

# MACD Executive Directors Report

## for 5/10/21 Board Meeting

### Legislature and Advocacy

The 2021 Legislative Session officially ended as of April 29th! MACD focused efforts on conservation district funding, alongside many other issues impacting districts. Here are the highlights of several key bills we worked on. (Please note this is not an exhaustive list - which can be provided through the LAHC minutes if you are interested!)

- **HB 374** addressed the funding shortfalls from coal severance tax. Specifically, HB 374 provided a \$1,000,000 fix for this current fiscal year as well as funding for the next biennium. This means that DNRC CARDD (which includes the Conservation Districts Bureau) has full funding for the first time in several years, which means that funding to Districts (Admin grant, 223 grants etc) will NOT be impacted by coal tax shortfalls. **MACD worked hard on HB 374, and this is a HUGE WIN for Districts!** There is a two year sunset on this bill, which makes HJ 27 (see below) very important for districts.
- **HB 2** is the General Appropriations Act. We worked hard to maintain the CD budget and fortunately did not receive the 10% cut that many other programs did!
- **HJ 27** is a bill to study conservation district funding. MACD will be pushing the importance of this bill during the interim session, as it is important to find a long term solution for CD funding given declining revenues from the coal severance tax. MACD President Jim Simpson plans to be very involved in this process. Related to MACD Resolution 08-02.
- **SJ 28** is the Study of the Flathead River Erosion. This study bill will be addressed during the interim session! Based on MACD Resolution 20-02.
- **HJ 7** is a Joint Resolution regarding the St. Mary and Milk River project. Related to MACD Resolution 20-06.
- **SJ 6** is the Resolution on Floodplain Permit Process.
- **SJ 7** is the Resolution to remove Hidden Pasture Creek from WSA, Based on MACD Resolution 06-10
- **HB 632** deals with the distribution of some of the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) money. CD's were not named under local government in the bill, so MACD worked alongside other entities (irrigation districts etc) to get this definition changed through an amendment! DNRC CARDD will be administering part of these funds specifically related to water and wastewater. MACD will keep districts informed as more information comes down from the federal government.
- **After Action Review:** MACD and DNRC participated in an After Action Review (AAR) to reflect on the 2021 session and start planning for the 2023 session.
- **Questions? Want to get involved?** Please reach out to Rebecca Boslough (rebecca@macdnet.org) if you have any questions or would like to be involved in the future! The Legislative Ad Hoc Committee (LAHC) will meet, if and as needed, during the interim session.

### **Regional and National Level Advocacy:**

- **St. Mary's and Milk River:** Rebecca has been working with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) to advocate for the St. Mary's Reinvestment Act, as well as reconsideration of the cost share and funding for the infrastructure that supports the Milk River!
- **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS):** Several conservation districts that work on AIS, as well as MACD and FWP, have been meeting with and in contact with South Dakota Districts as well as the SD Game, Fish, and Parks around AIS inspection stations. They are interested in Montana's model, while this also gives us an opportunity for broader cross-state coordination on AIS.

### **Annual MACD Events:**

#### Spring Board Meeting

The MACD Spring Board Meeting is planning for June 7-9th in Helena. We have a block of rooms at Jorgenson's and have reserved the Old Senate Chambers (room 303). They have not yet opened up reservations for the rotunda, but when they do we will try to make a reservation for that area for lunches.

- The MACD Board will be hearing from the DNRC, FWP, Agriculture, and (tentatively) DEQ Directors, as well as the Governor's Natural Resources Advisor.
- Additionally, the board will engage in leadership training and kick-off an extended strategic planning process that will culminate at the Convention in November.

#### Area Meetings

Area Meetings will take place at the end of September and beginning of October. A full schedule for MACD Meetings in 2021 can be found on the website here: [https://macdnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-MEETING-CALENDAR\\_updated-3.29\\_v2-1.pdf](https://macdnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-MEETING-CALENDAR_updated-3.29_v2-1.pdf)

- The District Operations Committee is working on updated guidance for Area Meeting planning, as District hosts should begin planning for Areas Meetings soon. Additionally, both DNRC Director Amanda Kaster and the Governor's Natural Resource Advisor Michael Freeman are interested in attending Area Meetings, so Area Hosts should make sure to extend an invitation to them. Rebecca Boslough has sent them the Area Meeting dates and can help facilitate these invitations if needed.

#### 2021 Convention in Great Falls

At this time, we are planning for an in-person convention. The 2021 MACD Annual Convention is scheduled to be held in Great Falls at the Heritage Inn from November 16th to the 18th, with an MACD Board Meeting the morning of the 19th. The Convention Planning Committee is currently meeting every two weeks.

## **MACD Operations**

### Merger

MACD and SWCDM were legally merged as of January 1st, 2021. We have the certificate of merger and necessary documentation from the Montana Secretary of State. Our name change on the federal level with the IRS goes through with our 2020 taxes for the two former entities. Once we have this back, we will be able to merge our accounts at the bank with the same federal Employer Identification Number (EIN). There are many steps to the merger. A timeline for the financial aspects of the merger is included in the May 2021 Financial Report to the Board. Please look there or reach out to Jim, Dean, or Becca with further questions. We are planning to have all steps of the merger completed by the 2021 Convention, including a new website.

