

**LARAMIE RIVERS
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

*Long Range & Natural Resource
Management Plan*

2025 - 2029



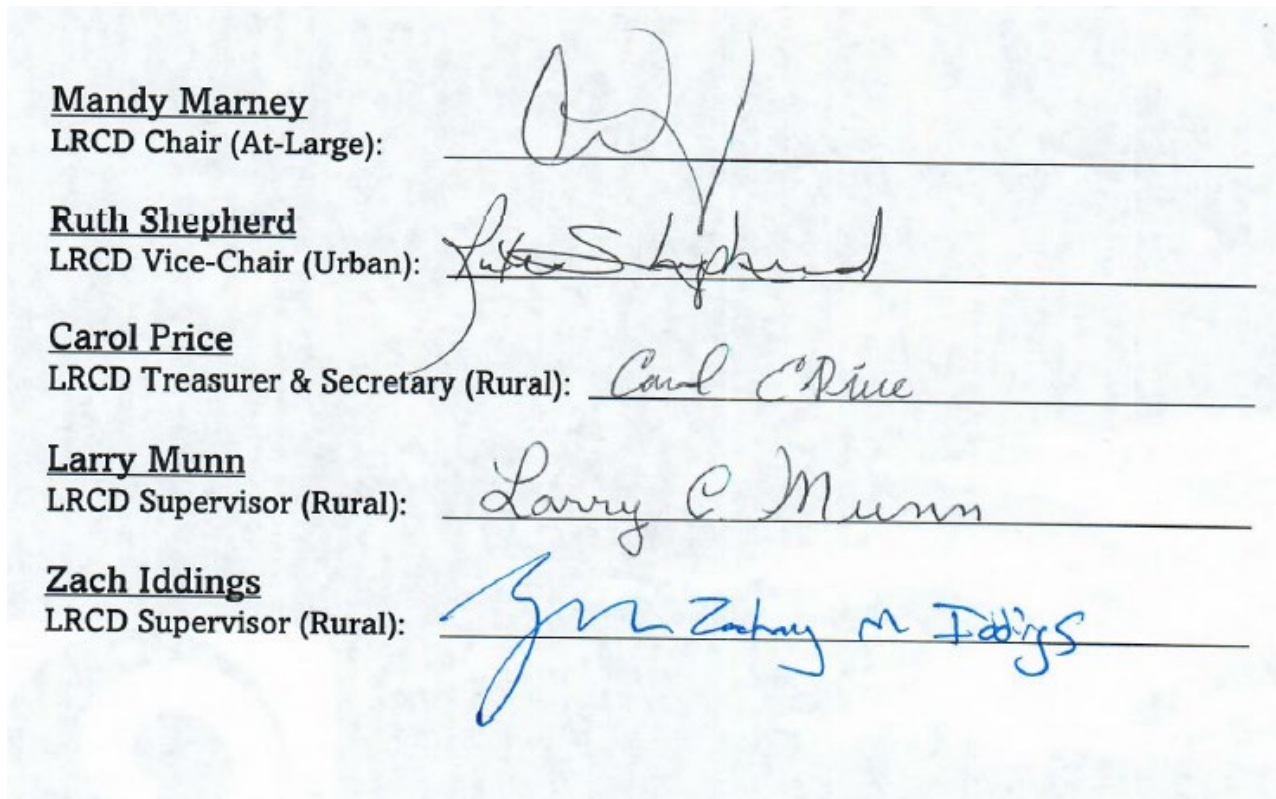
LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Long Range & Natural Resource Management Plan

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts require that Conservation District's develop a Long Range Plan every five years. The Long Range Plan serves as a broad outline of Laramie Rivers Conservation District's long-term priorities and goals. It also creates a common vision and direction for LRCD staff and Board of Supervisors for developing programs and activities that align with our mission.

Following a 45-day public comment period and a public hearing held on December 18th, 2024, the Laramie Rivers Conservation District approved the 2020-2024 Long Range Plan and Natural Resource Management Plan on December 18th, 2024.

A record of Laramie Rivers Conservation District 2024-2029 Long Range Plan is on record in the Office of the Albany County Clerk.



Mandy Marney
LRCD Chair (At-Large): _____

Ruth Shepherd
LRCD Vice-Chair (Urban): _____

Carol Price
LRCD Treasurer & Secretary (Rural): _____

Larry Munn
LRCD Supervisor (Rural): _____

Zach Iddings
LRCD Supervisor (Rural): _____

Authority

Laramie Rivers Conservation District is a legally organized Wyoming Conservation District by Wyoming State Statutes (W.S. 11-16-101 through 11-16-134) as a legal subdivision of the State of Wyoming, Department of Agriculture. Laramie Rivers Conservation District was formed in 1945.

