

EASTERN PLAINS RC&D AREA, Inc.
QUARTERLY COUNCIL MEETING
April 15, 2009

The Eastern Plains RC&D Area, Inc. quarterly council meeting was held April 15, 2009, at the Stockman Bank in Glendive. Those present were:

Dixie Berwick, Town of Culbertson & Bainville; Kevin Dukart, City of Baker; Kim Anderson, Fallon County Planner; Ginny Archdale, Town of Wibaux; Mickey McCall, Sheridan County and Conservation District; Jason Rittal, EPEDC; Todd Devlin, Prairie County; Jim Atchinson, City of Colstrip & Rosebud County; Adam Gartner, Dawson County; Ray Trumpower; Kathy Green, City of Glendive; Dennis Afrank, Fallon County; Bruce Smith, Dawson County; Paul Finnicum, NRCS; Bill Loehding, Carter County; Stark Ickes, Treasure County; Mona Madler, SMART; Emilie Boyles, Montana East Regional News; David Pratt, NRCS; and Pam Berwick, Eastern Plains RC&D.

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Dixie Berwick called the meeting to order and meeting participants introduced themselves.

AGENDA

Mickey McCall made a motion to approve the agenda as distributed and with the addition of a report on the National Carbon Offset Coalition. Jim Atchinson seconded the motion. All present voted aye. Motion carried.

MINUTES AND TREASURER'S REPORT

Bill Loehding moved to accept the February 4 minutes as distributed. Stark Ickes seconded the motion. All present voted aye. Motion carried.

Kevin Dukart moved to approve the treasurer's report as presented. Todd Devlin seconded the motion. All present voted aye. Motion carried.

ACTING COORDINATOR'S REPORT

Paul Finnicum, acting coordinator, reported that there has been a lot of activity with the federal stimulus bill, but nothing has yet been finalized. It looks like the Fort Kipp irrigation project will get some of the stimulus funding. Paul wrote a successful \$1800 DNRC grant to help them get easements finalized. In response to a request from the Governor's office regarding potential stimulus projects in the area, Paul submitted the following projects: a barley ethanol plant, Fort Kipp irrigation, a bio-lubricant facility, and a feedlot associated with the bio-lubricant facility. Paul also reported that he met with the governor, Evan Barrett, and officials at the Department of Commerce and DNRC during a trip to Helena. Among items discussed was the safflower plant at

Culbertson. Paul said he would be willing to help any entity with DNRC planning grants. The deadline for submission is May 15. His phone number is 768-7733.

Paul also noted that there will be 60 VISTA positions open for placement in Montana if anyone is interested.

Discussion of the stimulus program followed. Bill Loehding noted Carter County has been advised that the state will be going to bid on the final section of Highway 323 May 29.

EASTERN PLAINS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Jason Rittal said he had submitted an application for an \$800,000 Economic Development Administration grant for the North Baker water and sewer project. He also is working with Jim Atchinson from Southeast Montana Development Corporation on a joint application for disaster funds to add to the revolving loan funds of both entities. He also is helping Prairie and Carter counties apply for USDA equipment grants. Both counties are eligible for 35 percent grant funds up to a maximum of \$50,000. Prairie County is looking to purchase four new vehicles, and Carter County is applying for funds for a new road grader. Wibaux County is looking at a compactor but solid waste comes from infrastructure grants and Wibaux is only eligible for 15 percent grant funds, which may not be worth the additional requirements of the USDA. He also said he has a couple of small businesses interested in the revolving loan fund, but since the money is already loaned out he may apply to USDA for some loan funds. Jason also reported that the CRDC funding for next year has been approved by the state. He also has been monitoring the stimulus bill and making sure that all entities in his area responded to a request for project lists. Jason also announced that the Town of Ekalaka has a used generator to sell if anyone is in the market for one.

FIRST TIME HOMEBUYER CLASSES

Pam Berwick noted she had gone to Atlanta for instructor training in March. She presented one class in Glasgow with the previous instructor, Khyrste Earle, and did one by herself in Sidney. She has another one scheduled in Miles City. She said one problem is that people often take the class too late – when they are just about to close on a loan. She said banks are busy now refinancing loans rather than doing first time homebuyer loans, but the class would be good for anyone financing a home because it teaches them how to avoid foreclosure. Jim Atchinson suggested she create a schedule of classes for the year and step up efforts to make bankers aware of the program. Pam said it is difficult to schedule too far ahead, but she is trying to schedule several months ahead. Atchinson also asked whether Eastern Plains RC&D had looked at the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and whether it had considered a regional approach to applying for these funds. He said he only counties with high foreclosure rates are eligible for the program.

BIO-PRODUCTS

INNOVATION

CENTER

Pam Berwick said she has had a difficult time getting starting on this aspect of her job because the state coordinator's position is vacant and the Eastern Plains RC&D's

coordinator is only temporary. Bruce Smith said funding for these centers in the next biennium is included in HB 583, but instead of the current six centers only four are proposed and existing centers will have to apply for designation. He also said they will be renamed Food and Agriculture Innovation Centers. However, if funding is pulled from the Growth Through Agriculture program for these centers, he said those currently in favor of the bill will oppose it. Rep. Walt McNutt is carrying the bill. Pam said she sent the BPIC report to Sen. Steinbeisser.

ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK

After discussion, a motion was made by Bruce Smith to approve the revised Plan of Work as presented. Mickey McCall seconded the motion. All present voted aye. Motion carried.

AREA COORDINATOR

Mickey McCall and David Pratt said the selection process has been completed for a new Eastern Plains RC&D area coordinator, but new Natural Resources and Conservation Service rules require the selection to be approved in Washington, D.C., before the job is actually offered to the selected person. Pratt said he believes they should be hearing from Washington within the next couple of weeks.

