



United States Department of Agriculture

COLORADO **2021** Natural Resources Conservation Service
ANNUAL REPORT



Natural Resources Conservation Service

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February 2022



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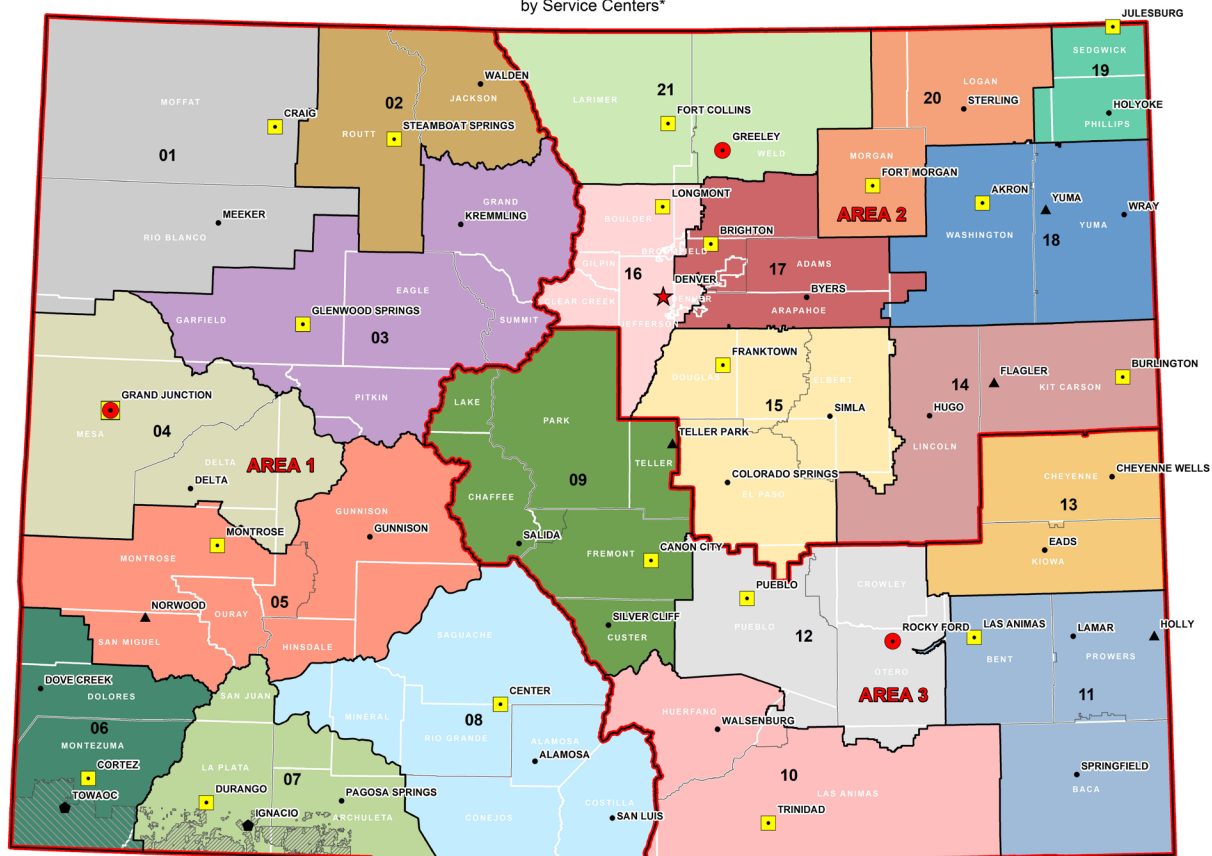
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Colorado NRCS Resource Teams

by Service Centers*



Office					
Field	•	Area/Field	•	County	□
District	▲	State	★	NRCS Service Center	□
Tribal	●	Team Lead	■	NRCS Resource Team	□
				NRCS Areas	■

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
Helping People Help the Land
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Date: 2/11/2019
*Teller/Park exception

0 12.5 25 50 Miles
1 in = 44 miles
1:2,763,606
Source: USDA - NRCS

Inside NRCS in Colorado

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides services in every county across Colorado. The Agency is committed to helping private landowners care and make healthy choices for the land and water, while using them productively. Through voluntary incentive-based programs, NRCS works directly with farmers, ranchers, forest owners and other land stewards to provide technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on private lands. The NRCS does much of its work through partnerships and conservation programs associated with the Farm Bill.

