

Missouri River Conservation District Council

Ground Rules

Revised June 28, 2001
Adopted November 14, 2001
Revised November 19, 2003
Revised December 8, 2004
Revised December 14, 2005
Revised January 31, 2008
Revised June 2, 2010

INTRODUCTION

These ground rules are to help the participants of the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council define and share their mission, purpose, and goals, document areas of agreement, govern their conversations and problem solving process, and aid in the creation of work plans to attain their mission and goals.

At any time, initiated by any voting member, changes or additions may be made to these Ground Rules by a written proposal for a *Ground Rule Change or Addition* being approved by a majority of the members present at any quarterly meeting, publication of the approved change or addition with the announcement of the next quarterly meeting, and an approval of the proposed change or addition by a majority of the members present at the quarterly meeting. If the change or addition does not obtain the votes of a majority of the members present at the next quarterly meeting, the change or addition may be considered in the future only by offering it again as a written proposal.

MISSION

The mission of the Council is to represent natural resource and environmental interests on the Missouri River. This Council believes the conservation of the river and the sustainability of its various uses can best be accomplished through grassroots collaboration, education, incentives, and voluntary action.

PURPOSE

The Council is founded on the following four fundamental precepts:

- 1) The need for scientific information on which to base management decisions;
- 2) The need to present a unified voice to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in sharing information to improve communications between districts, outside entities and local stakeholders;
- 3) The need for technical and financial assistance to address multiple use issues on the Missouri River; and,
- 4) Support local conservation districts efforts to provide local leadership, assistance, and guidance for the wise use and conservation of the Missouri River's Natural Resources.

GOALS

The Council’s goal is to provide leadership, assistance, and guidance to conservation districts along the Missouri River Corridor in order present a unified front and collective voice when addressing natural resource issues, opportunities, and challenges. “A forum for Missouri River stakeholders to share perspectives, solve problems, and exchange information on Missouri River resource management.”

PARTICIPANTS

Representation: The Council is a coordinating organization for those Montana conservation districts bounding or bisected by the Missouri River from the confluence of the three forks of the Missouri River to the Montana-North Dakota border. The following fifteen districts lie within the specified river reach:

| | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------|-----------|
| Big Sandy | Cascade | Garfield | Phillips |
| Blaine | Chouteau | Lewis & Clark | Richland |
| Broadwater | Fergus | McCone | Roosevelt |
| | Gallatin | Petroleum | Valley |

Each of the above listed conservation districts shall appoint one voting representative from their district. A voting representative must be a district supervisor or associate supervisor. Voting representatives shall also represent their district on the appropriate River Reach Standing Work Group (reference Standing River Reach Work Groups).

Conservation districts are allowed to define their level of participation. Though they may only have one voting member, Districts are welcome to multiple meeting participants. Each district’s participation may include more than one supervisor and staff person.

Participation and voting privileges are also open to one representative from the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), DNRC Conservation Districts Bureau, and NRCS.

Alternates: Represented organizations can, and are encouraged to, appoint a qualified “alternate” to sit-in for the designated representative. Designated alternates have the same authority as the standing member. It is the responsibility of the standing member to thoroughly brief the alternate on the current issues.

Each district will annually provide written notice of their participation and will identify their voting representative and alternate.

Non-Attendance: The Executive Committee may request a represented conservation district to appoint a new representative if a Council member fails to attend three consecutive Council meetings.

OFFICERS AND TERMS OF OFFICE

Officers for the Council include a Chair, Vice Chair, Executive Committee, and Coordinator. The duties, selection process, and terms of office are as follows:

Council Chair: The Council shall select one Council representative to serve as the Council Chair. The term of office is two years and the Council Chair's responsibilities shall rotate through the Council membership. The Chair will be nominated from the membership and selection approved by the Council. The Chair retains their right to vote as any other member.

The Chair shall serve as the primary contact for the Council and act as liaison with outside entities, facilitate meeting processes, serve on and chair the Council's Executive Committee, call meetings, and facilitate and ensure that meeting agendas and notices are prepared and delivered.

Vice Chair: The Council shall select one Council representative to serve as the Council's Vice Chair. Their term of office is two years. The Vice Chair's term of office shall be staggered from that of the Chair. The term of the Vice Chair elected in 2004 shall be for one year to achieve the stagger. The Vice Chair will be nominated from the membership and selection approved by the Council. Vice Chair retains their right to vote, as any other Council member. The Vice Chair shall also serve on the Executive Committee. In the absence of the Chair, or at their request, the Vice Chair will carry out the duties of the Chair.

