



Missouri River Conservation Districts COUNCIL

2016-2017 Annual Report



Iversen Ranch on the Missouri River between
Sidney and Culbertson
Photo credit MT DNRC

The Missouri River Conservation Districts Council is devoted to conservation of the Missouri River's natural resources through grassroots collaboration, education, incentives, and voluntary action.

MISSOURI RIVER Conservation Districts COUNCIL



"Montana is the only state that has an organization such as the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council to coordinate conservation efforts within the entire watershed. This unique approach leverages funds for important projects across land ownerships for maximum ecological benefit."

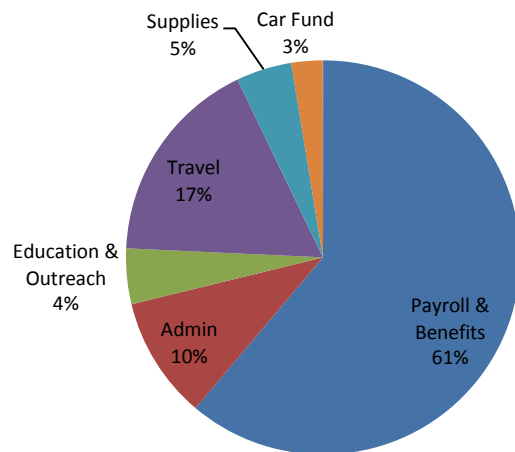
Dear Reader,

We are pleased to bring you this summary of the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC) activities for the FY 2016-2017. From invasive species prevention and control to cottonwood restoration and rangeland monitoring, the Council participated in an array of projects and programs as diverse as the river system we serve. The Council continued to work with the Montana Saltcedar Team to secure funding to control the invasive tree on the mainstem of the River. We also joined forces with other watershed partners in the state to coordinate outreach and education related to invasive mussels. The Montana Rangelands Partnership technician program and the Ranching for Rivers program entered their second year of operation for the council resulting in continued technical and financial support for rangeland and riparian grazing management and improvements.

The activities of the past year emphasize the importance and power of partnerships to furthering natural resource enhancement along the Missouri River. We are thankful to our member conservation districts and other partners for their support this past year, and look forward to working together in 2018. As you browse the annual report for a more detailed account of the Council's activities, please consider how we may better serve the region through future projects.

Sincerely,
Jim Beck, Chairman
Rachel Frost, Coordinator

FY 2016-2017 Expenses



- **Total value of grants procured through MRCDC projects: \$500,531**
- **Admin fees, salary, and educational funds provided directly to Conservation Districts through grants: \$28,057**
- **Total funding put on the ground through MRCDC projects: \$432,476**

**MRCDC receives no admin fees, and does not directly receive funding through grants. All grants written by MRCDC are run through CDs or SWCDM for 501C3 status. Grants are used to fund on-the-ground projects.*

The strength of the Council lies in the unique capabilities of the individual member districts and the our partner organizations

2017 River Rendezvous: An International Learning Experience



MRCDC and the Milk River Watershed Alliance teamed up to host the 2017 River Rendezvous that toured the St. Mary diversion system which supplies 60-90% of the water in the Milk River. The tour had two options, the international tour which viewed Alberta's St. Mary irrigation systems and constructed wetlands in the Milk River Ridge Reservoir, before meeting up with the Montana tour group to view the St. Mary diversion system near Babb, MT. The tour was open to the public and brought in over 60 participants from Conservation Districts, MT DNRC, Senate and Provincial Parliament representatives, landowners, local businesses, economic growth councils, and members of various watershed groups.



Tour attendees walk out on the 100 year old siphons that are critical to the interbasin transfer of water from the St. Marys River to the Milk River near St. Marys Montana.

Montana Saltcedar Team

During surveys of the Missouri River in 2016, small populations of saltcedar were mapped between Wolf Point and the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Efforts were immediately undertaken to eradicate these young plants before the population becomes too large to effectively and economically control.



Strategic control, education, and communication.



Saltcedar plant in full flower. Photo by: Joseph M. DiTomaso, University of California - Davis, Bugwood.org

This project is a cooperative effort between the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the Montana Saltcedar Team, the Fort Peck Tribes, the Montana Conservation Corps, and the county weed boards and conservation districts of McCone, Richland, and Roosevelt Counties. Crews will float the Lower Missouri River in late August and foliar spray saltcedar plants found below the high-water mark. Follow-up surveys will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the treatments. The goal is to eradicate saltcedar on the mainstem of the River, and use the project as an educational opportunity to increase awareness of the plant with area landowners.

Local leadership makes the project relevant, unity gives the project strength

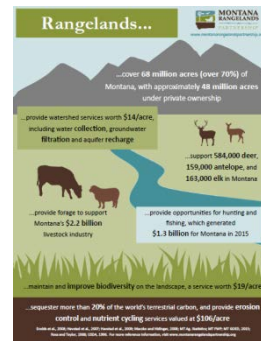


Montana Rangelands Partnership

The Montana Rangelands Partnership technician program celebrated one year of activity in 2017. The technicians continue to work with landowners to install monitoring plots, improve grazing management, and create educational products for rangeland health.

