



**JEFFERSON**  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Long

Range

Plan

2024-2026

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# Background

## **Organization of Jefferson Conservation District**

Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State of Colorado, and their authorities, powers, and structure are contained in Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 35, Article 70.

Jefferson Conservation District (JCD) was formed by a vote of landowners and received certification by the State of Colorado on June 11, 1942. JCD originally included most of the non-federal land within Jefferson County and covered 157,000 acres. There have been no withdrawals from JCD. JCD is governed by a Board of Supervisors composed of not less than 5 and not more than 9 supervisors, as outlined in the bylaws of JCD.

Lands within JCD are generally the northern two-thirds of Jefferson County, with the southern third being predominantly federal land. Portions of Denver's western suburbs, such as Golden, Lakewood, and Littleton, are within JCD boundaries, but other areas like Wheat Ridge fall outside JCD boundaries.

For the purposes of this long range plan, JCD expects to work primarily within its boundaries, but where practical and in partnership with neighboring organizations and conservation districts, JCD may also conduct work in adjacent areas bordering Jefferson County.

## **Function of Jefferson Conservation District**

To make available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.

## **Mission of Jefferson Conservation District**

To provide leadership through impactful partnerships to enhance and sustain our natural resources.

# Resource Description

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## **Natural Resource Data**

Jefferson County spans 4 to 18 miles west to east and 54 miles north to south. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 778 square miles, of which 772 square miles is land and 6 square miles is water.

**Agricultural Land:** There are only 5,000 acres of cropland left in JCD, which are scattered small tracts of irrigated and non-irrigated hay fields and pasture. A very small proportion of JCD has urban farms within the Denver suburbs.

**Forest Land:** Just over half (253,450 acres) of JCD is in mountainous forested areas. JCD spans parts of three National Forests. The 1996 Buffalo Creek, 2000 Hi Meadow, and 2002 Hayman Fires burned over 170,000 acres and hundreds of homes in Jefferson and surrounding counties. Forest concerns are loss of structural habitat diversity, loss of ponderosa pine and aspen resilience and regeneration, insects and disease, and wildfire awareness and action among homeowners living in the WUI (wildland-urban interface).

**Rangeland:** There are 46,000 acres of rangeland remaining in JCD. These lands are used for livestock grazing and wildlife/recreation; those not protected under conservation easement or public ownership are under pressure from developers.

**Urban, Recreation and other Lands:** Until the end of World War II, agriculture was a major source of income and land use. Today, most farms and ranches have been taken out of agriculture and mainly serve urban uses. Open Space lands are mostly used for passive recreation and wildlife.

### **Trends Impacting Conservation in the Jefferson Conservation District**

Jefferson County is nestled between the Mile High City of Denver and the magnificent Rocky Mountains. Known as the Gateway to the Rockies, Jefferson County has a tremendous uniqueness about it. It is on the far western edge of the metropolitan area. It literally straddles the foothills, with a north-south axis. The geologic formations that seemingly separate the plains from the mountains make for picture perfect scenery but pose diverse and difficult natural resource issues.

Less than one hundred fifty years ago, pioneers were mining, farming, and ranching, transporting fuel, minerals, and food to the urban centers, laying tracks for both streetcars and railroads, building one room school houses, discovering and securing safe and clean water for residents, and developing communities that would sustain the challenges of nature, topography, and time.

Today, subdivisions and shopping malls have replaced farms and ranches. We diligently balance urban land-use that is complementary to the rugged character of the land and the natural resources unique to this part of the State. Our soil, water, and forests require our immediate attention with recovery from droughts, wildfire, inappropriate land use, and disease.

The challenge for JCD is to foster communities and a landscape that will be resilient to natural disturbance, like wildfire and floods, while meeting the needs of a maturing and expanding population. Therefore, JCD's overarching perspective on addressing natural resource concerns is to pursue a holistic watershed restoration approach that promotes ecological function and resilience to disturbance, which will in turn create natural resource benefits for the community.

# Natural Resource Issue 1: Source Water Quality and Quantity

## **Why is this a concern?**

No less than 80% of Colorado's municipal and agricultural water supply is surface water from snowmelt in the mountains. The rivers and reservoirs that deliver water in Colorado also provide critical habitat to aquatic and upland plants and wildlife as well as abundant recreation opportunities. These watershed values are at risk due to impacts from development, wildfire, floods, and climate change.

