

FALL 2022
WINTER 2023

NEWS
from

SHERIDAN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT



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CALENDAR

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| JANUARY 19 | WCDEA Training Committee Meeting |
| JANUARY 24 | Lunchtime Conversations |
| JANUARY 26 | SCCD Partner Reception |
| FEBRUARY 1 | Spring Cost-Share Application Deadline |
| FEBRUARY 2 | SCCD Monthly Board Meeting |
| FEBRUARY 20 | President's Day Office Closed |
| MARCH 2 | Tongue River Watershed Meeting |
| MARCH 7 | SCCD Monthly Board Meeting |
| MARCH 9 | Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Meeting |
| MARCH 16 | Goose Creek Watershed Meeting |
| APRIL 4 | SCCD Monthly Board Meeting |
| APRIL 7 | SCCD Tree Program Order Deadline |

2022-2023 SEEDLING TREE PROGRAM

'Tis the season for ordering trees! The SCCD offers conservation grade seedling trees at a nominal price for conservation purposes such as living snow fences, windbreaks, visual screens, noise barriers, erosion control, and wildlife habitat.

Bare root seedlings are offered in lots of 25 and plug seedlings in lots of 50. Plug species were very limited this year and have sold out quickly. The nursery hopes to have a larger inventory of those next season. The District also offers a variety package which includes five each of five different seedlings.

To download a printable order form or to order through the online store, visit www.sccdwy.org/tree-program



PERENNIALS FOR POLLINATORS

For the second year, the SCCD is offering perennials in partnership with Piney Island Native Plants. As with the conventional tree program, these are intended to be used as a conservation planting for pollinator habitat and will be sold in bulk quantities.



The SCCD is selling a Perennial Pollinator Package that includes seven each of the following species: Blanket Flower, Rocky Mountain Penstemon, Smooth Aster, Western Yarrow, and Wild Bergamot (or Beebalm). Perennials come in 10 cubic inch "cone-tainers." Perennials are generally ready the week before Memorial Day.

Piney Island Native Plants is a greenhouse and nursery producing locally-sourced, locally-adapted, containerized native plants for restoration, reclamation, and conservation-focused projects.

www.pineyislandnatives.com



Wyoming Water Development Commission: Critical Aging Irrigation Infrastructure Assessment

The Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) received funding from the 2022 Wyoming State Legislature to begin to address the needs of our irrigation systems across the state. Many of these systems are over 100 years old, have structural issues, and are less resilient to damage ([see Gering-Fort Laramie Canal](https://www.wyoming.gov/newsroom/2022/04/20/wyoming-water-development-commission-receives-funding-to-address-needs-of-irrigation-systems)). In the last year, 10 public meetings were held across the state to inform communities and solicit additional input. A list of critical irrigation structures within the State will be developed, prioritized, and evaluated to help the WWDC and Wyoming Legislature understand the magnitude of aging irrigation infrastructure issues. To learn more, visit WWDC's website at:

https://wwdc.state.wy.us/critical_infrastructure/CAI.html

The Cost of Conservation:

USDA, NRCS, and SCCD Funding Processes



Every year there seems to be some questions or confusion on USDA, NRCS, and SCCD funding programs and processes. We are fortunate, in Sheridan County, to have access to multiple funding streams, though differences between them does contribute to some confusion. We thought it would be a good idea to provide a bit of a summary of the main opportunities as we transition into the new program year.

The USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is probably one of the most widely used for installation of natural resource conservation practices. It has been used to fund fencing, stockwater developments, irrigation upgrades, invasive grass treatments, among other things. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as having a good project and receiving a check. At present, Sheridan County project applications compete with applications from Johnson County for the local funding pools. There are some additional state pools depending on project type or applicant eligibility-those applications compete with similar projects throughout the state.

- **Pre-application Activities.** Prior to an application being considered for funding, there are several things that must occur. The most important step is to work with NRCS staff on a plan to address natural resource concerns and meet your goals for your property. Once the plan is firmed up, applicants **MAY** be considered for funding after other applicant eligibility criteria are complete. Applicant and land eligibility requires an appointment with the Farm Service Agency to register or update records and complete annual eligibility forms. This is usually not too burdensome but does take some time and information.

