

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2025 – Zoom only**

At 1:02pm, Karl Christians opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting. Council members present were Karl Christians, Lewis & Clark CD; Dana Berwick, Roosevelt CD; Mike Hansen, Gallatin CD; Tom Beck, Roosevelt CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Dick Iversen, Richland CD; John Chase, High Plains CD; Greg Jergeson, Blaine CD; Jeff Ryan, Lewis & Clark CD. Others present were Becca Boslough King, MACD; Barb Martin, BSCD; Autumn Holzgen, MCC; Cora Gray, Phillips CD; Dona Stafford, FCD; Macy Bliss, GCCD; Amy Seaman, MWCC; Shane Lammerding, Phillips CD; Katie Lund, MRCDC Fiscal Manager (Virtual); Trish Smith, PCCD/MRCDC; Brent Smith, CEMIST; and Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator.

General

Karl gave a general introduction and everyone introduced themselves.

1:00pm: MT Legislative Session Update: Rebecca Boslough, MACD – Becca Boslough provided a comprehensive update on numerous bills affecting conservation districts, including SB77 (procurement laws compliance), SB254 (lobbying restrictions), and LC334 (emergency response resources). Discussed several tax and funding bills, including a Coal Trust Fund update, highlighting potential impacts on district operations and funding. A package of five water-related bills addressing various aspects of state water administration was presented, with MACD supporting the package. Other key water bills discussed included HB256 (Montana Water Trust), SB10 (310 permit timelines), and SB472 (increased penalties for 310 permit violations).

Karl Christians and John Chase discussed a draft bill addressing declining groundwater levels in the Fox Hills Aquifer, proposing a temporary legislative closure of three administrative basins and setting a threshold limit of 35 gallons per minute for new permits, with some concerns raised about potential agricultural impacts. Becca will send the revised draft of the Fox Hill Aquifer bill to stakeholders once DNRC Water Resources edits are integrated.

Discussed local planning board laws, the MACD bill tracking sheet, and Becca encouraged everyone to reach out if they notice any bills of concern and also attend legislative committee meetings (Tuesdays at 7am) and provide testimony on important bills.

Public Comment

None.

Minutes

Minutes were read and John Chase moved to approve the November 19, 2024 quarterly minutes; Lorri Schafer seconded. Motion passed.

Financial Report

Katie presented the financial report. Three quarters the way through the FY; \$47,000 received from DNRC funds, another \$28K will be reimbursed soon, and have expended \$65K in total expenses, which is less than $\frac{1}{2}$ the projected amount. Current account balances: Checking (\$8,111), Savings (\$47,266), and CC balance (\$1,659). Discussed unpaid bills. John Chase moved to approve the February financial report and unpaid bills; Lorri Schafer seconded. Motion passed. Molly proposed purchasing a drone for conservation district projects, irrigation inspections, and monitoring. The proposal was discussed, including issues and things to consider; and Molly Masters will research options and present quotes to the Council. Katie discussed insurance for a drone.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – Everyone looked over the Executive Committee minutes included in the packet. Have approved several grant letters of support for a few different partners.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly stated that she sent out feedback surveys to the whole working group on the Listserv. Looking at condensing to 1-2 meetings a year – focusing on stakeholder updates and maybe a tour. Eighteen responses so far, only 2 producers. Most agree with the condensed meetings. Karl Christians emphasized the importance of engagement, especially with potential changes in Fish and Wildlife Service administration and the upcoming review of the CCP plan

Woody Invasive Species Working Group – Molly reported that the core planning group has met a couple of times this year; meeting tomorrow to discuss the overall goal of the group and review the state plan. Applied for another MT Noxious Trust Fund grant (over \$50K); to help fund a field day and outreach on TV and PSA info. Grant hearing for the grants is March 10-12. New tri-fold handout created for Common Buckthorn, Saltcedar, and Russian Olive identification. Continuing to work on the statewide plan.

Living on the Bank – John had no updates. Dona was at the MATE show and discussed the website with folks to share. New outreach materials available. Plans to present to CDs during meetings. Grant for the project has been completed.

Fort Peck Test Flows – Dana stated no test flow planned for next year; still compiling data. Dick gave an update on the work Cameron Skinner has been doing; provided info and resources to Cameron to read, working on Hydrofield mapping from the Corp. Karl discussed what all Cameron will be doing in the new position; interview irrigators about impacts of test flows. Results will help with future test flow planning. Data should be compiled by April 15.

Partner Reports

MACD – Karl reported that the DC fly in will be March 26, and complimented Becca doing a great job with the legislative bills and bill tracker. Jeff discussed the restructuring of FEMA and floodplain permitting. Karl discussed the recent NACD convention in SLC, including support for empowering NRCS state offices in staffing decisions and making virtual fencing a standalone NRCS practice. He stated the importance of districts leading local work groups. Karl mentioned working with Jeremy Peters (CEO of NACD) to establish a process for implementing passed initiatives. Lori reported that no new IRA contracts are being made, only existing ones are being paid. Greg mentioned losing two brand new engineer hires. Karl suggested that CDs could

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voluntarily document their weekly accomplishments to support NRCS staff positions. Dick discussed the difficulty in recruiting new employees, and experienced staff who took buyouts will be hard to replace. Karl stated that LCCD sent a letter to Brooke Rollins and Cc'd all Congressionals in support of NRSC partnership; encouraged other CDs to write similar letters. Dean, Steve Hertel, and Becca will be attending the DC Fly-in. Karl stated that specific topics for the fly-in are still being compiled, but typically include explaining what CDs do, discussing programs and where help is needed, etc. John requested that any list of bullet points or topics be circulated to the group for additional input. Next year's NACD convention will be held in San Antonio.

DNRC – No report.

