



THE CONEJOS COUNTY MESSENGER

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Welcome to our first Conejos County Newsletter! As elected officials and county department directors, our goal is to inform our citizens of news stories, information and data through the periodic publication of a newsletter.

Due to the expense of printing the newsletter, we will publish the newsletter on the county website conejoscounty.org. We are asking local businesses to allow us to post the code on their bulletin boards, in the front entry areas and other areas of the business.

Scan QR code with
your smartphone



COVER STORY

We are dedicating this first issue to our Conejos County frontline employees and Conejos County citizens who were considered essential workers. We acknowledge the following departments and staff whose work required them to continually serve citizens of the county during all times of the pandemic:

The Conejos County Department of Public Health, Ambulance service, Sheriff's Department and Jail Staff, Department of Social Services, Emergency Management Officer, Road & Bridge Department, and Coroner

We acknowledge all other Conejos County businesses and employees whose offices remained open until it became critical to close until further state mandates allowed only take out order and modified schedules by appointment.

Regardless of whether your business or job was considered essential or not, we appreciate everyone's part in protecting against the spread of this deadly virus.

As of this writing, nine Conejos County citizens lost their lives to the Covid-19 virus. We are also aware that former Conejos County citizens that had moved and lived in other counties of the state, or in other states, also lost their lives to Covid-19. We extend our sympathy and thoughts to their families and everyone impacted.



Honoring Former Sheriff Robert Gurule

Former Conejos County Sheriff Robert Gurule recently passed on. Mr. Gurule spent a total of 41 years in law enforcement, serving his community as the Chief of Police for Antonito and finishing his career as Conejos County Sheriff. Former Sheriff Gurule was highly respected throughout the county and had a positive impact on the youth and citizens of our county and the San Luis Valley. During his tenure in office, Sheriff Gurule maintained a balanced budget within the department. Over his 9 years as Sheriff, he was able to grow the department in staffing, bring in new equipment, and increase training. Our thoughts and condolences are with the Gurule family.



The year 2020 was a very challenging year for all of us in Conejos County with no exception to the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office was hit with many unforeseen challenges this year from deaths of loved ones and staff to the COVID pandemic. Normal routines and the way we conduct business on a day to day basis were abruptly halted for health and safety. People incarcerated in the jail were unable to visit with family members and the public was severely limited to services normally provided by the Sheriff's Office. We hope and pray that this will soon go

away and we will be able to conduct business and serve the great people of Conejos County the way we believe they should be served.

2020 Sheriff's Office Stats:			
<i>Calls</i>	<i>Major Felony</i>	<i>Major Misdemeanor</i>	<i>Minor Charges</i>
5627	39	111	1137

Even through the pandemic the Sheriff's Office continued to function at an amazing pace due entirely to the relentless service and dedication of the men and women who work in our office.

There were 5627 calls for service over the year with 39 major felony cases filed and another 111 major misdemeanor cases filed. The total case load including minor charges was 1137 cases. Along with the normal case load the Sheriff's Office is tasked with Search and Rescue Duties.

Over the year we conducted 38 Search and Rescue Missions with some quite complicated in remote areas of the wilderness with serious life threatening situations. Again thanks to the dedicated employees and volunteers of the Search and Rescue all missions ended with a positive outcome.

The Sheriff's Office applied and received a grant titled the "Black and Gray Marijuana Grant". Proceeds from the grant were used to buy equipment that assists with investigating illegal marijuana grows in our community. After looking into the needs of the office it was decided that we would purchase a Polaris Ranger 4WD side by side. The Ranger has been incredibly useful not only for investigation of illegal grows but the grant allows that it to be used for other duties as well. We have successfully used the Ranger on criminal investigations including Homicide scenes, missing persons and Search and Rescue. A drone was also purchased with the proceeds, which has been used for criminal investigations and Search and Rescue. The drone gives the operator the ability to see a scene from the air and limit the amount of danger our Deputies would be exposed to in certain situations.

The Sheriff's Office works closely with the schools located in Conejos County to help keep our educators and children safe. We want to continue to develop these relationships and provide training and friendships with our schools.

DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

The Conejos County Department of Social Services welcomes all readers to this first

issue of this quarterly newsletter. Many of our Conejos County citizens know that DSS provides services such as Food Assistance, Medicaid, Child Care, Child Support, Child Welfare, and Adult Protection. Also, the department hosts an annual school supply give away? During this giveaway we have awarded our TANF eligible students with backpacks, school supplies and have also assisted with laptops! We have also utilized our TANF funds for youth-to-work programs, scholarships, mentoring programs, and fatherhood courses. Our youth groups are offered through Family Foundations, Southwest Conservation Corp, and through Rocky Mountain Counseling (Fighting Chance). The students not only learn important life skills but through our Fighting Chance program students they will be working on valve cover racers as part of their curriculum and will assist in restoring a vehicle. We look forward to what they will be able to accomplish!! Take a look at some pictures of our youth that participated in our Southwest Conservation Corp program last summer!



April is Child Abuse Awareness month. Please help keep our children safe and report your concerns. Conejos County Scholarship deadline is 4/30/2021.



Treasurer's Office

Greetings from the Conejos County Treasurer's Office. Here's an update for spring 2021. Our office mailed out the 2020 tax notices on January 15, 2021. First half tax payments were due by February 28, 2021 and 2nd half tax payments are due by June 15, 2021. Full payments are due by April 30, 2021. If you would like a mailed tax receipt, please provide a self-addressed stamped envelope with your payment. Otherwise, your mailed-in check will serve as your receipt. Please note you can either mail your payment to: PO Box 97, Conejos, CO 81129, or pay online at: conejoscounty.org or call our office to make a payment over the phone.

If you have specific questions regarding the Senior Property Tax Exemption please contact the County Assessor's Office at (719) 376-5585. For questions on the Disabled Veterans' Exemption please contact our County Veterans' Office at (719) 376-6725.

For your information the federally guaranteed mortgages foreclosure moratorium for homeowners has been extended through June 30, 2021. This also extended the mortgage payment forbearance enrollment window until June 30, 2021 for borrowers who wish to request forbearance. If we can be of further assistance in the Treasurer's Office, please contact our office at (719) 376-5919. Please remember masks are still required in our office. Thank you.

Commissioners

At the regularly scheduled March 4, 2021 meeting, the Board of County Commissioners passed resolution C-03-21, recognizing the many contributions of Conejos County Cattlemen, Ranchers, and Farmers, and declaring March 20 as the annual Cattlemen's, Ranchers', and Farmers' Day. The resolution is posted on the county website and the following are two parts of the resolution:

- ◆ WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports (2017) the annual sale value of Conejos County cattle, calves, poultry, and hogs exceeds 19M; and
- ◆ WHEREAS, the same USDA reports that Conejos County's annual sales of other crops exceeds 27M; and

On March 11, 2021, the Board of County Commissioners sent the Colorado State Land Board a formal thank you letter for inviting the Commissioners to sit in on the April 14, 2021 meeting where further discussions will take place regarding the sale of the 45,650-acre La Jara State Trust Lands to Western Rivers Conservancy. "The CCBOCC welcomes the State Land Board's willingness to hear our perspective, and the perspective of the many stakeholders whose livelihoods and recreation would be affected by the sale of the La Jara State Trust Lands." The April 14 meeting has recently been changed by the State Land Board to April 9.

At a January 2021 work session, the Commissioners agreed to sponsor a Conejos County Commissioner's Scholarship Program. A \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded annually to a graduating senior in each of the three school districts in the county. Each Commissioner will donate \$1,000 annually to fund the scholarship. Application and criteria information are forthcoming.

During the first quarter of 2021, the Board worked in cooperation with the Sheriff and the county attorney in updating and adopting the 2002 edition of the "Model Traffic Code" to the 2020 edition. The process involved newspaper public notices, two public hearings and the formal adoption of the ordinance. The subject matter of the Model Traffic Code relates primarily to comprehensive traffic control regulations for Conejos County. A complete copy of the Model Traffic Code and the ordinance is available for public inspection in the County Clerk & Recorder's Office and the Sheriff's Office. The ordinance will become effective April 17, 2021.

