

Quarterly Meeting Minutes
May 21, 2024
In person & Zoom, Sidney, MT

At 9:38am, Dana Berwick opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting. Council members present were Dana Berwick, Roosevelt CD; Laura Kiehl, Petroleum County CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Steve Wanderaas, McCone CD; Monte Billing, Garfield County CD; Dick Iverson; Richland CD; John Chase, Cascade CD (virtual); and Bruce Anderson, Blaine CD (Virtual). Others present were Kimberly Van Donsel, Ag West Farm Credit; Rebekah Abern, Ag West Farm Credit; Julie Goss, Richland CD; Robbie Savelkoul, Roosevelt CD; Joe Bonneau, USACE; Jamie Selting, NRCS; Tami Madsen, WAWSA Executive Director; Dave Bell, WAWSA; Bill Vander Weele; *The Roundup*; Dona Stafford (Virtual), Fergus CD; Tayler Scherr (Virtual), NGPJV; Trish Smith (Virtual), PCCD/MRCDC; Brent Smith (Virtual), CEMIST; Audrey Wright (Virtual), MCC; Catey Bauer, CDB-DNRC; Arnold Bighorn, Ft. Peck Tribes Water Resources; and Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator.

General

Everyone introduced themselves. Minutes were read and John Chase moved to approve the February 21, 2024 quarterly minutes as amended; Monte Billing seconded. Motion passed.

Public Comment

None.

Financial Report

Molly briefly discussed the financial report. Beginning of this fiscal year we have left over funds from the previous fiscal year that have been added, so our current total is higher than previous months. Molly has been ordering items for the CMR Community Working Group event, so asked Katie to add \$1000 to her card. Steve asked if extra funds are earmarked for anything; Molly stated it is mostly for travel, but it is flexible. Laura stated there is \$16K in the termination account and approximately \$23.8K in the vehicle account. Bills to be paid: PCCD invoice and Fergus County Fairgrounds for the CMR CWG meeting. Dick Iverson moved to pay the unpaid bills; John Chase seconded. Motion passed. Steve Wanderaas moved to approve the financial report; Laura Kiehl seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business

BLM draft EIS for Greater Sage-Grouse – Molly has made it through more of the document, but hasn't started a letter yet; comment letters are due June 13. Will need to have a special meeting to approve a comment letter. Will reach out to Stacey Barta on her thoughts. Molly stated there are sections on predator control, and Alternative three doesn't allow grazing in management areas. Monte stated that everything he does helps sage grouse and in 15+ years

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they have only seen feathers on one fence. Laura stated they do predator control that helps the sage grouse population. Lorri stated that environmental issues cause more problems for sage grouse than man-made issues. The Council went over specific issues and suggestions to focus on for a comment letter. We will need to have a special meeting before June 13 to approve the letter.

New Business

MRCDC outreach plan – Molly stated that Trish had discussed a newsletter earlier in the year. She thinks the website, Facebook page, and the monthly coordinator report will suffice. Laura stated that perhaps we can link other CD newsletters, etc., on our website. Robbie, from Roosevelt County CD, stated that they are looking at having Trish help them with their website. Discussed upcoming events that MRCDC needs to promote on social media, and using an ad to push that information out. Laura moved to promote the River Rendezvous with a Facebook ad; Dick Iversen seconded. Motion passed.

NRCS-RCPP – Molly stated that applications are due in July and there are a couple projects that could be done; one being reservoir clean out. Would have to be routed through a CD. Jamie Selting (NRCS) stated that it has to be one of the practices that they have listed and they don't really have anything for reservoir cleanout. Partners have to do the proposals and come up with match. Lorri discussed projects that were funded last year. Alternative funding arrangements is what Molly is looking at.