For more than 80 years, NRCS has worked in partnership with private landowners and organizations, local and state governments, non-profits, and other federal agencies to maintain healthy and productive working lands.

Partnerships expand the reach and depth of conservation on the land. The federal, state, and nonprofit groups that comprise the Agency's conservation partnerships have a diversity of expertise in discipline, area, and focus. As partners in conservation, these groups share their unique areas of expertise and conservation work to put more conservation on the ground.

NRCS provides conservation assistance in cooperation with each of its partners across the state through a locally-led approach. Colorado's Department of Agriculture (CDA), the Colorado State Soil Conservation Board (CSCB), the Colorado Association of Conservation District (CACD), the 75 local Conservation Districts (CD), Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Intermountain Joint Venture (a division of US Fish and Wildlife Service), River's Edge West, Trout Unlimited, American Forest Foundation, Central Colorado Conservancy, and Colorado State University (CSU) are all critical partners for the Agency.



LOCAL WORK-GROUPS & the State Technical Committee



FY-21 Top Five Natural Resource Concerns

- Water Quality
- Water Quantity
- Rangeland Health
- Soil Health
- Forest Health

“Listening at the local level is essential. Land-use and natural resources concerns vary from community to community, as well as operation to operation. Gathering information and recommendations from the landowners we service is one of the best resources we have to establish priorities and to help address natural resource needs.”

Clint Evans
NRCS State Conservationist, CO

NRCS coordinates with the state's 75 conservation districts to hold local work-group meetings in order to help identify natural resource concerns and to help guide Farm Bill program implementation at the local level.

Data generated by local work-groups is then forwarded to the State Technical Committee. State Technical Committees serve in an advisory capacity to the NRCS and other agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the implementation of the natural resources conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation.

Participants for both the local work-group and the State Technical Committees can include representatives from federal, state, and local natural resource agencies, American Indian Tribes, agricultural and environmental organizations, as well as agricultural producers.





Top 10 Conservation Practices Installed through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in FY-21

Conserving natural resources on privately owned lands requires a diverse approach. A variety of options and solutions are needed to address and mitigate natural resource concerns while assisting landowners achieve their land-use goals.

Conservation practices are utilized to treat and combat natural resource concerns. FY-21 most utilized conservation practices in Colorado include:

PRACTICE CODE AND NAME	NUMBER APPLIED	ACRES APPLIED
587 Structure for Water Control	296	156,876
430 Irrigation Pipeline	286	75,738
614 Watering Facility	242	824,982.05
449 Irrigation Water Management	234	47,793
382 Fence	206	348,351
516 Livestock Pipeline	181	476,741
666 Forest Stand Improvement	181	16,791
533 Pumping Plant	167	220,880
384 Woody Residue Treatment	160	16,201
443 Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	147	9,625



Did you know...

Cover crop plants are grown primarily to benefit the successful growth of other future crops. They also remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and help make your soil more resilient to a changing climate.



CONSERVATION CROP Rotation

Conservation crop rotation is growing a planned sequence of various crops on the same piece of land for a variety of conservation purposes.

