BIG DRY CREEK

STATE OF THE WATERSHED

Newsletter of the Big Dry Creek Watershed Association

Special Agricultural Community Edition
Conservation Grants for Landowners

Local Landowners Express Concerns Regarding Big Dry Creek Flows and Erosion

Over the last three years, several landowners, farmers and ditch company representatives have participated in the Big Dry Creek Watershed Association through attendance at bimonthly meetings. At these meetings, long-time watershed residents Don and Barbara Rosenbrock, Barry Marrs and Gary Howard have expressed concerns regarding flooding and erosion in the lower watershed.

The Watershed Association is working to develop a better understanding of the flow and stream stability issues along the creek. Some of the activities in support of this effort have included inviting guest speakers to address various aspects of these issues. For example, during 1999, stormwater engineers from the cities of Westminster, Broomfield and Northglenn and the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District discussed the measures that are in place in the urbanizing portions of the watershed to help control peak flows during storm runoff events. During 1999 under 319 grant funding, a stream survey was conducted to identify portions of the creek that were experiencing accelerated erosion and to suggest approaches to help control this erosion.

Although there are no "quick fixes" to the problems being experienced by local landowners, there are measures that can be taken to help reduce the impacts of hydrologic changes in the watershed. This newsletter contains information on programs that may help provide financial and technical assistance to farmers facing environmental challenges. The Watershed Association welcomes the participation of local landowners in working cooperatively to develop approaches to managing and reducing these problems.

Conservation Reserve Program Funding Increased to $350 Million

In April 2000, Agricultural Secretary Dan Glickman announced that landowners can receive more money for participation in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) continuous signup. The new financial incentives—totaling up to $350 million in the next three years—include signing bonuses and more money for installing and maintaining conservation practices. Glickman said, "In difficult economic times for farm country, this additional $350 million will mean more cash in farmer's pockets."

The CRP encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is also

In This Issue:

provided to establish vegetative cover practices. The purpose of the program is to reduce soil erosion, protect the Nation's ability to produce food, reduce sedimentation in streams and lakes, improve water quality, establish wildlife habitat and enhance forest and wetland resources.

The enhancements to the program include:

- An up-front signing bonus of $10 per acre for every year the contract covers. This amounts to $100 to $150 per acre at the start of the contract to help defray up-front installation costs for filter strips, riparian buffers, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, shelter belts and living snow fences.
- A payment equal to 40 percent of the practice installation cost, in addition to the 50 percent cost-share paid by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for establishing certain approved practices.
- Increases in maintenance rate incentives for certain practices involving tree planting, fencing, or water development. Between $2 to $5 per acre may be added to existing maintenance rate incentives.
- Updated marginal pastureland rental rates nationwide to better reflect the market value of these lands.

The rule changes and incentives apply only to certain CRP continuous signup practices that generally include small acreages that provide high environmental benefits because of their impact on much larger areas. Unlike the regular CRP program, the continuous signup program allows producers to enroll eligible highly environmentally sensitive land at anytime, without waiting for a signup period or competing against other offers.

For more information on signing up for the CRP, contact the Brighton NRCS office (303)-659-7004.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) Funding Available

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 1996 Farm Bill conservation provisions, a variety of funding is available for conservation. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for those who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat. It provides both technical assistance and cost-share payments to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Under the program, participants who own or control land agree to prepare and implement a wildlife habitat development plan. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers participants technical and financial assistance for these practices. The USDA and the participant enter into a cost-share agreement for implementation of the plan, typically lasting from 5 to 10 years after the agreement is signed. Under the agreement, the landowner agrees to install and maintain the WHIP practices and allow NRCS or its agent access to monitor the effectiveness of the practices. The USDA agrees to provide technical assistance and pay up to 75 percent of the cost of installing the wildlife habitat practices.

WHIP funding is not restricted to agricultural lands and may be used to restore aquatic habitat as well as adjacent streambanks and uplands. WHIP may be a good resource for enhancing conditions on Big Dry Creek both in the urban and agricultural areas.

For more information, see www.nrcs.usda.gov or contact Eugene Backhaus (303) 236-2903 or Eugene.Backhaus@CO.USDA.GOV at the NRCS Metro Field Office.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program, established under the 1996 Farm Bill, which offers farmers and ranchers a tool to address their natural resources concerns while achieving the most environmental benefits through locally developed priority areas and natural resource concerns.

