**YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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**YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

March 6, 2025

**November/December Board Meeting Minutes**

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

2:00 pm

**Note:** The Local Work Group meeting commenced at 1:00 p.m. Chair Sedgwick presided and Seanna Torske moderated. A recap will be presented at the April 8th board meeting.

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

Bryan Mothershead, Stacey Robinson

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Leroy Gabel

**NON-BOARD PRESENT**: LaVerne Ivie - YCD; Mike Waters, Yellowstone Co. Commissioner, Carolyn Siever, YRPA;

 Christine Schweigert – DNRC; Seanna Torske & Zoe Craft, NRCS; Demi Blythe – FWP;

 Steve Williams, Yellowstone Co. Attorney;

 Others: Scott Aspenlieder - Performance Engineering; Skyler Williams - MT Farmers Union;

 Matt Crampton, Mark Vogel, Jim Stott – BBWA; Trevor Zubeck – Agri Industries;

 Taite Johnson, Landowner; Ryan Rupert – Land Design; Don Sasse

 Virtually: Anthony Sammartano & FranciscoGamboa Herrera - Yellowstone Co. Extension;

 Stephanie Criswell - DNRC; Colten Shimmer & Jeremy Anderson – ACOE; Matt Garett – DEQ

 Joe Lockwood, Yellowstone County Weed District

 310 applicants: Joy Stevens & Jens Selvey

**Chair Sedgwick called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.**

**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 (although

not everyone did).

**Agenda Changes:** Double L Ranch Yellowstone River Water Reservation application and three (3) Letters of Support for consideration.

**Minutes:** Kraft made a motion to approve January 14, 2025 Minutes as written and reviewed, second by Robinson, motion passed.

**Board member absences:** Mothershead made a motion to approve Leroy Gabel’s absence from today’s meeting, second by Haaland, motion passed.

**310’s**

* **Applications, Emergencies, Complaints & Violations:**
* **YE-12-25 Joy Stevens, Alkali Creek** – submitted a new 310 application for stabilizing the violation area affecting Alkali Creek. **Board decision**: Kraft made a motion to accept the application and an schedule an onsite inspection to view the new plan, second by Robinson, motion passed. The inspection will take place March 20, 2025 with YCD. Other agencies invited and indicated they will attend: ACOE, DNRC, FWP, Billings Floodplain, DEQ
* **YE-13-25 – Northwestern Energy, North Fork of Alkali Creek** – After board review, Mothershead made a motion to declare a non-project because the project does not impact the immediate bed or bank of Alkali Creek, second by Kraft, motion passed.

 **Other 310 Issues & Projects**

* **Yellowstone River CD Council** – no report

**Agency Report**

* **YCD Administrator Report –** was received prior to meeting. No questions or concerns raised by Supervisors.
* **Partner Biologist Report** – Crystal White –unable to attend meeting but sent report prior to the meeting which included: working on EQIP applications the past couple of months; realtor workshop meeting in Jan and hosted the workshop the following week; attended the two-day soil health symposium; hosted a prairie dog management workshop to help landowners understand all of the management methods and resources available to them; Attended the West End Reservoir meeting at the FWP office.
* **Army Corps of Engineers –** in attendance but did not offer a verbal report
* **Beartooth RC&D –** no current report
* **DNRC – Michelle Yeager, Jack Bernhardt –** unable to attend the meeting; Stephanie Crisswell – participated throughout the meeting in addition to the office report that was emailed to Supervisors prior to today’s meeting rom CDB.
* **Fish Wildlife and Parks –** Demi Blythe – provided a brief overview of activities she is involved with.
* **NRCS**  **-** **Seanna Torske and Zoe Craft –** Field office report emailed to supervisors:

FY25 EQIP Applications- The majority of our EQIP applications have been assessed, ranked, and have cost estimates. As of today, we’re looking at the total estimated applications and amounts (keep in mind some estimates may still change, and some apps may not get funded): Many of these applications are weed spraying projects. There rest are Community Ag (high tunnel), Pollinator TIPs, Tribal, and Sage Grouse stock water applications. We still don’t know where we stand with EQIP funding until they re-evaluate the IRA funds.