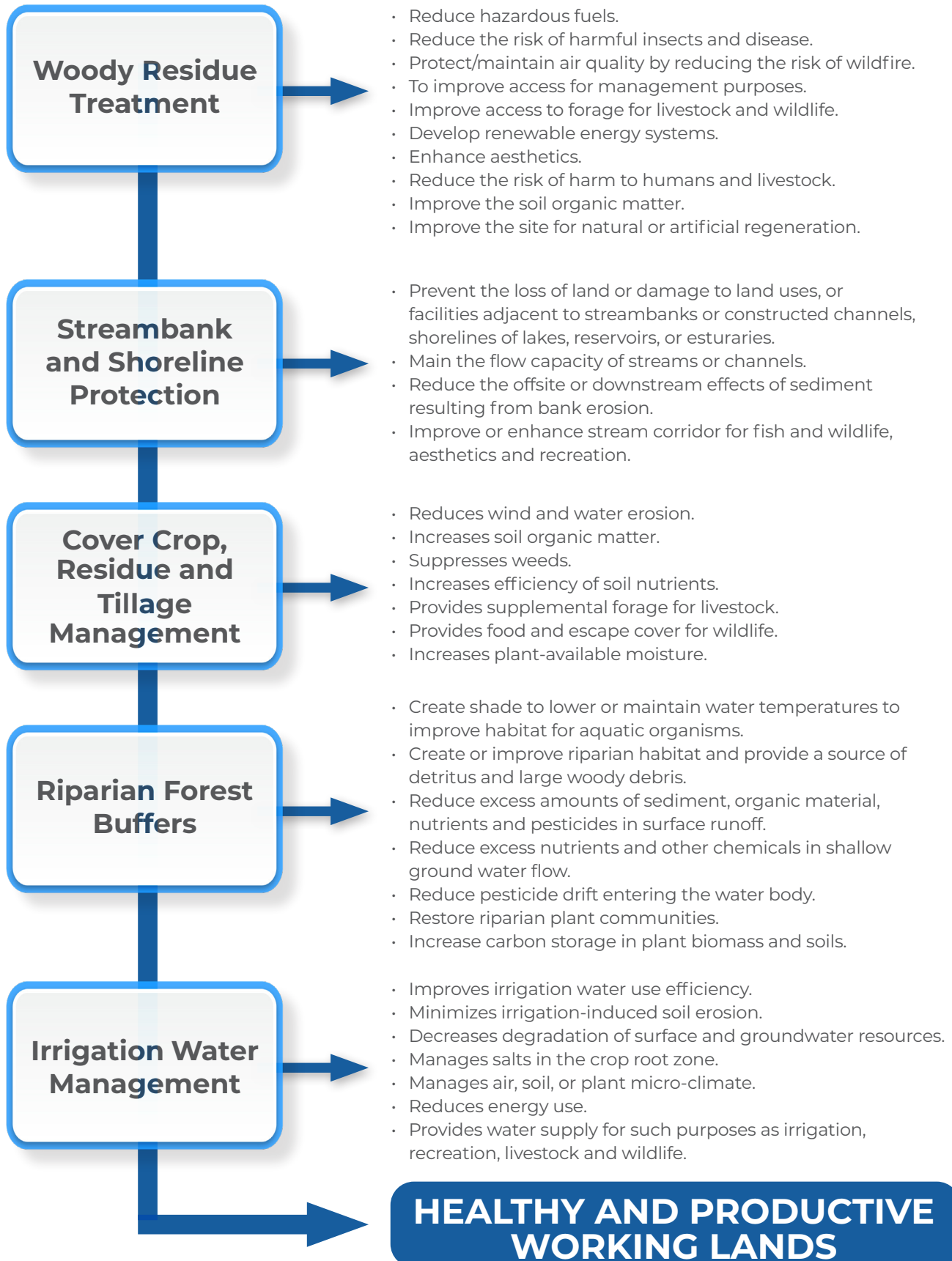


Crop rotations help:

- improve crop yields,
- improve the workability of the soil,
- reduce soil crusting,
- increase water available for plants,
- reduce erosion and sedimentation,
- recycle plant nutrients in the soil,
- provide better distribution of labor during the crop season by using different crops, planting dates, and harvest periods,
- reduce fertilizer & insecticide inputs break insect, disease, and weed cycles,
- add diversity to farm operations.