EQIP offers financial, educational, and technical help to install or implement structural, vegetative and management practices called for in 5- to 10-year contracts. These practices—which include manure management systems, pest management and erosion controls—help improve and maintain the health of natural resources. Cost sharing may pay up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices.

For more information, contact the Brighton NRCS office (303)-659-7004.

Activities of the Big Dry Creek Watershed Association

Since 1997, the Big Dry Creek Watershed Association has been working to scientifically assess conditions in the Big Dry Creek watershed. The Association also diligently works to serve as a forum where a variety of perspectives can be expressed and considered as watershed concerns and issues are explored in bimonthly meetings.

Over the last few years, the Association has collected and analyzed biological, chemical and physical data collected along the creek. Results indicate that the stream is in relatively good condition and is an amenity to the communities in its watershed. As a result of these findings, one of the key priorities for the Watershed Association is to promote riparian zone stewardship to avoid losing this important natural feature as urban development continues in the basin. Enforcement of storm water quality and quantity controls and implementation of erosion and sediment control practices during construction are key priorities for communities in the urban area to protect the stream. In the agricultural area, controlling cattle access to the stream would help to reduce impacts. Even with implementation of these measures, increased flows in Big Dry Creek resulting from development will put pressure on the stream system, accelerating the natural erosion process. In addition to working to restore areas that are already impacted, it will be important for the Watershed Association to continue monitoring conditions in the watershed, work to limit adverse influences on the stream and inform other appropriate parties of conditions needing improvement in their jurisdictions.

CSU Professors Interested in Streambank Stabilization Projects on Big Dry Creek

At the June 2000 Big Dry Creek Watershed Association meeting, Dr. Brian Bledsoe and Dr. Chester Watson of the Colorado State University Civil Engineering Department spoke on "Stream Stabilization Principles and Approaches for Big Dry Creek." Both have had experience working on stream stabilization projects in rural and urban areas. Dr. Bledsoe is interested in pursuing 319 grant funding to implement a streambank stabilization demonstration project on Big Dry Creek. Several reaches of Big Dry Creek are experiencing accelerated erosion in the agricultural area. If you are experiencing these types of problems and would be interested in participating in such a demonstration project, please contact Jane Clary, Big Dry Creek Watershed Coordinator (303-480-1700) or Dr. Brian Bledsoe at CSU (970-491-8410).

Buffers: Common Sense Conservation

One of the key conservation practices emphasized by the NRCS and others is buffers. The continuous CRP signup makes the use of conservation buffers economically attractive. Filter strips, field borders, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, shelter belts, contour grass strips and riparian (streamside) buffers are all examples of conservation buffers.

Buffers slow water runoff, trap sediment and enhance water infiltration in the buffer itself. They also trap fertilizers, pesticides, bacteria, pathogens and heavy metals, minimizing the chances of these potential pollutants reaching surface water and groundwater sources.

The enclosed brochure provided by the NRCS provides more information on these practices.

Who Are We?

The Big Dry Creek Watershed Association is a voluntary association of individuals and entities who dedicate time and resources to developing a sound scientific understanding of water quality, flow, aquatic life and habitat conditions in the Big Dry Creek watershed and act to improve these conditions.

The Big Dry Creek Partnership, which includes the Cities of Broomfield, Northglenn and Westminster and Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (Rocky Flats), founded the Watershed Association in 1997. These four entities discharge wastewater into Big Dry Creek and have been heavily involved in monitoring stream conditions for many years. Since 1997, the Association has expanded to include representatives from other cities, counties, farmers, ditch companies, citizens and regulatory and resource agencies. The Association is open to those interested in cooperatively working towards understanding and prioritizing efforts to improve basin conditions.

Activities of the Association during the last three years have been funded through the USEPA's 319 (as administered by the CDPHE) and Regional Geographic Initiative grant programs in combination with contributions from the cities of Broomfield, Northglenn and Westminster and the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (USDOE and RMRS).

For More Information

For more information on the Big Dry Creek Watershed Association, please contact Jane Clary, Watershed Coordinator, at Wright Water Engineers, Inc., 303-480-1700 or clary@wrightwater.com. The Big Dry Creek Watershed Association web page, which is hosted by the City of Broomfield, can be accessed at: www.ci.broomfield.co.us/broomfield/wastewater/bigdrycreek.shtml.

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