



Missouri River Conservation Districts COUNCIL

2018-2019 Annual Report



*Ryan Dam,
Great Falls, MT
Photo credit Rachel Frost*

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.

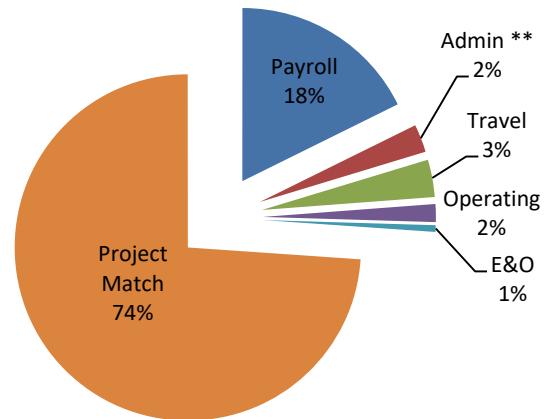
Dear Reader,

The past year was as diverse as it was productive for MRCDC. We continued to be leaders in the prevention and management of invasive species through our involvement with the aquatic invasive species program encouraging new inspection stations and working with local CDs, counties and land management agencies to control saltcedar along the Missouri River. The Council played a leading role in coordinating stakeholder response to proposed flow changes on the Missouri River, as well as providing outreach to local irrigators. The 2018 River Rendezvous, the Council's premier education event, was an excellent tour of the challenges municipal infrastructure places on rivers. Please browse our other activities and accomplishments from 2018-2019 in this report.

The Council ended the year by saying goodbye to Rachel Frost, who served as Coordinator for the past 6 years. Please join us in welcoming our new Coordinator, Casey Gallagher. We are excited to have Casey on board and look forward to what she will help the Council accomplish in the coming years. Casey will be located in the Fergus County Conservation District office in Lewistown. Stop by and make her welcome if you are in the area.

Sincerely,
Steve Wanderaas, Chairman
Casey Gallagher, Coordinator
Rachel Frost, Past Coordinator

FY 2019 Financial Summary



- ***The above summary includes the following grants in the Project Match Money category:**
 - Saltcedar Project through Fergus CD - \$20,000
 - Living on the Bank through Lewis and Clark CD - \$4,000
 - Aquatic Invasive Species through PCCD and DNRC - \$27,000
 - CMR CWG funds - \$14,000
 - Conservation Menu Reprint through PCCD with WWF - \$6,600
 - Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant with MCC \$ 199,000

***MRCDC receives no admin fees, and does not directly receive funding through grants. All grants written by MRCDC are run through CDs or SWCDM and they receive the admin fees. 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 our partner organizations



Montana Saltcedar Team



Strategic control, education, and communication.

Team Effort to Control Saltcedar in Fergus County

Controlling noxious weed successfully is the ultimate team-sport. Without participation by all the major land management agencies and owners, saltcedar management would be a dismal failure. The MRCDC and partners seized the opportunity to build on previous work and fill in a critical gap in the efforts of managing saltcedar above Fort Peck Lake. Partners in the project include the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the CMR National Wildlife Refuge, the Fergus County Weed District, the Fergus County Conservation District, and the MT DNRC. The group met in fall of 2018 to determine a priority area for saltcedar management, and to identify potential funding sources to augment existing control budgets. The section of the Missouri River and Fort Peck lake on the eastern side of Fergus County was identified as a gap in previous treatment efforts and a priority for treatment in 2019. The team decided to apply for a 223 grant through Fergus CD to fund an additional 2 MCC crews consisting of 5 members each in a 2 week tour. The teams will engage in a collaborative “blitz” effort to control the invasive riparian tree along the Missouri River in Eastern Fergus County.

The USFWS has already committed a Strike team consisting of 4 members that are certified herbicide applicators and 1 MCC adult "weed crew". The Fergus County Weed District has committed crews and chemical to the effort, and the US Army Corps of Engineers is conducting a treatment on the north side of the River simultaneously.



An MCC crew member applies herbicide to a salt cedar stand near the Missouri River in 2017.

MST Featured in Prairie Populist:

PRAIRIE POPULIST
★ ★ ★

Want to learn more about the history and past success of the Montana Saltcedar Team? Check out this story about the team in the Prairie Populist. The story was part of a feature of Eastern MT communities and projects that enhance the landscape and the lifestyle of these rural communities.

<http://prairiepopulist.org/the-montana-salt-cedar-team/>

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

Missouri River Recovery Implementation



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The Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee “provides a forum for stakeholders, tribes, states, and federal agencies within the Missouri River Basin to develop recommendations that consider the needs of the various groups affected by management actions.” In fall of 2018, the US Army Corps of Engineers announced a proposal to significantly alter the flows from Fort Peck Dam to improve spawning opportunity for Pallid Sturgeon below Fort Peck Dam. Concerns over the impacts of flows as low as 4,000 cfs on irrigation and other river water intakes prompted MRCDC to join forces with Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Council and a myriad of agency and private stakeholders to voice concerns to the US ACOE.

MRCDC’s contribution to the efforts included:

- Hosted 2 informational meetings between MT FWP and local irrigators in Culbertson
- Organized conference calls between MT stakeholders
- Worked with all stakeholders to request an extension to the comment period, which was successful
- Submitted comments to the NEPA scoping process
- MRCDC representatives part of a stakeholder group that presented concerns to the entire MRRIC workgroup at the May 2019 meeting



A typical irrigation pump site on the lower Missouri River.