Natural Resources **BENEFITS** of Conservation Practices





CTA

Conservation Technical
Assistance (CTA)

Some landowners and natural resource stakeholders partner with NRCS, seeking only the Agency's technical expertise and assistance. NRCS works with those entities through the **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)** program. CTA is a Farm Bill program which helps the Agency provide land users assistance and opportunities to address concerns and problems related to the use of natural resources. It provides assistance to conduct resource assessments, develop practice designs, establish resource monitoring, or follow up on installed practices. One of the most popular tools the Agency provides through CTA is the development of a conservation plan.

- In FY-21, NRCS in Colorado wrote conservation technical assistance plans to treat over 645,760 acres and applied CTA on over 197,744 project acres.

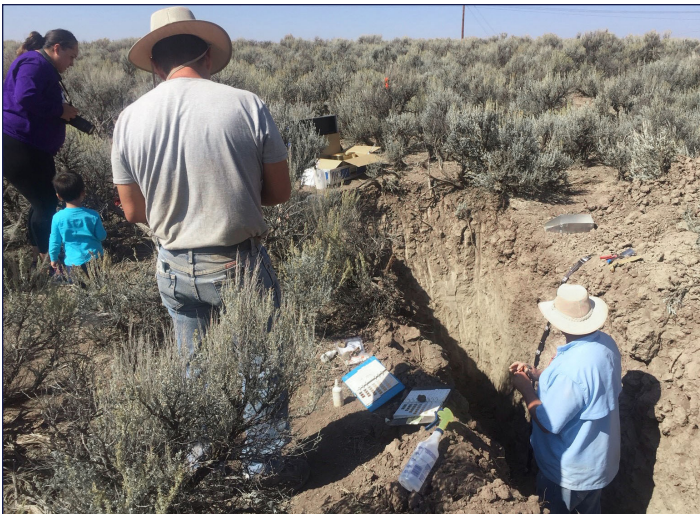


Southern Ute Tribe Weather Station Installation

Colorado's Southern Ute Tribe and the NRCS in Colorado have a long-standing partnership where ideas are shared, and projects are implemented. The installation of the Tribe's automated climate monitoring and data collection sites is a shining example of the partnership's collaborative efforts.

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe is located near Durango, Colorado on just over 307,000 acres, with 1,510 members currently enrolled, who reside both on and off the reservation. The Tribe has many important enterprises including agriculture and is a critical component to the viability of the area as it is currently the largest employer in La Plata County and supports many area non-profit organizations.

One of the collaborative efforts between the NRCS and the Tribal Nations is the installation of Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) systems on to Tribal lands including the one on Colorado's Southern Ute Tribal land near Ignacio, Colorado. "The installation of the Tribal Soil Climate Analysis Network (Tribal SCAN) supports activities on Tribal lands across the U.S., said Brian Domonkos, NRCS Snow Survey Supervisor in Colorado.



The SCAN system focuses on agricultural areas of the U.S. and is composed of over 200 stations. The NRCS National Water Climate Center provides the equipment and operates the system. A typical SCAN site monitors soil moisture content at several depths, collects climate information, air temperature, relative humidity, solar radiation, wind speed and direction, liquid precipitation, and barometric pressure. The Tribal network is designed to support natural resource assessments, tribal agricultural enterprises, and conservation activities on Tribal lands.

"The installation of the system was very much a collaboration between tribal members and NRCS staff," said Edwin McCaw,

NRCS Tribal Liaison in Ignacio, Colorado. "The NRCS provided conservation technical assistance as we conducted soil assessments which helped calibrate the weather station, while the tribal staff provided the labor for installation and future site maintenance."