## **What are JCD's goals to address this concern?**

1. Collaborate with watershed partners on watershed protection initiatives
2. Implement river/stream restoration projects on public and private lands
3. Prepare to be a local leader in post-fire/flood restoration capacities

## **What are JCD's annual objectives to achieve stated goals?**

### **2024 - Reestablish JCD's Watershed Restoration Program**

1. Hire a Watershed Project Manager to build the program.
2. Participate in the collaborative development of the North Fork of the South Platte Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP), and also serve as grant fiscal agent. Begin planning for at least 2 WRAP-recommended projects.
3. Identify watershed restoration grants and partners, and begin attending collaboratives, conferences, and trainings.
4. Develop an approach for JCD to plan and implement low-tech process based restoration (LTPBR) projects.
5. Explore roles for JCD to lead and participate in future post-fire/flood restoration efforts.

### **2025 - 2026 Project Planning and Implementation**

1. Lead and participate in watershed collaboratives, conferences, and trainings.
2. Begin planning, and if possible implementation, for at least four stream restoration projects.
3. Finalize an internal manual/plan that explains how JCD will lead and participate in future post-fire/flood restoration efforts.

### **How will JCD reach these goals operationally?**

#### **Staffing**

JCD will add one new Watershed Project Manager position to build the program. This dedicated position will be supported by existing administrative and technical positions on a project by project basis. Ultimately, we estimate these goals will require a 1.25 equivalent dedicated full-time employee (FTE), in addition to administrative/overhead support.

#### **Cost and Funding**

We estimate this program to cost \$90,000 per year in staffing, in addition to contractual costs for future project implementation, which are unknown at this time; all program expenses will be funded by a combination of landowner fees and grants from partners such as CSCB, CWCB, and NRCS.

# Natural Resource Issue 2: Forest Ecosystem Function and Wildfire Hazard

## **Why is this a concern?**

The interconnected ecological and social values of a forest ecosystem include upland and aquatic wildlife habitat, native plants, forest products, livestock grazing, recreation opportunities, and living space for communities. These values are increasingly at risk due to impacts from development, wildfire, insects and diseases, and climate change. Over 100 years of natural wildfire suppression has exacerbated these risks. JCD's overarching perspective on addressing this concern is a watershed restoration approach that promotes ecological function and resilience to disturbance, which will in turn create a natural resource benefit.

## **What are JCD's goals to address this concern?**

1. Participate in and lead collaborative stakeholder efforts to address forest restoration and wildfire mitigation planning, project implementation, and education.
2. Provide technical and financial assistance (via fiscal agency) to partner agencies and organizations.
3. Plan and manage forest restoration projects on private lands. Explore and implement forest biomass utilization solutions.

## **What are JCD's annual objectives to achieve stated goals?**

### **2024-2026**

Annual goals for each of the three years are the same, but they reflect increased internal capacity and on-the-ground conservation achievements from previous years.

1. Manage 500 acres of on-the-ground mechanical forest restoration treatments on larger private parcels (generally 40 acres and greater, which is necessary to accommodate heavy equipment). Treatments will be conducted by private forestry contractors.
2. Administer a \$13.4M NRCS RCPP grant and a \$6.3M FEMA HMGP grant to execute JCD projects and partner projects along the Northern Front Range.



3. Participate in the following collaborative groups and committees
  - a. Upper South Platte Partnership
  - b. Coal Creek Canyon Collaborative
  - c. Clear Creek Watershed and Forest Health Partnership
  - d. Jefferson County Wildfire Commission
  - e. Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative
  - f. Central Colorado Forest Collaborative
4. Partner with Jefferson County to deliver the annual community Slash Collection Program.
5. Explore the need for JCD to provide technical assistance for smaller parcels and defensible space work.

### **How will JCD reach these goals operationally?**

#### **Staffing**

In 2023, a new Forest Program Manager (FPM) position was created to oversee all forestry project planning and implementation conducted at JCD. Working under the FPM is an existing Conservation Forester position, of which two more will be added during 2024. This increased level of staffing is important for hitting acreage targets and fulfilling grant deliverables.

With as-needed assistance from other JCD technical staff and a team of four dedicated foresters, we estimate the equivalent of 4.5 FTEs, plus administrative/overhead support, to deliver on these forest restoration goals.

Delivering the Slash Collection Program will require the equivalent of 1 FTE and 2-4 seasonal employees.

#### **Cost and Funding**

We estimate this program to cost \$400,000 per year in staffing, in addition to contractual costs for project implementation, which will be approximately \$1.7M per year. All program expenses will be funded by a combination of landowner fees and grants from partners such as NRCS, FEMA, CSFS, TNC, and DNR. Several grants to support work during 2024-2026 have been awarded, but others yet to be determined will be pursued as needed.