Statute

W.S. 11-16-103. Legislative Declarations and Policy

(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.

Laramie Rivers Conservation District Mission Statement

LRCDD's mission is to provide leadership for the conservation of Albany County's soil and water, promote and protect the quality of Albany County's waters, and to promote sustained use of Wyoming's water and all other natural resources, to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, protect the tax base and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of Albany County through a responsible conservation ethic.

District Description

Location

Laramie Rivers Conservation District boundaries conform to Albany County boundaries, encompassing an area of 4,305 square miles or 2,755,136 acres. Within the district, 1,820,093 acres (66.1% of the area) are privately owned; 684,911 acres are federal land (24.8%); and 250,133 acres are state, county, city, and school owned (9.1%) (Source: 2006 Equality State Almanac).

Elevations

Elevations in Albany County range from 12,013 feet at Medicine Bow Peak in the Snowy Range to 5,160 feet where the Laramie River leaves the county. Albany County has only two incorporated towns; the elevation of Laramie is 7,165 feet and Rock River is 6,981 feet.

Watersheds

The Upper Laramie River watershed dominates the District's area. Other watersheds that make up a significant portion of the District are the Medicine Bow River (includes Rock Creek), the Little Medicine Bow River, and the Lower Laramie River (includes Sybille and Chugwater Creeks). Small portions of seven other watersheds are also within the District boundaries: Horse Creek, Upper Lodgepole Creek, Lone Tree-Owl Creek, Cache La Poudre River, and the Upper North Platte River (See map on page 5).

Climate and Vegetation

Most of the district is semi-arid; the precipitation amounts and temperatures are quite variable depending on the location's elevation and slope. Vegetation communities range from alpine to high desert as a result of elevation, climate, and precipitation patterns. The average temperatures in January range from 12.1 to 32.7 °F, and in July 51.3 to 71.5 °F. Because of the high elevation, winters are long; and summers are short and relatively cool. The wide range of temperatures and varied precipitation, occasional severe summer and winter storms, and frequent strong winds create an environment that is often harsh and unpredictable.

Precipitation in the Laramie Basin averages between 10-14 inches annually and the average number of rainy days per year is about 26 days. Annual snowfall averages 42.0 inches (107 cm). The majority of arable irrigated land in the district receives only about 6-13 inches of precipitation annually (based on our tracking of Laramie Regional Airport data over the past 15 years), with most occurring at the lower end of that range. Strong winds, water availability, frost-free period or growing season, which is about 90 days per year, all limit plant growth.

Land Use

Agriculture within the district consists primarily of ranching. The predominant livestock operations are cow-calf and yearling. Hay production consists of primarily grass hay with limited alfalfa. Most irrigation is provided by direct flow diversions from the Big and Little Laramie Rivers, Rock Creek and their tributaries (see list of watersheds on previous page).

Mineral extraction consists of some oil and gas production, along with quarries for limestone and shale for cement production, and rock, sand and gravel for cement production, road base, and landscaping.