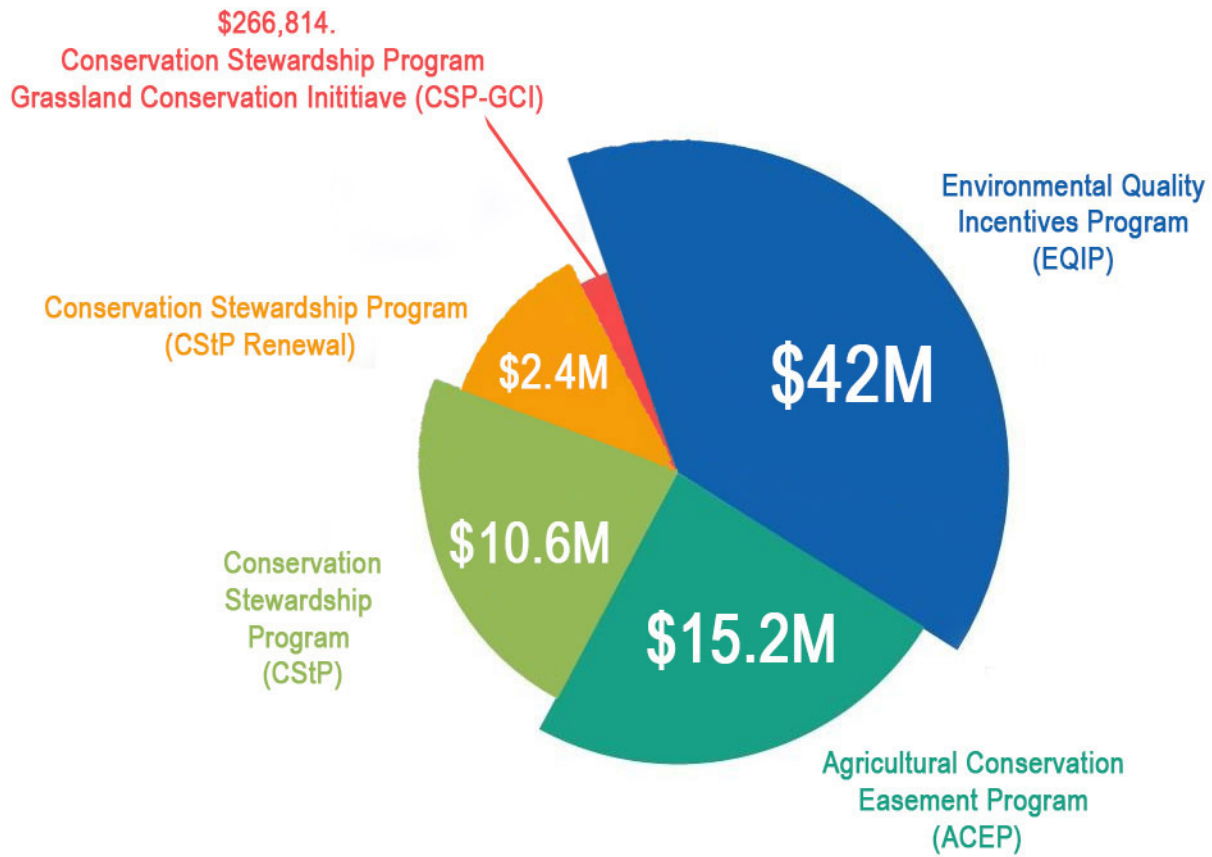
Tribal SCAN data is used to:

- monitor drought development, triggering plans, and mitigation policies,
- investigate and document climate change trends,
- predict the long-term sustainability of cropping systems and watershed health,
- monitor and predict changes in crop, range and woodland productivity, and
- predict regional shifts in irrigation water requirements.

"Nationally, this project was a good opportunity to provide important soil and atmospheric climate data in underserved areas," said Mike Wilson, former NRCS Climate Change Senior Scientist. "The best aspect, however, was it allowed conservationists, soil scientists, and other NRCS staff to work directly with various Tribes across the country and through this interaction, NRCS can better understand how our data can best serve all communities and then build on that opportunity."



