

Quarterly Meeting Notes
August 21, 2024
The Lodge of Townsend, MT

At 3:06pm, Karl Christians opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting. Council members present were Karl Christians, Lewis & Clark CD; Dallas Diehl, Broadwater CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Monte Billing, Garfield CD; Jeff Ryan, Lewis & Clark CD; Dick Iversen, Richland CD; Others present were Jeff Schafer, BLM Resource Advisory Council; Stacey Barta, DNRC-RRP; Steph Criswell, DNRC-CDB; Rebecca Boslough-King, MACD; Mary Hendrix, DNRC-CDB; Denise Donnelly, Broadwater CD; Connie Iverson, Richland County producer; Kasydi Lucas, DNRC-CDB; Russ Hartzell, MISC; Liz Lodman, MISC; Trish Smith, PCCD/MRCDC; Brent Smith, CEMIST; and Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator.

General

Everyone introduced themselves. The May 21, 2024 minutes were read, but due to lack of quorum they will be approved at the next meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Financial Report

Molly and Karl briefly discussed the financial report and outstanding bills. Went over the suggested changes for the budget and the possible hire of a couple Test Flow monitoring folks. Discussed several funding options, and asked council members to talk with their CDs on possible options. Due to a lack of quorum, no action was taken.

Old Business

Test flow monitoring hire - Dick discussed reasons for hiring folks to monitor the test flow, and the surveys that were put together to collect data that will be important for future decisions. Historically the Environmental Impact Statement discussed wanting to mimic a dam as if the reservoir isn't there. Dana and Dick offered to help train the new hires, and how to deal with the farmers.

Montana's Noxious Weed Trust Fund – Molly stated that Dan Rostad with YRCDC has been working with MACO to increase the amount of the funding in the MT Noxious Weed Trust Fund. Stacey discussed the history of the trust fund, and that it is currently at \$10 Million.

CDAC (Conservation District Advisory Council) Letter – Dick discussed the CDAC that was dissolved and that MRCDC thinks that a group like that is still important for Conservation Districts. MRCDC has put together a letter of support recommending the DNRC having a group

similar to CDAC to give advice and input to CDB; waiting to hear from MACD/DNRC to see what their thought is on it. Steph gave a history of the RCAC and CDAC, and the time/money involved with the it. She said the return on investment is what caused it to not be reallocated by DNRC. They will be giving information on this at Area meetings and the MACD Convention, and will be looking for input. For the grant cycle this fall, commenting will be open to everyone, including the public.

New Business

MRCDC funding mechanisms – Molly discussed the possibility of NRCS funds to help fund MRCDC.

Federal Register (new agenda item) – Everyone looked over the Department of Ag - Natural Resources Conservation Service's request for public input about the implementation of the sustainability targets in agriculture to incentivize natural solution act. Discussed the SUSTAINS Act portion of the document. Public comments are due Sept 16. Will research more on this, and have a committee get comments to Molly by August 29. There will be a special executive committee meeting September 6, 7:30am, to discuss and hopefully approve the letter.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – Everyone looked over the June & July Executive Committee minutes.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly stated that we were supposed to have a meeting September 19, but will be postponing it to October 29 in Jordan. Planning committee will be meeting next week. Focus will be range land monitoring programs and the resources to get started, etc. Karl discussed that last CMR CWG meeting that was June 27 in Winnett; good turnout, but did get rained out. Trying to get better turn outs to the meetings.

Woody Invasive Species Working Group – Molly stated that the 2nd Science Advisory Panel will be October 17 in Helena. They are getting economic and resource impact studies (Russian Olive, Salt Cedar, Common Buckthorn), before the next legislative session.

Living on the Bank – Molly stated that they are working with the Montana Realtors Association. They are having their convention in Great Falls October 16.

Fort Peck Test Flows – Dick would like to thank Molly, Robbie, Julie Goss, DNRC, and MACD for all their help. Molly gave an update from John Remus and their plan of operations for the next 6-8 weeks. They terminated the test flow July 24, and resumed normal operations. This resulted in increasing the average daily releases from 8K cfs to 9K cfs. Plan to hold these releases through mid-September, and then will reduce releases to the fall/winter rates of 4k to 5K cfs. Dick discussed the gage at Culbertson was not working properly and was not giving correct readings.

MT's Comprehensive Water Review – Rebecca Boslough-King stated that they have six draft bills that they are looking at, with different options. The main topics have been on exempt wells, not prioritizing particular use or industry, the accuracy of info, and the cumulative impact of water users. Also discussion on water courts and what that will look like.

