**YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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**YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

August 14, 2024

**July/August Board Meeting Minutes**

1670 48th St. West Suite #2, Billings MT 59106

8:30 a.m. (closed session) 9:30 a.m. (business/public meeting)

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**: Chad Sedgwick - Chair; Brad Kraft – Vice-Chair, Leroy Gabel, Jackie Haaland,

Bryan Mothershead, Stacey Robinson

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**NON-BOARD PRESENT**: LaVerne Ivie - YCD; Crystal White – YCD/PF; Mark Morse – Yellowstone Co. Commissioner;

Tim Miller & Ronni Tallerico – Yellowstone Co. Floodplain; Seanna Torske, Zoe Craft - NRCS; Anthony Sammartano & Francisco Gamboa Herrera – Yellowstone County Extension;

Veronic Corbett – DNRC Water Rights; Shannon Blackburn - FWP

310 applicants: Holly & Trent Stoltz

Presenters – Huntley Project FFA chapter representatives: Kindra Sedgwick, Lilly Morns,

Kade Oblender and advisor Logan Kotar

**Chair Sedgwick called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. RECESS TO CLOSED EXECUTIVE SESSION\* - YCD Administrator Performance Review \*Note: The Executive Session closed, as allowed in Section 2-3-203(3), MCA, as discussions relate to matters of individual privacy and wherein the demands of individual privacy exceed the merits of public disclosure.**

Gabel made a motion to open the public meeting at 9:35 a.m., second by Mothershead, motion carried.

**Roll Call**

After introductions, Chair Sedgwick informed attendees: All issues will be addressed to the Chair; public comments are always

welcome but ask that you wait until the issue is addressed on the agenda, ask to be recognized by the chair, and then limit

comments to 3 minutes; no action will be taken on any item, not on the agenda. Attendees were reminded to sign the attendance sheet.

**Agenda Changes:** Addition of Swift River Ranch 310 inspection and a report on the 310 Yellowstone River tour.

**Minutes:** Kraft made a motion to approve the June 18, 2024 Minutes as written and reviewed, second by Mothershead, motion passed.

**Board member absences:** None

**MT Range Days**: YCD sponsored the FFA chapter from Huntley Project. Kindra Sedgwick, Lilly Morns, Kade Oblender represented the chapter today to provide a verbal report and thank the YCD for the opportunity to represent Yellowstone County, Their advisor was also present to personally thank the YCD. The highlight of the camp verbal overview was displaying their

1st place plaque!

**310’s**

* **Applications, Emergencies, Complaints & Violations:**
* **YE-11-22 Joy Stevens, Alkali Creek** -- **Board discussion and decision today:** Stevens provided an update on the geotechnical service provider she hired – the area has been surveyed and she is waiting for a formal geo-tech report from the engineers. Gabel made a motion to postpone action on the Joy Stevens violation until the next YCD board meeting in anticipation of receiving a geo-tech report, second by Haaland, motion passed.
* **YE-33-24 – Phillips 66, Five Mile Creek floodplain activity** – The proposed project involves excavating an approximate 30’ x 50’ area of the existing Phillips 66 pipeline right-of-way. The project is necessary to identify, isolate and repair a segment of pipe. The project location will not impact Five Mile Creek or nearby wetlands; however the location is within the floodplain. No materials will be placed in the streambed or riparian areas for this project. **Board decision**: Kraft made a motion to declare a non-project, second by Mothershead, motion passed.
* **YE-01-25 – Trent & Holly Stoltz, Fly Creek -** application to install beaver dam analog (BDA) and post assisted log structures (PALS) to facilitate natural stream processes by reconnecting the stream with its natural floodplain, increasing groundwater storage, and aggrading the stream channel by trapping sediment over time. **Team inspection date and attendees:** 8-2-24; Sedgwick, Mothershead, Haaland, and Ivie accompanied representatives from Pheasants Forever, FWP, DNRC Water Rights office, and landowners Trent & Holly Stoltz. Landowners provided the background which led them to choose this project for their owned stretch of Fly Creek. The goal is to affect the immediate bed and bank in a good way. White reported that other installed BDA projects throughout the state have been very successful.

Team members reported since this is the first of its kind in Yellowstone County, they view the project as a demonstration site and were assured by the design crew that if the project causes increased turbidity or other adverse conditions in Fly Creek the structures will be removed immediately. **Board decision:** Mothershead made a motion to approve as proposed, seconded by Haaland, motion carried.

* **YE-20-24 – Montana Rail Link, Yellowstone River** – A YR side channel was dredged to allow boat access during the river cleanup process when the train derailed. 310 tour participants viewed the project site from the river on July 17, 2024. **Board decision:** Kraft made a motion to accept and approve MRL’s final report, seconded by Mothershead, motion passed.
* **PAR Montana** – will begin dredging the refinery intake channel this week per their emailed notification. The notice is a requirement of Par MT’s annual dredging 310 permit.
* **YE-02—25 (formerly YE-27-23) Swift River Ranch**, Yellowstone River – Engineer resubmitted project application. YCD and other permitting agencies will inspect prior to the Sept. YCD board meeting.