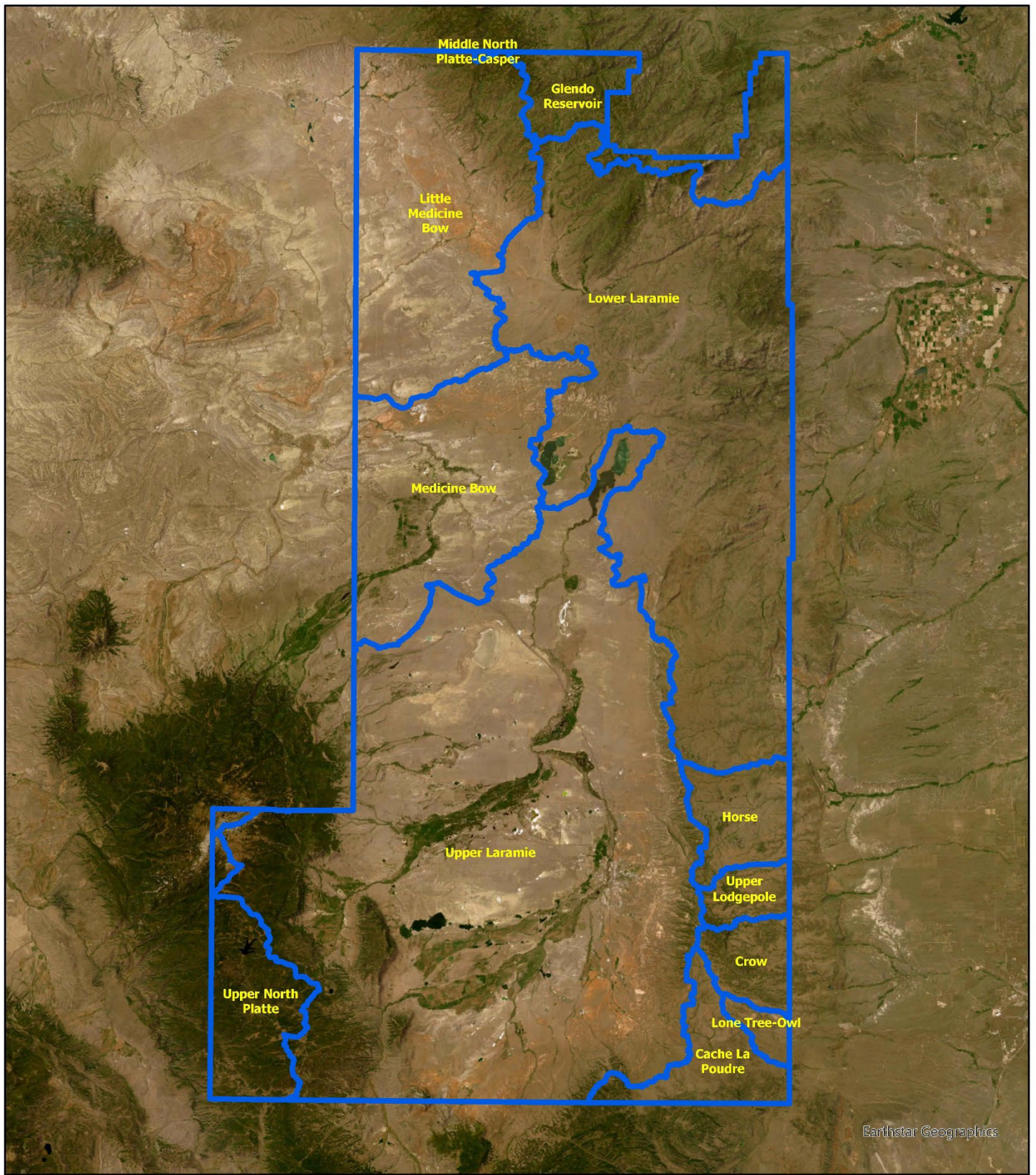
Wind development and new transmission lines are emerging as major industries in Wyoming. These can help keep agricultural operations viable, provide jobs, and help us achieve energy independence.

The majority of lands within the District are privately owned. With about 25% managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the (BLM). Local land users (agriculture, timber, recreation, and mining) are dependent upon the federal lands to varying degrees for commodity use and recreational enjoyment. Local economies derive a significant source of income from these public lands, from both commodity extraction, livestock grazing, and other various recreation uses.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires all federal agencies to cooperate to the fullest extent possible with state and local governments. The District has taken an active role in developing working relationships with the various federal agencies through Memorandums of Understanding and seeking Cooperating Agency status on various federal planning documents.

Recreational use of public and private lands continues to increase. Hunting, fishing, floating, hiking, four wheeling, snowmobiling, skiing, road biking, mountain biking and sightseeing are recreational opportunities within the Laramie Rivers Conservation District.

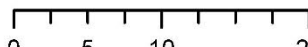
The large portion of forested lands within the district that were affected by pine beetles have either started recovery or have been further affected by fires.



 Watersheds of Albany County

NAD 83 UTM 13



 0 5 10 20 Miles



LCRD Watersheds

In order to think about where we are going, it is important to think about where we have been. Below is a list of issues we have been working on and a list of issues we have noticed taking on more interest or importance since the last 5-year plan.

Ongoing Issues

- Agricultural viability
- Land conversion from agricultural to residential
- Wildlife – human conflicts, habitat loss/improvement, endangered species issues
- E. Coli contamination and listed streams (2012 303d list)
- Wildfires and the wildland urban interface
- Invasive weeds in Albany County
- Water conservation in household use and home landscaping
- Youth education in conservation and food issues
- Federal and state lands management for habitat, recreation, and local economies
- Wind development impacts on raptors
- Wind development impacts on local landfills during construction and operation
- Casper Aquifer protection, wildlife habitat, open space, and recreation
- Stream sediment issues in the Laramie River in and below Laramie (2018 303d list) – remedies can include many practices in town from individual landowners to city infrastructure, along with rural river work
- Holistic look (whole river) at river health and fish passages (not just project by project) for continued Natural Resource Trust participation
- Continued interest in urban forestry/aging tree canopy in towns
- New Building: The District has committed to having a purpose-built structure that LRCD can use to optimize office and meeting room requirements and to provide opportunities for office space for collaborating agency personnel.