Coordinator: Council shall provide for a Coordinator. Duties of the Coordinator include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Aid the Council and its membership in scheduling meetings and tours;
- (b) Keep an adequate record of meetings and decisions;
- (c) Assist the Council in maintaining an archive of those records;
- (d) Assist the Council in maintaining communications with its membership;
- (e) Work with the Chair and Executive Committee to set agendas;
- (f) Assist in the record keeping associated with Council operating budget, bills, and grants;
- (g) Act as grants writer/administrator for the Council;
- (h) Act as public relations officer;
- (i) Act as lobbyist for the Council when necessary;
- (j) Assist the Chair in executing his/her duties;
- (k) Publish a quarterly newsletter
- (l) Supervise the Council Secretary in the execution of his/her duties to the Council

Secretary: The Council, working with their fiscal sponsor shall provide a Secretary for the Council. Duties of the Secretary include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Conduct monthly payroll and bill payment
- (b) Prepare the monthly, quarterly, and annual financial reports
- (c) Maintain the MRCDC checking account.
- (d) Provide quarterly invoices with backup to DNRC
- (e) Prepare invoices and financial reports for other grants the council may receive.
- (f) Help with quarterly meeting logistics including: finding and arranging for facilities; sending invitations, tracking R.S.V.P's; handling hotel and food arrangements; and minute taking –these could be recorded if someone is unable to attend.
- (g) Contribute to and handle the layout of the MRCDC's quarterly newsletter, to be distributed either through email and or regular mail.

Executive Committee: The Executive Committee is selected and empowered to serve and represent the Council in the interim between regular Council meetings.

The Council's Executive Committee will be formed from the Council representatives. Representation on the Executive Committee will include one representative from each of the four River Reach Working Groups, the Chair, Vice Chair, the immediate past Chair, MACD's Council representative, and any other Council member, serving at-large, as the Council deems appropriate. Executive Committee representatives will be elected annually by the membership at large, present at the annual meeting. Representatives may serve multiple terms.

The Executive Committee is responsible for facilitating the efforts of the larger Council. This includes:

- (m) Responding to the needs and priorities of the MRCDC;
- (n) Assisting the River Reach Work Groups;
- (o) Monitoring and reviewing the Council work plan;
- (p) Reviewing grants and other proposals;
- (q) overseeing, monitoring and resolving council finances;
- (r) setting meeting agendas;
- (s) acting as a liaison between standing work groups and the Council; and
- (t) assisting the Chair.

The Executive Committee will meet on a monthly basis. Executive Committee meetings may be conducted in person, or convened via a conference call or other electronic media provided that at least three of the Executive Committee members participate. The Executive Committee will approve payment of the Council's monthly bills.

At least one week prior to an Executive Committee meeting, an electronic notice of the meeting and copies of draft agendas shall be sent to all Executive Committee members, each conservation district participating in the Council, and every Council representative having access to the electronic transfer media.

The Executive Committee will report back to the Council at all regular meetings, and through distribution of Executive Committee meeting minutes. Executive Committee meeting minutes shall meet the same standards as those required of the Council. Electronic copies of meeting minutes shall be distributed, in the same manner, to the same parties as meeting notices and draft agendas.

DECISION PROCESS

To enhance the success of the Council's efforts, and to insure that the Council's efforts are credible to and supported by the individual participating conservation districts and their constituencies, the Council membership is committed to seeking and reaching agreement through consensus-based decision making. For the purposes of this Council, agreement is defined as agreement among the "members" of the Council and the interests they represent. In the event that consensus is not possible, an agreement may be adopted by a majority vote of the Council's participating membership.

QUORUM

A quorum of the Council consists of a simple majority of the designated Council members.

MEETINGS

The Council will hold four quarterly meetings annually. When possible, one quarterly meeting will be scheduled to coincide with the annual MACD convention. Three remaining meetings will be scheduled for each of the remaining three quarters. The Council may call additional meetings as deemed necessary.

In instances where a decision from the Council membership is necessary but a meeting is not feasible, the decision process may be carried out via mail or other electronic media. A proposed resolution may be mailed or electronically transferred to each designated Council member. The completed poll will be returned to the Chair in a timely manner as designated in the communication.

Each meeting of the Council will be held as scheduled and will begin and end on time, unless the participants agree to extend the time of a particular meeting.

Meetings shall begin with approval of the draft agenda by the Council. Any Council member in attendance may suggest changes to the draft agenda prior to its approval by the Council. The Secretary shall prepare draft minutes of each meeting of the full Council. The draft minutes shall record the members present, and all decisions made by the Council. The draft minutes shall be circulated to all Council members at least one week prior to the next Council meeting. The Council shall review, modify as necessary, and approve the draft minutes at the next regular quarterly meeting.

Provisions shall be made at each meeting of the Council, or its subcommittees and working groups, for public comment. Such opportunity for comment shall precede Council decisions.

Prior to the end of regular quarterly meetings, the Council will create a draft agenda for future meetings. A draft agenda identifies the major issues slated for discussion. Additional agenda items may be added to the "draft agenda" by contacting the Coordinator at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Council will select a conservation district from the membership to serve as the Council's fiscal agent to sponsor and manage grants on behalf of the Council. The administering conservation district will be paid for service on a basis to be determined by the Executive Committee on all grants administered, in addition to reimbursement for direct costs. All financial records will be available and open to Council members and the public at reasonable hours. The selected conservation district shall serve as the Council fiscal agent until it is mutually agreed to transfer the responsibility to another district. At any one time, the Council may utilize more than one conservation district as a fiscal agent.

