



**LOCAL COMMON SENSE CONSERVATION**

**18 Main Street  
 PO Box 669  
 Chester MT 59531  
 Phone: 406-759-5778, ext. 102**

*The Liberty County Conservation District Board of Supervisors met October 19, 2023*

*Present:*

*Lanny Jones                      Tyler Jones                      Mike Nelson                      Geoff Osterman  
 Diane Roberts                      Kurt Matkin                      Rodney Svenson                      Rod Oraw*

*Absent/Excused:*

*Robert Pugsley                      Ray Morkrid  
 Megan Hedges                      Tyler Streit*

**CALL TO ORDER:** *Lanny Jones called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.*

**DISTRICT BUSINESS**

**Motion** by Rod Oraw, seconded by Mike Nelson to approve the minutes of the September meeting. *Motion carried.*

**Motion** by Tyler Jones, seconded by Rod Oraw to file the Treasurer’s Report for September. *Motion carried.*

**Motion** by Tyler Jones, seconded by Rod Oraw to pay September bills. *Motion carried.*

**3/23  
 h Basis**

**Payments  
 September 2023**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Num</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Memo</b>	<b>Account</b>	<b>Paid Amo...</b>
09/18/2023	186	Sheila Roberts	Supplies Harvest Festival- bo...	212 · Promotions	14.08
09/21/2023	187	Diane Roberts	T & E Work Unit Sanford Park	370 · Travel	24.89
09/25/2023	188	HSA Bank	HSA Sept. LCCD Contribution	130.1 · LCCD con...	34.58
09/25/2023	188	HSA Bank	HSA Sept Permissive levey a...	130.2 · Permissive...	433.82
09/28/2023	ACH	PERS	September Pmt D Roberts	131 · Retirement	238.94
09/28/2023	190	Diane Roberts	September Net Payroll Diane...	Net Payroll	1,078.82
09/28/2023	189	U-I Contributions	UI Contribution 3 QTR	141.3 · Unemploym...	6.47
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b><u>1,831.60</u></b>

**NRCS Report – Misty Vermulm, DC, Shelby Office**

**October 19, 2023  
 NRCS Report**

- We avoided a government shutdown and are now in FY2024 and operating on a continuing resolution. The CR budget goes through November 17<sup>th</sup>.**

- **Workload wise:** we are working on CSP2024 Renewal applications, field work, planning with EQIP applicants and Food Security Act spot checks (including some flagged for gully erosion), CSP payments may also be processed soon.
- **Personnel:** Zach Williams will be moving to Helena to work for the NRCS, his last day in Chester is Friday October 20<sup>th</sup>. Matti Osterman was approved to assist the Chester Field office up to 3 days a week for the next few months. The District Conservationist, soil conservationist, and the administrative positions in Chester and Shelby will open periodically, every 3 months or so, until they can be filled. Our Human Resources department is also short staffed, so hiring is a slow process. There is presently a Pathways position open and it closes October 26<sup>th</sup> for Natural resource / ag students looking for a career with NRCS, these positions would be for summer 2024, locations across the state.
- **Program signup cutoff** was announced as October 27, 2023, for FY 24 applications (CSP and EQIP). Any unfunded applications from 2023 will be rolled over to fiscal year 2024. The EQIP TIPs offered are listed by county on the MT NRCS website: Liberty Soil Health (final year offered), Marias River TIP, Golden Triangle Expired CRP Conversion to Grazing lands, No More Dusty Trails.
- **LWG meeting** was held with slight adjustments to incorporate into the Long Range Plan.

Misty Vermulm  
District Conservationist

## Extension Report – Jesse Fulbright (not in attendance)

### District Business

#### LOCAL ACTIVITY

**TREE SALES:** Currently there are 3613 trees that have been sold in Liberty County for the 2024 spring planting. With the limited stock at Montana seedling nursery, it was suggested that other nursery options be explored. Diane has received information from Lincoln Oaks in North Dakota, Towner State Nursery in North Dakota, and Big Sioux Nursery in South Dakota.

- **Lincoln Oaks** fills all North Dakota orders first until November 8<sup>th</sup> and then it is open to out of state orders on a first come first served basis. The climate is very suitable for Hi-Line area. Payment is due once trees are shipped. The minimum order amount is \$200.
- **Towner State Nursery**, North Dakota, gives preference to North Dakota orders until December 1. Full payment due before orders are shipped. Minimum order is 100 trees.
- **Big Sioux Nursery**, South Dakota, gives preference until December 15. Trees are very suitable for Zones 3 & 4 climate. Minimum order amount \$200. Payment due before trees are shipped.

Additional options will be included in next year's tree sales. 48 trees have been purchased for CJI AG in the Class, spring of 2024.

