



Yellowstone River *Conservation District* Council

Meeting Minutes – September 29, 2017 MTFWP Region 5 Headquarters' Conference Room Billings, MT

Members Present: – Walter Rolf, Custer – Don Youngbauer, Rosebud/MACD – Steve Story/ Paul Gilbert, Sweet Grass – John Moorhouse, and Craig Wagner, At Large.

Not in attendance: Dawson, Richland, Treasure, Prairie, Stillwater, Park, Yellowstone and McKenzie ND CD.

Others Present: Warren Kellogg, Technical Advisor; Mark Elison and Sara Meloy, DNRC; Burt Williams, Technical Advisor; Ken Frazer, MT FWP; David Pratt, IWM work group; John Heyneman, Plank Stewardship Initiative; Madison Boone, BSWC; Chris Mehus, IWP work group; Susan Gilbertz, MSU; Nathan Adams and Jenna McKenney, Senator Daines office; Luke Ward, RMC; Cameron Woods, RMC; Mike Penfold, Our Montana; Dan Rostad, Coordinator, and Carol Watts, Custer CD.

Chairman Don Youngbauer called the meeting to order at 10:05 am on September 29, 2017. Introductions were made.

Business meeting: No business could be discussed due to the lack of a quorum.

Chairman's Report: Don Youngbauer stated that the Council was in exciting times, we would be viewed as leaders as projects are completed and the YRRPs are put into practice.

Vice Chairman's report: John Moorhouse reported that the Citizen Advisory Committee for recreation-related projects associated with the Natural Resource Damage Program has requested proposed projects from the public. The committee has received 28 proposals for projects such as boat ramps, trail repair, restoration of the Laurel Park, etc. The committee will meet with project applicants and evaluate/rank projects in the next month or so. A completed plan will eventually be submitted to the Governor for approval.

Coordinator's Report: Dan reported that the new YRCDC website is running well and has all the CEA information and data available in a user-friendly format.

We are still working on closing out the CEA cost-share issues with the Army Corps. We will invite the new Colonel from Omaha Army Corps to come to Montana to formally close out the project. Additional CEA books have been printed and will be delivered to the college libraries and a copy given to each member of the Congressional delegation.

We were approved for a Big Sky Watershed Corps member to be placed in Miles City to assist with the activities of the Council's two current working groups. Funding is in place and interviews of candidates will begin soon. Dan will be meeting with the Custer County CD Board to update them on their role in sponsoring the BSWC member.

There was no update on the Baling Twine Initiative proposed by the Audubon Society in Billings. They have not found a project site yet for their efforts but if they do they may seek funding support from the Council.

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Madison Boone, Big Sky Watershed Corps Member working with One Montana in the Gallatin Valley, shared her perceptions of the Big Sky Watershed Corps Program. She works with a variety of stakeholders in the Gallatin Valley to do drought planning and outreach education. Madison encouraged inviting the BSWC member to community events in Miles City in order to help integrate the member into the community. It is especially helpful to assist with finding housing as BSWC members only make a small stipend and often rely on food stamps and other assistance from family, etc. Overall, her experience with the program has been great as she returned for her second year in 2017.

Update on Working Groups: David Pratt and Sara Meloy reported on the Irrigation Water Management Work Group's efforts to get the group up and functioning. Both have met with several Conservation Districts and agency staff to solicit their input on potential projects. They will continue to develop a list of potential Work Group members to represent CD's, industry and other interested stakeholders. David will be providing day to day direction to the Council's Big Sky Watershed Corps member who will help with data & information collection and outreach to CD's and landowners.

Chris Mehus reported on the Invasive Woody Plant Working Group saying that he was anxious to get started. He thinks that marketing the projects is the way to go and is looking for ideas and guidance. Chris will be attending the statewide Russian olive – Salt cedar symposium in Great Falls later this month. Attendees include agency personnel, weed district representatives and landowners with the main focus on the Yellowstone & Missouri River watersheds.

A letter will be sent out to the local Districts informing them they are encouraged to participate in these working groups by providing representation to the working groups' discussion and planning process. A Big Sky Watershed Corps member will soon be hired to help with the further development of the two working groups. The Corps member will be stationed at the NRCS office in Miles City and work closely with the working group chairs. Data collection, information dissemination and outreach will be key aspects of their job. Local CD's input will be sought during the development of these working groups.

Yellowstone River Islands: Mike Penfold gave background information on this group and its efforts to create a floaters river trail along the course of the Yellowstone River. Part of this work entails increasing public access to the river (access for camping, recreation, study, etc...). Rocky Mountain College (RMC) student Cameron Woods and his adviser, Dr. Luke Ward, gave a presentation on two related research projects focusing on island ownership. Both projects have been supported by RMC's Yellowstone River Research Center and by Our Montana. The first island project used GIS data and workflows to identify seven islands in a 10 mile stretch of river upstream of Pompey's Pillar that, based on best available evidence and Montana Law governing island ownership, are likely publicly owned (though current property [cadastral] boundaries suggest otherwise). Based on these findings, the second project -- which is currently in progress -- uses ranking exercises (known as "Q method") to examine stakeholder attitudes towards two topics: 1) public access to Yellowstone river islands and 2) attitudes towards various mechanisms for formalizing public access to river islands. At the end of the talk, YRCDC meeting participants completed Cameron's ranking exercise, providing input from key stakeholder groups (representatives of irrigators and government agencies) that will be very helpful to Cameron Woods in his studies.

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MRRIC: Burt Williams reported on the meeting he attended representing the YR CDC at the MRRIC conference. The next MRRIC meeting will be later this month in Kansas City, MO at which time the Yellowstone River Intake project is scheduled to be discussed. At the present time, the Corps of Engineers plans to proceed with constructing a fish bypass channel to allow pallid sturgeon (and other fish species) better access upstream of Intake Diversion. The decision is on appeal in federal court and there is considerable difference of opinion as to how effective the proposed structure will be. If the bypass structure survives the challenges and is included in the Corps of Engineers biological assessment (necessary to get through the Endangered Species Act requirements), MRRIC may be called upon to approve a resolution of support for Intake and the Corps' biological assessment. There will be a mid-month conference call which either Dan or Burt will sit in on which may clarify the situation and timing of the final decisions. Our delegate may need to be ready to either support the decision or not and to present the Council position on this issue, keeping in mind the MRRIC consensus process and the need to offer viable alternatives should we vote against consensus on the issue.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm. No date or place has been set for the next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Watts, CCCD Administrator

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