**Other 310 Issues & Projects**

* **Yellowstone River CD Council** – Gabel discussed the upcoming weed meetings that YCD should attend. Ray Beck and Crystal White will represent the YCD at the virtual meetings.
* **2024 310 Yellowstone River tour –** July 17th – Two (2) boats and drivers were rented to tour the upper river portion of Yellowstone County (from the METRA Park area upstream to the Yellowstone/Stillwater County line). Attendees included: YCD – Kraft, Mothershead, Haaland, Ivie, White; Yellowstone County Commissioners Mark Morse and Don Jones and commissioner elect Mike Waters.

First time tourers Haaland and Mothershead reported they found it very informative. Mark Morse also expressed his gratitude and stated the tour provided for a different view of the river. Several planned stops were made with Kraft and Ivie leading discussions in their respective boats. No blatant issues were observed. All look forward to next year when the lower reach of the river will be toured.

**Agency Reports**

* **YCD Administrator Report –** Report provided before today's meeting. No comments or questions were received.
* **Partner Biologist Report** – Crystal White – report in its entirety at end of these Minutes
* **Army Corps of Engineers –** unable to attend
* **Beartooth RC&D –** no current report
* **DNRC – Mary Hendrix –** report sent to YCD Supervisors before today’s meeting.
* **Fish Wildlife and Parks –** Shannon Blackburn – participated in the 310 portion of the meeting. Also reported:
* FWP is still working with MRL on fish damage from the spill in the Yellowstone River.
* Confirmed mudsnails in Pioneer Park. Not much to do about it. Recommendation is to put up a mudsnail sign.
* **NRCS**  **-** **Seanna Torske and Zoe Craft –** report in its entirety at end of these Minutes. Presented fourteen (14) CRP Emergency grazing management practice contracts and two (2) CRP re-enrollment contracts for YCD Supervisors to sign.
* **Yellowstone County**
* **Yellowstone Co. Extension** – Anthony Sammartano introduced the new AG Extension Agent Francisco Gamboa Herrera. They are getting used to their new positions and will have more to report at the next YCD meeting.
* **Billings/Yellowstone County Planning Board and City of Laurel Planning Board-** Vacancy has not been filled.
* **Yellowstone Co. Floodplain –** Tim Miller & Ronni Tallerico office update: The county is in the process of going through legal channels to remove the unauthorized concrete and other debris dumping in the YR floodplain on the Huschka violation.
* **Yellowstone Co. Weed Department –** Joe Lockwood unable to attend and did not provide a work report.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

* **Old Business** –
* **YCD/PF cooperative employment partnership –** Now that the contract has been signed, White asked if there are any immediate projects the YCD would like her to assist with. The board will request her help with the Westend Reservoirs as that project develops and also will need her assistance with the Realtor Workshop planned for this winter. White’s technical expertise will assist with going forward with the request to increase the Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant program – on this project she will work with Ray Beck and the Yellowstone River CD Council.
* **AIS Lake Elmo videos** were shown and discussed at the AIS meeting in Billings. Chrissy Webb, FWP took the lead and Crystal White was in attendance to represent YCD.
* **New Business-**
* **Rocky Mountain College** – financial support request for the 18th Annual Yellowstone River cleanup. Gabel made a motion for YCD to donate $500 towards the cleanup efforts, second by Robinson, motion passed.
* **YCD Stream table use request –** Professor Kayhan Ostovar, RMC requests use of the YCD stream table to conduct demonstrations during the Phillips 66 annual community picnic. YCD Supervisors verbally approved the request with the caveat that Kayhan and/or his students receive training prior to using.
* **T-Report**
* **June & July T-Reports**: Robinson made a motion to accept the June and July Treasurer’s Reports as written and reviewed, second by Haaland, motion passed.
* **Travel & Meetings –** none
* **FY25 Budget**

**-** Sedgwick, Haaland and Ivie presented the FY25 draft budget to the Yellowstone County Commissioners, Finance Director and Clerk & Recorder. The commissioners expressed their appreciation for the conservation work YCD accomplishes each year. In addition to the draft budget an abbreviated list of YCD’s FY24 activities was provided to those present in the meeting.

**-** Gabel made a motion to adjust the draft budget to include a 10% salary increase for the YCD Administrator position, seconded by Mothershead, motion passed.

**-** Kraft made a motion to approve the draft budget as edited today and approve for FY25 financial guide, seconded by Robinson, motion passed.

