

Beaverhead Conservation District

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 20th, 2026

Call to order

Byron Martinell called to order the regular meeting of the Beaverhead Conservation District at 6:00 pm on August 20, 2026 in the NRCS office.

Roll call

The following persons were present: Byron Martinell, Tom Miller, Harris Wheat, Rich Nordquist, Carl Malesich, Sage Hansen, Marti Laknar, Emma Fullerton, Jess Fields, Dori McNeil, Kelly Rowe, Meg Smith, Nolan Salix, Marieke Jeffery, Greyson Gee, Dave Arnett, Walt Zobell, Sean Claffey, Jack Bazemore, Erin Paddack, Francis from Jackson, Tony Tezak, Trevor Walter, Jim Hagenbarth, Migual the engineer.

Absent: Jerry Meine, and JS Turner

Motion to excuse absences by Carl 2nd Rich, Motion carried

Approval of minutes from last meeting

- *Motion to approve the July minutes by Harris 2nd by Carl, motion carried.*

Summary of Finances

- *Motion to approve summary of finances for August by Carl 2nd by Tom, motion carried.*

Public Comment on non-agenda items- Limited to 3 minutes Must sign in.

We asked for topics not on the agenda but all of the attendees were there for an agenda topic.

NRCS – Erin talked about the application deadline on October 2, Montana allocated \$132 million in EQIP/CSP funding, second in the nation to Texas, NRCS is adopting locally led conservation as TIPs go away.

Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership – Emma is working with the seasonals to do cheat grass mapping, the Drone contract was sprayed Monday, the check will be mail tonight and reimbursement has been requested. A communications specialist came down to Dillon to interview Emma and highlight her position.

Beaverhead County Extension – Jack has been nitrate testing hay, so much hay that he has run out of strips, he is also certifying weed free hay. 2 4H cooking kids are going to nationals for 4H congress.

Range Committee – Meg gave updates on the range tour that is set for June of next year.

Education and Outreach – Marti has been working on the indigenous garden – it was part of the garden tour and had 47 visitors and raised \$1,700 for the food bank. Water timers are going in all the gardens to help with watering. UMW students is working on a campus garden.

Cloud Seeding – Greyson Gee and Dave Arnett gave a presentation on working with the Big Hole Watershed committee to do cloud seeding in the Big Hole Valley. The grant that they were applying for has fallen through but they will try again next year so at this time they do not need a letter of support. Their approach involves a drone and a small handful of silver iodide and is much more targeted compared to previous trials. The board opened it up to questions from the public. Francis was heavily concerned about flooding in the Upper Big Hole and how they were going to manage flooding especially in the fire areas that recently burned. This is just a study and will only be conducted in areas that are suited for heavy rain. If flooding occurs the cloud seeding can be paused and the area can be better studied. Francis was also concerned that the Rainmaker guys have not presented to the Jackson community but want to cloud seed there, citing the presentations in Dillon at the college. Francis was informed that these two are from a different group and there is not a group there to present the topic to like the Beaverhead Conservation District but that a community meeting will be considered before cloudseeding begins. Tony Tezak was also concerned that no one has presented to the legislature, Greyson did testify during the hearing but had not been able to get on the agenda for the committee, Tony told him he would get him on the committee. Concerns were brought forth about the effects to downstream invertebrates that may be negatively affected by the silver iodide. By using drones and miniscule amounts of silver iodide harm can be prevented. Jim Hagenbarth presented on the benefits of cloud seeding down in Idaho with Idaho power and the research he has done on cloudseeding over the last several years. Multiple people were concerned about how this affects the downwind people that normally get the rain and maybe the reason the Big Hole doesn't have water is because of Idaho's cloud seeding. Dave talked about how cloud seeding encourages the clouds to pull more water from the sky to drop it and that the clouds will still rain in their normal spots they will just also rain where the cloudseeding occurs.

Big Hole Watershed Committee – Nolan Salix and Marieke Jeffery presented on the Elkhorn mine biofiltration project. They are using fungus to clear the creek water of chemicals and heavy metals left by the mine. Currently, most of the work has been lab work with some field work, the new grant would cover the actual field study to make sure that this project can be successfully scaled up. We sponsored a grant for this in 2024 and that grant is set to end this year. The new grant is for \$75,000 and will cover Jess's time for reporting.