• Hardin – 28 applications totaling $5.7 million

• Crow – 10 applications totaling $992,000

• Billings – 40 applications totaling $5.9 million

 FY25 TIP Proposals – Seanna Torske has been working on TIP proposals for the remaining phases of our Pivot for Pollinators TIPs in Big Horn and Yellowstone Counties. Crystal White, our Pheasants Forever Farm Biologist in the Billings FO, is working on a “Ranching with Wildlife” TIP for Yellowstone County. The focus is on nonlethal methods for managing prairie dogs and other wildlife. Final drafts have been submitted to the Area Office.

* **Yellowstone County**
* **Yellowstone County Commissioner** – Mike Waters was present and contributed throughout the meeting.
* **Yellowstone Co. Extension** – Francisco Gamboa Herrera and Anthony Sammartano provided the following report:

**Horticulture, Anthony Sammartano**

Upcoming Classes and Workshops: March 15th, 11am - 1:30pm. Community Room of the Billings Public Library. Billings Community Seed Swap; April 9th, 1pm - 2pm. Community Room of the Billings Public Library. Garden Soil Health Workshop; June 7th 10am - 11am. Gainan's Heights Garden Center, Pest Insect I.D Workshop

Level 1 Master Gardener Classes starting March 18th.; Tabling at the Montana Audubon Center's Native Plant Symposium on March 29th; Planning Earth Day Projects at the Metra's new People's Garden, and the Master Gardeners Square Foot and Demonstration Gardens (April 22nd); Planning Invasive Species related Arbor Day Projects at Two Moon Park (April 26th)

**Agriculture, Francisco** **Gamboa Herrera**

 - During February, we offered nine educational opportunities to farmers and ranchers on relevant topics, such as Rangeland weed management, new stand establishment, calving cows’ nutrition, weed ID, and pesticide management. Seven of these nine trainings offered Private Pesticide Applicator license renewal credits. Close to 75 people attended these sessions; We will have a Vertebrate Pest management workshop on May 14th at the SARC. This is a joint effort between Extension and MDA (Steven Vantassel). All day hands-on prairie dog’s workshop; Working in the 2025 NACAA Conference Planning Committee on pre-conference tours to several business and agriculture operations around the Billings area; Working in the 2026 Sugar Beet & Barley Symposium planning Committee; Working with MetraPark at the Harvest Heaven project for 2025 Montana Fair; Soil testing assistance, pest ID and management questions, nitrate testing, water quality testing (TDS) Assisting citizens with Ag related questions

* **Yellowstone Co. Floodplain –** Ronni Tallerico unable to attend today’s meeting.
* **Yellowstone Co. Weed Department –** Joe Lockwood reported:
* Applied for a $75K Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant (Yellowstone CD wrote a support letter)
* There is currently a bill submitted this legislative session to appropriated $10 million statewide to combat noxious weeds. It has good bipartisan support.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

* **Old Business**
* **YCD sponsored Realtor’s Irrigation Districts/Ditch Co. Workshop -**  Kraft and Mothershead, being two of the five presenters reported that YCD had good realtor turnout, great reviews. The questions the panel fielded indicated this type of training was much needed. There has been a request to repeat next year.
* **New Business**
* **310 workshop –** Kraft attended a 310 workshop in Stillwater County specifically for irrigation districts. He felt it was especially important to hear from all the agencies and learn about their permitting authority. May be something YCD needs to host in the future.
* **Letters of Support:**

 **CEMIST** **DNRC Conservation District Bureau (CDB) Project Grant –** The focus of the CEMIST application will be an all-taxa Education and Outreach effort.  This will include salary for program staff as well as funds for supplies and travel to E&O events and meetings. **Board decision**: Mothershead made a motion for YCD to write a letter of support, second by Robinson, motion passed.

 **Billings Bench Water Association (BBWA): Jim Stott,** BBWA President provided an overview of the proposed project:The Canyon Creek Flume is essential to BBWA’s ability to convey water in the BBWA Main Canal across Canyon Creek. The existing structure has reached the end of its useful life and leaks water continuously, which reduces BBWA’s water supply and can negatively affect water quality in Canyon Creek. The flume also creates maintenance and operational challenges for BBWA. With the upcoming need to be functional for 12 months of the year for City of Billings flows it is critical to replace this structure for uninterrupted operations. If the existing flume were to fail, BBWA would be unable to deliver water to a majority of their water users, including the City’s drinking water system. **Board decision**: Kraft made a motion for YCD to submit a letter of support for the Canyon Creek new flume, second by Robinson, passed.