* **Standing Committee Reports**
* **NILE** – Kraft volunteered to contact the new NILE manager to come to a future YCD meeting and give an update on NILE activities. White will be a presenter with NRCS and the Weed District during the NILE AG-ED 4th Grade education event.
* **Yellowstone Conservation Area (aka West End Reservoirs/City Lakes)** – Robinson reported he has not heard from the City as to when Land Design is to begin updating the Master Plan to include a Conservation and Recreation Amenities layer. He hopes to meet with engineers soon to get a realistic timeline.
* **Yellowstone River Water Reservations training** – The board prefers to hold a separate session outside of a regular board meeting to conduct the training. An evening session with a light meal was suggested.
* **Unscheduled Matters**
* **Public comments** – none
* **Next YCD Board Meeting** – The next YCD meeting will tentatively be held on September 17, 2024.
* Gabel made a motion to adjourn at 11:17 a.m.

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**Chad Sedgwick, Chair LaVerne Ivie, YCD Administrator**

**Partner Biologist Report – Crystal White**

* Attended the MISC meeting on July 9th to view the Lake Elmo AIS videos made by FWP in partnership with YCD. Chrissy from FWP gave a short report on the video and we then viewed all three videos. I attended this meeting and took notes on the discussion and feedback around the videos. The council was impressed with the way the videos highlighted what impact these invasives can have and how they highlight the removal process. They were especially pleased with the CD3 cleaning station funded by YCD. With how much the CD3 costs, they had questions on how it is being kept safe from vandals. Chrissy answered, that since it is on a trailer, FWP employees bring it out and take it in when staffed. Overall, they were impressed with the improvements made around Lake Elmo.
* I have been assisting on the permitting documents and maps for the Stoltz BDA project and have done the site visit portion with YCD and other agency personnel.
* I am currently working on setting up a flush count event at Pompey’s Pillar in partnership with FWP, BLM and the local PF Chapter.
* I have been busy with field visits this summer which have included range inventories and pollinator monitoring.
* Attended Yellowstone 310 tour with YCD and County Commissioners.
* Connecting with and setting up times to meet with Stacey on West End Reservoir Project.

**Billings FO Report August 13th, 2024 - Zoe Craft**

FY24 EQIP/CSP Applications –

Almost all applications that were preapproved have been contracted. We have one EQIP that is still in the final contracting stage.

* EQIP: 15/16 contracted
* CSP: 3/3 contracted

FY25 EQIP/CSP Applications –

Applications have been coming in for the FY2025 funding cycle. The deadline for this signup is October 25, 2024. Applications received past October 25, 2024 will be considered for FY2026 funding.

Available fund pools for FY25 applications:

* Rooting for Soil Health TIP
* Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI): Annual Invasive Grasses, Land Conversion, Woody Expansion, Riparian Degradation
* Pivots for Pollinators TIP
* Fly Creek TIP
* Community Ag
* Tribal
* CSP Classic and Renewal

Work Unit Updates–

* Lauren Hanson – Pathways student for the summer in Hardin had her last day 8/9/2024.
* Guthre Ziebarth – Natural Resource Specialist in Hardin that just started 8/12/2024.
* Non-Supervisory District Conservationist – Advertisement for the Hardin field office open from 8/9/2024 to 8/23/2024.
  + [USAJOBS - Job Announcement](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.usajobs.gov%2Fjob%2F804128600&data=05%7C02%7CZoe.Craft%40usda.gov%7Cf9815ce617a94d9341c708dcb8aaafae%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638588290550136171%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=lt%2F5hjhqq%2FEsddVy4dx892%2FuQlQ28DBp%2BBY9GhbopY8%3D&reserved=0)
* Our state is planning to re-advertise the following positions for the work unit, we don’t have specific dates/job announcements yet but know that they should be reannounced at some point:
  + Civil Engineer
  + (401) Natural Resources Specialist
  + Admin Clerk
  + Graduating Pathways Soil Conservationist

Updates:

* Soil your undies – Billings Public Library
  + Soil health outreach with the Billings public library summer reading program July
  + NRCS brought the soil microscope to help participants get a closer look at life in the soil, different examples of soil for hands on texturing, and “life size” examples of soil particles, sand, silt, and clay.

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* Northern Plains Resource Council brought a slake test visual for folks
* People’s Garden – Metra Park
  + Showcase of soil health through renovation of an old building site at the Metra. Planning to feature cover crops, row crops, vegetables, and perennial crops. This designation as a People’s Garden will open this space up for outreach opportunities for multiple partners across Yellowstone County.
  + First round of soil testing was completed May 22nd, 2024, with Zoe Craft & Brad Holliday.
  + JB from AgriOrganics helped sift out and separate all of the fill material used and blended it with on site manure and compost from AgriOrganics to help get a better growing medium in July. They have the site reseeded with a cover crop mix from North 40 Ag and under sprinklers for the Montana Fair.

