

MRCDC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
April 22, 2025 at 1:00pm via Zoom

At 1:00pm, Chair Karl Christians called the MRCDC Executive Committee meeting to order.

Council members present were **Karl Christians, Lewis & Clark CD; Lorri Schafer, Fergus CD; Jeff Ryan, Lewis & Clark CD; Dick Iversen, Richland CD; John Chase, High Plains CD; Dana Berwick, Roosevelt CD;** Jeff Pattison, Valley CD; and Shane Lammerding, Phillips CD. Others present were Robbie Savelkoul, Roosevelt CD; Amy Seaman, MWCC; Katie Lund, MRCDC/PCCD Fiscal Manager; Olivia Finley, Blaine CD; and Molly Masters, MRCDC Coordinator. **Executive Committee Members in BOLD.*

APPROVE MINUTES

Minutes were reviewed from the March 25, 2025 MRCDC executive committee meeting. John Chase moved to approve the minutes; Jeff Ryan seconded. Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

FINANCIAL REPORT

Katie gave an April financial report. Income is around 70% (usually around 75% at this point in the fiscal year). Expenses are at around 60% of the total budget for the year. Accounts: Checking (\$24K) and Savings (\$47K). A reimbursement of around \$23K is ready for the last quarter. There is a \$35K advance that needs to be cleared up before the end of the fiscal year. Katie estimates expenses will reach close to the \$35K by the end of April. John Chase moved to approve the financial report and unpaid bills; Dana Berwick seconded. Motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

Work Plan approval – Karl stated that work plans are flexible and can be adjusted if pressing matters arise mid-year. John Chase moved to approve the MRCDC Work Plan; Dick Iversen seconded. Motion passed.

Budget approval – The current grant is set to close September 30, not June 30 as previously thought; this creates potential conflicts with the new budget and DNRC's fiscal year-end. Katie suggested transferring money from savings to cover cash flow until the next reimbursement in July. Will schedule a meeting with Steph Criswell with DNRC to clarify grant timeline and funding issues, and hold a separate internal meeting to discuss grant funding logistics before meeting with DNRC. Budget approval has been postponed until after the DNRC meeting. Molly stated that she needs to get her pickup windshield replaced (approximately \$450), and needs promotional items (pens, travel mugs, tote bags – approximately \$1200). No decisions will be made until the budget is finalized.

NEW BUSINESS

Extending Irrigation Outreach Specialist contract: The contract was discussed; the original contract end date was April 15. Discussed extending contract through September 30, 2025. Molly reported on the progress so far; 31 pump sites surveyed involving 15-20 folks. Discussed plans for an in-person event for irrigators; Robbie suggested hosting a meal with the meeting and tying the event with the Froid Field Day in June. Dick suggested reviewing a draft of completed surveys to ensure data quality. John Chase moved to extend the Irrigation Outreach Specialist Contract through September 30, 2025; Dick Iversen seconded. Motion passed.

Grazing Expo Registration: Molly discussed the event; 3-day conference with various speakers, \$450 early bird registration. Discussed benefits - professional development, networking opportunities, etc. Dick Iversen moved to approve Molly to attend; John Chase seconded. Passed.

FHHC Committee Stand-up: Molly gave an update on legislative efforts for the Fox Hills Committee; bill passed in the House, working on amendments to add a smaller closure area to be sent to the Senate floor. Karl and Dick commended Becca Boslough/MACD's involvement in the process. Dick suggested exploring regional partnership agreements with NRCS. Other items discussed: implementing valve systems on flowing wells and developing a co-share program for redrilling if needed. Karl agreed to bring up the idea for partnership with the NACD counterpart of the Northern Plains region.

MT Biocontrol Program Donation: Molly discussed the Montana Biocontrol Program. They are seeking donations; goal to raise \$20K. The program is tight on funds this year due to cuts. The Council would like more information on their program before deciding on a donation. Molly will ask Melissa Maggio to join a future meeting to give a presentation on funding and operation questions that arose. Perhaps she could present at the May 27th quarterly meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fort Peck Test Flows – Dick stated that the Test Flows are taking a break this year due to insufficient water; river might run slightly higher than usual, which could benefit pump sites if operational. Molly gave an update on the recent MRRIC meeting; focusing on communications with irrigators, and aim to develop best practices for the Corps regarding challenging topics. Discussed a proposal for MRRIC representation changes; Molly put as the primary contact and Dick to serve as an alternate for the Conservation Districts' stakeholder position. Dick discussed the need for younger representation; suggested finding a board member, rancher or farmer to represent Montana. Molly noted that stakeholder positions have a 3-year term, up for renewal this year. Dana stated that Montana is underrepresented compared to other states. Karl proposed reaching out to the upper-end districts for interested parties. Molly will send out info about MRRIC participation to Districts.

CMR Community Working Group – Molly stated that Paula Gouse's last day was April 18; she is a long-time CMR representative on the working group. CMR plans to appoint a new representative to the planning committee.

