

The McCone Conservation Board of Supervisors met on December 8, 2015 at 1:00pm at the USDA Building in Circle, MT. Those present were Steve Wanderaas-Chairman, Casey Nay-Vice Chairman, Larry Nagel-Urban Supervisor, Brant Quick-Rural Supervisor, Johnna Blankenship-DC-NRCS, Ashley Kiehl-Soil Conservationist-NRCS, Mary Hendrix-Administrator and visitors Rachel Frost and Stacey Barta. Dusty White, Josh Murphy and Jenny Garoutte were absent. The meeting was called to order at 1:01pm.

Visitors

Rachel Frost, Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC) Coordinator mentioned that the Montana Rangelands Partnership will be hiring (2) technicians in 2016. They will work with producers on rangeland concerns over the next 3 years. One person will be located in the greater Miles City area and the second in the greater Lewistown area.

Ranching for Rivers assists those interested in managing grazing in riparian areas. This will follow a 2 prong approach: provide education for producers and sportsmen as well as up to \$30K in funding for riparian fencing projects. This project will focus in the Upper (Broadwater, Cascade, Gallatin and Lewis & Clark Counties) and Middle Reaches (Big Sandy, Chouteau, Blaine and Fergus Counties).

The CMR Community Working Group's next meeting will be held at Zortman on December 17th. The group has focused on helping landowners sort through conservation programs through the development of conservation menus. This program should be available sometime next summer into fall.

The Saltcedar Team has mapped and developed a GIS database of saltcedar infestations on the Missouri River. In 2015, five landowners and partner agencies worked to treat the 7 Blackfoot Basin area in Garfield County. The group will meet at the Montana Weed Association convention in January 2016 to brainstorm the next treatment area.

MRCDC has been cooperating with the Missouri Breaks Riparian Group to promote cottonwood regeneration on the Missouri River within the Missouri Breaks Monument. The proposed 2016 River Rendezvous will have participants departing by boats from Ft. Benton and traveling on the river to Big Sandy. They will have opportunities to view fencing projects and plantings. The Chouteau and Big Sandy Conservation Districts will be co-sponsoring this event.

In the next year, the MRCDC will meet with conservation districts in each "reach" of the Missouri River and discuss what needs to be done in those areas. McCone County is in the "Lower Reach" along with Richland and Roosevelt Counties.

Steve had asked if Canada thistle can be put on the agenda for the next MRCDC council meeting.

Stacey Barta, DNRC Rangeland Resource Coordinator Program discussed the Rangeland Resource Program. Its areas of emphasis are:

- Working with county range committees, conservation districts and producer groups on sound rangeland management
- Partnerships between private, state and federal entities involved in range management
- Rangeland Improvement Loan Program
- Montana Range Tour, Winter Grazing Seminar and Montana Youth Range Camp

Connie Iverson from Sidney is our closest representative on this Committee.

She mentioned that there will be changes coming up with monitoring and stewardship through the Rangelands Partnership Program.

The Montana Sage-grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) consists of all agency directors, Senators Lang and Rosendale and Diane Ahlgren, producer and Petroleum County CD supervisor. Carolyn Simes was hired to head this program that will have \$10 million for on the ground projects. Public hearings on the administrative rules will be held in January 2016. Applications will be taken after March 2016. The funding focus will be on applications in core areas and on habitat. DNRC has as sage-grouse tab on their website that has current status on its program.

Correspondence & Handout

- Conservation News November & December 2015
- Supervisor Roles & Responsibilities
- MRCDC 2014-2015 Annual Report Form

Meeting Minutes & Treasurer's Reports

Meeting minutes from October 2015 were reviewed. Casey made a motion to approve the minutes and Brant seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Treasurer's reports from October and November 2015 were reviewed. Steve made the motion to accept both reports and Casey seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Public Comments on District Business

There were no public comments on the Districts business at this meeting.

Field Office Report PROGRAMS

CSP

- Payments: Nearly completed
- CPA 153s: There were four contracts out of compliance this year.
- Email from Chief Weller, Friday December 4, 2015:
For the FY 2016 CSP sign-up: CSP will be delivered exactly as it was last fiscal year. There will be no changes to the payment calculations, the CMT, or the enhancements.

Rollout for the new CSP: October 1, 2016. This may come as a disappointment to some of you and for that I apologize. But the changes I outlined in my previous email (October 30, 2015) will take place. Those overall changes are:

1. *The Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) will be placed by screening sheets to determine stewardship threshold based on NRCS's conservation practice standards and specifications, as well as with an application evaluation and ranking tool (AERT) will evaluate the application across national, state, and local resource priorities.*
2. *Enhancements will be clearly linked to our conservation practice standards and specifications, ensuring that the program is promoting continual improvement above and beyond the base standard and supporting producers who want to enhance their stewardship.*
3. *Payments will use a traditional payment schedule for new enhancement activities, consistent with other financial assistance programs. They will also include a component to maintain existing conservation activities and systems.*
4. *Program administration and contract maintenance will be simplified—based on the planning unit—and will provide field offices flexibility to work with customers.*

NWTF Grant 23,353.7 acres in proposed target area—will be working with 3 landowners with contiguous acres for 2017 grant.

