

The Corner Post

Summer/Fall 2020

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources & Policy Division
Newsletter



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IN THIS ISSUE

Shared Stewardship Agreement 1

WDA Launches Wyoming Ag Stress Resource 2

Don't Let Communication Be Your Downfall During the Grazing Season 2

Drought to Continue AGAIN 3

It's a Bird, It's a Plane! 4

Conservation Districts: Working to Protect Forest Health 5

Upcoming Events 6

Quotable Quotes

"If you wear cowboy clothes, are you ranch dressing?"
-Anonymous

*Cover photo courtesy of Ann Wittmann

Shared Stewardship Agreement

Chris Wichmann, NR&P Manager

The State of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service signed a Shared Stewardship Agreement (Agreement) on August 25, 2020 to work towards shared interests and establish a framework for federal and state agencies to promote active forest management, improve collaboration, and respond to ecological challenges and natural resource concerns in Wyoming.

The Agreement will allow the State and Forest Service to collaborate to determine priorities, implement projects, share resources and work towards identification of at-risk communities, watersheds and priority areas across all lands. The strategy behind the Agreement has three primary elements:

1. Strategize on a statewide level --- The State and Forest Service will work across boundaries. The State will take the lead role in talking to stakeholders and developing strategies, issues and priorities.

2. Implement meaningful projects in the right place and at the appropriate scale --- The State and Forest Service will utilize mapping and decision making tools to identify the highest priority areas for projects.
3. Use all available tools for active management --- The State and Forest Service will use all available authorities and tools in order to achieve desired outcomes.

The Agreement is an exciting opportunity to continue developing an already good relationship the State has with the Forest Service. It allows for projects to cross boundaries at appropriate landscape scales to address an issue or desired outcomes.

This Agreement will further strengthen the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's existing Good Neighbor Authority Agreement we have with the Forest Service and may create more opportunities to improve and restore Wyoming's forests and rangelands. ✦

WDA Launches Wyoming Ag Stress Resource



Lucy Pauley, Ag Mediation Coordinator & Derek Grant, WDA Communications Officer

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) has launched a web resource focused on supporting Wyoming producers with agriculture related stress and mental health concerns.

Agriculture producers have faced significant challenges in recent years like the coronavirus pandemic, regulatory difficulties, market uncertainty, significant weather events, and more. With so many factors out of a producer's control, this profession can be overwhelmingly stressful at times. In response, the WDA pulled together a variety of information and resources to support those dealing with ag-related stress.

"Agriculture and the people involved in this industry are the backbone of our state," said Doug Miyamoto, Director of the WDA. "We recognize that this industry is difficult and these can be challenging times for our producers so we gathered and compiled a wide variety of information on this page as a resource to assist in the well-being of our Wyoming producers."

The site has useful links and resources from numerous groups across the U.S. who have been working to address the issue of

ag-related stress and suicide. This page acts as a clearinghouse for resources available to those directly and indirectly involved in the agriculture industry. There is information for spouses and family members as well.

The page is divided into four areas; Get Help, Family Support, Help Someone, and Other Resources. The WDA highlights resources from other organizations, educational institutions, and government entities in one, easy to access location so those seeking information can quickly find the content and resources they need.

Recently, the Wyoming Department of Health launched a Wyoming specific suicide prevention hotline and text line for anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts. If you or someone you know is in danger of self harm, call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text "WYO" to 741-741 for help and support. Talking with someone about your thoughts and feelings can save your life.

Visit <https://agriculture.wy.gov/about-us/ag-stress> to see the Wyoming Ag Stress page and all of the resources available. †

Don't Let **Communication be Your Downfall**
During The Grazing Season

Justin Williams, Senior Policy Analyst

Smoke signals, pony express, and telegrams were just some of the ways people communicated in historic times. In today's modern, fast paced lives, we have even more ways to communicate, including e-mail, cell phone, texts, US Postal Service mail, or even the almost extinct fax machine. Despite all of these options, communication issues still surface in our personal and professional lives.

