Resource Conservation Advisory Council

MAY 20, 2020

10:00 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.

Conference Call

**RCAC Members Present:** Doug Bonsell, Bob Breipohl, Judi Knapp, Ramsey Offerdahl, Bob Schroeder, Gayla Wortman

**Conservation District Bureau Staff Present:** Linda Brander, Karl Christians, Jason Garbor, Mary Hendrix, & Laurie Zeller.

**Online Callers:** Sara Bowman, Gallatin CD, Chris Evans, Lewis & Clark CD, Carie Hess, Bart Icopini, Treasure County CD, Petroleum CD, Aaron Kolb, Big Sky Watershed , Becky Lime, Lincoln CD, Petroleum, Chris Mahoney, NRCS Gallatin, Erin Ferris-Olson, Coalition of Land Trusts, Liz Rider, Powder River CD, Dan Rostad, Yellowstone River Conservation District Council, Dena Schotzberger, Lincoln County Weed Board, Gene Smith, Powder River CD, Angela Stahl, Treasure County CD, Jim Stone, Blackfoot Challenge, David Stout, Ruby Valley CD, Carol Watts, Custer CD, Tracey and Wendt, Sun River Watershed

**Introductions**

Laurie Zeller facilitated the introductions of all Council, staff, and online callers

**Approval of February 12, 2020 Minutes**

The February 12, 22020 minutes were approved.

**Weather Station Overview**

Julie Goss, administrator of the Richland County Conservation District gave a presentation on the weather stations used in Richland County

The weather stations in Richland County were funded by the conservation district, Sidney Sugars, and private landowners. They were used to collect data like rainfall for drought purposes. They have collected a significant amount of data dating back to 2008. Originally data was stored at the district’s website, but now the Davis company (manufacturer of the weather stations) stores them on their system and people must have subscription to access. The stations are moved around. They are now being used to monitor climate modeling information.

Weather Link is the app used to disseminate information.

**223 Reviews & Ranking**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CD Name** | **Project Name** | **Requested** | **Approved** | **Comments** |
| Lewis & Clark  | **2020 MT Youth Range Camp** | $4,317.50 | $4,317.50 | Approved by Zeller |
| Phillips | 2020 MT Range Tour | $7,632.00 | $3,816.00 | Approved by Zeller |
| Custer | District Development Project Develop & Implementation | $10,000.00 | $10,000.00 | Strong partnerships who are contributing financially. Kinsey Irrigation contributing 50%. |
| Gallatin | Camp & Godfrey Creek Rehab | $16,600.00 | $14,000.00 | No significant comments |
| Gallatin | River Rendezvous | $2,200.00 | $0.00 | Withdrawn due to Corona Virus implications. |
| Lewis & Clark  | Sun River Watershed CAM Mapping Phase 2 | $17,730.00 | $14,000.00 | County is expending some funds, but not enough near Augusta area where there was extensive flooding. The MT Watershed Coordination Council is contributing administrative fees. In addition to mapping the project will determine the best places for resources. |
| Lincoln | S. Lincoln County Cost-Share Weed Program | $5,525.00 | $0.00 | Council wanted to know why their proposal was denied at the MT Noxious Weed Trust Fund and the response was that program said you could go to the 223 program. Concerns about using public funds for commercial hay land and private lands. |
| N Powell | Market Demand for Friendly-Conservation Meat Study | $4,950.00 | $0.00 | This request seems more like an e commerce project than conservation. |
| Petroleum | Musselshell River Coop Weed Mapping | $5,253.00 | $0.00 | Mapping for weeds is the financial responsibility of the county. |
| Powder River | Weather Stations | $5,398.00 | $5,398.00 | CD will own and maintain the stations.  |
| Ruby | District Development Watershed Stewardship Program | $10,000.00 | $10,000.00 | No significant comments. |
| Sheridan | District Development Connecting CDs to watershed resources | $10,000.00 |   | Withdrew due to Corona Virus. |
| Treasure | No-Till drill | $20,000.00 | $15,000.00 | No significant comments. |

**Fiscal 2021 Grant Deadlines—Linda Brander**

The following deadlines are proposed for the 223, Mini-Education, and District Development grants:

* **July 15, 2020**
* **October 14, 2020**
* **January 13, 2021**
* **April 7, 2021**

The Council approved the fiscal year 2021 deadlines.

**Shelter in Place for State Employees—Laurie Zeller**

Due to the Corona Virus, Laurie stated that most of the Department of Natural Resource, Conservation District Bureau Employees were working remotely.

**Funding Overview—Laurie Zeller**

Biennium Budget

Laurie Zeller stated, and the RCAC approved, she would like to make the following budget adaptions for the 2022/2023 fiscal years:

* Increase the 223 budget for technical assistance by $160,000 per fiscal year
* Increase the funding for the Milk River Watershed Alliance
* Allocate funds for technical assistance for the districts
* Set aside funds to help CD personnel with training for professional development, recruitment of speakers for special engagements, and to attend seminars

The future budget of the Conservation District Bureau is uncertain because of the Corona virus and decreased usage of coal.

**Administrative Grants**

There were 35 admin grants submitted.   The goal was to bring CD’s operating budget to a level of $38,000 (admin grant plus mill levy).  There total Admin funds available are $568,000.  Karl balanced the applications to reach this amount, or at least to the level requested.  The RCAC approved as submitted.

The 310 funds available was $60,000.   The RCAC approved a cap of $2750.00, of which was applied to 11 CD’s.  The remaining CD’s received $62.37 per permit processed in 2019.

The RCAC did not approve setting aside $10,000 for computer equipment this year.  With the increase in Admin Grant funds available, the CD’s should be able to cover those expenses.

**Funding Weed Management Education Requests with Mini-Education Grant Funds**

Linda Brander, Mini-Education Grant Program manager, asked the Council to clarify the 223 guideline (11) that states that any conservation requesting money for a weed project must first apply to the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund. This requirement works for a 223-project request but is impractical for the small $500 grant Mini-Education Grant requests. It is impractical because the MT Noxious Weed Trust Fund’s grant process is a complicated, only has one submittal date, and is more applicable for large-scale weed management projects.

The Council moved to waive the 223 Guideline (11) for Mini-Education Grant requests.

**Pollinator Grants—Mary Hendrix**

No reports were given. Agenda notes state that five grants have been funded and there was a balance of $8000 for fiscal year 2020.

**310 Program Overview—Jason Garbor**

No report was given.

**Old Business**

Due to time constraints, the topic of “Reorganizing Resources to Meet Conservation District Needs was tabled.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Other**

No other items were brought up for discussion.

**Next Meeting Time & Location**

The next meeting will be held in Deer Lodge, MT in August. Linda Brander will select the date and secure approval from the Council.