MT FWP employee holds a juvenile shovelnose sturgeon

Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant

The Council partnered with Montana Conservation Corps to successfully author a Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant to increase capacity for the Ranching for River’s program. The grant will fund a full-time employee to work directly with CDs and NRCS to recruit landowners to participate in Ranching for Rivers projects along the Missouri River. Big Sky Watershed Corps members will be placed in districts with high levels of landowner interest to help in developing plans for landowners to participate in conservation activities aimed at improving riparian health and watershed function. Contact MRCDC for more information on the project.



MISSOURI RIVER
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Grab your floatation device and hang on tight! Cascade Conservation District hosted the 2018 River Rendezvous, and it was filled to the brim with boat rides, bus tours, and most importantly, great food. We spent the morning on the water seeing first-hand the good, the bad, and the ugly of bank stabilization on the Missouri River from near Ulm to Broadwater Bay. Following lunch and a presentation on the proposed Natural Heritage Area in Cascade County, attendees got an up close look at the Great Falls Water Treatment Facility, and Ryan Dam. The festivities ended that evening with a presentation on drone footage, and how it could be used to document projects by Conservation Districts. Great Falls is the largest municipality on the Missouri River, providing unique challenges, but also great opportunity to reach local citizens for natural resource conservation.



Tour attendees watch as the filters are cycled at the Great Falls Water Treatment Plant. Who knew water treatment could be so much fun, Bruce?



Old cars line the banks of the Missouri River below the Country Club in Great Falls. While unsightly, the car bodies do provide effective erosion control.

Supervisor Summit

Making the Voice of CDs Heard in Public Lands

Montana is a mixture of private, state, federal, and tribal owned lands, and the projects and management strategies employed on one landownership have the potential to affect the natural resources on surrounding lands. It is increasingly important that MT citizens take part in the public process to influence management of federally owned lands.

During the 2018 Supervisor Summit held in Helena, MRCDC Coordinator, Rachel Frost, taught a session on how to author effective public comments through the NEPA process. The session provided insight on why it is important for conservation districts to participate in the public comment process, how to write substantive public comments, and how those comments are used and incorporated by the agencies. A tip sheet for creating substantive public comments during NEPA scoping can be found on MRCDC's website.



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



Living on the Bank Website

The Living on the Bank website has information and learning modules to assist landowners on how to best manage issues that may arise when buying, selling, and/or improving property along a river, stream, or lake.

Specific Modules Include:

- Buying Property and Selecting a Construction Site
 - Flood plains, river movement, fire, earthquakes, potential hazards, septic systems and water supply
- Property improvements
 - Boat ramps and docks, Landscaping and vegetation management, bridges and stream crossings
- Protecting my Investment
 - Flood insurance, vegetation and landscaping, bank armor, alternatives to bank armor, failing bank protection, and erosion control
- Stream Dynamics
- Potential Permits Required
- Where to go for help



Screen shot of the homepage of the Living on the Bank website

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

Once again, the MRCDC partnered with Petroleum County Conservation District and the Musselshell Watershed Coalition to host 2 Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) Members in 2019. This year's members took on outreach for aquatic invasive species, helped coordinate the CMR Community Working Group activities, and worked on saltcedar projects.

MRCDC is working with Montana Conservation Corps to provide training for BSWC Members, Conservation Corps crew chiefs, and interns on Montana's rural culture, economy and conservation ethic.



BSWC Members Mitch Hoffman and Mark Werley manning an AIS table at the Fort Peck Water Carnival.

Our most valuable resource in natural resource enhancement is our people



Central and Eastern Montana Invasive Species Team

MRCDC continues to work closely with partners in the Central and Eastern MT Invasive Species Team (CEMIST) team to protect Central and Eastern MT from new invasive species.

CEMIST Purpose and Goals

- Coordinate education on invasive mussels to all water users in Central and Eastern MT
- Advocacy for resources for invasive mussels to be allocated to Central and Eastern MT
- Provide communication and outreach on invasive mussel events, news, and policy relevant to Central and Eastern MT

A crew member at the Flowing Wells AIS Station is inspecting a boat. This station is run by Garfield CD.



Within the CEMIST, the MRCDC has the following roles and accomplishments: The Coordinator acts as the Helena liaison, maintaining communication with MT FWP and MT DNRC. Council members have engaged in outreach to encourage CDs to manage AIS check stations to thoroughly protect the borders of MT.

MT Fish Wildlife and Parks and DNRC engaged key members of Conservation Districts and the Montana Invasive Species Council to help build relationships and conduct outreach with local conservation districts in areas where inspection stations were struggling. These volunteers drove hundreds of miles to attend CD meetings and present the need for a more localized approach to AIS inspection stations. In 2018, Garfield County Conservation District (GCCD) began managing the inspection station at Flowing Wells. The station was wildly successful, and under the management of the CD, was free of many of the employee-related issues that plagued other inspection stations. Success breeds success, and with full support from MT FWP, more and more conservation districts are stepping up to run inspection stations in Eastern MT.

Educating Decision Makers



Members of CEMIST joined other aquatic invasive species partners on an educational panel that addressed the House and Senate Natural Resource Committees to inform lawmakers of the importance of preventing AIS in MT, and the devastation these invaders would cause the entire state.

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

Irrigation, World Class Fishing, Power Generation, Wildlife Habitat

Missouri River Conservation Districts C O U N C I L



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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