



Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins
Conservation District
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LONG RANGE PLAN

Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District
2026 – 2031

Adopted: ???

CONTENTS

Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Wyoming Conservation Districts' Authority	4
About Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District	4
History	4
General Description.....	6
Board of Supervisors (2026).....	7
Conservation District Staff (2026)	7
Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff (2026)	7
Environmental Conditions.....	7
Natural Resources	7
Economy	8
Goals – Desired Outcomes – Actions.....	8
Goal 1: District Operations.....	9
Goal 2: Natural Resources	9
Goal 3: Water.....	11
Goal 4: Working Ranches.....	11
Goal 5: Education & Outreach	12
Resolution of Adoption.....	13

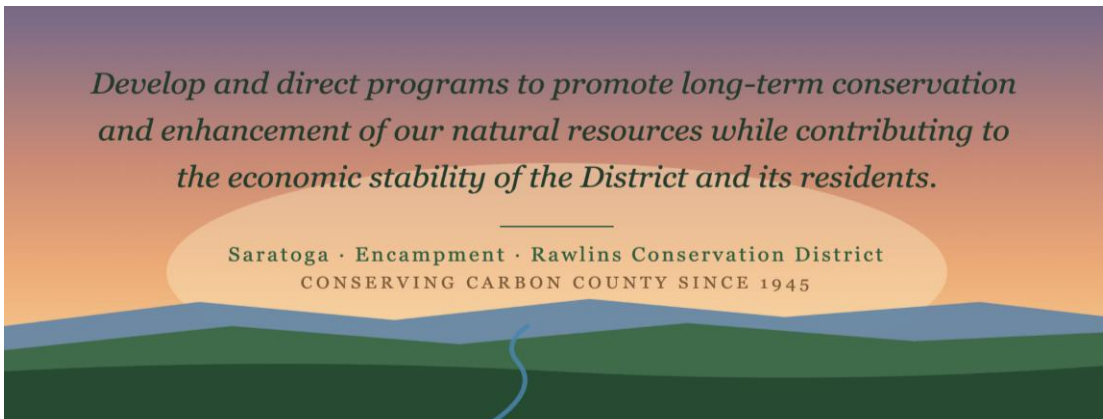
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District's Long Range Plan is to serve as a guide for the Board and Staff to efficiently and effectively carry out actions when planning and making decisions for natural resource conservation work over the next five years. The goals and objectives identified in the Long Range Plan provide programmatic guidance for use of the resources while protecting the environment. These goals and objectives to guide and prioritize activities, inform the Annual Plan of Work, and the day-to-day actions of the Staff as they work with partners to accomplish our mission.

DRAFT

*Develop and direct programs to promote long-term conservation
and enhancement of our natural resources while contributing to
the economic stability of the District and its residents.*

Saratoga · Encampment · Rawlins Conservation District
CONSERVING CARBON COUNTY SINCE 1945



INTRODUCTION

Wyoming Conservation Districts' Authority

Wyoming's Conservation Districts were created in 1941 and [Wyoming Conservation District Law](#)¹ is codified in Article 11, Chapter 16 of the Wyoming statutes (District Law). District Law describes, among other matters, the powers, purposes, and duties of a conservation district at WY Stat § 11-16-122. The law clearly states that conservation districts are legal subdivisions of the state of Wyoming. Wyo. Stat. §§ 11-16-102(a)(v), 11-16-113(c). In Wyoming, conservation districts are not "home rule" political subdivisions. Therefore, a conservation district's powers are limited by its statutes, and they do not have any power other than that expressly granted by the constitution or statutes, as well as powers reasonably implied from the expressly granted powers.

Wyoming Law provides authority for conservation districts related to the conservation of soil and water resources; control and prevention of erosion; conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water; to stabilize the ranching or farming industry; preserve natural resources; protect the tax base; control floods; preserve wildlife; protect the public lands; develop long term strategic plans and watershed plans; develop and implement comprehensive resource use and management plans; and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the State. See Wyo. Stat. §§ 11-16-103 and 11-16-122. Conservation districts are the only local government, charged specifically by state statute, with natural resource management.