“Roadmap” for this plan:

Goal 1: Programs we control or are closely involved in

Goal 2: Education and outreach programs

Goal 3: Internal administration and development

GOAL 1: Improve water conservation and development, wildlife habitat, soil health, natural resources, water quality and work to enhance responsible management of private and public lands.

Objective 1: Provide technical assistance to support implementation of natural resource stewardship practices to conserve resources, improve ecosystem function, and help to ensure viability of production agriculture.

- Continue to promote Best Management Practices through technical assistance and cooperation with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- Promote agriculture producers use of the Rural Cost Share program providing technical and financial assistance with implementing conservation practices.
- Continue offering rangeland improvement equipment for landowners to rent at affordable rates (seeder and pipe welder).
- Work with producers, using rangeland data, to improve fencing and grazing management practices as requested.
- Expand efforts in vegetation monitoring with landowners and agencies through utilization of updated monitoring methods and ArcGIS mapping programs for use in land use management.
- Continue to cooperate with local, state and federal agencies, as well as private landowners on wildlife and conservation issues that can protect and benefit landscapes and species.
- Continue emphasizing the importance of keeping the soil covered and utilizing windbreaks where practical to reduce soil erosion and to help maintain soil moisture.

Objective 2: Advocate and work on projects with local, federal and state land use officials with attention to conservation and protection of natural resources, disaster mitigation, and healthy ecosystems on a larger scale.

- Participate and/or advise federal land agencies regarding land use planning, paying attention to the balance of ecological and economic needs and encouraging the consolidation of small land-locked parcels into larger, more practical public land units.
- Work with the public and appropriate governmental entities to conserve lands that will benefit water resources, wildlife, open spaces, the local economy and quality of life.

- Work with agencies to ensure access and responsible use of state and federal lands, while respecting the rights and expectations of paying lessees of these lands.
- Collaborate with the Wyoming Highway Department and Albany County Road & Bridge on upcoming construction projects that traverse waterways to help develop bridges that are less of a choke point on a waterway. This will help to reduce the channelization that occurs at the various bridges throughout the county.
- Collaborate with the Wyoming Highway Department and Wyoming Game & Fish on using dirt berms along the highways, in the county, to provide wildlife an escape route out of the highway right-of-way.

Objective 3: Implement, oversee, and monitor water quality protection and improvement projects, water conservation and development, and other pertinent natural resource management and improvement projects on public and private lands.

- Use watershed studies to identify and develop water storage opportunities and to improve and expand existing irrigation systems.
- Work with the Dept. of Environmental Quality to address impaired reaches of the Big and Little Laramie Rivers; work with private landowners and use rural cost share program and other outside funding to implement practices that will protect and improve habitat and water quality.
- Promote water conservation through improved irrigation practices, and the promotion/planning of water-wise landscaping. Work with the County, the City of Laramie, the University and other interested parties to protect water quality and wildlife habitat around the growing City of Laramie.

Objective 4: Support and implement conservation through many smaller scale projects including noxious weed control, junk removal/community clean up/beautification efforts, energy efficiency and water conservation throughout the county on multiple smaller scale projects

- Expand the district’s Living Snow Fence program through promotion and education efforts.
- Continue collaboration with Albany County Weed & Pest addressing noxious weeds in Rock River area, and other smaller communities and explore new problem areas to address in the county.

- Facilitate the implementation of the above projects through technical guidance and cost sharing assistance when appropriate.
- Continue performing subdivision reviews and highlight the impact of layering more septic systems and wells in a smaller parcel of land.
- Promote awareness of noxious weeds and other potentially invasive plants through articles and public notifications, and with guidance in our cost share programs, as opportunities arise. Promote weed control in City of Laramie and surrounding residential areas.

GOAL 2: Engage and support the community in making informed decisions that are conscious of resource conservation, the health and safety of the community, and our local economy.

Objective 1: Inspire and support an ethic and understanding of resource stewardship in Albany County.