# Natural Resource Issue 3: Noxious Weed Management

## **Why is this a concern?**

Native plant communities are critically important to pollinator species, wildlife habitat, soil health, and livestock forage. Noxious weed species threaten abundant and diverse native plant communities due to their competitive advantages and a lack of biological controls (that exist in their native range).

Native plants are an important part of the broader forest ecosystem, and because JCD aspires to a holistic forest and watershed restoration approach, the management of expected noxious weeds after forest management occurs is a necessary element of JCD's forest restoration program.

## **What are JCD's goals to address this concern?**

1. Manage on-the-ground noxious weed treatments for at least the first two years following forestry work on JCD's forest restoration projects.
2. Implement native seeding projects post-forestry when necessary.
3. Provide general education on noxious weed ecology and management.
4. Collaborate with weed management partners on planning, funding acquisition, project implementation, and education.

## **What are JCD's annual objectives to achieve stated goals?**

Annual goals for each of the three years are the same, but they reflect increased internal capacity and on-the-ground conservation achievements from previous years.

### **2024 - 2026**

1. Manage at least 800 acres per year of noxious weed treatments carried out by private weed management contractors.
2. Explore a model for hiring private contractors to conduct native seeding after forestry projects are finished.
3. Explore a model for controlling gambel oak after forestry projects are finished (although gambel is not a noxious weed)
4. Update JCD-branded noxious weed education materials.

### **How will JCD reach these goals operationally?**

#### **Staffing**

These goals can be met by two current positions, the Vegetation Management Specialist and the Natural Resource Specialist position. Therefore, we estimate the staffing need equivalent to 1.5 FTEs, plus administrative/overhead support.

#### **Cost and Funding**

We estimate this program to cost \$125,000 per year in staffing, in addition to contractual costs for project implementation, which will be approximately \$300,000 per year. All program expenses will be funded by a combination of landowner fees and grants from partners such as NRCS, CSCB, CDA, and NFWF. Several grants to support work during 2024-2026 have been awarded, but future grants will be pursued as well.

# Natural Resource Issue 4: Urban Agriculture

## **Why is this a concern?**

Urban sprawl in the Denver Metro Area (within Jefferson County) is occurring at a rapid rate and agricultural land is at risk. It is important to promote sustainable urban agriculture for maintaining fresh, local, and affordable food access.

## **What are JCD's goals to address this concern?**

Though JCD does not currently have urban agriculture staffing or ongoing projects, it still supports sustainable farming and conservation practices through technical assistance, education, and partner cooperation.

## **What are JCD's annual objectives to achieve stated goals?**

During 2024-2026, JCD will continue to consider ideas for roles it might play in the support of urban agriculture. Additional funding, and staff or contractors, would be needed for urban agriculture projects.

1.



2.



3.



4.



# Who are JCD's Partners?

To achieve its goals, JCD will rely on a wide variety of partners that will often overlap the interconnected resource concerns and goals stated above. JCD's programs address resource concerns primarily on private lands, and so private landowners are an important first partner in JCD's work. Other partner agencies and organizations provide technical expertise and guidance, funding opportunities, and training opportunities.

JCD looks forward to meeting new partners in the future. Current partners with whom JCD anticipates coordination to achieve stated goals include the following:

AW	Aurora Water	DNR	Dept. of Natural Resources (Colorado)
AFF	American Forest Foundation	DOLA	Department of Local Affairs
BLM	Bureau of Land Management	DW	Denver Water
BCWA	Bear Creek Watershed Association	FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
CACD	Colorado Association of Conservation Districts	FPD	Fire Protection District
CDA	Colorado Department of Agriculture	FRRT	Front Range Roundtable
CFRI	Colorado Forest Restoration Institute	Jeffco	Jefferson County
COL	Colorado Open Lands	MALT	Mountain Area Land Trust
CSCB	Colorado State Conservation Board	NACD	National Association of Conservation Districts
CSFS	Colorado State Forest Service	NFF	National Forest Foundation
CSU	Colorado State University	NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
CUSP	Coalition for the Upper South Platte	RMRS	Rocky Mountain Research Station
CWMA	Colorado Weed Management Association	TNC	The Nature Conservancy
CWCB	Colorado Water Conservation Board	USFS	U.S. Forest Service
DMP	Denver Mountain Parks	USPP	Upper South Platte Partnership



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Make

Every

Acre

Count