Each conservation district is governed by a board of five locally elected supervisors who serve without pay (hereafter Board). The Board has the authority to hire and direct staff to carry out the day-to-day operations. By Wyoming state statute three members are rural, one is urban, and one is designated as at-large. They are elected to staggered four-year terms. District supervisors serve as the grass roots representatives of private landowners and the general public providing leadership and direction in natural resource conservation programs.

About Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District

History

The Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District (hereafter District) local government agency was organized in 1945, under Wyoming Conservation District Law, by members of the ranching community. Its charge is to exercise responsibility for the conservation of soil, water, and natural resources within its boundaries. The current expanded District was formed in 1972 to take in all lands and people in an effort to address natural resource issues people find important. The District is a microcosm of the state. It encompasses the same vast diversity of landscapes, wildlife, and industry.



Mastication prior to fence replacement in Mullen Burn Scar

¹ <https://wyoleg.gov/StateStatutes/StatutesConstitution?tab=0>

The natural resource issues facing the Board and District resources are just as diverse—wind energy and its impacts, preservation of open spaces, agriculture, and its contribution to the economic stability of the communities within the district, cooperatively providing input to Federal agencies managing public lands for the purpose of multiple use, and conservation issues facing producers, recreationists, and municipal users.

The Board and its staff have conducted more than 80 years of conservation work in Carbon County and it is the largest of three conservation districts in the county. The Board partners with the Little Snake River and Medicine Bow Conservation Districts as appropriate and feasible. Even though the District's issues have become more complex over the years, the Board mission remains the same: "Develop and direct programs to promote long-term conservation and enhancement of our natural resources while contributing to the economic stability of the District and its residents."



Beaver on Hat Creek

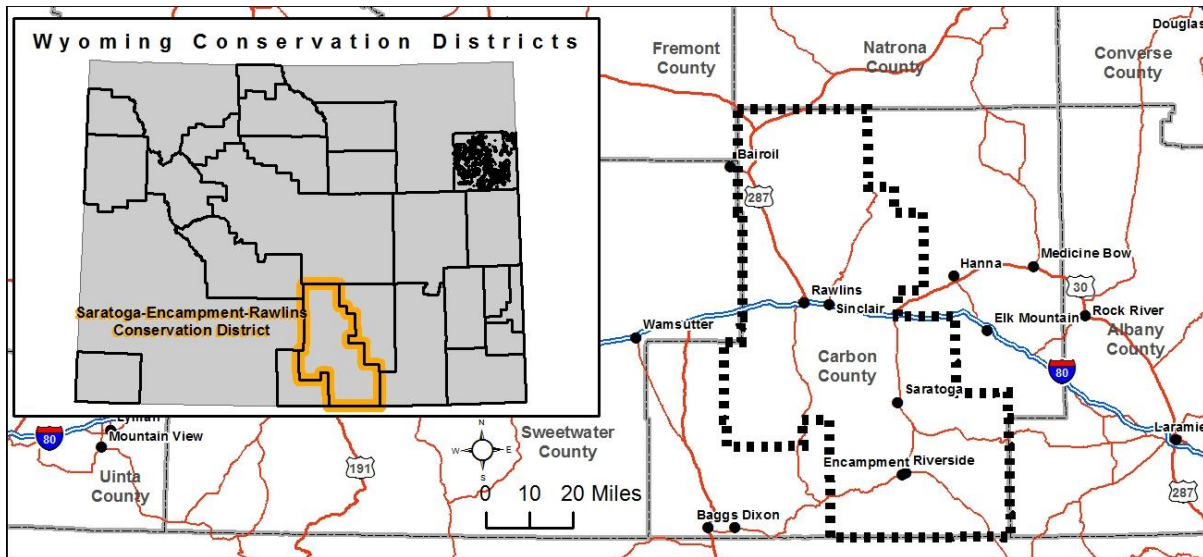
The Board declares its interest in maintaining, protecting, and enhancing soil and water resources within the District, and where applicable, on related public lands. It intends to develop and direct programs to promote long-term conservation and enhancement of natural resources while contributing to the economic stability of the District and its residents. Issues of concern connected to soil and water resources such as wildlife resources, vegetation resources, private property rights, and agriculture are included where feasible and appropriate.

The Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District is one of thirty-four conservation districts in Wyoming. Accountability for meeting goals and objectives is documented in the District's Annual Plan of Work that specifically identifies goals and objectives for the year. The Annual Plan of Work is included in the yearly Annual Report. A copy of the District Annual Report can be obtained from the District Office in Saratoga or downloaded from the website, <http://www.sercd.org/>.

Carbon County was organized in 1868. Prior to that, about 3,400 square miles in the center of the county were once part of the Republic of Texas and then part of the State of Texas until 1852.

General Description

The District runs the length of Carbon County from the Colorado State line north to the Natrona County, Wyoming line and occupies the center of Carbon County, Wyoming.



The District includes approximately 2.7 million acres. Of this total, approximately 37% is privately owned, 57% federally managed, and 6% owned by the State of Wyoming.

District Surface Ownership	Acres	% of Total Ownership
Bureau of Land Management	1,087,985	39.9%
Private	996,645	36.5%
Forest Service	431,126	15.8%
State	156,449	5.7%
Bureau of Reclamation	29,040	1.1%
Water	25,183	0.9%
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	1,468	0.1%
Total	2,727,897	100%

The historical development of the transcontinental railroad through Carbon County established the “Wyoming Checkerboard,” a 40-mile-wide band (20 miles to either side of the Union Pacific Railroad line) of alternating sections of private and federal land. The disproportionate amount of federal land as well as the Wyoming Checkerboard in the District means that any change in federal land management policy also influences private land use decisions, and these policy changes have an even greater effect on the District’s economy.

Ultimately, cooperative management and communication between the private landowner, federal land managers, and the State of Wyoming is necessary to foster successful land, water, and natural resource use. This use has both direct and indirect impacts on the local communities and the sustained health of these valuable resources. The District often assists private landowners as a liaison to help navigate mixed ownership natural resources issues/projects and helps bring the parties together for the benefit of the natural resources.

Board of Supervisors (2026)

Chris Williams – Chair
Shannon Fagen – Secretary
Scott Kerbs – Member
Jack Berger – Associate Member (2007 – 2016 Chairman)

Arla Strasser – Vice Chair
Randy Arnold – Treasurer
Dan Mika – Associate Member

Conservation District Staff (2026)

Joe Parsons – District Manager
Justin Stern – Water Resource Specialist/Education Coordinator
Leanne Correll – NEPA Consultant
Garrett Pantle – Resource Specialist

Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff (2026)

Caleb Owens – District Conservationist
Vacant – Soil Conservation Technician
Luke Paludan – Civil Engineering Technician

Environmental Conditions

Most of the District is quite arid, and the temperature and precipitation vary with elevation. Elevations range from the 12,000-foot alpine tundra of the Snowy Range to 5,800 feet at the extreme northern edge of the District near Pathfinder Reservoir. The vegetation ranges from alpine to desert and is a result of the climate and growing seasons. The wide range of temperatures and precipitation resulting from occasional violent summer and winter storms, usually coupled with strong winds, creates an environment that is often harsh and unpredictable. Temperatures are quite variable depending on elevation and slope. Recorded temperature extremes within the District are -46°F at Encampment and 100°F recorded at both Saratoga and Muddy Gap. In the mountains, temperatures can range from highs near 89°F to lows of -50°F.

Precipitation in the District averages about 10” annually. In the higher elevations of the Sierra Madre Mountains the precipitation averages over 52” annually. The majority of arable irrigated land in the District receives only about 12” to 18” annually, 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.

Natural Resources

There is an abundance of natural resources present in the district. Indigenous peoples and then trappers, mountain men, soldiers, ranchers, sportsmen, railroad workers, guest ranchers, and miners guest ranchers, and miners have been drawn to the area because of the quality, quantity, and diversity of the natural resources in the area. While some of these resources are classified as renewable, many are considered non-renewable. Regardless of the classification, all these natural resources require appropriate management, and the District works with all landowners/managers to address natural resource issues, planning, use, management, projects, and conservation to achieve the desired outcomes identified on a case-by-case basis.