- **Establishing Fund Priorities.** Funding is prioritized through public and partner input based on natural resource concerns and occasionally by project type. This input is gathered at an annual Local Work Group meeting. This meeting is typically in the spring **PRIOR** to a funding cycle and is hosted by the Conservation District to provide recommendations on natural resource priorities for the next year. So, during the spring 2023 meeting, participants will establish funding priorities for the 2024 funding cycle. The public is invited and encouraged to attend and provide input at the meeting. The meeting notice is advertised through local media as well as on the District website. In the recent past, partners have also provided input including Conservation District Boards, Farm Service Agency/County Committee, State and Federal Agencies, local government officials, and other local conservation organizations. **It is important to note that this group only establishes funding priorities for upcoming program years, it does not review, rank, discuss, or approve individual project applications.**

- **Ranking Funding Applications.** While applications for funding can be accepted throughout the year once a plan to address concerns has been developed, the “sign-up deadline” for a funding cycle is generally in November or December of the preceding year. Eligible applications will be ranked using a tool that measures how well the application addresses the resource concern priorities established by the Local Work Group. Once ranked, projects will be approved for funding based on the ranking score until the funding is exhausted. This typically occurs in the spring, often by the end of April in recent years. In some years, additional funding is allocated later in the year and awarded to additional projects in order of their ranking score.

- **Contracting and Completing a Project.** Once a project is selected for funding, NRCS staff will work through a contracting process with the landowner to implement the plan developed at the beginning of this process. It is important to ‘work out the kinks’ in the plan as much as possible before a project is considered for funding because it becomes difficult to make adjustments once selected for funding. Installation can begin after construction documents are issued and after the contract has been signed. **Payments are made to participants AFTER project components have been installed and certified by NRCS staff.** It is the participant’s responsibility to coordinate and pay contractors according to the terms agreed between them.

The SCCD Water Quality Improvements Program can be used for projects that have the potential to reduce bacteria and sediment contributions to waterbodies in the Tongue River, Goose Creek, and Prairie Dog Creek watersheds. Projects typically include fencing and water development or relocation of corrals/facilities to reduce livestock access to streams and replacement of eligible septic systems to eliminate sewage discharges to waterbodies. The program has two application periods each year, spring and fall, with application deadlines of February 1 and August 1. Projects that meet eligibility and readiness screening will be ranked according to relative environmental benefit. During the March and September meetings, the SCCD Board of Supervisors will allocate available funding resources. District staff will then work with the landowner to develop a contract. Installation can begin after the contract has been signed with payment being made **AFTER** the project has been installed and certified by District staff.

Regardless of the funding program or project type, it is always better to start the process early, rather than waiting until an application deadline. Projects that have more upfront planning and a solid understanding of specific project elements have a better chance of ranking well.

INVEST IN SHERIDAN'S NATURAL RESOURCES

SCCD is one of the 34 conservation districts in Wyoming. Each district has a unique program tailored to meet the specific natural resource needs of its district.

The SCCD is funded primarily through federal and state grants with some support from local funding sources, including contributions from private citizens.

As a political subdivision of state government that uses donations solely for public purposes, your investment in the SCCD is considered a tax-deductible charitable contribution.

Individual or business name

Mailing address

City, state, zip

Email address

Phone number

CONTRIBUTION AMOUNT

☐ \$50 ☐ \$100

☐ \$150 ☐ \$500

☐ Other \$ _____

CONTRIBUTION PREFERENCE

☐ Acme Power Plant Reclamation Project

☐ Oil Recycling & Tree Program

☐ Invasive Grasses & Range Monitoring

☐ Information & Outreach

☐ Anywhere needed

Please make checks payable to SCCD or donate online at www.sccdwy.org

WINTER TREE BURN

- Clark Van Hoosier, Arborist, City of Sheridan

Surviving the winter is the ultimate test for Wyoming's trees. While the winter climate is tough on all of our trees, evergreen trees are particularly susceptible to the realities of winter, especially while they are young. When spring finally returns to the Cowboy State, it is not uncommon to find that our evergreen needles have succumbed to some of the pressures of winter. This damage can range from minimal impact all the way up to full tree death, but the signs of damage typically presents itself in the form of browning needles. While there are a variety of reasons that needles turn brown, this type of damage is often categorized as winter burn.

So what causes winter burn? To understand that, it's best to understand the function of the needle. Just like a leaf on our deciduous trees, the needle acts as a solar panel for the tree creating energy through the process of photosynthesis. Through this process, water is lost from the plant through holes in the needle known as stomata. In the winter our deciduous trees drop their leaves and photosynthesis largely ceases. However, as evergreens retain their needles throughout the winter, the ability for photosynthesis (and thus water loss) remains.