NRCS – Karl reported that NRCS was close to signing someone on as a state conservationist

MCC – Autumn stated that 35 BSWC members have been launched to work across the state. State; four in Helena, one in Havre, two in Glasgow, one in Townsend, and one in Lewistown. Crew leaders started their leadership development training. Field season officially starts in May. Specialized restoration crews increased this year; focused on BDA work. In the process of hiring a new program coordinator to help Autumn; based in Great Falls.

CEMIST – Brent stated that CEMIST attended the Invasive Species Rotunda Day in Helena in February. There was a strong turnout by partners, as well as legislators. CEMIST had a booth at this year's MATE Show in Billings. Dona and Molly helped staff the booth. CEMIST's quarterly meeting will be tomorrow from 1-3 and is virtual only. There will be partner updates as well as season outlook reports. Walker Billings from Sheridan County Weed and Pest in Wyoming will present on IAG and their E&O efforts. CEMIST will be pivoting a little with regards to our Early Detection and Monitoring AIS workshops. There hasn't been much benefit for the FWP AIS bureau for gaining additional monitoring efforts, so CEMIST will be focusing more on a "see something, say something" effort. Use of "I Naturalist" app with public and students. In July or August CEMIST will be supporting the Judith Basin CD for an Eastern Heath Snail workshop. This will bring in partners and EHS specialists as well as producers that are operating in areas of infestations. CEMIST is also applying for the CDB project grants for continued funding for our all taxa E&O efforts.

MWCC - Amy Seaman reported on the funding challenges; organizing watershed groups to put together numbers from the effects of federal cuts. Sending a letter stating money at risk and budgets dependent on this. BOR grants supporting staff are at risk. Their grants are still moving forward as of right now. Just about done getting through the 1st round of capacity grants. Will possibly have it open again this fall. Just opened DEQ project grants. Watershed Stewardship awards will be in Helena March 30. Watershed symposium planned for September 15th week in Billings; collaborating with Winnett ACES.

MRWA – Molly stated that they met last week to go over the MOU between VCCD and PCCD. Looking at having a meeting mid-March between the MRWA committee, a couple PCCD and VCCD board members, Stephanie Criswell and DNRC Legal, to make sure everyone is on the same page, then move on to a work plan after that.

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Individual CD Reports (voluntary/as needed) – John stated that they are currently working with the city on their growth policy. Focusing on use and abuse of the river corridor, and storm water runoff. Trish shared images of the recent flooding. The Musselshell River is around 40 yards from the Rowton house now. Trish also discussed working on grants and a potential new Water Conservation Program Coordinator position. Dona discussed the TA Grant applied for to do a feasibility study due to the horrible floods they have; solid rock and no vegetation. Working with Big Spring Creek Watershed. Also stated that they are having a lot of tree sales.

Old Business

Fox Hills efforts -covered prior.

River Rendezvous Location – Molly discussed having the River Rendezvous in the Sleeping Buffalo area; it is available for the planned week but is a little pricey. Government rates are available and there are cabins and suites that can accommodate 30 people. Also camping spots available for campers. Shane and Lori cautioned about expensive dining options. Malta was suggested as an alternative by Shane. Lori suggested having Malta as a base, with day trips to other locations. Molly Masters mentioned a Phragmites presentation by Josh from the Department of Agriculture. Karl gave a quick Milk River project update; also a good topic for the River Rendezvous. Lori suggested arranging meals as part of a package with a set menu and rate. Shane mentioned Range Days organized by Phillips County. Molly stated that coordination with Range Days might be challenging. Molly stated they will form a R.R. committee to have a meeting in early March. Tentative timeframe for the event is in August, and will move forward with Malta as the potential location.

New Business

NRCS program support letter – Dana Berwick moved to send a NRCS program support letter; Dick Iversen seconded. Motion passed.

CEMIST letter of support for CDB grant – Brent discussed the grant. Mike Hansen moved to approve the CEMIST letter of support for the CDB grant; John Chase seconded. Motion passed.

Council leadership elections – The MRCDC Chair and Vice Chair positions will open up at the May quarterly meeting; both are 2-year terms. Vice Chair is usually put in the Chair position. Vice Chair is then opened up to a CD supervisor.

FY 26-27 Work Plan – There have been considerable changes since the Council went over the plan in 2023. Discussed the changes that Molly had made to the FY26-27 work plan. Molly will send the FY26-27 Work Plan to the Council and set up a date to finalize and approve at the April Executive Committee meeting.

Coordinator Update – Molly stated that March 10-12 is the Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant hearing. Traveling at some point for the Fox Hills aquifer bill. River Rendezvous is paid for with the MACD agreement through NRCS. As of right now, that money is still in place.

Jeff Ryan stated to add to the calendar their MT Conservation Elders *Montana Matters* event, April 19, in Helena. It is an outdoor event with educational booths and outreach for kids;

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Invasive weeds trailer, rolling rivers trailer, solar powered pump system, pollinator station, etc.
Last year's attendance was over 700.

Upcoming Events/Important Dates

February

25: MRCDC Quarterly Meeting – Zoom Only

26: PCCD Meeting

26: CEMIST Meeting

TBD: MRWA meeting

TBD: CMR CWG planning committee

TBD: WIWG Core Group meeting #2

Weekly on Tuesdays at 7am: MACD Legislative committee meetings

March

19: Molly out

25: MRCDC Exec. Committee

26: PCCD meeting

26: CEMIST meeting

Weekly on Tuesdays at 7am: MACD Legislative committee meetings

Announcements

With no further business, Karl Christians stated the meeting was adjourned at 3:51pm.

Approved by unanimous vote on: May 27, 2025

Submitted by:



Trish Smith, Secretary



Karl Christians, Chairman