**Resource Conservation Advisory Council (RCAC)**

**November 5, 2020**

**10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

**Zoom Meeting**

[**https://mt-gov.zoom.us/j/91550737484**](https://mt-gov.zoom.us/j/91550737484)

**Meeting ID: 915 5073 7484**

**Dial by Telephone--+1 646 558 8656 or +1 406 444 9999**

**RCAC Members Present:** Doug Bonsell, Kathleen Johnson, Judi Knapp, Ramsay Offerdalh, Bob Schroeder, & Gayla Wortman.

**Staff Present:** Mark Bostrom, Linda Brander, Autumn Coleman, Mary Hendrix, Amy Personette & Laurie Zeller.

**Online Callers:** Darrell Baum, Broadwater Conservation District, Sharon Flemetis, Stillwater Conservation District, Lindsay Clark, Stillwater Watershed, Katie Mumford, Broadwater Conservation District, Jalyn Klauser Sage Grouse Range Specialist/Carter Conservation District, Ashley Lowrey, Park Conservation District, Tom Osborne, Stillwater Conservation District, & Wayne Yost, Stillwater Conservation District.

**Introductions**

Laurie Zeller facilitated the introduction of all online participants.

**Approval of August 19, 2020 minutes.**

The minutes were approved.

**223 Awards**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Conservation District** | **Project** | **Amount Requested** | **Amount Awarded** | **Comments** |
| Broadwater | Beaver Creek Riparian Health Improvement | $20,000.00 | $20,000.00 | No comments. |
| Carter | No-Till Drill | $20,000.00 | $20,000.00 | The RCAC Council recommends the district charge between $12.00 to $20.00 per acre, Since funding for a no-till drill is a one-time-only award from the 223 program, the district must receive sufficient rental funds to pay for maintenance and the replacement of the drill in approximately eight years. This recommendation will be presented to the board at the next meeting. Also,  |
| Park | History & Relevance of Upper Yellowstone Irrigation; An Educational Video | $9,900.00 | $9,900.00 | Ashley Lowrey, Watershed Coordinator is confident the other funding sources will happen, but if funding is denied, they will do a shorter version of the documentary. |
| Stillwater | Stillwater-Rosebud Water Quality Initiative | $17,758.86 | $17,760.00 | No comments. |
|   | **Total** | **$67,658.86** | **$67,660.00** |  |

**Introduction of New Bureau Chief—Laurie Zeller**

Mark Bostrom stated there would be no new Conservation District Bureau chief hired at this time and the Conservation District Bureau would be temporarily merged into the Resource Development Bureau whose bureau chief is Autumn Coleman. Ms Coleman will handle the activities of both Bureaus. Autumn assured the Council that she and her staff would do anything necessary to manage bureau activities and provide good customer services the districts. Autumn will send out her contact information to the conservation districts.

In addition to leaving Laurie Zeller’s position vacant, Mark indicated he would not rehire for Linda Brander’s position, and Duane Claypoole’s (Water Reservation Specialist) position in the Miles City office. By using vacancy savings for these three positions, Mark hopes to minimize the impacts to the (CARDD) Division from revenue losses and potential budget impacts that may are likely to happen with a new Republican administration and legislature.

Presently, now coal tax revenues are declining and could cause a short fall of $1.3 million dollars for Conservation Resource and Development’s (CARDD) operating budget and grant programs.

In addition, he did not want to hire a new bureau chief and then have to let him/her go at the end of the fiscal 2021 year. Go if there was a budget deficit.

And finally, he indicated he wanted protect the remaining employees in the (CARDD) Division because if there are demands by the new Republican administration to reduce agency budgets, he would be able to use the vacancy savings to save jobs.

Gayla Wortman said that she understood the decision and asked if merger was definitely going to be temporary.

Mark said

Laurie Zeller expressed concerns that

**Upcoming Webinars at the Conservation District (CDB)**

Laurie indicated the monthly webinars have been very successful with nearly 50 attendees at each meeting. She stated that the following webinars have been presented to date: Records Management and

The next one will be an idea sharing webinar. The CD presenters will be Flathead CD, “Running a Virtual Adult Education Seminar, Madison CD, How to Involve A Community in Conservation Values and Workshops, Lake County CD, Soil Health and Pollinators, and the Gallatin CD on Operating the Farmers Market.

In December there will be a webinar on the grasshopper problems and resolutions in Montana and in February, there will be one on new supervisor orientation.

**Legislature 2021**

Laurie stated that conservation districts are going to have to make their voices heard. They will need to have a plan and ask for what they need.

One the issues will be election laws that impact CD supervisors. There are ten words in the existing law that need to be amended and cleaned up. It involves a supervisor’s resignation during mid-term

The Governor’s Office allocated $200,000 in emergency funds to address the 2017 and 2020 fire issue (e.g. erosion and weed problems). The CDB will manage the disbursement of funds. Laurie asked the Council if they wanted to review applications and the Council said no and agreed they should be reviewed by CDB staff.

**Oral History Project**

Linda Brander provided an overview of the oral history project that will be in place after she retires. Presently there are 50 plus stories in the collection that represents 27 conservation districts. The original goal of the project was to have a woman’s story from each conservation district. To accomplish that goal, the Conservation District Bureau has developed a contract with the Liberty County Conservation District. Gail Cicon will work with 31 districts to identify a woman, conduct an interview, transcribe the story and place it in DNRC’s online collection. The contract will run from January 2021 to December 2023.

**Inspirational Videos**

The Conservation District Bureau (CDB) will showcase four Montana conservation districts (CDs) who are doing unique and revenue generating programs that are outside the usual scope of work and services performed by many Montana CDs. The objective is to produce a five-minute video for each district. The videos will be published on YouTube, state, and national conservation websites.

The CDB allowed $10,000 to fund this project.

The CDB release a request for proposal to four video production companies and only one responded. The CDB will develop and finalize a contract by December 31, 2020. Work will begin January 2021 and be completed by August 2021.

**Other**

NA

**Public Comment**

NA

**Next Meeting Date**

The next RCAC meeting will be March 4, 2021 and will be in a Zoom format.