Living on the Bank – Molly will follow up with Chris at Lewis and Clark CD for website analytics.

Woody Invasive Species Working Group – Molly stated they are planning a tour with various partners in 2026. Focusing on social media and radio advertising for education and outreach. Karl stated the Montana weed law regarding Russian olive trees needs to be reevaluated. They are hardy and can grow where other trees struggle to survive. Molly will follow up on the draft statewide management plan to see if it addresses the value of Russian Olive Trees in certain locations.

MRWA (Milk River Watershed Alliance) – Jeff Pattison stated the Milk River project is progressing rapidly; water is expected to flow by July. About 600 irrigators are paying for 75% of the project cost. FCA has made significant progress towards PL-566 funding. Molly stated that the next meeting to be scheduled in the coming weeks to look at the work plan and discuss putting together an informational pamphlet about the St. Mary's River system. Jeff stated that they do have an older pamphlet and video of the St. Mary's River system; he will email to Molly.

River Rendezvous – The council discussed scheduling for the River Rendezvous tour and quarterly meeting; proposed dates of August 25 and/or 26. The planning committee will meet May 15 to discuss and figure out a plan.

PARTNER REPORTS:

MACD – Karl stated Becca Boslough has been busy with the legislative session – thank you to all who called in to testify.

DNRC – No report.

NRCS – Discussed NRCS facing significant staffing challenges, with potential consolidation of offices and staff shortages. Jeff Pattison stated that Kyle Tackett is doing a great job, and that the Glasgow office will be down to one person, but the Malta office will retain a couple of staff members. Molly discussed Kyle's report from the RRN meeting - the State conservationist position is caught in a hiring freeze, Kyle's detail has been extended indefinitely, travel has been curtailed, and existing agreement payments can continue. Dick expressed concern about long-term impacts.

CEMIST – No report.

MWCC – Amy Seaman stated they are having their Watershed Symposium in Billings the week of September 15, partnering with Winnett ACES. Watershed Summer Program – social media and storytelling campaign led by Gary Davis, free participation for CDs, last year they had 30 participating groups with over 1,500 direct post engagements and reached over 30K individual accounts. Amy offered support for the River Rendezvous event.

REACH REPORTS

Lower Reach – No report.

Reservoir Reach – Shane stated that he attended the joint border control meeting in Malta. Irrigation is expected to start around the 1st week of July, possibly June 15 if weather permits. The Harlem area is likely irrigating now. Nelson reservoir area is expecting to start irrigation around July 7 or 10.

Middle Reach – Lorri stated that chokecherries survived through the first year, no bear sightings reported, and not much precipitation.

Upper Reach – Jeff Ryan reported that he attended a permitting workshop in Great Falls focused on the federal floodplain insurance program. Discussed issues with FEMA's no-rise rule in floodplain permitting, causing difficulties for restoration projects and increasing costs due to required engineering analysis. Participated in a Zoom call with the Environmental Policy Innovation Center to provide examples of projects affected by the no-rise rule. Mentioned potential legislation to address the no-rise issue, allowing for qualitative assessments instead of formal analysis in some cases.

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

COORDINATOR UPDATE – The next in person Quarterly meeting will be in Manhattan May 27; most likely hybrid. Molly will see if Melissa with the MT Biocontrol Program is available to put on a presentation. Karl suggested inviting Libby Wawro (NRCS) for a presentation to discuss support for test flows and other regional issues. Molly suggested to have Libby attend and present at the August meeting, after there is more test flow data.

Karl discussed a Grizzly Bear Management Plan meeting that he set up for May 6. Shelby from the American Farm Bureau will be presenting. The purpose is to discuss the federal grizzly bear management plan and to gather comments. Invitation extended to council members, districts, and Farm Bureau members. Main goal is to compile comments addressing resource concerns related to grizzly bears. Comment deadline is May 15.

April

22: MRCDC Exec. Committee, FY26-27 Work Plan and Budget approval

23: PCCD meeting – MRCDC presentation/update

30: CEMIST meeting

Weekly on Tuesdays at 7am: MACD Legislative Committee meetings

May

6-7: MRRIC AMCR meeting

26: Memorial Day, closed

27: MRCDC Quarterly, Manhattan

28: PCCD meeting

28: CEMIST meeting

Weekly on Tuesdays at 7am: MACD Legislative Committee meetings

TBD: MRWA meeting

TBD: CMR CWG planning committee

June

3-5: MRRIC AM workshop

10-12: MACD Spring Board, Helena

24: MRCDC Exec. Committee

25: PCCD meeting

25: CEMIST meeting

TBD: MRWA meeting

Other

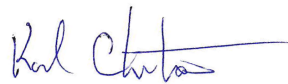
With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.

Approved on: 6/24/2025

Submitted by:



Trish Smith, MRCDC Secretary



Karl Christians, Chairman