

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes
May 27, 2025 – In Person & Zoom**

At 1:00pm, Karl Christians opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting. Council members present in person were Karl Christians, Lewis & Clark CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Greg Jergeson, Blaine CD; Dallas Diehl, Broadwater CD; and Mike Hansen, Gallatin CD. Council members present virtually were Dick Iversen, Richland CD; John Chase, High Plains CD; Jeff Ryan, Lewis & Clark CD, Laura Kiehl, Petroleum CD; Dana Berwick, Roosevelt CD; Steve Wanderaas, McCone CD; and Monte Billing, Garfield CD. Others present were Cameron Skinner, MRCDC Irrigation Outreach Specialist; Danika Holmes, Upper Missouri Water Planner (DNRC); Rebecca Boslough-King, MACD; Liz Lodman, MISC; Robbie Savelkoul, Roosevelt CD; Melissa Maggio, MT Biocontrol Program; and Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator (in person).

General

Karl gave a general introduction and stated that his term as chair will be ending in a couple of months; Dana taking over the Chair position. A new vice chair will need to be selected. Everyone introduced themselves.

Public Comment

None.

Minutes

Minutes were read and Greg Jergeson moved to approve the February 25, 2025 quarterly minutes as amended; Lorri Schafer seconded. Motion passed.

Financial Report

Molly discussed Katie Lund's (MRCDC fiscal manager) financial notes. Insurance has increased, so need to increase budget around \$1000. Holding current 707 grant through September 30. The council's grant cycle has been extended to September 30th, 2025, to align with DNRC's fiscal processes and ease financial pressure on Petroleum CD. The new grant will start Oct 1. Mike Hansen moved to approve the May financial report and unpaid bills; Dana Berwick seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business

FY26-27 Budget Review – No report.

New Business

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Coordinator telework agreement– John Chase moved to approve/adopt the Coordinator Telework Agreement; Mike Hansen seconded. Motion passed.

FWP's 2025 Draft Aquatic Invasive Species Mngt. Plan– Molly discussed the two documents and the letter she put together stating that MRCDC supports the program. Comment letters are due June 15. Liz stated there are a lot of changes from the management plan from 2002, but she thinks it is a good plan. Greg Jergeson moved to approve the FWP 2025 Draft Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan comment letter; Mike Hansen seconded. Motion passed.

MRCDC's DNRC Grant Application – Discussed the new DNRC grant application process. A new grant application for MRCDC and other councils is being developed by DNRC, currently under legal review. Essentially, need to define and qualify success of the council in the new application. Lori inquired if we need to make a motion to approve budget to grant MRCDC to continue using grant funds after July 1. Molly said that the budget approved prior to July 1 as a Council should suffice, since the funds are there. Karl stated that DNRC signed the amended grant through Sept 30, 2025, so should be authorized on the previous budget. Laura Kiehl moved to approve the continued use of our FY2025 budget through September; Dana Berwick seconded. Motion passed.

Partner Reports

MACD – Update

DNRC – Danika Holmes, DNRC's Water Resources Division, provided an overview of her role as a water planner for the Upper Missouri basin. Her responsibilities include helping communities implement drought plans, water management plans, and providing technical assistance for water-related projects. She offered to connect council members with resources and expertise within DNRC to support their work.

NRCS – No report.

MCC – No report.

CEMIST – Steve Wanderaas stated CEMIST received 75% of their ask of the DNRC CD project grant; good for the next year. Brent will be giving an Eastern Heath Snail presentation at the Grain Growers board meeting in Great Falls on June 5. They did a review of their MOU with PCCD; will be approved and signed at their PCCD meeting tomorrow.

MACD – Becca Boslough reported that MACD's spring board meeting is scheduled for June 10-12 in Helena. The formal board meeting and partner updates will take place on June 12th. MACD is preparing for upcoming interim committee meetings, including monitoring the Water Policy Interim Committee's activities related to HB 935. Greg asked about the outcomes of several exempt well Bills. Danika with DNRC stated that a bill passed creating a "notice of intent to develop groundwater" process, replacing the current "notice of completion" for exempt wells. This change aims to address issues raised in the Broadwater County decision regarding water right assurances for subdivisions. The new process will be implemented statewide but won't always be necessary for existing developed land. Rulemaking to iron out details will occur later in the fall, with a public comment period. Becca stated that SB472, which impacts the 310 law, was vetoed by the governor. Districts and DNRC are expected to revisit the issue.

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MISC – Liz Lodman stated that a science advisory panel was convened to assess the invasiveness of species and prioritize threats to Montana. Emerald Ash Borer awareness week was held, emphasizing the importance of not moving firewood to prevent its spread. Eastern Heath Snail infestations have been detected in several Montana counties, with a meeting planned for July 16th to discuss impacts. The next quarterly meeting of the Invasive Species Council will be held on July 29th in Trout Creek, including a tour of noxious weeds entering Montana from the west.

