

Agriculture, Wildlife, & Rural Affairs

Revegetation of Water Division 3	
Saguache County	
Preferred Contact:	Tom McCracken Saguache County Phone 719-221-1822
Co-Sponsoring Counties/Commissioners:	N/A
Who is your subject matter expert?	N/A
Has this proposal been approved by your BoCC?	Yes.
Have you reviewed the CCI Instructional Memo?	Yes.
Describe the problem your proposal will solve.	The reduction of irrigated agricultural acreage within Water Division 3 has resulted in thousands of acres of dry agricultural lands that are susceptible to the spread of noxious weeds and the generation of significant dust during high wind events. These conditions negatively impact neighboring agricultural operations, public health, wildlife habitat, and roadway safety. Dust storms originating from these properties have reduced visibility on county and state highways and have contributed to multiple vehicle accidents. The proposal seeks to establish revegetation requirements that stabilize soils, reduce noxious weed infestations, and improve environmental conditions while protecting public safety.
Areas of Impact:	Day-to-day operations of the county, Functionality of county programs or services, Power/Authority/Mandate of county government, General community advancement
What is the ultimate source of this problem?	The reduction of irrigated agricultural acreage within Water Division 3 has resulted in thousands of acres of dry agricultural lands that are susceptible to the spread of noxious weeds and the generation of significant dust during high wind events. These conditions negatively impact neighboring agricultural operations, public health, wildlife habitat, and roadway safety. Dust storms originating from these properties have reduced visibility on county and state highways and have contributed to multiple vehicle accidents. The proposal seeks to establish revegetation requirements that stabilize soils, reduce noxious weed infestations, and improve environmental conditions while protecting public safety.
What is your initial proposal to solve this problem?	Establish legislation directing the appropriate state agencies to develop revegetation standards for permanently or temporarily dried-up irrigated agricultural lands within Water Division 3. Landowners participating in water

	transfers, fallowing programs, or other water management activities would be required to implement approved revegetation or soil stabilization measures that reduce noxious weed infestations and minimize airborne dust. The legislation should also encourage partnerships between state agencies, local governments, conservation districts, and water conservation organizations to provide technical assistance and funding opportunities.
Please provide sample language for this solution.	"The Colorado General Assembly directs the Colorado Division of Water Resources, in consultation with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, local governments, conservation districts, and affected water conservation districts, to develop minimum revegetation and soil stabilization standards for agricultural lands that are permanently or temporarily removed from irrigation. The standards shall be designed to minimize the spread of noxious weeds, reduce airborne dust, protect public safety, preserve soil health, and promote long-term environmental stewardship. The Department shall establish guidance for implementation, monitoring, and compliance, while providing opportunities for technical and financial assistance to affected landowners."
Are there any solutions that do not require state-level legislation? Has your county explored these alternatives?	Saguache County has begun discussions regarding voluntary collaboration with the Colorado Division of Water Resources and the Rio Grande Water Conservation District to identify practical solutions. While cooperative efforts are encouraged and may provide localized benefits, statewide legislative direction is needed to establish consistent standards, clarify agency responsibilities, and ensure long-term implementation throughout Water Division 3.
Has CCI or any other organizations sought a solution to this problem before?	To our knowledge, neither Colorado Counties, Inc. nor other statewide organizations have pursued legislation specifically addressing revegetation requirements for dried-up irrigated agricultural lands within Water Division 3. This proposal presents an opportunity to proactively address an emerging environmental and public safety concern.
What possible organization(s) would support your proposed solution?	•Rio Grande Water Conservation District •Colorado Division of Water Resources •Colorado Department of Agriculture •Colorado State University Extension •Local Conservation Districts •County Weed Departments •County Road and Bridge Departments •Colorado Counties, Inc. •Agricultural producers affected by noxious weed spread •Public health and environmental organizations
What possible organization(s)	•Property rights organizations •Agricultural producers concerned about additional regulatory requirements or implementation costs

would oppose your proposed solution?	•Water users participating in fallowing or water transfer programs •Organizations concerned with additional state regulatory oversight The proposal should emphasize flexibility, technical assistance, and available funding opportunities to minimize impacts on landowners.
Have you spoken with any legislators about your proposed solution? If so, what was their response?	Yes. Saguache County Commissioners have discussed this issue with Representative Matthew Martinez. Representative Martinez expressed interest in the issue and indicated a willingness to continue discussions regarding potential legislative solutions.
What are the financial implications of this problem to your county? Are there any financial implications to this solution either?	The continued spread of noxious weeds and dust from dried-up agricultural lands increases county expenditures for weed management, roadway maintenance, emergency response, and coordination with state agencies. Dust-related traffic accidents also increase demands on law enforcement, emergency medical services, and road maintenance. While implementation of revegetation requirements may require initial investments for planning, technical assistance, and vegetation establishment, those costs are expected to be offset over time through reduced weed management expenses, improved roadway safety, lower maintenance costs, and protection of agricultural productivity.
What are the financial implications of this problem to any other impacted parties? What are the financial implications of this solution to any other impacted parties? <i>Please consider any relevant Colorado State Departments.</i>	State agencies, including the Colorado Division of Water Resources, Colorado Department of Agriculture, and Colorado Department of Transportation, may experience costs associated with implementation, technical assistance, and oversight. However, long-term savings may result from reduced noxious weed management, improved air quality, fewer dust-related transportation incidents, and improved environmental conditions. Agricultural producers, neighboring landowners, and local communities would benefit from healthier soils, reduced weed infestations, improved visibility on roadways, and better long-term land stewardship. Grant opportunities and cost-share programs should be explored to minimize financial impacts on individual landowners.
Staff Feedback	<u>Risk/Difficulties:</u> <u>Time Commitment:</u>