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## Quarterly Meeting Minutes May 18, 2011 Fort Peck State Fish Hatchery Fort Peck, MT

At 2:35 pm, Chairman Nick Schultz welcomed everyone and opened introductions. Tim Ouellette with the State NRCS office talked a little about his position on the MRCDC and explained the background leading to the Sage Grouse Initiative presentation we will see today. Tim Ouellette then introduced Tim Griffiths, National Sage Grouse Coordinator, stationed in Bozeman Montana. Tim Griffiths gave a little of his background information and what led him to work with the sage grouse. Tim discussed all of the partners that came together to implement the Sage Grouse Special Initiative such as Department of Natural Resource Conservation (DNRC), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Fish Wildlife Service (USFWS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) just to name a few. Dr. David Naugle from the University of Montana serves as the science advisor for the initiative. Sage grouse are a landscape-scale species meaning that they need large diverse landscapes to serve as their habitat. Landscape fragmentation, such as from tillage, energy development, subdivision and conifer encroachment, is one the leading causes in the declining numbers of sage grouse. This decline has led to the sage grouse being listed as a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. Sage grouse on average live 5 to 7 years compared to pheasants which average about 14 months. The males weigh from 5 to 7 pounds and hens usually lay their eggs within 8 to 10 miles of the lek (the mating grounds). Worldwide, sage grouse habitat encompasses 186 million acres in portions of 11 western states and 2 Canadian providences in North America. Four percent of the range has 25 percent of the grouse population so the SGI focuses on improving the best and most highly populated habitat, on areas where 75 percent of the grouse population exists. In Montana tillage is the fragmentation activity of concern; in Wyoming it is energy development and subdivisions; in Nevada it is wildfire; and in California it is conifer encroachment. On July 30, 2010 the USFWS gave certainty of compliance with the Endangered Species Act for those producers in SGI in compliance with their practices. Tim noted that sage grouse are very susceptible to the West Nile Virus as they have no immunity. Money has been obligated for projects in Washington where SGI was used to keep lands in CRP for another 3 years, in Oregon to remove conifers encroaching into sagebrush habitat, and in Montana to improve grazing practices on 150,000 acres of rangeland. Tim concluded and took questions from the group. The presentation concluded about 4:05 pm.

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Lewis & Clark Conservation District  
Cascade County Conservation District  
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Blaine County Conservation District  
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Petroleum County Conservation District  
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Chairman Nick Schultz opened the MRCDC quarterly business meeting at 4:25 pm with introductions. Council members present were; John Chase representing Cascade County CD; Dean Rogge representing Garfield County CD; Paul Geis representing Fergus CD; Jim Beck representing Broadwater CD; Dennis Mitchell representing Blaine County CD; Buzz Mattelin representing Roosevelt County CD; Ron Garwood representing Valley county CD; Jeanne Kirkegard representing McCone CD; Dick Iversen representing Richland County CD; Karl Christians representing DNRC; Tim Ouellette representing NRCS, MRCDC Coordinator Laurie Riley, and MRCDC Secretary Carie Hess.