Clerk & Recorder's Office

After 45 years of service Annabelle Gomez has decided to retire from the Clerk and Recorders Office. Please join me and my staff and wish Annabelle a

great retirement and offer her a huge Thank You for all the years of service. Annabelle's last day will be March 31st. We do plan to fill her spot; however, we know she is irreplaceable.

Office hours are 8:00 am to 4:00pm Monday through Friday, we do not close for lunch.

We can always be reached at (719) 376-5422, if you have any questions about Vehicle Registrations, Title Transfers and any other Motor Vehicle Questions.

ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE? DO YOU NEED TO UPDATE YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION RECORD? All these can be done by coming into the office or by visiting <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/>

Assessor's Office

April through June is a busy time for property owners in the county.

If you own a **business** of any kind you should have received a personal property declaration form which needs to be returned to our office by April 15, 2021. If you did not receive this form from our office please contact us to send one out to you.

For all property owners this is the time of year when we work on setting property values for 2021 and 2022. Sales during the preceding 18-month to 5-year period prior to June 30, 2020 are used to increase or decrease property values according to whether the sales indicate that the previous values are higher or lower than those arms-length transactions. Each area is looked at differently as to what homes or land would be a comparable sale to that area. In other words, Bear Creek and Sheep Creek sales are only compared to those sales within those subdivisions and not properties down in the valley floor.

Property owners should be receiving a Notice of Valuation the first part of May to show you the value assigned to your property on which taxes will be based. Please look over your Notice and if there are any discrepancies you can give our office a call to see if the problems can be rectified.

Conejos County Emergency Medical Services

"Our Family Caring for yours"

Conejos County



Conejos County EMS is your local ambulance service that provides emergency medicine 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are based out of La Jara, Colorado, and respond to all calls for service. Conejos County EMS is now under the direction of Ernest D. Abeyta, NRP FP-C and Brandon L. Sowards, EMT-I, creating over 18 years of experience in emergency medicine.

In 2016, Conejos County EMS moved from a volunteer service to an agency staffing seven full-time employees. Of the seven, three are paramedics and two are EMT- Intermediates. It is the goal of Conejos County EMS to provide Advanced Life Support to the communities each shift.

	2020	2021 YTD
TOTAL CALLS	1,088	250
SECONDARY OUT CALLS	106	21

In 2020, Conejos County EMS responded to a total of 1,088 calls for service (this number does not include any special event coverage due to the COVID pandemic, which accounts for approximately 50 more calls of service throughout the year). This number is steadily increasing each year, **making Conejos County EMS the second busiest service within the San Luis Valley**. As of March 22, 2021, only 81 days into the year, Conejos County EMS has responded to 250 calls for service. Averaging three calls per day.

What Would You do if no one Responded?

Due to a lack of funding within the general fund of Conejos County, Conejos County EMS is facing budget cuts and facing cuts to provided services. Conejos County EMS is directly funded by the county General Fund in all aspects of the ambulance budget. **We kindly request your help in the form of a YES vote the next time there is a county wide sales tax ballot question!!!**

What does this mean?

Conejos County EMS will be forced to cut hours, cut secondary response ambulances - **completely**, cut essential training, and cut out life-saving equipment. If the primary ambulance is responding to another call for service, and you or your loved one need an ambulance, you could be waiting for up to **60 minutes**, depending on mutual aid availability and response time.

Road & Bridge Dept.

In the year 2020, the Road & Bridge Department:

- Installed 16 new culverts on county roads
- Converted 6 wood plank bridges to culverts
- Resurfaced county roads with thousands of tons of gravel/road base
- Repaved 3.2 miles of road, laying a 1 inch or more leveling base followed by 1.75 inch top.
- Reentered into a Schedule A agreement with Rio Grande National Forest to grade Forest Service 250 Road from Horca to Platoro
- Began a three week rotation of grading 603.66 miles of dirt roads in all 3 districts, excludes paved roads. The department is responsible for maintaining 603.66 miles of roads in the county.