Test flow monitoring hire – Molly stated that she talked with the DNRC and emailed the Dept. of Ag. Budgets are tight but maybe at the new fiscal year they will have funding to hire students to go out for several weeks this summer to monitor sites. Dick stated that it will be hard to have outsiders that are not Ag savvy to come in and visit with ranchers who are already upset about not being able to irrigate. Laura suggested a local FFA Chapter. Robbie stated they will be applying for more funds, that maybe they can add to their CDA grant for additional payroll money to fund that position.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – Everyone looked over the April 23rd Executive Committee minutes.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly stated that the next CMR CWG meeting is June 27 in Winnett; going out to the King ranch after the meeting (at the PCCC). It will be hands on monitoring and 6 different stations with specialists. The Sept 19 meeting will be in Jordan and will have resources to help get a plan going on at properties.

Woody Invasive Species Working Group – Steve stated that MISC is helping move ISAN in response for doing work and statewide management. Plan is for Common Buckthorn, Russian Olive and Salt cedar; waiting on an economic study. It will take a lot of money so the noxious weed trust fund needs to be raised; hoping to present to the 2027 legislature and going to the 2025 legislature to get supplement funding of approximately \$500K. YRCDC is really involved and he will be attending their meeting on June 3 in Billings.

Living on the Bank – Dona stated that there were 8825 impressions for the Facebook ad they posted. John stated that later in the summer, when Cascade gets settled, they have plans to

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attack Naked River Banks, and hopefully can get MRCDL involved and try to get some movement on issues involved with the Naked River Banks campaign.

Fort Peck Test Flows – Dick stated what Rebekah (Ag West Farm Credit) will be doing with the crop insurance. He thanked Molly, Julie, and Robbie for helping put things together; it is a work in progress. Dana stated that he heard from a few producers; they have had their pump in the water a few times and back to irrigating. Rebekah (Ag West Farm Credit) stated that her job is to educate producers, go over different scenarios, and let them know that crop insurance is to cover natural occurring events, not man-made events. Dick has asked that they provide a letter for the DC trip.

MT's Comprehensive Water Review – Molly listened in on meeting in Glasgow last week. They are trying to finalize the different routes for the way the courts work with the water systems. They are starting to put bills together and the goal is by August. The other part was exempt wells and finalizing zones. Red zones are where they have issues with exempt wells and having impacts to surface water rights (Billings, Missoula, Helena, Bozeman and Kalispell). Nothing designated as yellow zones yet; places might be an issue but they are not sure. Green zones are the rest of the state. Working on finalizing that information. Next meeting is June 3rd in Helena at 9am.

River Rendezvous – Molly stated that we are still working on finalizing plans and hoping to open registration (\$25) around June 15; registration deadline is July 31. Event is August 22 in Townsend. Have a handful of rooms reserved for council members. There will be a Council code for registering. Sending that email out in the next few weeks.

Partner Reports

MACD – Steve stated that the MACD Spring Board is June 11-13 in Helena. McCone Invasive Grasses Workshop is June 12. The MISC Quarterly Meeting is in Billings July 9. NAISMA Conference is September 30 – October 3 in Missoula.

DNRC – Catey Bauer stated that Stephanie is back in the office. The CDA administrative grant deadline is June 30th and our Mini Education grants continue to have a rolling deadline. DNRC's fiscal year ends June 30th, so we are encouraging all reimbursement requests to be submitted as soon as possible.

NRCS – Jamie stated that they have worked a lot on the Yellowstone River working on irrigation efficiency. Soil health is gaining some momentum, and they are working on surveys with producers.

MRWA – Bruce Andersen stated that there was a meeting in Malta. Far as he knows they are going to continue and keep that group together. There is a canal and lateral efficiency study and the district is moving forward with projects to fix river banks and laterals. It is a great group and they want to keep it going, but they are limited on time.

MCC – Audrey Wright stated that MESIC restoration (BDAs) work will be done in multiple counties along the Missouri River.

