

MONTANA'S CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

VISIT TO

WASHINGTON, D.C.

30th November and 1st December 2011



REPORT TO THE DISTRICTS

The MACD Board of Directors approved funds for the Executive Director to travel to our nation's capitol for a series of meetings. The main purpose of the trip was to hand-deliver to our Congressional Delegates the recently passed eight MACD Resolutions that were approved at the 2011 MACD Convention in Helena. The resolutions are included as part of this report and may be seen below. The meetings are listed in the order they occurred. This was the first time in a number of visits that we have been able to meet in person with all three delegates.

The National Association of Conservation Districts

If one leaves Montana on the early flight, one can conduct business that same day in D.C. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and President Jefferson would be astounded to know this. The first stop Wednesday afternoon was at the National Association of Conservation Districts offices. CEO John Larson was not in the office, but meetings were held with [Laura Wood](#), *Director of Legislative Affairs*, [Danielle Dills](#), *Grassroots Coordinator*, and [Rich Duesterhaus](#), *Senior Advisor, Northeast Region*. Each were provided a copy of Montana's resolutions, and general discussions were held about DC politics, the Super Committee, the Farm Bill, and Montana's role in the upcoming NACD Convention (MACD has two presentations scheduled at the NACD convention – one about sage-grouse and one about funding). There were also discussions about the NACD Legislative Conference in 2012, and future plans for the when and where of that major national event. Laura Wood was recently appointed to her position and offered to help with meetings/presentations to Montana's Congressional Delegates. Copies of NACD's positions on the Farm Bill were provided by Danielle, with the understanding that these would be handed to the delegates.

Senator Jon Tester

On Thursday morning Laura and Jeff first visited Senator Tester's office. We walked through the resolutions with his Legislative Assistant, Nathan Taylor, and Senator Tester. In general, Senator Tester agreed with the ideas in the resolutions, except as noted below. Specifically, he wanted to know more about Resolution 11-04, US Fish and Wildlife Service Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Reservoir Removal Plan, and said that he had an interest in this and would follow up. The Senator had questions about Resolution 11-05, Land & Water Conservation Fund, stating that this fund helps provide recreational access. Jeff said that we had three main concerns. The first is the projection that much more food will be needed in the not-too-distant future. The second is the acquisition of land on a large scale, as this could affect farms and ranches. We also had concerns about maintenance of federal lands. These issues drove this resolution.

Laura mentioned that the Montana resolution dealing with cover crops (Resolution 11-08, Risk Management Agency Guidelines for Cover Crops) would be of value to NACD in broadening their bag of tools they use when working on the Farm Bill.

Jeff mentioned the interest in Montana regarding the Cooperative Watershed Management Act, and the comment period open for input. Senator Tester wrote and championed this bill. As a side note, Laura said that she would take this issue to her legislative committee at NACD for consideration.

Jeff handed the NACD Farm Bill flyers to both Senator Tester and Nathan Taylor. Jeff said that these positions were developed with input from 3,000 Districts across the country, and that they represent the best thinking and broad support regarding conservation issues in the next Farm Bill. Jeff recommended that Nathan visit with Laura when he had specific questions about this issue.

Senator Tester ended the meeting by offering to help Conservation Districts in any manner that he could.

Editor's Note: The Land & Water Conservation Fund resolution is one of several from Montana that was accepted by our national association (NACD) for consideration at their convention. In addition, Board Member Gary Giem suggested wording that may help clarify the issue as noted above. It may be seen below:

Land & Water Conservation Fund

WHEREAS, Conservation Districts have responsibilities to protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state, and

WHEREAS, agriculture provides an essential foundation of the nation's tax base, and

WHEREAS, agricultural land stewards have proven themselves skilled, cost-effective caretakers of private and public lands, and

WHEREAS, demand for food is expected to increase by an additional 70% by 2050, and

WHEREAS, our staggering national debt requires that we manage money and resources more skillfully and efficiently than ever before, and

WHEREAS, there are efforts to fully fund the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). WHEREAS, the LWCF is a primary funding mechanism for federal purchases of fee title lands and conservation easements which retire or reduce agricultural use,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the NACD oppose funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund for land acquisition, but support use of funds for development of local, public, and outdoor recreation projects as well as maintenance of existing projects.

Either MACD Vice President Steve Hedstrom, Treasurer Jack Judisch, or Board Member Don Youngbauer will represent Montana's Supervisors at the NACD committee hearing where this resolution will be debated.

Representative Denny Rehberg

The next meeting was with Representative Denny Rehberg and his Legislative Assistant Darrin Munoz. Representative Rehberg apologized that San Sweeney, his Agricultural Assistant, could not be with us for this meeting. He said that Districts were batting 100% when we finished reviewing the eight resolutions. However, he pointed out that several resolutions were not issues where the federal government should be involved. We gave the above stated perspective ref the NACD handout and the Farm Bill.

