the voluntary conservation of our natural resources

CTA Programs

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working to maintain and improve management, productivity, and health of the Nation's privately-owned grazing land. For the past three years, Colorado GLCI has focused its efforts on providing sustainable low-input management education to ranchers to improve rangeland condition and economic profit to the producer.

In FY 2011, Colorado GLCI accomplishments included: sponsored 15 range management workshops, expos, and tours throughout Colorado with a total of 847 participants; provided scholarships allowing 10 high school students in the rangeland management discipline to attend Camp Rocky near Divide, CO; sponsored three Range Management (Rancher) Schools in Anton, Rifle, and Craig with a total of 107 participants; and co-sponsored the state FFA Range Judging Contest in Flagler where 80 students from various high schools competed.

Plant Materials -- The Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center (UCEPC) serves Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, finding conservation solutions for the diverse intermountain region. At 6,500 feet in elevation, the Center is unique in that it is the highest elevation center in the plant material system.

Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting works with Colorado's water users and managers to provide information on water availability across the State. In this region (CO, AZ, NM, and southern WY), there are 178 automated SNOTEL (SNOwpack TELemetry) sites, including 112 in Colorado, and an additional 169 manually measured snow courses, including 106 in Colorado.

Soil Survey data is available online, or in draft form, for 99.8 percent of the state's privately-owned and state land and 99.5 percent of the state's Federal land. Colorado consistently ranks in the top five states for customer downloads from Web Soil Survey. Over 40,000 customers downloaded Colorado soils information from Web Soil Survey in 2011.

Other NRCS Programs

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) encourages and improves the capability of volunteers, locally elected and civic leaders in RC&D areas to plan and carry out projects that improve the quality of life.

Small Watershed Programs (PL-566) works through local government sponsors to help solve natural resource problems on a watershed basis. Colorado has 154 watershed dams, and growth in the State has made these flood-prevention projects critical to protect life and property.

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) is designed to help protect lives and property threatened by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires.

In September 2010, Colorado's front range experienced one of the state's most devastating fires in recent history. The Fourmile fire burned more than 6,000 acres and a total of 4,086 of those lands were privately owned. NRCS provided $1.3 million in EWP funds for fire rehabilitation and stabilization efforts on approximately 2,000 acres in Boulder County. The efforts were completed in July 2011.

Watershed Planning and Operations -- Colorado has five watershed projects for land treatment practices to address water quality and quantity. The state has completed all rapid watershed assessments on the 94 8-digit hydrologic units in Colorado.

FY 2011 USDA FARM BILL SUMMARY. The information below reflects program activity in Colorado during fiscal year 2011. Last year, Colorado NRCS obligated more than **$45 million** in assistance through numerous financial and easement programs to landowners, farmers, and ranchers on more than **1.2 million acres** of land. These accomplishments could not have been met without the hard work and dedication of Colorado's NRCS employees, partners, and stakeholders. The conservation provisions in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) provides conservation opportunities for farmers and ranchers for years to come.

Farm Bill Program Activities Statewide Summary

Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Contracts:789
Acres: 337,839
Financial Assistance: $26 Million

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
Contracts: 19
Acres: 3,460
Financial Assistance: $1 Million

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
Contracts: 12
Acres: 15,656
Financial Assistance: $421,000

Grasslands Reserve Program
Rental Contracts/Easements: 3
Acres: 22,760
Financial Assistance: $89,269

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
Properties/Entities: 18
Acres: 9,477
Financial Assistance: $8.4 Million

Wetlands Reserve Program
Permanent Easements: 2
Acres: 760
Financial Assistance: $1.5 Million

Conservation Stewardship Program
Contracts: 329
Acres: 800,000
Financial Assistance: $7.8 Million

*The numbers above reflect Financial Assistance (FA) that is provided directly to landowners. Technical Assistance (TA) funding was also received by the Agency for professional planning and expertise to help carry out the conservation activities. (Sources: NRCS Protracts and Fundiing Manager's Records for Easements, 10-4-11)

Natural Resource Benefits and Impacts

In 2011, conservation practices were applied by farmers and ranchers in Colorado through the various NRCS programs shown to the left. Conservation practices work to improve farmland, soil, water quality, air, plants, forestland, and wildlife habitat.

Through practices such as nutrient management landowners were able to improve soil quality and plant health; and through irrigation water management, they were able to improve water delivery, thereby improving crop production on their working lands.