Partner Reports

MACD – Rebecca Boslough-King stated that CD Area Meetings will be the last week of September and 1st week of October. The MACD Convention is November 19-21 in Great Falls. Resolution preliminary deadline was August 15; final deadline is Sept 1. There is a NACD Poster contest for schools to take part in. MACD is flying their Communication Specialist position (previously Eric Ranstad); hoping to have someone in person in Helana, but open to a remote position. Discussed topics at the next Legislative Session and district funding. The Trust does continue to grow (at around \$20 Million, cap is \$100 Million). The administrative grant has gone up to \$60K. So far 58 districts are participating in the MACD dues, which is probably the highest number to date. Discussed the Big Sky Watershed Program; if a CD is interested in hosting they need to get in an application since the deadline is September 1. A Big Sky Watershed member will be filming at the River Rendezvous tomorrow. MACD has been working over the last 6 months, redoing the MT Conservation Menu (funding and program resources), collaborating with the Department of Ag, DEQ, etc., and will be relaunching it in October.

DNRC – Steph Criswell stated that they have approximately \$1.5 Million going out for CDA grants; contracts coming out now, \$60K is the base amount for every district after subtracting their mill levy amount. The \$3500 for MACD dues is in addition to that base amount. Everyone that applied for the CDA opted in for the MACD dues. The Planning/Project/Pollinator grant application will open September 1 and close October 15. The DNRC wants to hear from districts their thoughts on the grants. Only change to the application is adding a field to upload a photograph/logo since they are displayed online. Minutes need to be filed with the County Clerk and Recorder office and the DNRC. Working on a guide book for equipment rentals with a couple CDs, and there will be a training to go over those guidelines August 27. Their monthly newsletter spotlights CDs monthly. Stacey stated that the Grazing School will be in Havre next June 4-5 at the Northern Ag Experiment Station, the Range Tour will be Hilger/Lewistown mid to late June, and having a Level 2 Grazing School next year also. Just finished up their internship program with three interns. Going forward, can only have two interns since lost some funding. October 8-9 the Range Resource Committee Meeting is in Winnett.

Liz Lodman discussed updates with MISC (Montana Invasive Species Council). Hired Russ Hartzell as the new program specialist. MISC is made up of four state agencies, and several representatives. The CD representative and chair of MISC is Steve Wanderaas. Helping at the NAISMA conference Oct 1-3 in Missoula. The Noxious Weed Trust Fund covers registration but not the field trip. There will be an invasive annual grasses presentation on Oct 1, Oct 2 is the field trip day, and there will be more seminars on Oct 3. NAISMA will not be close to Montana again, so encouraging all to attend. MISC Summit will be in Helena November 13-14. Eastern Heath Snails were detected in Lewistown a couple weeks ago; they have been in Belt for many years. The Fergus CD is taking the lead on this. MISC manages the AIS grant. Grant cycle is coming out later this fall and will award for the 2025 year.

NRCS – No report.

MRWA – Karl stated that the Milk River is dry after the siphons blew.

MCC – No report

CEMIST – Brent Smith stated they had a stakeholder meeting in Lewistown yesterday to discuss education and outreach options, and Eastern Heath Snail management of the new population in Lewistown. There will be public meetings in the near future to address the issue. Hosting an AIS Train the Trainer Workshop October 16 in Bozeman. Four miles of Vententa was detected on Hwy 200 at Belt.

Reach Reports

Lower Reach – Dick stated that they have a lot of grasshoppers and dealing with drought. He talked to a producer who said that over the last few years, four wells have gone dry. Discussed oil fracking and the increasing wells. There is a surplus of natural gas and a \$450 Million fertilizer plant going in.

Reservoir Reach – Monte stated that it has been a good crop year, but pastures are dry from the heat and grasshoppers. It has been their 5th year having grasshoppers.

Middle Reach – Lorri stated that they have had quite a bit of rain but everyone still cutting. Good hay crops, but some were hailed out. Discussed putting Eastern Heath Snail brochures in everyone's water bill in the town of Denton.

Upper Reach – Jeff stated that they had a good turnout at their Annual Watershed Festival. It is an outreach effort with their CD and Rolling Rivers trailer. Their Area 5 Meeting will be September 24; will be having a tour on 7 Mile Creek, west of Helena by Fort Harrison.

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

Coordinator Update – Molly mentioned that the October Executive Committee Meeting will need to be rescheduled due to the CMR CWG meeting rescheduled for October.

Upcoming Events/Important Dates

August

21: MRCDC Quarterly meeting, Townsend

22: River Rendezvous, Townsend

28: CEMIST meeting

28: PCCD meeting

September

2: Labor Day, closed

9: Molly out

17-19: All MRRIC event

19: CMR CWG, Jordan

24: MRCDC Exec. Committee meeting, 1:00pm

25: CEMIST meeting

25: PCCD meeting

30-10/3: NAISMA Conference, Missoula

October

14: Closed

16: MT Realtors Conference – LivingOnTheBank.com table, Great Falls

17-18: Educators Conference, CEMIST table, Bozeman

29: *MRCDC Exec. Committee meeting, 1:00pm*

30: CEMIST meeting

30: PCCD meeting

Announcements

With no further business, Karl Christians stated the meeting was adjourned at 5:51pm.