FINANCIAL Assistance



PROGRAM	OBLIGATED CONTRACTS	ACRES
EQIP	556	403,851
CSP-GCI	24	2,973
CStP (New)	92	199,370
CStP (Renewal)	24	80,889
ACEP	14	66,200+

NRCS offers voluntary programs to eligible landowners and agricultural producers to provide financial and technical assistance to help manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. Through these programs, the agency approves contracts to provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns or opportunities to help save energy, improve soil, water, plant, air, animal and related resources on agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest land.





EQIP

Environmental Quality
Incentives Program (EQIP)

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is NRCS' most flexible conservation program. Through EQIP, landowners receive financial and technical assistance to implement structural and management conservation practices which optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land. NRCS offers a variety of opportunities for Colorado landowners to receive EQIP funding including targeting resource concern, customer demographics, and allocations based on the 21 NRCS resource teams located around the state.

- In FY-21, NRCS funded 556 contracts, helping address resource concerns on 403,851 acres, totaling \$42M.
- From 2009–2021, NRCS in Colorado invested over \$377M, towards 8,137 projects to treat nearly 5.5M acres.

FY-21 EQIP Funding Opportunities Included:

- Air Quality Initiative
- Animal Waste Management
- Beginning & Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher
- Conservation Activity Plan
- Colorado River Salinity Program
- Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Initiative
- Source Water Protection
- High Tunnels
- On-Farm Energy
- Organic Initiative
- Wildlife Habitat
- Resource Team Fund Pools
- Water Management Entities
- Tribal Conservation Projects
- Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiatives:
 - Sage Grouse (Greater and Gunnison), and Lesser Prairie Chicken
- EQIP CIC Addressing:
 - Soil Health and Resilience
 - Improved Water Efficiency
 - Grazing Land Resilience to Drought
 - Forest Land Resiliency and Resistance to Drought
 - Ogallala Ground Water Conservation Projects, and
 - Tribal Conservation Projects



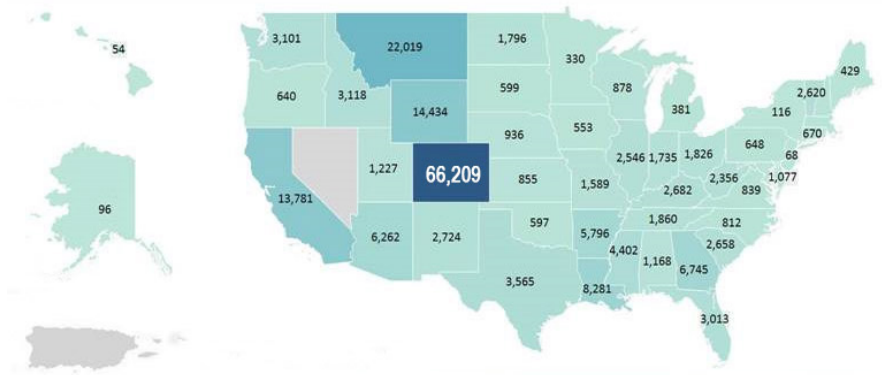


ACEP

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** provides financial and technical assistance to help landowners conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements ACEP program, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments, private landowners, Land Trusts and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) component, NRCS helps to restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands.

ACEP FY-21 TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY STATE



- Colorado lead the Country in ACEP enrollments in FY-21, totaling 1/3 of all the acres that were enrolled in last fiscal year.
- In FY-21, NRCS funded 14 easements, totaling \$15.2M and protecting over 66,200 acres.





Melissa Ogilvie owner of Speedwell Farm & Gardens applies compost. Speedwell Farm & Gardens is a Restore Colorado grant recipient, and supplies produce to many of the Boulder County, food businesses that fund Restore Colorado's regenerative farming grants.

USDA Helps Urban Communities Improve Colorado Soils While Supporting Urban Agriculture

USDA's commitment to urban communities is no better evidenced than in its partnership with Boulder County, Colorado. As an awardee and participant of the USDA's 2021 Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CCFWR) pilot project, Boulder County launched Restore Colorado, a program that connects restaurants and food businesses with local food producers to fund regenerative farming projects that sequester carbon and support healthy soil on Colorado farms and ranches.