FEDERAL AND STATE STIMULUS BILLS

Meeting participants discussed the federal and state stimulus bills, but Paul Finnicum emphasized that nothing is set in stone yet and legislation needs to be monitored. Jim Atchinson said he believes money for Eastern Montana is leaking out of the bill and everyone should contact their senators and representatives to make sure Eastern Montana stays in there.

REVOLVING LOAN FUND

Jason Rittal and Jim Atchinson outlined their plans to use the existing revolving loan funds as match for an Economic Development Administration grant to expand the RLF. Initially, the expanded funds would be available only in Carter, Fallon, Custer and Powder River counties, which were designated disaster areas last year. When the initial loans are repaid, the RLF can be expanded to all counties in the Eastern Plains Economic Development District Southeast Montana Development District. After discussion, Mickey McCall made a motion that \$50,000 of the Eastern Plains RC & D's revolving loan fund be earmarked as match for the EDA grant application. Kevin Dukart seconded that motion. All present voted aye. Motion carried. Mickey McCall also moved that the Eastern Plains RC&D's executive board develop a memorandum of understanding with the Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation board, contingent upon a memorandum of understanding being developed between EPEDC and the Southeast Montana Development Corporation, regarding the loan committee membership and use of existing loan funds. That motion was seconded by Todd Devlin. All present voted aye. Motion carried.

NATIONAL CARBON OFFSET COALITION

Ray Trumpower said Eastern Plains RC&D narrowly missed getting a dividend from NCOC in 2008, because the company that verifies the carbon offset took too long and the price dropped in the meantime. He said the RC&D should receive a dividend in 2009. He also said there was a good write up on the NCOC in the Scientific American magazine. Paul Finnicum discussed a proposal to pipe CO₂ from a power plant in Canada to northeast Montana for re-injection into the Poplar Dome. He said they are looking at injecting 40 million metric tons of CO₂, at about \$15 a ton. However, enabling legislation is hung up in the Montana Legislature.

FARM-TO-TABLE COOPERATIVE

Bruce Smith said the Farm-to-Table Cooperative will have a VISTA volunteer this summer who will be talking to communities in the area and mapping out the food systems of the area, including major purchasers of food (i.e. hospitals, schools, nursing homes). They also are applying for a grant to hire a marketing manager. Dawson Community College has committed to a culinary arts program, and Mid-Rivers will do an on-line cooking program featuring local food products such as rhubarb. They also are looking at starting a revolving loan fund to help people buy high tunnels that can result in year-round gardening.

AREA REPORTS

Bill Loehding said other than the news about construction on Highway 323, Carter County also is busy cleaning up after the severe storm last month. They are seeking a disaster declaration because of livestock losses and flooding over roads. They also are monitoring the TransCanada gas pipeline construction project that is expected to bring 400 workers to the area in 2010. Housing is a big concern for that construction.

Jim Atchinson handed out information on upcoming training classes offered by the Small Business Development Center. One on taking advantage of federal funds will be offered May 12 in Miles City. Three workshops on Quick Books will be offered in Glendive, Colstrip and Miles City. He also noted the Energy Open will be Aug. 13-14 in Colstrip.

Todd Devlin said Prairie County also is monitoring the TransCanada pipeline. He said he understands they will begin purchasing easements next month. He warned that western Montana is trying to get some of the money from the pipeline. Devlin also discussed PILT reform and changes in federal water bills.

Dennis Afrank said Fallon County is putting up three more wind monitoring towers utilizing Mike Carlson.

Paul Finnicum said construction will be getting underway this summer on Basin Electric's plant at Culbertson. There also is a new grain plan and a new concrete plant planned at Culbertson, and the airport is being renovated.

Mickey McCall said a grain company is putting in a new small pulse plant in Sheridan County, some bridge replacement is taking place, and a farm tour is coming up.

Stark Ickes said they had a very successful trade show in Hysham, with more exhibitors than expected. Former astronaut Frank Borman was the guest speaker at their conservation tour and did an excellent job. Stark recommends him to anyone, especially if the group includes youths. A fly-in breakfast for vintage planes is scheduled Aug. 2 in Hysham.

Kevin Dukart said Baker is seeing the recession hitting the oil field. Baker also is waiting to hear on housing grants it applied for. Mona Madler from Baker said the port authority there is looking seriously at a geothermal project.

David Pratt from NRCS said Joyce Schwartengruber is the new state coordinator and would like to get to this area. If anyone has special events, he would encourage them to invite her. The portion of the stimulus bill affecting NRCS relates to watershed, which may mean funding for at least a portion of a plan for the Buffalo Rapids watershed. He also said an NRCS audit did not go very well, which will mean upcoming changes in reporting, agreements, accountability, and office space allocations.

Kathy Green said Glendive is just working on keeping the city infrastructure in working order.

Bruce Smith said the Department of Agriculture will be putting on training in Glendive sometime this spring on value-added agriculture products.

Dixie Berwick said the Montana RC&D Association has a conference call once a month. If anyone is interested in joining in on the call, they should contact her for information.

Pam Berwick said a procurement workshop scheduled April 20-21 in Sidney was cancelled due to insufficient registration. They may try to reschedule it in August.

NEXT MEETING

Dixie Berwick said the next Eastern Plains RC&D meeting will be July 15 in Wolf Point.

ADJOURNMENT

Mickey McCall moved to adjourn the meeting. Stark Ickes seconded the motion, all present voted aye. Meeting adjourned.