EQIP Ranking Questions (both Cropland and Rangeland) were submitted to Terry Heck, Area Resource Conservationist. Positive feedback was received. Many of the ranking questions **may** be allowed to be changed to reflect McCone County resource concerns identified at the February 2015 Local Working Group (LWG) meeting.

Ashley's last day will be Thursday, December 10. She will be moving on to her new job in Lewistown. We will miss her. David has mentioned that there may be a new staff person in the future for the Circle Field Office.

Johnna met with Sue Wittkopp, FSA CED and the COC meeting addressing crested wheatgrass and the difficulties of establishing other species for CRP options such as CP10 and CP25. She asked Terry Heck if he would speak on the topic at an upcoming workshop and he has agreed.

Chairman's Report

Steve updated the board about the MACD Convention held November in Missoula.

- The schedule was fast paced and busy.
- He attended the MRCDC meeting where there were discussions on the upcoming trip to Denver, resource concerns along the Missouri River and focus on invasive species.
- He next attended the Montana Salinity Control Association (MSCA) meeting. He reported that the organization is well run with Jane Holzer in charge. He asked if the district would be interested in having a salinity control workshop as it was identified as a natural resource concern through the LWG meeting.
- Steve is now on the district operations committee.
- There was some house cleaning done on the MACD by-laws.
- Three resolutions passed. One resolution (15-3) on predator control was added at the last minute and passed at Convention.
- Next year's convention will be in Sidney.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DNRC and NRCS does not need to be reviewed, but the desk used by the district staff belongs to NRCS.
- We met with Dave McClain with Everpower out of Pittsburgh, PA. He told us that he is working with Sand Creek Inc. to develop 32 wind turbines in northern McCone County. He said that construction won't happen in 2016, but will in 2017. Steve spoke with Jim Moos, McCone County commissioner and he was advised that they had followed all necessary protocols through them. Somehow the district was not included in the loop. Food for thought: Steve asked if the district might consider sponsoring a resolution for all energy projects (including green projects such as solar, wind, etc.) to let conservation districts know of proposed projects in their areas.
- Also met with Bryce Christiaens, Chair of the Montana Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MISAC) and Dr. Dean Pearson regarding a Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) grant measuring impacts of invasives on eastern Montana grasslands that will be submitted December 1. If the grant is funded, the survey will provide valuable information on the pervasiveness and impacts of noxious weeds in eastern Montana and provide comparative data already collected for western Montana. Letters of support were sent in by the district and the county commissioners.
- MISAC Summit will be held in Helena April 12-13, 2016.
- At the MISAC webinar, Lisa DeBruyckere commented that the assessment survey responses point to a lack of coordination between entities everywhere. Steve would like to change that here. He would like to have a coordinated meeting between the district, county commissioners, weed board members and supervisors. The minimum he hopes to see come out of the meeting is getting the second spray rig out. He would like to brainstorm projects, too.

UPCOMING

- December 17—CMR Community Working Group Meeting in Zortman
- January 6—Board Meeting in Circle @ 3pm
- January 20—Invasive Species Meeting in Helena
- January 26—Tentative trip date to Denver

Administrator's Report

Mary attended the Employee Meeting (EO) during convention. She will be the secretary for the organization. It was a good convention and she came back energized and ready to work!

FSA has been asked to contribute news, deadlines or information on programs in upcoming newsletters. A copy will be emailed to them so should they choose to distribute it to their clients electronically they can do so without compromising confidentiality.

Also, she will be working on a couple of reports due by the end of the month.

Old Business

Bison Procedures: Steve is still working on procedures for the bison ordinance. A couple of changes are proposed for the application. This will be addressed in the January meeting.

New Business

Meeting Attendance: *From Supervisors Handbook:* "Supervisors should plan to attend and actively participate in all district meetings and carry out assigned committee responsibilities. A supervisor's commitment of time, creativity, and energy is a valuable asset to an effective board. Continual absence or sporadic attendance places an undue hardship on those who regularly attend the meetings and activities. After three unexcused absences from regular monthly meetings, the board may formally request, in writing, the resignation of a supervisor." There are a couple of supervisors that have been no call/no show to board meetings. Steve and Casey will give a courtesy call to those individuals.

Noxious Weed Workshop:

- Should we have a noxious weed workshop? Yes
- Who's interested in helping in the planning? Casey, Johnna and Mary
- Topics: Chemicals, new biologicals, new technology, Terry Heck's talk on CRP practices CP10, CP25
- Power Point presentation
 1. What the district did in the past year.
 2. LWG identifies noxious weeds as natural resource concern
 3. Current problematic weeds in the county
 4. Problematic weeds seen in adjacent counties and we don't want to see here
- Door prize: "Weeds of the West" and weed booklets from MSU or MT Weed Association

Adjournment of Meeting

Steve made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Casey seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 3:21pm. The next scheduled board meeting will be Wednesday, January 6, 2016 at 3:00pm.

Mary Hendrix
Mary Hendrix, Administrator

2/3/2016
Date

Steve Wanderaas
Steve Wanderaas, Chairman

2-3-2016
Date