

# HIGH DESERT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Annual Report 2021



## History of Conservation Districts

Conservation Districts trace their roots back to the 1930s, when national attention was directed to the soil erosion crisis of the Dust Bowl. Conservation districts were initially established to promote the value of conserving soil and water to farmers. Today's districts have evolved; their areas of interest and expertise involve almost every area of natural resource conservation imaginable.

High Desert Conservation District (HDCD) works to help people and communities in Montezuma County take care of the natural resources in their area including soil, water, wildlife, trees and other plants. Using natural resources wisely helps to insure their availability well into the future. HDCD operates under the belief that conservation works best when local people, those who live and work in the area, play an active role in managing their natural resources. Because conservation districts are familiar with local issues they are able to identify and prioritize actions needed to manage the resources of a particular area.

High Desert Conservation District stands ready to offer technical assistance and educational guidance to land owners and managers, local governments, teachers, students and people from every walk of life. HDCD can provide information and help on matters such as soil conservation, flood prevention, drainage, irrigation and sediment prevention.

## Board of Supervisors

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David Temple

Vice President,  
Joe Lanier

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Secretary,  
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Supervisor,  
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## Staff

Executive Director,  
Gretchen Rank

District Manager,  
Neva Connolly

DC Technican,  
Rocky Rockwell



## Seedling Plant Sales

Each year around October, the HDCD opens the Annual Tree Sale for purchase of trees, shrubs, and native plants grown at the Colorado State Forestry Nursery. The initial plant stock was limited in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but sales were strong for spring planting in 2022. Few conservation efforts provide the extensive and enduring benefits of planting seedling trees. Seedling trees help enhance wildlife habitat, protect water supplies, reduce soil erosion, serve as living snow fences and wind breaks, and reforest burned areas.



## District Conservation Technician

HDCD's District Technician is an agronomist that helps to address natural resource concerns on local farms and ranches. The Technician assists landowners with technical assistance for conservation planning and works as a liaison with the NRCS for USDA cost-share opportunities. HDCD's Technician is also available to help with one-on-one site visits, technical design, and consultations. In 2021, the District Technician, Rocky Rockwell, assisted customers with the no-till seed drill and manure spreader rentals and conservation supply sales, performed surveys for landowners converting open ditches to pipelines, assisted with the conversion of side roll irrigation to center pivots, and addressed various landowner concerns regarding irrigation issues. In addition to working with landowners on water resources and irrigation issues, the District Technician assists landowners in addressing soil health concerns and implementing practices to improve soil health and viability.

Planting seeds  
of inspiration  
to promote  
conscious  
stewardship of  
our natural  
resources

MISSION STATEMENT





## No-Till Seed Drill Rental

A No-Till Seed Drill is a planter that allows for placement of seeds in the ground without having to drastically disturb the topsoil beforehand. Using a no-till seed drill can result in reduced compaction, reduced soil erosion, increased organic matter, improved soil structure and better infiltration; just a few of the positive attributes associated with no-till. The District's No-Till Seed Drill is most often used to rejuvenate tired pastures without having to disc or plough and to plant competition for weeds after a control method has been applied. The drill has been used in many cases to plant covercrops, a diverse mix of seed that helps improve the water holding capacity, fertility and structure of the soil. Over 2000 acres in Montezuma County have been seeded with the No-Till Drill in the last 5 years. The District also has a manure spreader available for rent to landowners.



## Irrigation Water Management Project

The District continued its nozzle exchange program and irrigation water management project during 2021. This water conservation practice includes nozzle exchange and a flow analysis program that assists local landowners to swap out older, worn irrigation nozzles with new, pressure compensating nozzles to achieve greater water use efficiency while maintaining soil health and resulting in stable production yields. As part of the consultation with HDCD staff, landowners participating in the program received an in-depth analysis of water budgeting and irrigation scheduling. This program will continue in 2022, and aims to increase water use efficiency by 10 to 20 percent for producers enrolled in the program.

## Conservation Supplies

The High Desert Conservation District continued to sell a number of conservation products during 2021. The HDCD supplies include weed barrier cloth, rabbit cages, bamboo stakes, and water saving polymer added to planting soil. The District supplies are sold without the markup from typical retail stores.

## Looking toward the future

The High Desert Conservation District Board of Supervisors are committed to helping local producers strive towards a sustainable future, even in the face of long-term drought and uncertainties.

The Board will continue to pursue available grant funding to increase sustainability and to mitigate the challenges of climate challenges and reduced productivity losses faced by the producers in SW Colorado.

## Montezuma School to Farm Program

The District continues to support the Montezuma School to Farm Program, dedicated to providing integrated, hands-on school garden classes throughout Montezuma County. The program now serves more the 2,300 students with school garden programs and curriculum, and has grown to incorporate 6 school gardens, a 7-acre production space and heritage orchards.



## Soil Health Initiative

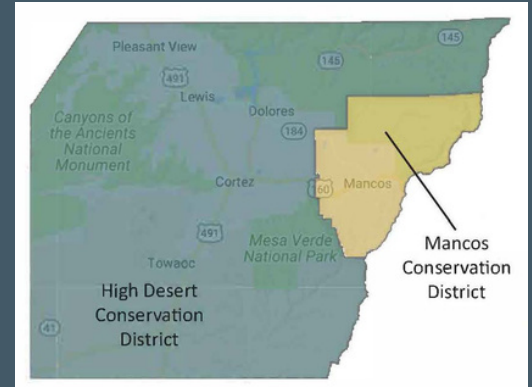
Healthy soils help to capture and store water, improve nutrient cycling, help prevent erosion, increase drought resilience, and are the foundation of a healthy agricultural ecosystem. In 2021, the High Desert Conservation District partnered with the Mancos Conservation District to help local producers understand and improve their soil health by using soil techniques to reduce nutrient and soil losses on their fields. The Mancos CD will provide funding for producers to implement resilient soil health practices, such as no-till seed drilling, planting cover crops, and contour farming, while HDCD will provide staff and resources to support the producers in their soil health efforts. The majority of this project will continue into spring and summer of 2022.



## Master Land Steward Program

This intensive 9-week course highlights water, soil, production and all facets of effective land management for both beginning as well as long-time area farmers and ranchers. This program has traditionally been held from January to March every year, but was put on hold in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff is putting together a program for 2022.

## District Boundaries



## Monthly Meetings

The High Desert Conservation District holds its Board of Supervisor Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of every month from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. The meetings are held via Zoom, and can be joined at this address: <https://zoom.us/j/7856459574>

## Office

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