Below are a few highlights of the past year:

- Monitoring established on over **135,000 acres**
- Organized **7 workshops**
- Website
- Rangeland economics informational sheet
- Facts of rangeland monitoring
- Rangeland Day at the Rotunda
- Educational display at Stockgrowers, Woolgrowers, MACD Convention, Farm Bureau



www.montanarangelandspartnership.org

CMR Community Working Group

MR CDC is the leading stakeholder and coordinating entity of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Community working Group. This group is comprised of agencies, landowners, stakeholders and interested individuals that are concerned with the vitality of the 6-county region surrounding the CMR NWR.

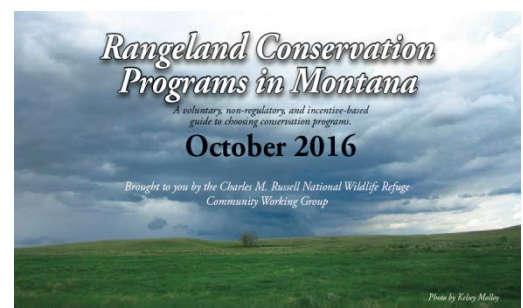
Aside from regular meetings and committee meetings, during the past year we developed a website for the CMR CWG, a work plan, and restructured our meeting schedule. Most notably, we completed and published the Rangeland Conservation Programs in Montana through the efforts of the Sage Grouse Committee. The Council continues to seek funding for the CMR CWG and provide support to local community projects that develop from the relationships created through the CMR CWG.

Meeting locations and topics:

- August, Fort Peck – Developed Work plan for the Group
- October, Jordan – Bighorn Sheep Recovery
- February, Malta – Community Resiliency
- May, Circle – Aquatic Invasive Species

CMR CWG Committee Meetings:

- September, Lewistown – Sage Grouse
- October, Jordan - Bison
- January, Lewistown - Bison

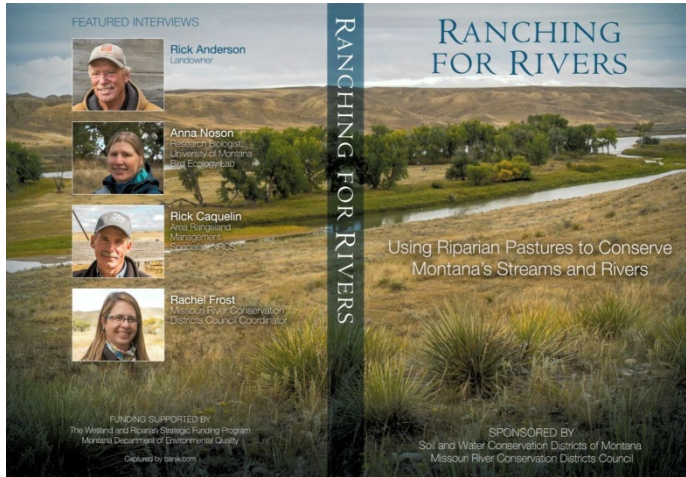


The Conservation Menu was completed and published in October of 2016 by the Sage Grouse Committee.

Combining science with local ecological knowledge to develop sound natural resource management strategies



Ranching For Rivers: Highlighting Conservation in the Media



Video sponsored by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM) and the MRCD, with funding supported by The Wetland and Riparian Strategic Funding Program and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

The video “Ranching for Rivers: Using Riparian Pastures to Conserve Montana’s Streams and Rivers,” was produced to highlight this new riparian pasture infrastructure cost-share program.

View the video now on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIcobNmWHfs>), and soon you will be able to borrow a DVD copy from your local conservation district office.

Ranching for Rivers: Conservation Highlighted in Media

MRCDC worked with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to publish stories on Montana farmers and ranchers who are devoted to conservation work. Congratulations to the Iversens for being one of three featured stories published in the NACD Blog.

Excerpts from John Grassy’s article: It was June of 2011, and down below them the Missouri River had reached a level of flooding no one had ever seen. Down from the bluff, 1,500 acres of the Iversen’s farm near Culbertson was under water. The flood had taken away plenty, but it had also given something: thousands of seedling cottonwood trees. “We had noticed cottonwoods were dying of old age and there wasn’t any new growth,” says Dick.

“We thought, ‘this is our chance.’ We decided we better maintain what we had because we weren’t going to see it again in our lifetime. ... it was important to leave some of those trees.” To best manage their cows’ grazing activities in the riparian areas, Connie and Dick established a series of smaller pastures, some of which included dense thickets of young trees. “In another 50 years this is going to be a pretty impressive sight,” Connie says.



Connie and Dick Iversen stroll through new cottonwoods from the floods of 2011, while old trees stand in the background. Photo by: Rachel Frost

Combining the art and science of natural resource management with the desire of people to be good stewards of the land for the best results



Board and District Development Facilitation and Meeting Management Training

Herding Cats: Facilitation and Meeting Management Workshop



Blake Christiansen of the MSU Local Government Center teaches workshop participants methods to stop “herding cats” and run effective meetings. Photo by Rachel Frost

The Council hosted a workshop on Facilitation and Meeting Management taught by Dan Clark and Blake Christiansen from the MSU Local Government Center. Dan and Blake provided an excellent training session complete with great tips to improve meeting efficiency and to increase leadership skills within our organizations.

A total of 32 folks attended the workshop and it received excellent reviews. The Council is working to provide future opportunities for CD Supervisors to attend similar training sessions.

Big Sky Watershed Corps Program: Enhancing Council and Member District Capacity

The MRCDC partnered with Petroleum County Conservation District and the Musselshell Watershed Coalition to host 2 Big Sky Watershed Corps Members in 2017. These talented Americorps volunteers bring a wealth of energy and fresh ideas to their host sites and projects. MRCDC has utilized members to assist with the monitoring for the Ranching for Rivers program, newsletters, the CMR Community Working Group activities, and outreach for aquatic invasive species.

Many of these talented young people choose to stay in Montana and make their careers working with landowners. MRCDC is pleased to be a part of the program and plans to continue utilizing the capacity building potential of these amazing young people.



Big Sky Watershed Corps Members (left to right) William Friedman, John Lange, (MRCDC, PCCD, and MWC) and Casey Gallagher (Milk River Watershed Alliance) sit at a Mussel Alert informational booth at the Montana Ag Summit. Members handed out educational materials and answered questions on invasive mussels. Photo credit: Casey Gallagher

Local leadership makes the project relevant, unity gives the project strength

Central and Eastern Montana Mussel Response



The discovery of invasive mussel larvae in Tiber Reservoir and suspect samples in Canyon Ferry Reservoir completely changed the aquatic invasive species conversation in Montana. The MRCDC began working with watershed coordinators for the Musselshell, Milk, Yellowstone, and Big Horn Rivers to coordinate the efforts to solicit stakeholder input for their own regional needs to support efforts for prevention of further infestation of tributary waters. In March of 2017, the group released a report summarizing the needs and concerns of stakeholders from across Central and Eastern Montana on the issues surrounding invasive mussel prevention.

MRCDC worked with PCCD to secure funding to address education and outreach deficits related to invasive mussels. The Council participated in the Cascade CD Mussel Summit in April that brought in several excellent guest speakers that provided a lot of insight and wisdom in how other states were dealing with invasive mussels. Next, we organized a series of public meetings to provide information on how mussels can impact the ecosystem, our communities, and our economy. The meetings were held at the following locations:

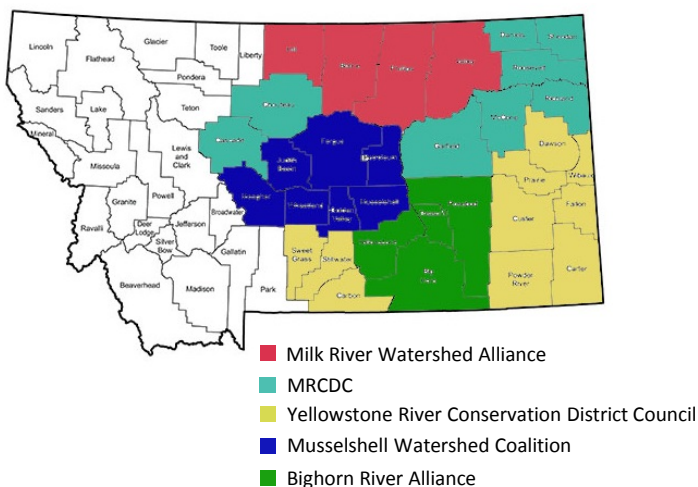
Lewistown on May 15th, Eagles Club

Malta on May 16th, Great Northern

Fort Peck on May 17th, Fort Peck Interpretive Center

Jordan on May 18th, Summit Corral

Central & Eastern MT Mussel Response



Map depicting the counties covered by regional watershed coordinators within the Central and Eastern MT Mussel Response

Mission: The Central and Eastern MT Mussel Response exists as a conduit of information between stakeholders and the Aquatic Invasive Species Bureau to further the effectiveness of mussel education and prevention in MT.

Conservation Districts are uniquely positioned to develop cooperative working groups on any topic of interest or concern to Montana

THE MISSOURI RIVER:

National Icon, Local Treasure

National Importance

- 2341 River Miles
- 500,000 square mile watershed
- 10 states and 2 Canadian Provinces

Irrigation, Navigation, Recreation, Power Generation



Montana's Missouri River

- 790 River Miles
- 145,000 square mile watershed
- 10 Dam
- 14 Counties
- 15 Conservation Districts

Missouri River Conservation Districts COUNCIL

Blaine | Big Sandy | Broadwater | Cascade | Chouteau | Fergus | Gallatin |
Lewis & Clark | McCone | Petroleum | Phillips | Richland | Roosevelt | Valley

Mission: *To represent natural resources and environmental interests on the Missouri River and the associated uplands.*

Purpose: *To provide leadership, assistance, and guidance to conservation districts along the Missouri River Corridor and present a unified front and collective voice when addressing natural resource issues, opportunities, and challenges.*

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