Representative Rehberg ended the meeting by offering to help Conservation Districts in any manner that he could.

Senator Max Baucus

The final meeting of the day was with Senator Baucus and Spencer Gray, his Legislative Assistant. Alexis Taylor, Senator Baucus' Legislative Assistant for agricultural issues, was in Montana. Concern was expressed about the Land and Water Conservation Fund resolution, and Jeff explained the thinking behind it. Except for this one, and Resolution 11-04, US Fish and Wildlife Service Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, Reservoir Removal Plan (we did not cover this one with the Senator), Senator Baucus was in general agreement with the ideas expressed in the resolutions.

We gave the above stated perspective ref the NACD handout and the Farm Bill.

Senator Baucus asked about things in general. Jeff told him about the idea of a statewide conference to help Montana prepare for "The Next Ten Years." The idea behind this is that the northeast is under stress dealing with the impact of the oil boom, in the southeast development will increase again when the coal bed methane search comes out of the recession, and the western part of the state will once again have impacts from out of state people wanting to move there to escape crowded urban areas of our country. The Next Ten Years conference could bring experts and our people in one location to help them think about what they want their communities to look like, and address what they could be doing to make the future a win-win. Senator Baucus offered to help with this if the MACD Board of Directors is interested.

Senator Baucus ended the meeting by offering to help Conservation Districts in any manner that he could.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Tiberi, Executive Director

**MONTANA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
RESOLUTIONS
November 2011**

Resolution 11-01

Adopting Guidelines to Develop Near Streams, Waterways, Tributaries, & Drainage Areas

WHEREAS, due to explosive growth with the oil and gas industry, Eastern Montana, has experienced massive development.

WHEREAS, in our neighboring state, North Dakota, has seen many problems with oil locations being flooded and compromised due to the location and weather.

WHEREAS, the Conservation Districts find it important to learn from North Dakota's experiences and prevent the negative from happening in Montana.

WHEREAS, the Conservation Districts have concerns about the problems that may arise without guidelines for development.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That MACD convene a working group consisting of DEQ, Board of Oil & Gas, DNRC, the Montana Petroleum Association and other identified parties to consider options to regulate the development of oil & gas industrial sites located near streams, water ways, tributaries, and drainage areas before permitting occurs.

Submitted by: Roosevelt County CD

Area Meeting Action: Passed Area I

MACD Committee Assignment: Water Resources/ DO PASS AS AMENDED

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-02

Wild Horse & Burro Introduction

WHEREAS, many areas of Federal controlled lands in the southwestern United States are becoming over-populated with wild horses and burros, and

WHEREAS, the over-population of horses and burros causes significant environmental damage including degradation of water quality and native vegetation, erosion, and soil compaction,

WHEREAS, the substantial cost to manage wild horses and burros is borne by the taxpayer,

WHEREAS, additional nationwide locations for wild horses and burros are being considered,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that existing wild horse herds be confined and managed at their current locations, and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Conservation Districts of Montana stand opposed to the introduction of any new population of wild horses and burros in Montana.

Submitted by: Phillips CD

Area Meeting Action: Passed Area III

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: Soil Resource & Land Use/**DO PASS**

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-03 Future Wild Lands Designations

WHEREAS, Conservation Districts are units of local government designated to help citizens conserve their soil, water, and other renewable natural resources, and

WHEREAS, the northern prairies of the United States are an environment naturally conducive to vibrant wild lands and wildlife in conjunction with production of plentiful livestock, hay, and grains, and

WHEREAS, native wildlife co-exist readily with livestock and benefit greatly from currently well-managed agriculture lands, and in turn, livestock thrive alongside wildlife on the prairie, and

WHEREAS, farmers and ranchers working and living on the land have traditionally been the best care-takers of the land, and

WHEREAS, a United States Department of Interior's Wild Lands designation would take lands out of production, thereby affecting the livelihood of area farmers and ranchers, the local tax base, and the local economy, and

WHEREAS, a "Wild Lands" designation would have similarly detrimental effect as a "Monument Designation",

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Conservation Districts of Montana stand opposed to the US Department of Interior's authority to designate lands as Wild Land, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Conservation Districts of Montana stand opposed to any new US Department of Interior Wild Lands designations in Montana.

Submitted by: Phillips CD

Area Meeting Action: Passed Area III

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: Soil Resource & Land Use/**DO PASS,**

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-04
US Fish and Wildlife Service Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
Reservoir Removal Plan

WHEREAS, in MCA 76-15-102, it states: “*Declaration of Policy. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of soil and soil resources of this state, for the control and prevention of soil erosion, for the prevention of floodwater and sediment damages, and for furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water and thereby to preserve natural resources, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this state.*”,

WHEREAS, the US Fish and Wildlife Service Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge has identified in their conservation plan to eliminate 215 reservoirs on the CMR Refuge (Draft CCP and EIS, Charles M. Russell, pg.178).