Motion to apply for an RDG grant to pay for Montana BioAg to conduct a full-size field study on the Elkhorn creek contaminants by Tom, 2nd Rich, Motion carries.

Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership – Sean Claffey presented on the conifer encroachment work that SMSP has been doing the last several years and they get all of the work done by hiring seasonals. The Nature Conservancy hires them in spring and summer and The Centennial Valley Association hires them in the fall and winter. Kara from CVA has moved on to a new position and CVA is no longer able to hire the seasonals. Sean is asking that the conservation district hire 2 seasonals for October – February. TNC will pay their office rent and they already have computers and supplies; the grant will only be for payroll and fringe.

Motion to hire 2 seasonals through TNC grant funding by Tom 2nd Carl, Motion carried.

310 Business

Beaverhead – Matt Jaeger

- BCD 2630 HRL Inc. Koy Holland, Rattlesnake Creek, Willow Removal
Conditioned the same as upstream and downstream projects, area will be monitored for erosion.
Motion to approve with monitoring requirements by Tom 2nd Carl, motion carried.
- BCD 2631 Rattlesnake Reservoir and Water Company Koy Holland, Estler Creek, Irrigation Water Monitoring Weir
Motion to approve with modifications by Tom 2nd Carl, motion carried.
- BCD 2632 Rattlesnake Reservoir and Water Company Koy Holland, Estler Creek, Irrigation Water Monitoring Flume
Motion to approve with modifications by Tom 2nd Carl, motion carried.
- BCD 2635 Vigilante Electric, Jeff Davis Creek, Buried Powerline to new cabin
Motion to approve at a depth of 4th by Tom 2nd Carl, motion carried
- BCD 2636 Diamond O, Beaverhead River, Bridge Replacement
The board had several questions about construction and concerns about flooding, The engineer for the project Migual, was able to answer all questions and provide additional construction plans. The bridge will pass the 1984 flooding event. The abutments and wingwalls were also adjusted.
Motion to approve with modifications by Carl, 2nd Tom, Motion carries.
- BCD 2638 Eric Wendland, Blacktail Creek, Beaver Dam removal
This beaver dam is in a floodplain and the board is concerned about the debris ending up back in the creek and clogging headgates further down. The debris needs to be hauled off.
Motion to approve with modifications by Carl, 2nd Rich, Motion carried.

Big Hole - Jim Olsen

- BCD 2629 Dustin Wade Brown Complaint, North Fork of the Big Hole River, Willow Burning and Channel filled in. Previous Violation BCD 2604
The board would like a site visit before determining if it is a violation.
- BCD 2639 Vince Husted, Miner Creek, taking an excavator across creek for ditch work
Motion to approve as proposed by Tom 2nd Carl, motion carried.
- BCD 2640 John Hunziker, Big Hole River, Unpermitted(2541) boat ramp removal
The board would like a site visit to determine what other clean-up work needs done.
- Pendergast Ditch complaint about not having enough room to pass a boat through the gap.
After looking at the photos the board believes there is enough room to pass a boat but let the decision up to Jim.

Beaverhead Watershed Grants

- Jess is working on the BLM Conifer Encroachment agreement and Sean is working on the cultural assessments for the conifer encroachment sites.

Administrator Report

- Watercraft Inspection Station – 2564 Inspections, 915 High Risk, 10 Mussel Boats. Less boats overall throughout the state but mussel boats are about the same.
- District Cell Phone
Motion to get a district cell phone for all district business by Tom, 2nd Carl, Motion carried.

Old Business

- BOR WaterSmart grant to fund water quality program and build the web-hosted interactive clearinghouse to host all the data – this will be taken off the agenda until Brian comes to discuss the project.

New Business

- 310 Resolution – read through and give suggestions for the vote next month.
- Bridger Plant Material Center Donation – Asking for \$35, we usually give \$50
Motion to give \$50 for the Bridger plant materials center by Carl, 2nd Rich, motion carried.
- DNRC Update – Catey Bauer

Upcoming Events

- Next meeting date – September 17th 6 pm
- Area 6 Meeting – October 8th White Sulphur Springs (pg.10-11)
- Sustainable Ranching Workshop – October 14th - 15th (pg.12-13)
Motion to sponsor sack lunches by Harris, 2nd Carl, motion carried.

Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 9:30 pm

Minutes submitted by: Jessica Fields

Approved:

Byron Martinell
Byron Martinell, Chairman