### General:

1. Minutes were read and John Chase moved to approve with the change of the date to January 12, 2011 from January 12, 2010. Dennis Mitchell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. It was reported that the Executive Committee was having trouble with obtaining a quorum to conduct business on their monthly conference calls. It was suggested that having the meetings earlier in the morning such as 7 or 8 might be better for the committee.
2. Carie read the financial package. She briefly explained where the Council was for the year and that both Laurie and she had met with Laurie Zeller and Linda Brander to streamline the grant reporting process to expedite reimbursements. Carie reviewed the unpaid bills detail and John Chase moved to pay those bills as submitted; Dean Rogge seconded and the motion passed. It was decided that Carie would finish up with the billing and send out (via email) final projections for the end of the year so that the Council could decide what projects to spend money on and where it was needed. The Council briefly discussed a few options on where some of the money could be spent.
3. Correspondence received and sent since the last meeting was presented and the process was reviewed and changes were noted so that Laurie has a better way of getting this completed.
4. Coordinator's Report-Laurie reported on her activities since the January meeting. She reported on the Natural Resource Partnership that was started by Joyce Swartzendruber (NRCS) and showed the Council articles that she and other members had written that have been submitted to papers across the state. She talked about the request from Deb Bogar with the NACD for an indication of interest and proposal to gather, organize, and distribute natural resource related information from the Missouri River basin into a newsletter of website links and send out on a list serve. Laurie explained that this is an important opportunity for the Council to both grow in size, as a new staff member would need to be hired, and take on a National presence. There is money from NACD to complete this project. Buzz thought that the NACD might consider MRRIC, individual districts, or the MACD for the work. The Council was reluctant to take on a task of this significance at this time. Buzz moved to send the request to Jeff Tiberi and have him send it to the districts and Ron seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### Reports:

1. Upper Reach:
  - ❖ Jim talked about the Missouri Headwaters Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) Task Force. They had their initial meeting in Three Forks. EWM has been found at the upper end of Canyon Ferry Lake, and Toston Dam. It is the group's general plan to hire a part time administrator and continue to look into the different applications to attack the problem.

- ❖ Whitmore Ravine Update: John reported that the Cascade CD had stepped back in its role with the project. The project has had troubles securing funding so there has not been much movement on the project.
- ❖ River's Edge Trail Interpretive Signs (Great Falls): John gave a presentation on what the signs will look like and costs and where they could be placed. It was noted that there are about 15 miles of paved trail and that they are looking to have 15 to 20 signs up by the end of 2011. He informed the Council about possible contributors, labor budget and potential material. Buzz moved to allocate a minimum of 1,000 dollars to the sign project and Dean seconded, the motion passed unanimously.
- ❖ CREP Update: Laurie informed the group that the grazing language was not accepted by the FSA Headquarters in DC and that after talking with other partners involved in the process it was determined to go ahead with everything but the grazing. The other changes received approval. The Council could address grazing in a future addendum; the DC office of FSA claims an EA is needed. Paul moved to approve the addendum without the grazing language and recommended for the partners to move forward. John Chase seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Middle Reach:

- ❖ BLM RAC Update: Nick reported on the latest meeting and noted that anyone who is interested should apply. He noted that most places along the river have only about a foot for cottonwoods to grow along the riverbank. He also talked about the BLM Wildlands Designation, which has no funding. The local Montana offices are still working on it and there are 4 main characteristics. He talked about the possibility of a land swap in the Monument. He informed the Council that the Lewistown RMP is scheduled for 2013. He also talked about the structure of the BLM RAC and the Council noted that Dana Darlington and Laurie Riley have applied for appointment to the committee.
- ❖ Cottonwood Regeneration & Wild & Scenic Reach: Karl explained that all partners agree flooding is not a good alternative but that augmented flows in high water years is an idea worth pursuing. He is going to meet with Lenny Duberstein of the Bureau of Reclamation and they will review maps to see what damage might occur with high water. Laurie is to contact each of the districts along the river and get some information on the impacts from past high flow years.

3. Reservoir Reach:

- ❖ CMR Community Working Group: Dean gave an overview of the last 2 meetings. The presenters at the upcoming June 2 meeting in Winnett will be will be the American Prairie Foundation and the Montana Wilderness Assn. Jeanne is going to try to invite permittees. Mr. Waite asked to speak (from the audience) and stated that he felt that Mr. Potts was brought in to complete the CCP and that the request for an extension would probably not be granted as it could not be done congressionally. He also noted that the last CMR manager stated that they (USFWS) did not have to follow NEPA.
- ❖ Fort Peck EWM Task Force: Ron Garwood reported that EWM had been found at the intake at the hatchery and in the dredge cuts. He noted that he had made the first meeting but missed the next 2. Ron said that EWM can grow up to 8 feet. He also noted that Patricia Gilbert with the Army Corps is the contact person.