Throughout the summer, I received a number of calls between federal agency staff and federal lands grazing permittees regarding their struggles to communicate with each other. Concerns revolved around livestock grazing management, fence construction, trespass, overutilization, and more. The majority of the complaints were due to a lack of response and replies to phone messages or e-mails. Continued on page 5



Chris Wichmann, NR&P Manager

(This article is being recycled from 2013 based on the 2012 drought we had experienced in Wyoming and the west. I thought it would be good to bring this up again because of the recent drought conditions we are experiencing in the summer of 2020. It is always good to prepare for drought, or the worse case scenarios, rather than wait for land management directives that could affect your operations.)

If drought continues into the 2021 grazing season then these discussion points should be considered...

(Originally printed January 2013)

Last year went down as the driest and warmest year on record (since 1895) for Wyoming. The combined heat and lack of precipitation created horrible drought conditions across the state and added to the many fires and the extreme fire danger that we saw. A recent drought monitor released on January 3rd showed worsening drought conditions across east-central Wyoming and slight improved drought conditions across portions of the western and northwestern portion of the state.

The BLM field offices are currently monitoring precipitation, vegetation, water availability in areas suffering from the drought. They are also preparing to initiate their annual operating plans/meetings in the near future in preparation for this coming grazing season. These meetings will discuss the planning and preparation for grazing management on each specific allotment but will most likely include a thorough discussion on how drought conditions may be addressed during the grazing season. Based on the 2012 grazing season, changes to the grazing plan mostly consisted of changes in duration on allotment/pasture or time of use. Drought letters are anticipated to go out to permittees in early February to prepare permittees for the upcoming grazing season.

We encourage each permittee to be proactive in the management of livestock operations and management of their allotment. We would like to throw out additional thoughts for you to consider when planning for this grazing season.

- Prepare for the worst case scenario. Many producers are preparing for voluntary measures in case the drought occurs, such as, destocking their herd, or other operation plans.
- Start early communication with range staff. Communication with range staff is crucial, in both directions, to be able to understand and make sound decisions on an allotment.
- Participate in allotment use monitoring with range staff. By participating in the monitoring efforts, you will see how they are making determinations on an allotment and have consistent dialog with range staff on potential timing and consequences of drought conditions.
- Prepare drought contingency plans. Many field offices will accept drought contingency plans if presented to them prior to the event. Drought contingency plans will identify mitigation measures or alternatives for the Authorizing Officer to consider when making a decision on when to remove grazing on an allotment. This may consist of proposals to haul water, provide supplemental feed, temporary fence to protect sensitive resources, providing herding, adjusting grazing plans, etc. All these types of alternatives may help you stay on an allotment longer, if the parties agree.
- Be aware that the BLM has emergency response abilities within their regs. That can be considered on a case-by-case situation. This does not exclude them from analysis of impacts but does allow the Authorizing Officer the ability to do things on an allotment in case of an emergency.
- Identify and propose rangeland improvement projects for the allotment that will protect and improve the allotment and rangeland health. This should include the needs for water (wells, tanks, reservoirs) on the allotment, fences (temporary and permanent), spring development or other improvements that may protect and improve the allotment.

These are just additional things to consider when trying to manage your livestock operation in another year of drought. ✦

It's a Bird..... It's a Plane!



Scott McDonald, Senior Policy Analyst

Look up in the sky... it's a bird... no, it's a plane... what in the world is that thing anyway. The world of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) have grown leaps and bounds over the last several years. You may think of UAV's as those fun little toys everyone got for their last birthday. You know those ones that follow you around and take those amazing pictures. You may also think of those much larger ones the government uses for, well, whatever the government does. I am not going to be talking about those ones in this article however, I wanted to look at two use cases for drones that may be a huge benefit to the agriculture industry.

The first example is from the industry in my prior position with the Department of Agriculture. I had the opportunity to learn and observe pesticide applicators using drone technology to evaluate, apply and monitor pesticide applications in remote and hard to reach areas. This technology has huge potential to revolutionize the pesticide industry by allowing applications to be mapped out prior to application, use drones equipped with different types of chemicals to target specific species of weeds with targeted chemicals, and allow post application monitoring. This has the potential to reduce the amount of chemicals used in the application process, make those chemicals more effective by targeting application types and rates and will also allow pesticide applications in hard to reach areas through conventional means.