 **Huntley Project Irrigation District (HPID):** Scott Aspenlieder, Performance Engineering provided an overview of HPID effort in applying for a Water Saving Commodity Grant through the Federal Government.

Nine (9) Water saving strategies will be applied within the HPID service area to increase water delivery efficiency and usage to reduce losses during delivery of irrigation water to producers in the Huntley Project Irrigation District. The soil conditions and hydraulic conductivity will be used to estimate the physical losses from seepage and evaporation before the project and the District will measure actual losses after project completion. A comparison of results will be made to calculate water savings. **Board decision:** Mothershead made a motion for YCD to write a letter of support, second by Haaland, motion passed**.**

* **Water Reservations:** Taite Johnson and Trevor Zubeck presented an overview of the proposed center pivot project the Double L Ranch is planning to develop and are requesting to use a portion of YCD’s Reserved Water Right. The Plan is to install 3-5 pivots by 3/31/2026 according to what the Irrigation and Power companies have told them and for feasibility and logistical reasons. The full build will not be completed until 3-5 years for all 10 pivots which will allow the time to fully build out all 10 pivots. Volume requested: 1,686 acre feet with a flow rate of 7,400 gallons per minute on a total of 843 acres. The design calls for a floating pump in the river. **Board decision**: Robinson made a motion to accept the water reservation application to begin the process with DNRC, second by Haaland, motion passed.
* **T-Report**
* **January & February T-Reports**: Kraft made a motion to accept the January and February Treasurer’s Reports as written and reviewed, second by Mothershead, motion passed.
* **Travel & Meetings –** Mothershead made a motion for travel to be covered if needed for Supervisors to attend Legislative hearings in Helena during the Session, second by Kraft, motion passed.
* **Dues and Donations:**
* **NACD –** Kraft made a motion to support NACD with a $200 dues donation, second by Haaland, motion passed.
* **Chamber of Commerce –** Robinson made a motion to not approve the $450 dues request at this time, second by Mothershead, motion passed. A Chamber representative will be invited to a future YCD meeting to provide benefits of Chamber membership at which time the board may reverse the dues decision made today.
* **Beartooth RC&D –** Mothershead made a motion to pay the full dues request of $275, second by Robinson, motion passed.
* **MT Forest Products donation request** – Donation to fund aPublication to tell the forest product story andsustainably reverse the decline of the lumber industry. The goal is to raise awareness, promote legislative change and of course revitalize Montana Forest Products Industry. Robinson made a motion to donate $100 towards the effort, second by Mothershead, motion passed.
* **Standing Committee Reports**
* **Legislative Committee:**

 - **SB472 - 310 Law civil penalties**.  The bill was never submitted with the correct amounts and now the Timber Association has added an amendment. We will watch closely and make a decision to support or not when all of the amendments are in their final form.

 **- SB77 - the procurement bill** – is also being amended and will be forwarded to Supervisors when new information is available.

* **Yellowstone Conservation Area (aka West End Reservoirs/City Lakes)** – Land Design presented the Amenities and Recreational mapping layer for the Master Plan. The plan was well received and discussion centered around how to take to the public and other governmental agencies. Land Design will delineate individual components of the areas of the plan, assign estimated costs to each area thus allowing the City and YCD to be able to solicit funding alliances to build.
* **Soil Health Symposium** – Mothershead represented YCD at this years symposium held in Billings. He reported there were about 200 people in attendance. He did not attend all of the breakout sessions, just the ones that pertained to what he was interested in or offered new opportunities/ideas for farming and ranching. Kraft made a motion to reimburse Mothershead the $160 registration fee, second by Haaland, motion passed.
* **Arbor Day** – Trees have been ordered and will be delivered in time for the April 25th event. The event will be held on the YCD office grounds but because of traffic flow issues we will work with Canyon Creek Nursery to maybe hold onto their part of the property to make for better traffic flow. Volunteers are already signing up to help.
* **Unscheduled Matters** – none
* **Public comments** – none
* **Next YCD Board Meeting** – The next YCD meeting is scheduled to be held April 8, 2025
* Kraft motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:40 p.m.

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