**YOUNG AG Conference:** The Montana Department of Agriculture will host it's 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Young Ag Conference on January 17-20, 2024, at the Delta Hotels Helen Colonial in Helena, MT. The LCCD would like to scholarship two couples to attend. Diane will reach out to the list of attendees to see if there are two couples that would like to attend.

**AREA III Meeting:** The MACD Area III meeting was held on September 27 at the Stage Stop Inn in Choteau, MT.

Resolutions that passed:

- Area 1- 23-01 A resolution to coordinate reuse of used infrastructure materials. Petroleum County CD.
- Area 5- 23-02 Natural Water Bodies and Land Preservation Disclosure. Missoula CD
- Area 1- 23-03 Irrigator Water Rights, Roosevelt CD

- **Area 3- 23-04** Opposition to BLM's proposed Public Lands Rule for Conservation Leasing, Phillips CD
- Area 1- 23-05- Resolution to Support the Governor's Recommendation to Exclude Grizzly Bear Encroachment into Eastern Montana. Valley County CD.

The above resolutions will be voted on at the MACD Convention in November.

Mark Suta stepped down from the position of Area III representative. Roger Smedsrud from Toole County was voted in as the new Area III representative.

The LCCD was presented with two longevity awards. Rodney Svenson, 35 years and Megan Hedges, 10 years.

The MACD will vote on a new dues structure for conservation districts at Convention. The current structure for dues is 6.5% of the county mill levy with a minimum amount of \$750. to a maximum of \$17,000. The new structure would be a straight fee of \$4000 for each district with the DNRC offering a \$3500 grant for assistance with dues to every district. This would leave the remaining amount of \$500 that would need to be paid out of the mill levy budget. If approved, this would be a great savings to the LCCD for the amount that is currently being taken out of the mill levy.

It was also discussed at the Area meeting that Area 3 would pool funds together for an Auction Item at Convention. Each district is to contribute \$50 towards the live auction item and Tenlee Atchison from Cascade District in Great Falls will put together an MPRF package that will include rodeo tickets, hotel accommodations and more.

***Motion** by Tyler Jones, seconded by Kurt Matkin to contribute \$50 towards the MACD auction item for area III. Motion carried.*

**LCCD COST SHARE PROGRAM:** Liberty County Conservation District cost share program has been added to the website with fillable PDF's.

**LWG MEETING:** The NRCS and the LCCD hosted a Local Work Group meeting on October 19 from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the USDA office in Chester. Below are the notes from the meeting.

### **LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETING** **October 19, 2023**

The Liberty County Local Work Group Meeting 2023 Session commenced. There were 12 attendees. LCCD Chairman Lanny Jones welcomed everyone to the Session. Misty Vermulm went over the meeting ground rules and then reviewed the information from the 2019 LWG report. The top 5 most important natural resource concerns in 2019 where:

- 1) Soil health/Soil Quality
- 2) Ag Sustainability
- 3) Ag Productivity
- 4) Nutrient Management
- 5) Soil Erosion

Following not far behind the above concerns where:

- 1) Food and Fiber production
- 2) Rural Land Use
- 3) Grazing Lands tied point wise with Wildlife/Fish
- 4) Ag Land Conversion
- 5) Pesticide Management tied point wise with Water Availability
- 6) Water Quality tied point wise with Recreation

Tips that were discussed in **2019:**

**Tip 1 Willow Creek Tip** Producers in Toole and Liberty Counties have been advancing in many of the principles of soil health by having barriers to implementing livestock grazing. This becomes a key principle for the unique biological benefit that livestock can provide for the soil as well as the potential to provide income in the form of AUM value while simultaneously kick starting the health of the soils when grazing. This TIP is unique in that it dovetails the partnering efforts of Two Conservation Districts with One NRCS Work Unit, all championing for the common goal of healthier, more sustainable soils in their communities. Years 2020-2024.

**TIP 2 Salinity in Sage Creek** and Associated Health Principles- Partnering with the Sage Creek Watershed Alliance, LCCD, HCCD, Montana Salinity Control Association and the Havre NRCS Work Unit. Years 2021-2024.

**TIP 3 Marias River** Resource opportunities as outlined in the May 2008, Marias River (Bear River: Kai'yo Isisakta) Stream Corridor Assessment. Potential partnering with landowners, LCCD, TCCD, Marias River Livestock Association, BOR, BLM, and DNRC – State Lands. Timeline to be determined.

**TIP 4 Squeal on the PIG's!** Education campaign. Potential partnering with "Squeal on the Pigs" project sponsor MT Department of Livestock, Marias River livestock Association, local landowners, Sage Creek Watershed Alliance, LCCD, TCCD, HCCD, DNRC, and groups such as Pheasants Forever. Timeline to be determined.