The Secretary shall provide financial reports outlining expenses, income, and grant balances to the Executive Committee and Council quarterly. The Executive Committee will resolve issues pertaining to Council finances and make recommendations to the Council in establishing fiscal responsibility,

budgets, etc. However, a quorum of the Council will make decisions that establish or modify budgets, financial policies, and methods of expenditure in accordance with all applicable laws and within granting agency guidelines. Council members may not commit resources or enter into agreements on behalf of their respective conservation districts without their written consent.

When funds are available, member conservation districts will be reimbursed for travel expenses when their voting member or the alternate attends Council business, and submits an appropriate travel voucher with documentation. Expenses for attendance at Council meetings and other approved Council related travel will be reimbursed at rates approved for State of Montana employees.

Members serving in the best interests of the State of Montana will avoid conflicts of interest and will adhere to Montana’s code of ethics as it pertains to conservation district officials.

WORK GROUPS AND SUBCOMMITTEES

Ground rules specifically provide for three general types of committees:

- (1) The four permanent and geographically oriented River Reach Work Groups;
- (2) Task oriented work groups or subcommittees; and,
- (3) Collaborative consensus-based Dispute Resolutions Work Groups.

These Work Groups or subcommittees may not make decisions on behalf of the Council.

In addition to Council members, any member of the public with clear interest in the issue may be designated by the Council to serve on a subcommittee.

River Reach Work Groups: The Council recognizes that there exist regional differences along Montana’s Missouri River Corridor. These differences and similarities lend themselves to coordinated approaches on a smaller regional and more local scale. Therefore, the Council shall create four permanent work groups representing the upper, middle, reservoir, and lower reaches of the Missouri River.

These reaches are defined as follows:

| Upper | Middle | Reservoir | Lower |
|--|---|--|--|
| 4 conservation districts | 4 conservation districts 3 counties | 4 conservation districts | 3 conservation districts |
| Gallatin County CD Broadwater CD Lewis & Clark CD Cascade County CD | Chouteau County CD Big Sandy CD Fergus CD Blaine County CD | Phillips CD Petroleum CD Garfield CD Valley County CD | McCone County CD Roosevelt CD Richland County CD |

Special Work Groups or Subcommittees: The Council may create work groups or subcommittees to assemble information, explore issues or develop proposals for consideration by the full Council. In the formation of such committees, the Council will provide guidance and support, will define its primary tasks, make recommendations or appoint participants and suggest time frames for reporting and completion.

Public Dispute Resolution Work Groups: The Council recognizes that individual conservation districts, as publicly elected representatives, or the Council as a collective leadership body, may be called upon to resolve or intervene in public resource decisions or disputes. The Council will actively seek the input and advice of individuals, groups, or communities that are affected by the decision and actions of the Council. Further, the Council, consistent with its own decision process, is committed to seeking and reaching agreements through consensus-based decision making. When appropriate, the Council may act as the convener of the dispute resolution process serving as a focal point to initiate a new effort. A professional facilitator or mediator may be utilized.

Prior to the sponsorship of a dispute resolution process, the Council will evaluate opportunities and the potential for a successful collaborative process. A situation assessment will be conducted to evaluate opportunities and methods of resolution.

The situation assessment will examine several factors related to the issue or dispute. The situation assessment, utilizing interviews, will identify the substance of the situation, affected persons and interests, needs and interests of the parties, parties willingness to participate in a collaborative process, and cost and benefits association with different procedures for addressing the situation.

Where opportunities exist and the assessment of conditions is favorable, the Council will encourage and support local collaborative multi-interest dispute resolution processes.

In establishing or facilitating collaborative consensus-based process, the Council will encourage the participation and representation of diverse views and interests. Adequate representation by each interest will be included. The Council will consider representation by an individual, group, or organization that demonstrates:

- (a) A substantial interest in the Missouri River Corridor or the related resource issue;
- (b) An identified constituency;
- (c) A willingness to abide by the collaborative consensus-based ground rules;
- (d) A commitment to the issues and work of the Missouri River Corridor as a whole; and
- (e) A willingness to seek practical solutions that benefit all interests.

The interests that may need to be represented in the process include, but are not limited to, agriculture/ranching (when appropriate for the scale of the project, agricultural representatives from each of the three major segments of the Missouri River), conservation groups, fisheries, organized sportsmen, outfitters, small business/tourism, local residents, local government (including county commissioners and county planning boards), conservation districts, and utilities (including municipal water users and power companies).

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Each participant is free to speak to the media regarding their own views of this process and its outcomes. No participant may characterize the views of other participants to the media or in other forums. Council Chair is the primary spokesperson for the Council and will speak on behalf of the Council.