"This project illustrates how the USDA can help facilitate a full circle moment between urban activism and the implementation of agricultural conservation practices on working farmland," said Christian Herrmann, Boulder County Climate Communications Specialist.

Here's how it works:

- Boulder County used their USDA CCFWR grant to launch, coordinate, and promote the Restore Colorado program with non-profit partners Mad Agriculture and

Zero Foodprint, 2020 James Beard Humanitarian of the Year award recipient.

- Participating businesses and restaurants become Zero Foodprint members and add an opt-out 1% fee to their customer's bills which goes towards Restore Colorado grants.
- Restore Colorado grants are administered by Mad Agriculture and distributed directly to Colorado farms and ranches, mostly in Boulder County and Denver.
- These grants fund climate beneficial regenerative farming projects, like compost application and cover crop planting, that can be costly for farmers to implement without support.
- Zero Foodprint member restaurants and businesses are more incentivized to buy local and purchase products from farms receiving Restore Colorado grants.

"As chefs/caterers for many years in NYC, we felt so far away from where our food came from," said Debbie Seaford-Pitula,



owner of Zero Foodprint member Whistling Boar. "Moving to Colorado was our way to create a company that was sustainable and, by choosing to source locally, supports the community around us. We are so thankful to be a part of Zero Foodprint because they made it easy to support the farms we know and love right here in our "neighborhood" We pride ourselves with providing our clients with the delicious produce grown by Speedwell Farm & Gardens and to know that our 1% donation goes directly to help Mel and Cody continue to do what they do, makes our heart ache with joy."

The owners of Speedwell Farm and Gardens, Cody Jurbala and Melissa Ogilvie said, "When chefs and restaurants participate in Zero Foodprint programs, they are helping to ensure their efforts directly affect ethical farms in their community and across the country. The Restore Colorado program helped us by contributing funds towards local compost that we needed for our newly acquired farm property. The use of compost is essential for regenerative vegetable farms. Every year we add local compost to our beds adding fertility and carbon back into the soil. This helps ensure that we are growing nutrient dense produce.

The funding we received from Restore Colorado, felt like a huge weight lifted off our shoulders. Just knowing that our mission at Speedwell Farm & Gardens was worthy of this type of funding was a boost of motivation and dedication to regenerative techniques."

"The USDA grant has really helped us raise awareness with the public," said Herrmann. "It's the public that chooses to support participating restaurants and businesses adding a percentage of their bill to directly fund these grants that improve soil health. It's exciting to see participating food businesses, like Whistling Boar, purchase from the farms receiving Restore Colorado grants. This program is growing the regenerative agricultural movement right here in Boulder County and reinvesting in the local food economy. It's connecting Colorado food businesses to the land and highlighting how urban communities can take climate action in their own backyard."

Since its launch, Restore Colorado has had over 30 food businesses sign up to participate and has formed partnerships with the City and County of Denver and the Colorado Department of Agriculture.

"David and I created Whistling Boar knowing that we wanted to do things differently. As chefs/caterers for many years in NYC, we felt so far away from where our food came from and we could not handle the waste that came with the events," said Debbie Pitula, owner of the Whistling Boar. "Moving to Colorado was our way to create a company that was obtainable, sustainable, and by choosing to source locally, help support the community around us. We are so thankful to be a part of Zero FoodPrint because they made it easy to support the farms we know and love right here in our neighborhood. We pride ourselves with providing our clients with the delicious produce grown by Speedwell Farm and Garden and to know that our 1% donation to ZFP goes directly to help Mel and Cody continue to do what they do, makes our heart ache with joy. How could we not join?"



David Pitula and Debbie Seafood-Pitula, owner of the Whistling Boar.