4. Lower Reach

- ❖ Missouri River String of Pearls – Yellowstone confluence NWR: Dick reported on the LoMo CRM-hosted meeting in Culbertson March 1 with Nick Kaczor from the USFWS Denver office. Nick offered no handout material and he asked Dick for documents related to a USFWS filing opposing an application for water. There were over 30 ranchers/farmers in attendance and they all told Nick that they absolutely did not want the Yellowstone Confluence NWR in their counties. According to the Preliminary Project Proposal (USFWS Sep 2010) the strategy is to purchase 50,000 acres of land in fee title and 100,000 acres of conservation easements in a 984,000+ acre project area. Dick suggested that the Council should review the proposal and decide at the next meeting how to respond, as this document was just obtained in May. The Council wrote a letter to Kaczor in March to voice opposition to the String of Pearls and also a letter to Director Salazar in April asking for more information. After further discussion Paul moved to send a letter to Steve Guertin, USFWS Regional Director, about the lack of information that Nick Kaczor presented at the meeting in March in Culbertson. Dick seconded and the motion passed. Dick asked if he could help Laurie draft the letter and a 5 person subcommittee was formed to finalize the letter. Jim Beck noted that there is a second String-of-Pearls site in the upper portion of the Big Hole and he will talk with those parties and report to the Council.

5. MACD - None at this time, Jeff Tiberi is on annual leave.

6. DNRC - Karl reported that the budget had passed and the Council could expect at least a 6 percent cut.

7. NRCS- Tim informed the Council that both Tim Griffiths and he had been contacted by Rick Potts and that they have a meeting with him tomorrow (May 19, 2011). He asked the group for input for the meeting. He briefly described his conversations with Mr. Potts. The Council mentioned farmer/rancher Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), a change in monitoring protocol from the use of "sentinel plants" to NRCS-accepted practices, 5 – 10 year permits and lower grazing fees, weed management and the possibility of a pilot area managed by a team led by conservation districts.

Old Business: Jim Beck reviewed the idea behind the state water plan and stated that nothing had been done to date. It was reported that there is no funding for the Ameri-corps program so they are not sure where it is headed. Laurie updated the Council on some of the current bison issues; SB212 was signed on May 12, 2011 and that it is the act clarifying the authority. Steve Wanderaas had stated at the CMR NWR community working group that a new NWF survey on bison was misleading. Laurie has also talked with Arnie Dood who has been working on a document on bison background information that it makes no management recommendations; it should be out within a month. Laurie is to write to the NWF asking for the survey questions. The APF allotments and the conversion were also discussed and it was thought that an EA should have been done to convert. Laurie was going to get more information and send out.

New Business:

The 2012 Work Plan was discussed. The Council reviewed the list of priority projects determined July 2010 and reprioritized them with new Council assignment. The list follows:

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Priority Rank	Project / Focus	Council Assignment
1	Bison	Dean, Paul, Dennis
1	Noxious Weeds/AIS	Jim-Headwaters Task Force / Ron-Ft Peck Task Force / Karl-Terrestrial weeds
2	CMR	Dean (lead), Jeannie, Paul, Ron
3	String of Pearls Refuge	Dick
4	Monuments	Dana (in abstentia)
5	MRRIC/ ACOE:	Buzz
5	BLM RAC	Nick
6	CREP	Paul
6	Cottonwood Regeneration	Nick
7	River Rendezvous	John
7	State Water Plan	Jim
7	Residential Development	Karl

The Council brochures were also discussed. Karl and John Chase will work with Laurie to get a new brochure worked up.

Public Comment: None

Next meetings: To be Determined

With no further business coming before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Approved by unanimous vote on September 26th, 2011,

Submitted by:

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Carie Hess, Secretary

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Nick Schultz, Chairman