Committee Reports

Fort Peck Test Flows – Cameron reported on the ongoing Fort Peck Test Flow Study, revealing significant impacts on irrigators including increased debris accumulation, pump damage, land erosion, and crop losses. He discussed the ongoing irrigator survey, with about 25-30% of participants surveyed so far. Key findings from the survey include: High test flows cause debris accumulation around pump sites, requiring dangerous cleaning operations. 100% of respondents reported at least 20 additional hours of pump site cleaning and monitoring. 20% experienced pump damage due to debris. Low flows cause sudden water level drops, exacerbating erosion. Average land loss was one acre per 4,300 feet of river front. 25% of respondents reported crop losses exceeding \$10,000, with extreme cases losing over \$650,000. Safety concerns were raised about working in the water to maintain pumps. The survey will continue, with about 29 irrigators left to interview. Plans to present broad-level data at the upcoming adaptive management meeting next week. Dana emphasized the importance of the survey data, especially in light of potential funding cuts for USACE monitoring efforts.

Executive Committee – Molly discussed executive committee minutes in the packet.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly stated this group is on pause for now. Paula Gouse will be replaced.

Woody Invasive Species Working Group – Molly stated they are working on their draft state plan. Liz stated they didn't get funded for their Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant.

Living on the Bank – Molly will email out updated website analytics.

River Rendezvous – Molly stated that the planning committee met 2 weeks ago. Finalized the "Save the Date" info. Quarterly meeting will be the morning of August 25 and then will start the tour in the afternoon around 1:30pm. First portion of the tour will be from Dodson Bladder to Malta. The following morning (26th) the tour will continue from Malta to Vandalia Dam. Discussed meals, lodging and the bus.

Fox Hills Hell Creek Aquifer Efforts Molly stated that MRCDC is working with MACD. Dick reported that the Bureau of Mines and Geology will conduct a study on the Fox Hills aquifer. The DNRC has put a stop on issuing permits for two industrial development wells, providing relief for people with stock wells. DNRC officials thanked the Missouri River Council and districts for their efforts in bringing attention to the water rights issue. Kimberly Fisher from North Dakota, described as a "water rights guru," has produced a 250-page report on the Fox Hills

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aquifer. Fisher suggesting that the Fox Hills aquifer might be "one-time water." This means the aquifer may not recharge within many lifetimes, emphasizing the need to maintain current water levels and use it sparingly. Reports indicate numerous wells in the Trenton bottoms area are submerged under Lake Sacagawea and are continuously leaking. Karl discussed the RCPP program; successful in salinity control projects. Laura discussed a successful well-capping program in Petroleum County (20 years ago), and stated they want to reinstate a similar program.

Individual CD Reports (voluntary/as needed):

Laura (PCCD) discussed their new Water Conservation Program Coordinator position. Interviewed two applicants last week, and will decide this week who they will hiring. The position will focus on projects such as well capping, Petrolia irrigation district rehabilitation, and off-stream storage projects, assist with a watershed plan being developed by Winnett ACES. It will be full-time and involve grant writing to fund the position further. Discussed un-capped wells further.

Dallas stated their new administrator has been working on starting a lot of programs and working with different organizations like Envirothon, school etc.

Greg discussed the work on the St. Mary's syphons; getting close to be able to move water. Discussed all the work being done, issues dealing with, and irrigation going on. Everyone is happy with the progress.

Jeff Ryan reported on a new bill introduced by Senators Daines called the Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act. The bill allows engineers to use qualitative analysis (best professional judgment) instead of quantitative no-rise analysis for certain projects in floodways. Aims to reduce costs for smaller restoration projects that intuitively won't impact flood flows. Karl emphasized that this legislation could affect many districts, as projects have been shut down due to expensive engineering requirements. There is hope that this bill will start a conversation about developing guidelines for projects that could bypass expensive hydraulic and hydrologic studies.

Guest Presentation – MT biocontrol Program – Melissa Maggio:

Melissa Maggio presented an overview of the Montana Biocontrol Coordination Project, highlighting its mission to incorporate biocontrol into noxious weed management. In 2024, the project collected and distributed over 1.6 million insects for 4 target weeds across 35 Montana counties, 2 tribal nations, and 15 other states. The project is facing significant funding challenges, with some federal funding sources completely gone and others currently frozen. This situation may impact future activities and the scope of the program's operations. Despite financial constraints, future plans include coordinating collection days throughout Montana, partnering with MSU for white top gall mite distribution, continuing educational programming, updating the website with new resources, and conducting various monitoring activities for specific weed species and biocontrol agents.

Coordinator Update – No update.

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Upcoming Events/Important Dates

May

27: ***MRCDC Quarterly, Manhattan***

28: PCCD meeting

29: Molly out

29: CEMIST meeting

June

3: Test Flow presentation at MRRIC

3-5: MRRIC AM workshop

10-12: MACD Springboard, Helena

13: YRCDC meeting

17: River Rendezvous planning meeting

18: Froid Field Day – Test Flow survey

24: ***MRCDC Exec. Committee***

24: MRWA committee meeting

25: PCCD meeting

25: CEMIST meeting

TBD: CMR CWG planning committee

Announcements

With no further business, Karl Christians stated the meeting was adjourned at 3:45pm.

Approved by unanimous vote on: 8/25/2025

Submitted by:



Trish Smith, Secretary



Karl Christians, Chairman