The grasslands, sagebrush deserts, riparian corridors, forests, lakes, rivers, streams, and all the areas in between that provide us with room to roam, wildlife to view, and an opportunity to “get away from it all”, are natural resources that everyone values and appreciates. The District is committed to the enhancement, conservation and preservation of these resources that make this part of Wyoming special.

Natural resources of particular note for the District work include soil, water, rangelands, environmentally limited croplands, forested lands, energy resources, minerals, wildlife and their

habitats, viewshed, air, and open space. Each of these valuable resources are complex and interconnected. It is important for the District to be a voice for natural resource use, enhancement, conservation, and protection – sometimes all at the same time to ensure a case-by-case approach to natural resource use and management to foster long-term sustainability.

Economy

Today, while agriculture remains as a cornerstone to the economic stability of the District, expansion in energy development including oil, natural gas, and wind is becoming a larger driving force in the economy and includes the possibility for growth in the current population of the area. 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 industry to agriculture to recreation.

The connection and access to the abundant natural resources in the area along with the ability to engage in recreation, including both motorized and non-motorized activities, are important to residents. Maintaining traditional historical land uses – ranching, livestock grazing, energy development, and recreation such as hunting and fishing, etc. – which all contribute to the economic viability of the area, is crucial to sustaining the District communities.

Carbon County has experienced periodic ups and downs to its local economy, caused in part by the local and regional impact of energy development. Natural and mineral resources have and continue to be important economic factors in Carbon County. The local economy has a few stabilizing influences such as employment opportunities created by the Wyoming State Penitentiary, the presence of a major east-west Interstate, and the continued operation of the Union Pacific Railroad.

Agriculture has been a main driver for the economy since the early history of the County. Livestock continue to be raised in the County but are not the major economic drivers they once were. Some agricultural operations have shifted to more diverse operations that include guest ranches and outfitters. Carbon County has and continues to be a haven for hunters, fishermen, and others who enjoy outdoor activities.²

The timber industry once was a large economic driver for Carbon County as timber was harvested for the railroad and transported down the river to make it easier to access. The timber industry has decreased significantly in more recent years, however, the sawmill in Saratoga, Saratoga Forest Management, is one of only a few in Wyoming that remains open and a large employer to the Saratoga community. The sawmill provides lumber products and wood by-products.

Over time, tourism and recreation have remained centered around outdoor activities but have changed some in the County. Guest ranches, resorts, outfitting, and guiding are now popular tourism attractions. Some agricultural operations have diversified to include recreation and tourism activities including outfitting. Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and outdoor recreation have always been a key part of Carbon County's economy but increasingly represents a larger percentage of employment in the County.

GOALS – DESIRED OUTCOMES – ACTIONS

The basis for Board work is the Wyoming Conservation Districts Law, based on priorities and actions the supervisors deem necessary. The five Board goals refine the organization's focus and define the outcomes desired. The associated objectives outline actions to move toward the Board's desired

² Van Pelt, L. (2014b). Carbon County, Wyoming. WyoHistory.org, A project of the Wyoming State Historical Society. Retrieved February 5, 2026, from www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/carbon-county-wyoming

outcomes. Established goals and identified objectives guide the development of yearly Annual Plans of Work and day-to-day activities.

Goal 1: District Operations

Maintain accountability, credibility, and financial stability of the District.

- Provide training and professional development to enable staff and board members to make informed decisions, develop policy and convey a consistent message.
- Pursue funding sources to expand and fulfill conservation needs within the District.
- Develop a fiscally responsible annual budget with public input and perform an annual audit.
- Plan for emergency and capital expenditures for specified purposes in accordance with the Board's Reserve Policy.
- Provide opportunities to increase community awareness of District activities.