**TIP 5 Seeding permanent cover under power lines** – Northwestern Energy as a potential partner with additional focus along roadways for added erosion control TIP, CSP, and CRP. Timeline to be determined.

**TIP 6 Wildlife Habitat Areas.** Wildlife developments and tree plantings to provide habitat AWAY from roadside habitat. This is an idea from producers. Timeline to be determined.

Currently there is a Soil Health TIP that was implemented in 2022 and ends in 2023.

TIP's to be implemented in 2024 are:

No More Dusty Trails

Maria's River, off stream water

Golden Triangle CRP to grazing land.

In **2023** a Survey was sent out in Liberty County and 21 people responded. The top 5 concerns in 2023 were:

1. Soil quality/health
2. Ag sustainability
3. Soil erosion
4. Ag productivity
5. Pesticide Management

NRCS facilitator, Stacy Eneboe, led the discussion on natural resource needs currently in Liberty County.

Attendees were given several minutes to vote on the top concerns in Liberty County.

There was little change, but Invasive Species was added to the LWP list. Additional subjects were added under the 12 topics to be considered for future TIPs through the NRCS. Below is the list in order.

1. Soil Health/quality
  - a. Salinity issues
  - b. Low PH in the soil
  - c. Flexibilities with cover crop management, harvesting forage.
  - d. 5 Soil health principles
2. Pesticide Management tied point wise with Water Availability
  - a. Alternative chemical solutions
  - b. Herbicide Resistance
  - c. Biological Controls
  - d. Track use.
    - i. Proper mixing vs application control to reduce over application.
3. Ag productivity

- a. Cost benefit ration vs profitability- New Technologies excel to track inputs and outputs.
  - b. Yield limited by water.
4. Soil Erosion
  5. Ag Land Conversion
  6. Grazing Lands tied point wise with Wildlife/Fish
    - a. Grazing Management (528 prescribed grazing)
    - b. Pipeline & tanks
    - c. Cross fencing that is wildlife friendly
    - d. Target producers in the Sweet Grass Hills.
    - e. Existing Marias River TIP along the river.
      - i. Wildlife
        1. Potholes to grass
        2. Planting crop to grass
        3. Pollinators
        4. Remove marginal land from CRP.
  7. Ag Sustainability
  8. Nutrient Management
  9. Invasive Species
    - a. Spotted Knapweed
    - b. Canada Thistle
  10. Water Quality tied point wise with Recreation
    - a. Bureau of Mines & Geology well data.
  11. Food & Fiber production
  12. Rural Land use

This information will be used for a future NRCS Long Range Plan and dovetailing that with the current LCCD Long Range and Work Plans.

Dennis Hull shared that COCORAHS records soil moisture and soil temperature that could be used for drought concerns.

Chairman Jones thanked attendees for their participation and reminded that additional feedback can always be shared with the LCCD or NRCS throughout the year. The October 19, 2023, session concluded.

**REVIEW STRATEGIC & ANNUAL PLAN:** Lanny Jones and Megan Hedges attended the local work group meeting. Input from the meeting determined that the focus for Liberty County has not changed significantly. Invasive species were identified as an additional concern along with salinity issues and low PH that would come under soil health/quality. The top 5 concerns where:

- 1. Soil Health/quality**
- 2. Pesticide management tied point wise with Water Availability**
- 3. Ag productivity**
- 4. Soil Erosion**
- 5. Ag Land Conservation**

Diane will work on updating the **Long Range Strategic plan/ Annual plan** to be reviewed by the board for input and approval.

**MACD CONVENTION:** The MACD convention will be held in Billings, MT on November 14-16, 2023. The LCCD will cover costs for any Supervisors who would like to attend.

**REGIONAL AND STATE**

*One handout was presented as an update from Kasydi Lucas.*

*Next Meeting –December 21, 2023*

**ADJOURNMENT**

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*Diane Roberts, Administrator*

*Lanny Jones, Chairman*

*Diane Roberts*

*Lanny Jones*

District meetings are held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at the USDA Service Center, Chester, 7:00 p.m. unless otherwise noticed.

**MISSION: TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS BY PROVIDING LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAMS TO CONSERVE, IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN OUR NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT.**

**VISION: Having a community that is economically stable with the natural resources conserved by:**

1. providing education and encouraging control of nuisance weeds and eradication of noxious weeds
2. having no soils blowing above their tolerance level—ideally no soil or water erosion
3. sustaining and improving water quality, with rivers and streams running clear.
4. encouraging tree planting for shelterbelts and wildlife
5. encouraging recycling
6. working jointly with all other agencies/organizations to enhance conservation practices within the district.
7. improving the public perception of the Conservation District