Many Farm Bill conservation practices apply to rangelands, such as prescribed grazing. Through installation of water developments, pasture division fences, wells and water pipelines, these practices focus on maintaining, enhancing, and restoring needed plant communities and habitat conditions.

Landowners worked with NRCS staff to develop a good, sound conservation plan to identify and address natural resource concerns on their land.

Conservation Program Descriptions

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers, ranchers and owners of private, non-industrial forest land that promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible producers install or implement conservation practices on eligible agricultural land.

Wildlife Habitat Incetives Program (WHIP)
The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program offering cost-share incentives to landowners to voluntarily develop and improve wildlife habitat on private lands.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) A voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land for the purposes of conserving surface and ground water and improving water quality.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to restore former wetlands, re-establish native wetland wildlife habitat and retire marginal land from agricultural production.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities; and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners keep their productive farm and ranch land in agriculture. USDA provides matching funds to state, local, or tribal government entities and nongovernmental organizations with existing farm and ranch lands protection programs to purchase conservation easements.

NRCS Conservation Program Success Stories

Protecting Sage Grouse Habitat

Escape ramp installed in watering tank to assist sage grouse out of structure.

Issue:

Protecting strutting grounds and other habitat for the Gunnison and Greater Sage-grouse

What NRCS CO is Doing:

The only two places in the world the Gunnison Sage-grouse can be found are on the Western slope of Colorado and in a small portion of Southeastern Utah. Colorado, however, hosts the largest population of the species. The protection of sage-grouse habitat has been one of NRCS in Colorado's highest priorities for nearly a decade. The state hosts two species in the Sage-grouse family including the Gunnison as well as the Greater. Over the past 10 years, the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CDPW) placed the sage-grouse on its "species of concern list," and as a result, NRCS strengthened its partnerships with the agency to help support efforts to conserve sage-grouse habitat. NRCS has not only partnered with CDPW, but also Partners in Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Wild Turkey Federation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), local Conservation Districts, landowners and numerous other stakeholders to map and enhance habitat as well as conserve it through easements. NRCS conservation efforts to improve habitat for sage-grouse include the use and implementation of prescribed grazing systems, range planting, brush/pinon-juniper management, cross fencing and fence marking. NRCS efforts in 2010 and 2011 alone saw the treatment of nearly 40,000 acres. **Programs used: EQIP, WHIP, FRPP, GRP**

The Ogallala Aquifer & Colorado's Water

Center pivot irrigation allows producers to irrigate with a higher application efficiency and uniformity, minimizing runoff from the field or water moving below the root zone where it is unavailable for the crop.

Issue:

The Ogallala Initiative proves vital to Water Quality and Quantity issues in Colorado

What NRCS CO is Doing:

Much of the High Plains region of Colorado relies on the Ogallala for water but the water in the Ogallala Aquifer is diminishing because of widespread irrigation use. NRCS in Colorado places special emphasis on land use conversion from irrigated to non-irrigated cropland, and conversion to perennial vegetation and managed for livestock. In 2011, it is estimated that Colorado awarded nearly $800,000 in contracts for the Ogallala Initiative, resulting in resource conservation plans on approximately 5,000 acres and although this is a new initiative in the State, the plans impacted the aquifer by increasingly improving residue and reducing tillage on 1,218 acres of cropland. Also, better irrigation water management will be implemented on approximately 4,042 acres, as well as nutrient management plans on 400 which can positively impact water quality irrigation efficiency of water delivery systems has been improved on 1,949 acres. **Program used: EQIP**

Soil Surveys and the Once Over in Colorado

MLRA Soil Survey Leader examines soil for categorization and data collection.

Issue:

Appropriate land use is greatly determined by the condition of its soil.

What NRCS CO is Doing:

Colorado recently saw the completion of its initial soil survey (often referred to as the "once over"). This is a tremendous milestone not only for NRCS but also for the state as Colorado's soil survey efforts began with a Reconnaissance Soil Survey of the Cache La Poudre Valley in 1899. Since then, soil scientists have walked Colorado's landscapes digging holes and collecting information on the more than 5,000 soil map units and 1,500 unique soil types. Colorado consistently ranks in the top five states for customer downloads from Web Soil Survey. **Program used: CTA**

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