There are three common scenarios in which winter burn occurs:

1. Our region experiences a winter warm spell in which the temperatures are greater than 50 degrees for multiple days in a row.
2. Sunlight hitting the south/southwest side of an evergreen can warm that side of the tree to the point where needles begin to photosynthesize. Reflected sunlight off the snow can also cause this temperature pocket to occur.
3. Large temperature swings, especially in late fall or early spring can create severe winter burn. If tree cells are active and not gradually hardened off, rapid temperature drops below freezing can easily damage needles.



MANAGING FOR WINTER BURN

1.Planting: Some species are more cold hardy than others and some locations are better than others. Putting the right tree in the right place can solve a majority of our tree issues. For evergreen trees, a spring or early summer planting is likely best. This will give the tree time to better develop a root system before winter.

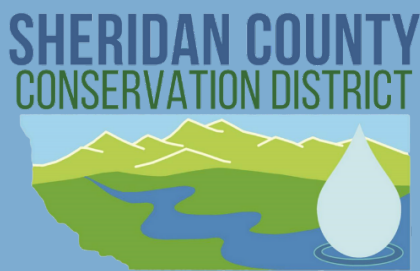
2.Mulch: A four inch layer of mulch out to the drip line of the tree may be the best thing you can do for a young tree. The mulch will help insulate roots from temperature fluctuations and it can also help to reduce water loss from the soil. Make sure to pull the mulch away from direct contact with the trunk. Mulching right up to the trunk can create an invitation for mice or voles to chew and girdle the bark.

3.Water: Keeping the soil moist is key. It's easy to forget about watering trees in the winter, but if we have an extended warm period with no snow, watering may be needed. Not sure if there's moisture in the soil? I always recommend homeowners purchase a moisture meter, they're cheap (\$20) and easy to use. They take the guesswork out of watering trees and they are readily available at local nurseries.

4.Avoid: The pruning or fertilizing of evergreens should be avoided in the late summer and fall. Both of these actions can cause a tree to push new growth out right before dormancy. This late season new growth will be more susceptible to winter burn. Most evergreen trees will be best served by pruning in winter, when pests such as beetles won't be drawn in to open wounds. De-icing salt, commonly used in the winter, can also damage trees. Avoid placing salt near evergreen trees and be mindful of runoff and overspray near salted roads or sidewalks.

5.Protect. For young evergreen trees certain protection measures can be taken. In exposed sites, covering the trees with burlap or installing a snow fence to reduce the amount of light and wind on the southern side of the tree can be beneficial. Outside of winter burn, many young evergreens fall victim to browsing in the winter from deer, rabbits and voles. A fence surrounding the tree can help easily deter this browsing.

6.Recover. If your tree does end up with some winter burn, it's likely that the tree will recover. Depending on the extent of the injury, most trees will put on new needles the next growing season. Aesthetically the tree could be a little odd for a few seasons, but over time the tree can recover. If you're uncertain of what to do with your tree, it is always a good idea to have a certified arborist come and offer professional advice.



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The mission of the Sheridan County Conservation District is to protect Sheridan County's water and land quality through assistance programs, information and outreach, monitoring, and planning.

SCCD's regular board meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month at 4 pm.

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2023 PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATERSHED MONITORING

We'll be out and about in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed this summer! Sampling will occur several days each month from May-September on five mainstem sites and three tributary sites (Wildcat Creek, Meade Creek, and Jenks Creek), pending landowner access.

Parameters to be sampled include instantaneous and continuous temperature, pH, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, *E. coli*, stage height, and discharge. In September, we'll collect macroinvertebrates and conduct habitat assessments at five of the mainstem sites.

SCCD COST-SHARE ASSISTANCE **SPRING DEADLINE**

The District is accepting requests for spring 2023 water quality improvement projects. The application deadline is **February 1, with the next one on August 1**. Funding is available for projects that address potential bacteria contributions to waterbodies within the Tongue River, Goose Creek, and Prairie Dog Creek watersheds. **Potential projects include fencing and water development, relocation of corrals, and replacement of eligible septic systems.**

Applications received by the deadline will be considered by the Board of Supervisors at the March meeting. At that time, the Board will prioritize and allocate funding resources so potential projects can be constructed in the spring or summer of 2023. Among other things, projects will be ranked based on their potential water quality benefit and readiness.

For more information, assessments, and applications, visit www.sccdwy.org or contact our office at 307-672-5820 ext. 3.



To unsubscribe from our mailing list, please email garrett.key@sccdwy.org