Conejos County is required to follow all regulations of a mining permit. Mining regulations only allow materials extracted from the gravel pits to be used on county owned lands and county roads. The Road & Bridge Department cannot give gravel or other extracted material for private use on private lands.

The Road & Bridge Dept. does not remove snow from subdivisions or private driveways unless there is an emergency and those agencies are unable to reach the public involved in the emergency. In these types of emergencies, the Road & Bridge Department would be dispatched by the Colorado State Patrol Dispatch Center.

Our plans are to post before and after pictures on the Road & Bridge Department's page of the county website during the year. Please look for our pictures at: <https://www.conejoscounty.org> and follow the links. We have included two pictures in the edition that are on the following page.

Road & Bridge Department Pictures



Culvert Replacement on Road G.5, east of Antonito



Culvert Replacement on Roads 12 & M

Land Use Department

you would like to comment about the adoption of the IRC please send your written comments to the Land Use Office by personal delivery to the Land Use Office, by mail (PO Box 197, Conejos CO 81129), by fax (719-376-6769), or by email to (landuse@co.conejos.co.us). Please keep up with this process by watching for news articles in the Valley Courier, in the County Website - www.conejos.org.com - Land Use Department. We are willing to answer any questions regarding the IRC 2018. Call us and watch future newsletters with more information.

Hello Conejos landowners, residents, and visitors we are promoting the adoption of the 2018 International Residential Code (IRC.) We are soliciting written comments and will conduct a Town Hall meeting on Wednesday, May 5, 2021. If

Strong Building Codes Save Lives, Reduce Damage

Enacting and enforcing strong building codes can save lives and billions of dollars in damages from high winds and other natural disasters. Model building codes provide protection from tragedy caused by fire, structural collapse and general deterioration. The insurance industry supports strong building codes because we see firsthand the personal and financial impact that inadequate standards and code enforcement can have on a family, community or state. .

Type of Permit	2019	2020
Physical Address	37	37
Address Signs	42	44
Septic Permits	45	64
Construction	173	189
Variance	3	4
Vacation of Roadway	0	1
Minor Subdivisions	1	2
Division of Land	10	9
Boundary Adj./Replat	7	6
Lot Consolidation	0	3
Large Lot Dev.	0	1
Septic Contractor License	16	15
Special Use Permit	5	11
Access Permits	9	12
Utility in Right of Way	18	15
MHIP (Adopted in 2020)		11

UNDER

CONSTRUCTION



Imagine if there were no building regulations? Anyone pretending to know something about building and construction could do whatever they wanted, without fear or recrimination. Building standards would suffer, safety would be compromised, and people's lives could potentially be at risk.

Public Health Department

Exciting things are happening in Conejos County! While the last year has been trying and very busy, public health continues to roll along with the challenges, changes and successes COVID 19 presented.

CCPH is proud to say that as of 3/34/2021 we have ZERO (0) active cases of COVID 19 in our county. That doesn't mean that we do not have community members who are still recovering or fighting this illness. Instead, it means that no new cases have been identified or reported. We have not been at zero active cases since April of 2020. Because our community has been diligent in hand washing, masking up in public and protecting our vulnerable community members, we have been able to slow the spread of COVID 19. On another positive note, Conejos County has been moved to Level Green on the State Dial. This means capacity increases are available for indoor events and restaurants. For more information on the dial please see <https://covid19.colorado.gov/covid-19-dial>.

CCPH received its first batch of the Moderna vaccine in late December of 2020. The first doses were administered on December 23, 2020. As of today, 1,020 individuals have received their full 2-dose COVID vaccine from CCPH. An additional 150 people are currently scheduled to receive their second dose from CCPH. CCPH is providing vaccine appointments weekly on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as long as we have inventory to do so. Currently we are only using Moderna as the Janssen 1 dose vaccine has not been made available to us.