WHEREAS, the reservoirs on the CMR Refuge provide critical habitat for wildlife and livestock,

WHEREAS, the reservoirs are more critical during periods of drought,

WHEREAS, the removal of the CMR reservoirs will result in loss of grazing distribution for both wildlife and livestock,

WHEREAS, these reservoirs protect soil and prevent flooding,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Conservation Districts of Montana oppose the removal of any reservoirs on the US Fish and Wildlife Service Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge.

Submitted by: Phillips CD

Area Meeting Action: Passed Area III

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: Water Resources/ DO PASS AS AMENDED

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-05
Land & Water Conservation Fund

WHEREAS, Conservation Districts are charged through Montana code 76-15-102 with rights and responsibilities to protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state, and

WHEREAS, agriculture provides the essential foundation of rural Montana's tax base, and

WHEREAS, agricultural land stewards have proven themselves skilled, cost-effective caretakers of private and public lands, and

WHEREAS, demand for food is expected to increase by an additional 70% by 2050, and

WHEREAS, our staggering national debt requires that we manage money and resources more skillfully and efficiently than ever before, and

WHEREAS, Montana's senators have been proponents of passing legislation to fully fund the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

WHEREAS, the LWCF is a primary funding mechanism for federal purchases of fee title lands and conservation easements which retire or reduce agricultural use,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Conservation Districts of Montana oppose funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund for land acquisition and that the fund be used for maintenance.

Submitted by: Phillips CD

Area Meeting Action: Passed Area III

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: District Operations/**DO PASS**

General Session Action: PASSED AS AMENDED.

Resolution 11-06
Montana Irrigation Water

WHEREAS, the flooding events of 2011 have had a large economic impact on the agriculture communities and,

WHEREAS, many irrigation structures were damaged or destroyed and,

WHEREAS, most repairs for agriculture irrigation structures will receive little or no governmental funding and,

WHEREAS, many agriculture irrigators will not be financially or physically able to fix the structures by the start of the 2012 irrigation year and,

WHEREAS, permanent Point of Diversion changes through the water court take multiple years and,

WHEREAS, the state of Montana recognized the extreme need to be able to irrigate crops any way possible and,

WHEREAS, the state of Montana suspended the rules for point of diversion regulation to allow irrigators the opportunity to get water to their crops and,

WHEREAS, this ruling was for the 2011 irrigation year.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Montana Association of Conservation Districts contacts the Governor to support a continuation of the suspension of point of diversion rules for the 2012 irrigation year.

Submitted by: Lower Musselshell s CD

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: District Operations/DO PASS

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-07
Conservation Districts and NRCS Office Space Resolution

WHEREAS, for more than 75 years the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service(NRCS), and local government Conservation Districts have worked as partners to conserve and protect the soils, water, and air of the United States;

WHEREAS, this partnership includes joint offices located in most counties in the USA, where oftentimes several natural resource and agriculture-related entities are housed to deliver services to local people;

WHEREAS, for more than seven decades the citizens of the US and the taxpayers of the US, through these local offices, have been provided with benefits that included one stop shopping, program development, local cooperation, improved communication, sharing of resources, public access, telephone coverage, and other benefits of a local office setting;

WHEREAS, in the big picture of how this all works and benefits America, farmers and ranchers have used this working relationship to better conserve natural resources and provide food and fiber to both Americans and citizens of other countries;

WHEREAS, the federal government has contributed to the success of local Conservation Districts by providing office space for Districts without financial compensation;

WHEREAS, local Conservation Districts have provided in-kind, non-cash contributions to the success of the local office, by providing information and guidance about federal programs, answering telephones, greeting customers, and other general office management tasks and concerns;

WHEREAS, it appears that there is no authority in the federal laws to allow the sharing of office space in the historic fiscal relationship that has succeeded for more than seven decades serving America;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED; that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) formally requests that the National Association of Conservation Districts seek a legislative solution that would:

1. List the benefits of a joint office arrangement;
2. Seek Congressional approval to enable through statute the sharing of office space between NRCS and Conservation Districts; and
3. Formalize and regularize the existing, historically mutually beneficial, financial arrangement.

Submitted by: Lewis and Clark Conservation District

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: District Operations/DO PASS

General Session Action: PASSED.

Resolution 11-08
Risk Management Agency Guidelines for Cover Crops

WHEREAS, biodiversity with cover crops has been documented to improve soil health,

WHEREAS, Montana soils can benefit from using cover crops in their cropping systems,

WHEREAS, Montana farmers need to protect their crops with crop insurance,

WHEREAS, Federal Crop Insurance limits the opportunities to use cover crops by requiring termination by June 15 for the subsequent crop to be considered to be grown on fallow,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts investigate and pursue changes to Risk Management Agency guidelines to expand opportunities for cover crops in Montana.

Submitted by: Toole County CD

MACD Committee Assignment/Recommendation: Soil Resource & Land Use/DO PASS

General Session Action: PASSED AS AMENDED.