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CEMIST – Brent agreed with Steve Wanderaas update on the WIWG and their efforts for the Economic/Ecological Impacts of Woody Invasive Species in Montana. There isn't a lot of data available and the range of woody invasive isn't conclusive. The Watercraft Inspections stations are all open and operating in the state of Montana. There have been over 8000 watercrafts inspected and 15 mussel fouled boats to date this year. CEMIST is hosting the AIS early detection and monitoring training at Fort Peck on June 18th. McCone CD is hosting an Invasive Annual Grasses Workshop on June 12th. CEMIST will have our monthly call on May 29th at 10AM.

Reach Reports

Lower Reach – Dick introduced Bill Vander Weele with *The Roundup* and Tami Madsen, Executive Director for the Western Area Water Supply Authority.

Reservoir Reach – Monte stated that they are moving forward with their water treatment plant at Dry-Redwater. Had around 3 inches of good rain in Garfield County. Laura stated that Petroleum County had a homesteading workshop (how to save seeds, atmospheric canning, etc.), the applicators class was postponed until later this fall, and the Ladies Day on the Range event will be June 6th on her ranch. Sarah Degn, from Sidney, will be doing a hops presentation. She grows hops as an alternative crop and Laura has a pilot hops yard. There will also be presentations on Invasive weeds, and mental health. Petrolia Irrigation District continues to move forward with the FCA for their Irrigation improvement project. Trish stated that they submitted the grant for the 2nd phase of the McDonald Creek Headgate (with WWC Engineering), planning a Kid's Day event in September, and finalizing MSGOT contracts with lawyers next week.

Middle Reach – Lorri stated that the BLM issued final rules on the conservation leases that MRDCDC commented on a year ago. Lorri's husband is on the RAC committee with BLM. They did implement some of the concerns and would like to see the final rule to see if our comments were incorporated. There was discussion on conservation leases and the process for doing Conservation Restoration Projects on BLM ground on properties.

Upper Reach – John stated that Cascade CD is getting into their new building. It is taking up a lot of time so they haven't been able to work on other projects. It is on a 12-acre site and need time doing landscaping; board members and employees will be doing that. Hoping sometime in the summer everyone can come and see the new headquarters. Molly suggested having our quarterly MRDCDC meeting there during convention.

Individual CD Reports (voluntary/as needed) – Bruce Anderson stated that they got a local engineer hired in Blaine County. The BOR is working on the dam; had over 4 inches of rain and water is going over the spill way. Dana stated that Roosevelt CD received a grant and got a 2nd No-Till Drill and getting equipment for their soil health program. Dona stated that Fergus CD sold over 6400 trees.

Coordinator Update – Molly mentioned to all to be sure to sign in on the sign in sheet.

11:30 pm: Joe Bonneau, Missouri River Recovery Program Manager, with the US Army Corps of Engineers, gave a presentation on the Fort Peck Test Release from the Missouri River

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Conservation Districts Meeting. Joe discussed the 2024 Flow Release Design, Test flow constraints designed to avoid/minimize impacts, and the expected flow schedule.

Upcoming Events/Important Dates

May

21: MRCDC Quarterly Meeting, Sidney

27: Memorial Day, closed

29: CEMIST meeting

29: PCCD meeting

Every Wednesday at 12:00pm (mtn time): USACE Test Flow update meeting

June

3: YRCDC meeting, Billings

5: MT Comprehensive Water Review

6: River Rendezvous Planning Meeting

11-13: MACD Spring Board meeting

25: MRRIC – Fish Draft AM Report

25: MRCDC Executive Committee meeting

26: CEMIST meeting

26: PCCD meeting

27: CMR CWG Rangeland Monitoring Training

Every Wednesday at 12:00pm (mtn time): USACE Test Flow update meeting

July

4: Happy Independence Day, Closed

19: Molly out

23: MRCDC Executive Committee Meeting

31: CEMIST Meeting

31: PCCD Meeting

30-8/1: MRRIC AM Workshop, Omaha

Every Wednesday at 12:00pm (mtn time): USACE Test Flow update meeting

Announcements

With no further business, Dana Berwick stated the meeting was adjourned at 12:18pm.

Approved by unanimous vote on: 11-19-2024

Submitted by:



Trish Smith, Secretary



Karl Christians, Chairman