CStP

Conservation Stewardship
Program (CStP)

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP)** helps farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners earn payments for expanding conservation activities while maintaining agricultural production on their land. CStP also encourages the adoption of new technologies and management techniques.

- In FY-21, NRCS invested over \$13M on 138 New and Renewal projects totaling over 283,000 acres.
- From 2010–2021, NRCS in Colorado invested over \$240M on over 2900 projects, covering nearly 5.9M acres.





CSP/ GCI

Conservation Stewardship
Program / Grassland
Conservation Initiative
(CSP/GCI)

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) / Grasslands Conservation Initiative (GCI)** is a new program implemented in 2019. Eligible lands are limited to cropland for which base acres have been maintained under FSA's ARC/PLC and were planted to grass or pasture, including idle or fallow, during a specific period. Enrolled acreage must be managed consistently with a grassland conservation plan.

- In FY-21, NRCS in Colorado invested over \$266,800 on 24 projects, totaling nearly 3,000 acres.



EWP

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

The **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)** was established by Congress to respond to emergencies created by natural disasters. It is designed to relieve imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

Typical Values at Risk:

- Life and Safety
- Residential Properties
- Commercial Properties
- Transportation
- Water Infrastructure
- Utilities
- Endangered Species
- Cultural Resources

Typical Recovery Measures:

- Erosion & Sediment Control
- Streambank Protection
- Structure Protection
- Flood Diversions
- Debris Removal
- Dike Repairs
- Mulching & Seeding
- Building Protection
- Road Protection

Over the past 24 years, Colorado experienced record breaking natural and man-made disasters which have had devastating impacts on the State's natural resources, private landowners, and their communities. Through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, the NRCS has helped many impacted Coloradoans navigate towards stability, notably more so within the past 10 years. Over 80% of the State's EWP funding allocated between 1998 and 2020 has been expended between 2010 and 2020.

1998–2020

NRCS EWP FA & TA	\$165,654,393
Sponsor	\$48,523,873
Total	\$214,178,267

2010–2020

NRCS EWP FA & TA	\$147,959,393
Sponsor	\$42,443,873
Total	\$190,403,267



Colorado Disaster EWP Response Summary FY-21

INCIDENT NAME	Grizzly Creek	Pine Gulch	Cameron Peak	East Troublesome	Calwood	Totals
COUNTY	Garfield	Mesa/Garfield	Larimer	Grand/Larimer/Jackson	Boulder	
DATE STARTED	8/10/2020	7/31/2020	8/13/2020	10/14/2020	10/17/2020	
SPONSOR(S)	Garfield County, City of Glenwood Springs	Mesa County, Garfield County	Greeley, Larimer County	Grand County, Northern Water	Boulder County Parks & Open Space	
NRCS INVESTMENT	\$541,245	\$811,546	\$12,058,966	\$30,800,571	\$4,381,000	\$48,593,328
SPONSOR INVESTED	\$111,258	\$164,062	\$2,573,395	\$8,663,524	\$1,327,000	\$12,839,239
VALUE OF PROPERTY PROTECTED	\$23,625,000			\$53,625,911	\$12,440,693	\$89,691,604
NET BENEFIT	\$18,625,000			\$13,663,815	\$7,132,693	\$39,421,508
OUTCOMES	Protected Glenwood Spring Municipal water intakes from sediment and flooding, reduced flood threat to 15 project sites.	Reduced threat of flooding/sedimentation to homes, road infrastructure. 25 project sites.	Erosion control, sediment reduction, debris removal to benefit 5 municipal water reservoirs, homes and transportation infrastructure.	Erosion control, sediment reduction, debris removal to benefit 4 municipal & ag water reservoirs, protect water diversions, transportation infrastructure, and homes from threat of future flooding/sedimentation.	Protecting life and property from erosion, sediment and threat from future flooding for homes, county road infrastructure and facilities.	
NUMBER PEOPLE DIRECT BENEFITS	111,676			4,527	5,944	122,147



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