- Continue participating in the Wyoming Small Acreage initiative through workshops, articles, and one-on-one meetings for land use planning.
- Continue organizing and promoting workshops that address natural resource and conservation issues.
- Continue providing informative articles for tri-annual newsletter, Barnyards & Backyards magazine, local newspapers and other publications as requested.
- Continue promoting tree conservation through hosting the district’s annual tree sale, producing educational publications and videos, and assisting residents with tree health issues, and supporting other urban tree planting initiatives.
- Continue cultivating the bi-annual Conservation Expo through expanding relationships with similar agencies, organizations, institutions and businesses.
- Advocate energy conservation, recycling, and composting through articles, publications, education, and local events.
- Increase awareness of the LRCD Water & Soil Analysis Cost Share program to provide information for sound decision making for Albany County residents.

Objective 2: Increase visibility of LRCD’s activities and programs in the community.

- Explore opportunities to take LRCD message to civic groups, service clubs, recreation clubs and individuals throughout Albany County.
- Pursue volunteers for LRCD projects and events from student groups and interested residents.
- Seek opportunities for advertising, news coverage of LRCD activities and events, and LRCD sponsorship of high-visibility community events and workshops.
- Encourage staff involvement in suitable community committees, groups and supervising boards.
- Promote staff and board participation at community events and meetings that relate to LRCD mission.

GOAL 3: Increase the LRCD’s ability to implement its mission through making continuous improvements in management, staff enrichment, and the visibility of the LRCD in the community.

Objective 1: Strive for excellence in areas of fiscal responsibility, transparency, and overall operation of the District.

- Keep board and staff instructed in bookkeeping/accounting methods and reporting to assure fiscal responsibility.
- Ensure that LRCD has the tools/equipment, facilities, staffing and vehicles necessary for accomplishing goals.
- Continue improving LRCD website to keep the community informed, able to access reports and district information, and to provide valuable advice on conservation practices.
- Expand into other appropriate social media, as appropriate.
- Maintain an ongoing dialog with other elected officials at the local and state levels.

Objective 2: Cultivate an involved, knowledgeable, and motivated staff.

- Foster opportunities for staff and board training and education.
- Remain informed of State, Regional and National conservation issues, policies and procedures through attendance of Area/State meetings on annual basis and Regional/National if practical.

Objective 3: Pursue plan and means of maintaining and/or upgrading LRCD equipment and facilities.

- Save cash to build or purchase a proper office/shop facility that meets all LRCD's needs.

References considered in defining issues to be addressed in the context of our mission statement:

- Freedman, KS, 2019, *Public Opinion Poll on Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming, 2018*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
- Freedman, KS and Nicole Korfanta, 2014 *Public Opinion and Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
- Boelter, Ann, and K.D. Mays, 2004, *Public Opinion in Wyoming on Conserving Agricultural Lands and Open Space*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
- University of Wyoming Surveys conducted by Small Acreage Issue team to identify issues important to Albany County Landowners
- LRCD's conversations with the public, elected officials and informal polls

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Laramie Rivers Conservation District published a notice in the Laramie Daily Boomerang newspaper on November 2nd and November 6th, 2024 stating that public comments were being accepted on the 2024-2029 LRCD Long Range and Natural Resource Management Plan. An advertised Public Hearing was also held at the District office located at 5015 Stone Rd, Laramie, WY, on December 18th, 2024.

The following public comments have been incorporated into this draft:

- Continue working with the Albany County Weed & Pest on their spray areas. (G1; OB4; B2)
- Continue with livestock water development, irrigation diversion restorations, and stream bank restoration projects. (G1; OB1; B2)
- Continue doing subdivision reviews and highlight the impact of layering more septic systems and wells in a smaller parcel of land. (G1; OB4; B4)
- Continue emphasizing the importance of keeping the soil covered and utilizing windbreaks where practical to reduce soil erosion and to help maintain soil moisture. (G1; OB1; B7)
- Collaborate with the Wyoming Highway Department and Albany County Road & Bridge on upcoming construction projects that traverse waterways to help develop bridges that are less of a choke point on a waterway. This will help to reduce the channelization that occurs at the various bridges throughout the county. (G1; OB2; B4)
- Collaborate with the Wyoming Highway Department and Wyoming Game & Fish on using dirt berms along the highways, in the county, to provide wildlife an escape route out of the highway right-of-way. (G1; OB2; B5)
- Stay on top of the potential Glade Reservoir at La Porte, CO. and actively support Albany County landowner's water rights. (G1; OB2; B2)

G=Goal; OB=Objective; B=Bullet