### Other items of note

- There is an updated calendar on the MACD website. Please let a MACD Staff member know if you would like to submit any events.
- The MACD Staff each developed job descriptions, which will be reviewed by the Personnel Committee.
- The Montana Conservationist (TMC) restarted in April - [check out the new issue on the website here!](#) Eric is gathering stories and photos for future issues. Reach out to him if you have ideas or content.

### Committees

- The Soil and Land Use Committee has created a Forestry Subcommittee, and they are looking for members! Please let Stephanie Adams know if you are interested in joining! ([stephanie@macdnet.org](mailto:stephanie@macdnet.org))
- The Education Committee has created a Communications, Planning, and Outreach (CPO) subcommittee / workgroup. Stay tuned for more information on this!
- The MACD Standing Committees (Education, District Operations, Soil and Land Use, and Water Resources) are currently reviewing all resolutions in the MACD Resolution Library. The committees will be contacting sponsoring districts and making recommendations on whether resolutions are still relevant, have been accomplished, or if they should stay 'active.'

## **CARES Act - Local Government Reimbursement Program (LGRP)**

The Department of Administration told me that the final reimbursement requests should have been processed by the end of March. Please check with your county if you have *not* received reimbursement for eligible items purchased by districts by Nov 30th and submitted for reimbursement by the deadline. If you are having issues with your reimbursement or county, please reach out to Rebecca, who can contact the Department of Administration or MACo.

## **Soil Corps Idea - AmeriCorps Planning Grant**

- MACD applied for an AmeriCorps Planning Grant last month to explore the idea of Soil Corps. We have a follow-up meeting with the Office of Community Service the week of May 10th to discuss our application and learn if we will move on to the next phase. A significant factor will be the amount of funding available to OCS for state-sponsored programs. This relates to the amount of national-level funding for ongoing AmeriCorps Programs in Montana. We should learn more about the availability of funding and our application status soon!

### Background:

- Through conversations with the MT Office of Community Service (OCS), MACD developed the idea of a Soil Corps AmeriCorps program that would serve conservation districts and their partners by placing AmeriCorps members in their offices. We are not starting a program at this time, but OCS did recommend that we consider applying for an AmeriCorps planning grant (which we did last month!)
- A planning grant would give MACD a year to gather input from districts over 12 months to determine if a Soil Corps program is worth pursuing and what it would look like. Districts would have a chance to shape this. Additionally, a major benefit of the planning grant is that it does not require that we start a program at the end (especially if we were to hear from Districts that a Soil Corps program is not the right fit).
- This is a 'window of opportunity' for districts that MACD is exploring. A Soil Corps program could potentially gel with the new NRCS Soil Health Strategic plan and aligns with Americorps getting more funding this year.
- The Board voted that MACD should submit an application during the April 12th Board Meeting.

## **Infrastructure Project Ideas:**

- We are gathering ideas to prepare for the possibility of federal funding for infrastructure. If you have any ideas for programs or projects related to infrastructure (irrigation, water etc!) please let MACD know!

## **Brief overview of ED meetings and events since the last board meeting:**

### Committee Meetings

- Convention Planning Committee
- Legislative Ad Hoc Committee
- Education Committee
- MACD Executive Committee Meeting
- (3 meetings)Outreach Workgroup (Subcommittee of Education)

### Other meetings and Events

- Monthly meeting with NRCS - Tom Watson and Kyle Tackett
- Weekly legislative meetings with DNRC
- Weekly Conservation Districts Bureau (CDB) Meeting
- Weekly MACD Staff Meetings
- Soil Corps AmeriCorps Planning Grant Application Review Meeting - MACD
- (2) Soil Health Meeting
- Meetings and calls to determine best consultants for MACD Leadership Training and Strategic planning
  - (6) Preliminary/screening calls with strategic planning consultants
  - (3) Calls with Jim, Dean, and strategic planning consultants being considered
  - (3) Calls with potential leadership training consultants
- Envirothon judging in Lewistown - April 20th
- Meeting to review District Covid Funding Requests
- Milk River Talking Points Meeting
- State Library and MACD - Funding and opportunities for Districts to use State Library Resources
- (3) NACD re: St. Mary's and Milk River
- (2) Aldo Leopold Application Review Meeting
- Many meetings and calls with legislators and agency leadership!
- Legislature After Action Review (AAR) with MACD and DNRC
- Various calls and chats with District folks
- Introductory Strategic Planning call with chosen consultant
- NACD, Western Caucus, WACD, MACD re: Sage Grouse and WOTUS

### **Upcoming Meetings and Events**

- River Councils meeting with Director Kaster
- Calls with NACD, Congressional offices re: St. Mary's and Milk River
- Call with Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) Executive Director
- AmeriCorps Planning Grant with Office of Community Service (OCS)
- Chasing our study bills (HJ27 and SJ28 in the interim!)
- Soil Health discussion
- Standing meetings, committee meetings, and other partner meetings