

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Utah Association of Conservation Districts' 63rd Annual Convention

Wendell Stenbridge, November 2, 2011

In my first year as president I am learning the job and enjoying this opportunity to represent your interests. Like you I am busy with my own operation! These are challenging times for many of us! As conservation district supervisors we care about the soil, water, and natural resources in our counties. We are needed. We have our hands in the soil. Often other interests (i.e. recreation, development) conflict with agriculture or unintended consequences threatens our livelihood and the sustainability of the land and water we are responsible for.

The conservation district is the advocate for the natural resources in your counties.

The UACD was established in 1948 to support the districts' work and represent your interests, "as one voice" at the state-level. That one voice is the result of the resolution process. At this convention resolutions will be adopted as additions to the UACD policy positions.

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The activity and initiative of your districts is important to UACD. We are interested in how best to support and assist you. We want conservation districts to be relevant to the needs of the community. We need to be more visible. The importance of our work needs to be better understood. With our partners NRCS and the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food we have asked that a resource assessment be completed for each county. These assessments are the district's statement of the priority natural resource concerns and should provide information that will be useful to our partners that are asking for our direction in allocating technical and financial assistance.

As supervisors, our responsibility is to direct the work of the districts. We are needed to "show up and speak up". We do not need to do all the work! All districts are served by a zone coordinator and most districts have (or access to) technical staff. Our total staff has decreased slightly with budget reductions over the last four years. It is a priority to maintain and where possible employ more conservation planners.

I value our partners (many are here with us). We need our partners and our partners need us! We are interested and want to be included in the local delivery of state and federal conservation programs you (our partners) are responsible for. We (conservation districts) are trusted by private landowner. With our partners we are able to get conservation projects from state and federal agency levels built on-the-ground.

A personal experience as chairman of the Kamas Valley Conservation District:

Summit County is growing and agriculture is not as important in some areas (i.e. Park City) as it once was. Our district has been reluctant to give much attention to the conservation needs in the more urban parts of the county. We are a lot more comfortable with supporting the farmers and ranchers we have always worked with. NRCS programs are what we know and so we have not paid much attention to conservation needs outside of agriculture. I am learning we need to think more broadly – bust out the box we have been operating in! Two years ago we had the opportunity to hire a watershed coordinator. Lars Christensen has expanded our abilities and represents our district in areas of the county we had not paid much attention to [Upper Weber Watershed Water Quality Committee].

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Recently UACD questioned why our district was not responsible for the local delivery of NPS 319 water quality funding administered by the Utah Division of Water Quality. The Division had contracted this responsibility to the Synderville Basin Reclamation District.

When we asked why? It was reported that we had said, “*We were not interested.*” We probably did. Yet now we have an employee, he is doing a good job! With the encouragement and help of our zone coordinator, Ray Loveless, and the Summit Conservation District we needed to “speak up” and make known

that we were interested. Together we sent a letter to Walt Baker expressing our interest and outlining what the districts had to offer.

For Conservation Districts to be relevant and a force in our counties we need to take seriously our “authority and duties.” [Utah Code 17D-3-103 Conservation District Status, Authority, and Duties]

The Kamas Valley District is stretching. With the encouragement and help of UACD we are busting out of the box and are needed to address more priority conservation needs in Summit County. The needs are enormous and it may not be possible, with the limited resources, to accomplish all that is needed. Yet, what is possible is for the district to take a position, to show up and speak up.

By preparing the Summit County Resource Assessment not only are we better informed we have taken a position. In a well thought out publication we have identified the conservation priorities. Ronald Regan said during his administration, “*The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.*” We have staff and partners that can do the heavy lifting. Often, what is needed and what is within our ability and is our duty, is to speak-up, take and position, and be heard.

Thank you