Fence replacement in Mullen Burn Scar



Buck and rail fence along UTV trail

Goal 2: Natural Resources

Advocate for the enhancement, conservation, and sustainability of natural resources including rangelands, forests, soils, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

- Promote forest, rangeland, and watershed health through the conservation of soil and water and the responsible use of natural resources that result in resilient landscapes, productive soils, optimum vegetation, and improved habitat.
- Encourage federal and state agencies to use scientific-based methods to manage vegetation.

- Advocate for responsible use and management of public lands to enhance their function and benefits for multiple use, sustained yield, and prevention of natural resource waste.
- Encourage active management of our forests and rangelands to ensure healthy and vibrant forests and rangelands for current and future generations and to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires.
- Encourage best management practices to mitigate surface disturbance and facilitate soil conservation and successful re-establishment of native or other desired vegetation.
- Establish tree planting and living snow fences for natural resource conservation addressing erosion control, livestock shelter, wildlife habitat, etc.
- Monitor present rangeland sites, install new transects, analyze data, and develop trends.
- Work with local, state, and federal partners along with private landowners to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) and improvement projects.
- Consult with local, state, and federal partners to provide special expertise in the conservation of soil, water, and natural resources.
- Continue working with NRCS and other partners to obtain a completed level 3 soil survey for rangelands and a level 2 soil survey for irrigated lands in Carbon County.
- Promote and coordinate water distribution system installation and infrastructure improvements to benefit all livestock/wildlife health and welfare.
- Promote the use of wildlife escape ramps in livestock watering tanks.
- Participate in local wildlife working groups.
- Work with private landowners and public land managers to fund and implement practices/programs to maintain or enhance habitat.



Conservation tree planting

Hunting and fishing have always been a part of the history of the County. The Ute Indians lived off the game before any settlers arrived. The numbers have fluctuated with changes in forage resources and bad winters, but most years the herds of deer, antelope, and elk attract hunters from many states. Fishermen from all over the world come to fish Blue Ribbon streams.



Beaver Dam Analog Project



Fish Passage Project

Goal 3: Water

Maintain and improve water quality and watershed health and protect water rights.

- Provide leadership to manage all watersheds for water quality and quantity.
- Proactively support and protect all water rights as spelled out in Wyoming Water Law.
- Support maintenance, protection and/or enhancement of existing water quality in the context of watershed management and development.
- Provide proactive support for conservation practices and programs to beneficially conserve, expand, and develop water resources.
- Provide technical assistance and cost-share dollars for the design and implementation of wells, windmills, solar pump systems, livestock and wildlife watering tanks, and irrigation conveyance structures.
- Prioritize the sustainable and historic use of water within the district for agriculture and wildlife.

Goal 4: Working Ranches

Advocate for private property rights and working ranches while carrying out conservation district statutory authorities.

- Promote Board natural resource management policies especially with our federal and state partners.
- Encourage Federal planning-level and project-level National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents to include proper characterization and analysis of the area, recognizing the benefit of ecosystem services provided by working ranches adjacent to or nearby public lands.

- Engage in NEPA planning to protect private and state property rights in conformance with the United States and Wyoming Constitutions.
- Actively support landowners with split estate rights issues – surface ownership being different than mineral ownership. Assist landowners, if requested, in working to develop surface use agreements with mineral owners/leases.
- Conduct subdivision reviews within the District and make recommendations to the Carbon County Commissioners/Carbon County Planning Office on soil suitability and characteristics, potential flooding problems, erosion control, watershed protection, conservation practices and similar concerns in the area affected.



Goal 5: Education & Outreach

Improve the appreciation of natural resources, awareness of conservation activities, and encourage responsibility and stewardship among land users and the public through outreach and education.

- Provide technical information to the community on natural resources, land management practices, and funding programs.
- Promote natural resource education programs in the schools.
- Expand the opportunity for outdoor, place-based, and hands-on natural resource learning.
- Inform policy makers of local issues, concerns, and opportunities.
- Coordinate and facilitate opportunities to view and/or discuss conservation projects, stewardship activities, and natural resource issues.



Ag Day Education



WYRED – Monitoring Education 2025

RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION