

Quarterly Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2023
In person, Billings, MT

At 2:01pm, Chair Karl Christians opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting. Council members present were Karl Christians, Lewis & Clark CD; Laura Kiehl, Petroleum County CD; Steve Wanderaas, McCone CD; Dean Rogge, Garfield County CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Monte Billing, Garfield County CD; Dana Berwick, Roosevelt CD; Dallas Diehl, Broadwater CD; Mike Hansen, Gallatin CD; Jeff Ryan, Lewis & Clark CD; Hal DeBoer, Phillips CD; Rick Anderson, Chouteau CD; Bruce Anderson, Blaine CD; and Jeff Pattison, Valley CD. Others present were Michael Wendland, Montana Salinity Control; Steve Hertel, Fergus CD; Barbie Martin, Big Sandy CD; Brent Smith, CEMIST Program Manager; Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator; and Trish Smith, MRCDC Secretary.

General

Everyone introduced themselves. Minutes were read and Dana Berwick moved to approve the June 21, 2023 quarterly minutes; Steve Wanderaas seconded. Motion passed. Reviewed the September 20th Executive Committee meeting notes.

Public Comment

None.

Financial Report

Molly went over the financials. Still waiting on the Quarter 1 reimbursement. Karl discussed the October meeting with the DNRC; had \$21,720.44 left from the old grant and we were able to put that money back into the account. Also discussed the administration fee that changed from reporting a flat 10% to exact hours/time. It will now be shown as a *Sponsorship Fee*. In outstanding bills, there is just an extra check to pay the PCCD, otherwise just have the normal auto-payments. Steve Wanderaas moved to approve the financial report; Mike Hansen seconded. Motion passed. Dana Berwick moved to approve the outstanding MRCDC bills; Laura Kiehl seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business

USFWS proposed Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area Comment Letter – The Council looked over the proposed letter that Molly put together. Lorri stated that there were a few minor typos. Dana had a few minor corrections. Molly went over her amendments for the letter. Dana Berwick moved to approve the letter as presented with corrections; Dallas Deihl seconded. Motion passed.

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Nov 14, 2023

Page 2 of 6

New Business

2024 River Rendezvous location – Molly discussed the River Rendezvous locations. In the last few years it has been in Bozeman, Winnett and Jordan. She would like to do something a little more in the western part of the state. Karl asked the Council to showcase areas with projects for the next River Rendezvous. There were several suggestions of locations. Molly discussed that we usually have the River Rendezvous in combination with a Quarterly meeting. Dean stated the biggest factor is how far people are traveling. Karl discussed that CDs used to be in charge of programs and the NRCS helped them; it has changed over the years that the NRCS is now in charge and the CDs help the NRCS. Discussed projects similar to what Lorri and her husband have done with reservoirs, cleaning them out when they are dry to make better areas for habitat/cattle; could be a good NRCS TIP program and could pull money from other sources like Ducks Unlimited, etc. Dana moved to hold the next River Rendezvous in the Broadwater/Lewis & Clark County area; Mike Hansen seconded. Motion Passed.

USFWS Proposed rule changes for their wildlife refuges – Molly discussed the rule changes; only 21 comments across the nation, and only six in the actual comment period. Dean stated that we need to get forces together (Stockgrowers, CDs, Farmers Union Alliance, Commissioners, etc.) and put together a letter that has a *unity of message*. Molly discussed changes to the MRCDC comment letter. Dana Berwick moved to accept the letter as amended; Steve Wanderaas seconded. Motion passed.

Council concerns/What is an issue in your district that Council can help with:

- Mike Hansen stated that he would like to be informed by the Council about what activities are going on downstream, to make sure to coordinate so they are not doing something contrary and can work together with other districts.
- Hal DeBoer said there is nothing he can think of at the moment but anything that Jeff mentions would be their same concerns.
- Jeff Patterson stated that out of state NGOs are affecting their tax base, a lot of prime ground that is no longer farming ground, and now commercial.
- Rick Anderson stated that their issues are the same year to year and varies with weather; nothing specific. Working through the TIP processes and dealing with the agencies. He doesn't think the Council should spend too much time trying to rectify the inequality of the tax policy.
- Dean Rogge discussed conservation leases, comment letters we are writing and the changes happening in the future that are going to impact and be of concern. He discussed their CMR pilot project and hope to have support of the council. Karl would like the CMR pilot project study to get peer-reviewed and published since it is going on 9 years for the study and there is a lot of good data. Dean hopes to have it presented at the state convention in 2 years and then the next year at the national convention.

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Nov 14, 2023

Page 3 of 6

- Mike Wendland stated that there wasn't much water that came out of the Marias River. There is a worry about finding an endangered species since it stops all the work that has been done by the Council. Karl discussed "Natural Asset" companies.
- Dana Berwick stated that he would like to continue to see "Test Flows" on the agenda. Worried about erosion on the rivers from so many big boats going up and down the rivers, causing big wakes. Money needs to go to stream bank restoration.
- Dallas Diehl said that we need to find ways to help producers to buy pipe so they can get water to where they need it. Ranchers are barely making it each year and can't afford it; possibly writing a TIP regarding this. Discussed ditch laws. Last year partner agencies put together a letter to the Forest Service in regards to their lawsuit against the Vigilante Electric Corporation; hindering fighting fire.
- Lorri Schafer discussed the American Prairie buffalo/bison impacts and the impact of FWS regulations. She would like to see the Council to continue working on education to show that most management practices do have a good conservation impact. Discussed regenerative agriculture and continuing to sell the stories of positive actions of farming/ranching.
- Monte Billing stated similar issues as Lorri and the American Prairie buffalo/bison impacts; been too quiet and worrisome on what they are doing. Land prices are an issue; can't afford to buy land to have his children next to him.
- Laura Kiehl stated that Petroleum County is very small and rural, and our infrastructure is strained from the extra traffic from recreation. We have American Prairie issues as well. Hard to keep track of their use and how it is going to affect the future of water quality. Issues with woody invasives with all the extra traffic. Brent stated that hunters are ruining our roads.
- Bruce Anderson that we need to get the pendulum swaying back with decisions more towards the CDs and less for the NRCS. Discussed NRCS staffing issues.
- Steve Wanderaas discussed staying engaged with the Test Flow situation and also staffing issues.
- Jeff Ryan discussed floodplain permitting issues; need floodplain permit for planting vegetation in riparian areas. Need to send a letter to the DNRC about the permitting issues.
- Barbie Martin stated that there have been a lot of river floaters leaving trash along the river. Discussed weed issues (whitetop and knapweed) and also the American Prairie impacts.
- Karl Christians discussed Living on the Banks, CMR CWG, Test Flows and the Comprehensive Water Review.

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Nov 14, 2023

Page 4 of 6

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – Molly stated that she didn't have much to report. Minutes are online or will be posted online if everyone wants to see what they have been discussing.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly discussed the CMR CWG meeting in Circle last week; went well, discussed BLM projects going on in MT and don't have any future plans yet for the next meeting. Dean suggested do a history lesson in January since so many new faces. Looking for new members on the CMR CWG planning committee, perhaps CD supervisors/producers. Laura suggested Winnett ACES or RSA members. Dean stated that districts put in their CD newsletters a letter about folks coming to the CMR CWG meetings.

Woody Invasive Species Task Force – Molly stated that there will be a Science Advisory Panel meeting next Monday in Billings, with a virtual option.

Living on the Bank – Handed out the Analytics Report that Chris put together from the website. LOTB info rack cards were made up and will be handed out and mailed to CDs.

Fort Peck Test Flows – Dana stated that he went to a MRRIC meeting the end of October; they discussed a lot of statistical information. They have been having stakeholder meetings; not been productive since so many new folks attending and have to give an overview that takes up a lot of time. A lot of smaller drainages unable to tell what fish traffic is happening or spawning. Dec 5-7 will be going to the MRRIC meeting in Omaha; there will be a lot of talk on test flows there. Dec 20 is the next meeting with the Joe Boneau group. Agencies folks are doing an excellent job giving answers; 50/50 on whether not doing the test flow next year. Annual Operating Plan was supposed to be last Tuesday, and not sure if rescheduled.

MT's Comprehensive Water Review – Molly stated she has been trying to attend their virtual meetings monthly. They are recorded and she will share those recordings when they become available.

Partner Reports

MACD – Dean Rogge stated that he hopes everyone enjoys and learns a lot at the MACD Convention. Had the Election of Officers this morning. Dean and Steve are remaining as President and Vice President and Gary Geim will be the Secretary/Treasurer; committee members staying the same. Karl Christians is the NACD delegate.

DNRC – No report.

NRCS – Kyle Tackett asked if anyone had questions. Karl discussed cleaning reservoirs and that it would be a good conservation effort with the NRCS. Kyle stated that they can't do everything, and hoping that someone else can work on that (cleaning reservoirs), and the NRCS can partner up for off stream stock water on the upland areas to help reduce sedimentation. Tom Watson will be here on Thursday for Convention.

MRWA – Jeff Pattison stated that Greg Jergeson and himself are on a Public Advisory Group. Canadians have a dam to divert water; allocated \$40 Million to do that. He read what he

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Nov 14, 2023

Page 5 of 6

received from Jon Testers office - things moving along with Ft. Belknap, \$260 million funding coming down and it is the Senators number one priority so far. Will keep posted as he hears more. House side – \$2 million in drought money that they got put in place to get projects moving on the ground at Fresno Lake. Continue to work on the EIS for the entire Saint Mary's Canal – weather has been favorable for getting work done. Diversion dam should get started for bids this month, and will start next year with the bypass canals.

MCC – No report.

CEMIST – Brent Smith stated that they are having an Eastern Heath Snail public meeting in Lewistown December 12 and the Feral Pig Highline Tour will be in March 2024.

Reach Reports

Lower Reach – Dana stated that Roosevelt's resolution is coming up and he is asking for everyone's support. The resolution was producer driven.

Reservoir Reach – Laura Kiehl stated that due to the River Rendezvous tour two years ago, Petrolia Irrigation District was chosen by Farmers Conservation Alliance to have a study done and paid for by NRCS to modernize Petrolia. Had a kick off meeting yesterday.

Middle Reach – None.

Upper Reach – None.

Individual CD Reports (voluntary/as needed) – None.

Coordinator Update – Went over the travel invoice vouchers and stated that she has them printed if anyone needs one. She has LOTB rack cards and Annual Reports on her table at Convention; and packets that will be sent out to the CDs. She also has MRCD annual reports.

Upcoming Events/Important Dates

November

- 14: MT Comprehensive Water Review
- 14: MRCD Quarterly in-person meeting, Billings**
- 15-16: MACD Convention, Billings
- 20: Woody Invasives Science Advisory Panel
- 23: Thanksgiving, Closed
- 29: CEMIST Meeting
- 29: PCCD Meeting

December

- 4-7: MRRIC Plenary Meeting
- 14: MT Comprehensive Water Review
- 19: MRCD Executive Committee Meeting**
- 20: PCCD Meeting
- 25: Christmas, Closed

January

9-10: MT Comprehensive Water Review, Lewistown

30: MRCDC Executive Committee Meeting

31: CEMIST Meeting

31: PCCD Meeting

Announcements

With no further business, Karl Christians asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dana Berwick made a motion to adjourn; Steve Wanderaas seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:07pm.

Approved by unanimous vote on: 02/21/2024

Submitted by:



Trish Smith, Secretary



Karl Christians, Chairman