

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

District Board

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Diane Fitzgerald, NRCS Soil Conservationist
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Jim Williams, NRCS Soil Conservationist Technician

**Lewis & Clark
Conservation District**



Submitted February 11, 2016

WATER RESOURCES: Watershed work continued this year, with efforts on Elk Creek as part of the Sun River Watershed, Lake Helena Watershed Group, the Upper Clark Fork group and the Blackfoot Challenge and the Dearborn area.

The CD has had significantly fewer 310 permit applications this year, with only 26 applications, 5 complaints and 1 emergency.

The board continues the water well test cost share program in 2015, the board approved ear-marking \$1000 toward cost-sharing \$25 to landowners for water well tests. This is a cooperative program with the Water Quality Protection District and County Extension.

We continued funding support this year for the Rimini stream gauge on Ten Mile Creek. Our \$2500 contribution allows USGS funding to assist in supporting other gauges in the Helena area.

The board also continues their support of the Sun River Watershed Group, budgeting \$4000 annually to assist in the operation of the group.

The CD Board approved support with a grant as well as a donation of funds for the Prickly Pear project. This was a large scale project with lots of supporters and includes a new fishing access site.

WEED ISSUES: Again in 2015, there was a large group of landowners on the South Fork and Middle Fork of the Dearborn Rivers who gathered to work on their common noxious weed problems. Assisting in this project were the USFS, the USFWS, the County Weed District and the Conservation District. This is a great project that is driven by landowners and for that reason has met with continued success. The Conservation District, Weed District and USF&WS provide cost-share for the chemical used.

The board continues their support of the Augusta Insectary program, budgeting \$2500 annually to assist in the operation of the program. The Augusta School has a new employee who will hopefully lead the charge on this project.

In 2015 the CD continued the Weed Cost Share Program. With \$25,000 budgeted again in 2015, they also approved using funds that were not used in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 to cover all applicants. Expenditures for 2015 totaled nearly \$22,000. These funds come from accumulated savings from the last 17 years. Landowners may apply for chemical cost share, commercial applicator cost-share, re-seeding and insect cost-share if the insects have a cost associated with them. We will continue the program for the foreseeable future. To-date the CD has spent almost \$90,000 on the program with the bulk of the projects for 2015 still to come in.

The Lewis & Clark CD is one of only two Conservation Districts in the state to give financial support to the Biological Weed Control Project. The board approved a 2nd annual donation of \$1000 to the organization in 2015.

The Rocky Mountain Front Weed Roundtable has had the CD support now for 3 years, with the CD donating \$750 again in 2015.

LAND RESOURCES: This year we are again directing landowners to use the Montana Conservation Seedling Nursery in Missoula for their shelterbelt and other tree and shrub planting needs. Landowners who have smaller needs than their minimum order size are being directed to the County Extension who has indicated their willingness to combine orders for landowners.

The District maintained involvement with the Missouri River CD Council, with Scott Blackman as the voting member.

New in 2015, the board approved a pilot "Cost Share" project for small practices in the county, such as culverts, riparian and cross-fencing and the like. They allocated \$7500 to cost share 50% or up to \$2500 per approved project.

COMMUNICATIONS: CD Administrator Chris Evans upgraded the District website at www.lccd.mt.nacdn.org in 2015. The website incorporates district history, supervisor information, meeting notices and newsletters as well as 310 forms, and a photo gallery with a variety of topics. In addition to the new look, the CD has a new Facebook page. We continue *The Explorer*, our quarterly newsletter, incorporating partner news from FSA, NRCS, Extension and the Weed District. The newsletter is also available on the web site.

In January 2015, CD Supervisors updated the annual plan and budget for 2015. The layout used allows Supervisors an opportunity to expand and take ownership of specific projects in the county.

EDUCATION EFFORTS: The 8th Annual East Valley Middle School Flood Awareness Day was cancelled this year due to weather. We plan to be back in the spring of 2016.

The CD sponsored a Rolling Rivers Trailing demo at the Lake Helena Watershed Festival in August. Fortunately the smoke cleared for that day at least! It's estimated that we had between 200 and 300 people come through the festival displays. In addition to the Rolling Rivers Trailer, Supervisor Jeff Ryan had a booth show-casing the soil/willow lift projects he's been assisting with.

The Conservation District board continues to fund Envirothon Teams from the two high schools (3 teams in 2015) in Helena. The students had a great experience and plan to return in 2016 with continued CD support.

In January 2016, we co-hosted a workshop on cheat grass management. It was very well attended with over 90 participants. In September the CD is finishing up their requirements as part of the 223 Cover Crop grant and is hosting a final workshop on soil health and cover crops.

PEOPLE: The CD has a new supervisor in 2015, Sarah Howe-Cobb ran when her husband Mike decided to switch to the Weed District Board. We are very happy to have Sarah on-board. Other supervisors include Stan Frasier, Jeff Ryan, Steve Granzow, Scott Blackman, Ron Ingersoll and Bob Bushnell.

We welcomed a new District Conservationist in October of 2014. John George came to the Helena Field Office from northern California. He has spent time working for NRCS in California, Oregon, Washington and previously in Montana.

2016: For the next year, we anticipate continued work with our small and large acreage landowners, the various watershed, weed, fire and education projects that we are involved in, our education efforts with the schools in the county and of course the website and our quarterly newsletter, *The Explorer*. The District looks forward to another East Valley Middle School Flood Awareness Day in May, and assisting the two Helena high schools in sending teams to the Envirothon. We will be doing a 6th year of the weed cost-share program as well. In 2016 the CD is hosting a Big Sky Watershed Corps member, sharing their time with the Lake Helena Watershed Group and the Water Quality Protection District.

And finally, we were selected to submit a full proposal to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and anticipate hearing results on that in January 2016. If approved, the funding will go primarily toward Forest Health Projects in Broadwater, Jefferson and Lewis and Clark Counties.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Evans
District Administrator
Lewis & Clark Conservation District