

NASCA Field Staff Sharing Session Presentation
For Charleston S.C. Meeting
Tyce Palmer – Utah Association of Conservation Districts

Grazing Improvement Program (GIP) in Utah and how districts are involved.

The new Grazing Improvement Program (GIP) in Utah was established last Spring 07 by House Bill 145 sponsored by two rural legislators during the 2006 Legislative Session. It passed unopposed and was signed by the Governor of Utah.

The GIP Program will do is:

- Establish Regional Grazing Boards throughout the state.
- Establish a State Grazing Board.
- Allows the Utah of Ag and Food to award grants for rangeland improvements and invasive weed control.

Many districts jumped on the bandwagon with the first round of grant dollars and applications and acted as the clearinghouse for project applications, marketing the program and approving conservation plans even before the regional grazing boards were well enough organized to handle the project load. District and Association planners developed the majority of the conservation plans that were required by the Utah Dept. of Agriculture and Food.

As the new grazing boards were developed, the second round of grant funding shifted to them as they were intended. These boards are made up of local ranchers and landowners within their respective regions. These new grazing boards will also take the place of the old "Taylor Grazing Act Regional Grazing Boards" established some years ago in the states.

As the GIP Program got underway, and gained more momentum with many landowners submitting applications and requesting help to develop conservation plans, it became evident that conservation districts needed to continue to have a major role in the program. Several zones throughout the state developed proposals to utilize the expertise of districts and their technician/planners for this major rangeland/grazing land improvement initiative. These proposals were submitted to the Commissioner of Agriculture, the newly hired GIP Director and the State Grazing Board for their approval. In late Spring the decision was made to use several zone/district planner/technicians in the capacity of "GIP Coordinators" which basically meant they would guide the program at the grassroots level in project planning, working with the regional grazing boards, and coordinating with the GIP program leadership at the state level.

This became an opportunity for the Utah Association of Conservation Districts and several conservation districts to adjust their budgets accordingly and focus some much needed technical assistance to the state's Grazing Improvement Program and helping the state's rangeland and grazing land resources.

Using the conservation districts in this major undertaking has once again shown the importance of locally led conservation through locally elected leaders!!