To schedule an appointment with us please call 719-274-4307 or sign up at <https://www.conejoscounty.org> and click on Public health. To see other options for Vaccine providers in the SLV, please visit the SLV Public Health Partnership at <https://www.slvphp.com/>

Administration

Things are moving fast in Conejos County; first quarter flew by. The administration office is preparing for audit and moving forward. Commissioners and I are very concerned about the financial future of Conejos County's General Fund and services within, such as our Sheriff's Department and ambulance services. The county will once again be putting a sales tax question on the ballot in November. We are asking our citizens to support our measure and vote yes on a sales tax. I observe our neighboring counties especially Alamosa thriving on their sales tax largely supported by the citizens of Conejos County. For other information on our county funds, go to the county website and read my budget message. Go to conejoscounty.org and go to 2021 budget.

On a good note, Conejos County is eligible to receive some Cares Act dollars on a reimbursement basis. The purpose of the dollars is to help small businesses and/or nonprofits with revenues lost in their businesses due to COVID-19 between March 1st 2020 and forward. Businesses are to prove their revenues lost and be in good standing with the State of Colorado.

These dollars have also been utilized to help with all the shot clinics that Public Health has provided. The CARES ACT dollars are federal dollars and are subject to a single audit and subject to the "Cares Act Requirements."

Emergency Management

The Conejos County Office of Emergency Management has been active during this COVID pandemic. The OEM has and does support Conejos

County Public Health's efforts to combat this pandemic. This is the 394th day (3-29-21) the Colorado Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) in partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) have operated the joint emergency operations center for Colorado for COVID-19 coordination.

The San Luis Valley Region Departments of Public Health and Emergency Management have also been active on your behalf during this pandemic. We have opened a joint emergency coordination center and then moved to a departmental operations center under each County's Public Health Department.

With the efforts to vaccinate and socially isolate we are seeing progress in the fight to control and subdue this disease. We are not there yet, but great progress has been made. We appreciate all of the efforts each of you has made. You as individuals and families are making our efforts successful. THANK YOU ALL!

Here are some links to more information that you might find helpful.

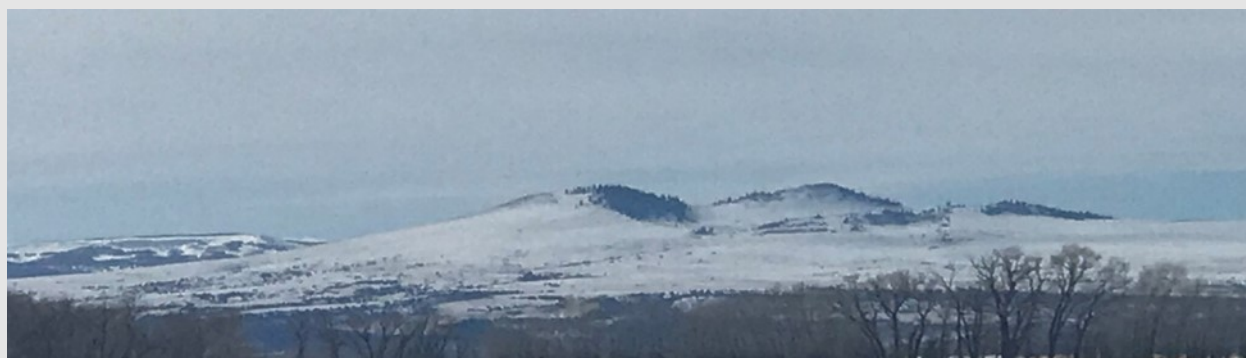
<https://covid19.colorado.gov/>

CDPHE Situation Report may be accessed at <https://mailchi.mp/7a8ddc17463a/cdphe-covid-19-situation-report-4706646?e=cce9a6cba8>.

Ready.gov: Plan Ahead for Disasters

<https://www.ready.gov>

The latest and most updated news stories can be found on the county website: <https://conejoscounty.org> All offices and departments have a link to their individual web page with very useful information and Facebook page, if they have one.



Our Beautiful Conejos County/Mogote Peaks