Currently this technology is utilized mostly in forest settings on areas that are hard or impossible to reach on foot. They can use a single drone or multiple drones (a swarm) that can all be programmed to apply chemicals at different rates in different areas of the application site. The limitations of

the current technology is flight time and capacity. The more water/chemical you have on the drone the less flight time the drone has. This is due to the limited battery capacity of current drones. You can guarantee, however, they are working on new battery technologies to close this gap in the near future.

The second example is more relevant to what I do now. Thinking about example number one I am sure you can imagine how useful a drone that would be outfitted with sensors, cameras and other equipment could be in rangeland monitoring. There are several studies that have looked at using UAV technology to do more consistent, timely and unbiased research on rangeland health. Relatively small groups of operators could evaluate large areas of land on a regular basis to better understand land use trends. This would better inform land use managers when making important decisions in regards to the conservation and protection of our public lands.

Currently this technology has similar limitations to pesticide application. The high cost of increased flight time does not allow for utilizing this technology to its fullest potential. However, as the cost declines and the longevity of batteries improves I would look to see this technology utilized more in the future.

So be on the lookout, sometime in the near future that swarm of birds headed your way may just be your neighbors drone swarm getting ready to spray the field next to you. That buzzing sound you hear while hunting just may be an important monitoring evaluation being done on the nearby grazing allotment. ✦





Justin Caudill, Ag Program Coordinator

As a program coordinator with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture working with Wyoming's 34 Conservation Districts, I like to highlight the spectacular projects and programs these districts are providing. This article deals with a landscape scale project Campbell County Conservation District, Crook County and Weston County Natural Resource District's and the partnership are working on. It is evident as one drives around the western US, the effects the pine beetle epidemic has had on our forested areas with all the dead, reddish gray colored trees. This left Federal and State land managers, and especially private land owners wondering what do we do, and how do we prepare for the next epidemic.

The three districts began working with landowners within their boundaries to find funding sources to address these forest health issues. It quickly became apparent that the scale and need was much larger than a single district's issue. So, Campbell County CD, Crook County NRD, and Weston County NRD came together defining common goals and developed external partners to address the forest health needs on private lands. Weston County Weed & Pest District, WY State Forestry,

USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, WY Game & Fish, National Wild Turkey Federation, and the north eastern offices for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) came together with the districts.

This partnership pooled their resources and made application through NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Through RCPP the partnership was able to secure almost 1.3 million in funding, bring the total project budget to \$1.6 million to assist landowners in improving the forest health on their properties. As well as providing for an opportunity for these landowners to create a forest stewardship plan, managing for the owners long-term forestry goals. These plans help to guide landowners in determining what actions, and when to implement further treatments in the future.

If you would like to learn more about the conservation district in your area you can visit the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts website at <http://conservewy.com/conservation-districts/> where the states 34 conservation districts are defined on a map with their contact information. †



Grazing Season (continued from page 2)

Many of the grazing permittees we work with live and work in remote areas across the State of Wyoming. Cell phone service is limited and often times, the permittees are in the field well after agency staff have left the office. This gap in time causes a breakdown in communication when the two parties are leaving multiple phone messages or e-mails, but not getting to speak directly to each other.

If communication has broken down between you and your range staff, consider including this topic of conversation during your pre or post grazing season meetings. Identify your concerns and take a proactive approach to find solutions that

work for everyone. Develop a list of ways to best communicate; including identifying a secondary point of contact in-case you're unavailable for a day or two. If you know you'll be out of service, take the opportunity before you lose service to let your range staff know you'll be away for a few days and will touch base once you're home. We all have some form of communication breakdown in our daily lives, but when it comes to your federal grazing permits, don't let it be your downfall. †





Upcoming Events

November 19-21: Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union Annual Convention

November 16-19: WY Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention, Torrington

December 7-9: WY Stock Growers Winter Roundup Convention & Trade Show, Casper

January 12: Legislature Convenes General Session

January 8-13: American Farm Bureau Convention, San Diego

February 6-10: National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention, New Orleans



Visit our website:
<http://agriculture.wy.gov/divisions/nrp>

If you have questions or comments about the information in this newsletter, or to obtain an email copy, please contact Michelle MacDonald, Natural Resources & Policy Division at: 307.777.7323 or michelle.macdonald@wyo.gov.

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