



National Association of Conservation Districts

National Headquarters: 509 Capitol Court, NE, Washington, DC 20002 Phone: 202-547-5228 Fax: 202-547-5450

October 27, 2006

RE: Proposed Framework for Establishing the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC)

I am writing on behalf of the Northern Plains Region Board of the National Association of Conservation Districts, representing members in the states of Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Conservation Districts (CD) and Natural Resource Districts (NRD) are local units of state government directed by a board of elected and/or state appointed citizens. They are charged with coordinating assistance from all available sources - public and private, local, state and federal - in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns. CD/NRDs work with private landowners and land users, providing them with the necessary technical and financial information and assistance to manage their land, water and wildlife resources. They work through partnerships with private organizations and public agencies at all levels, and are well experienced in collaboration on natural resource issues. CD/NRDs have the closest working relationship with landowners/users on resource management in the nation.

Our Missouri River Team has reviewed the Proposed Framework for Establishing the MRRIC. They agree with the premise that 'a broad, unified, and transparent process that includes the full spectrum of basin tribes, stakeholders, governmental agencies and non-governmental organization is necessary to orchestrate...recovery'. We appreciate the vision of re-establishing a healthy self-sustaining Missouri River ecosystem, while continuing to meet the multiple needs of society, guided by the best scientific thinking.

We understand the MRRIC will provide recommendations to governmental and non-governmental entities for the purposes of implementing and integrating Missouri River recovery actions, and while those recommendations will be advisory, the federal agencies have committed to fully considering those recommendations. We believe it is important for the agencies to provide specific reasons if recommendations are not accepted and provide the MRRIC opportunity to suggest alternatives if they choose.

Our Team supports the establishment of a broadly represented Planning Committee (PC) to develop the MRRIC Charter. We offer the following recommendations for this group's structure and process.

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1. Conservation Districts/Natural Resource Districts (CD/NRD) must be represented on the Planning Committee as well as the MRRIC. Because of their longtime relationships with landowners/users, their technical expertise in natural resource management, and their array of public and private partnerships, CD/NRDs will bring important perspectives and connections to the PC and MRRIC. They are most likely the only local government entity focused entirely on natural resource management and usually work closely with other bodies of local government. In fact, many CD/NRDs sponsor locally led planning sessions to gather input from citizens and government bodies to identify resource concerns and priorities. Their unique structure as government entities with local citizen boards means they cannot be adequately represented by other government entities, federal, state or local. We strongly urge the Federal Working Group to add 2-4 positions for elected CD/NRD officials, with representation from both the upper and lower portions of the Basin.
2. We note in the various categories of interest groups that 'water quality' is not represented, and recommend position(s) be created for this area.
3. In the application process for non-governmental representatives, the FWG should require organizational letters of support or some form of credential. This would help ensure representation of the majority of members of special interest groups rather than individual interests.
4. The proposed travel assistance is needed and appreciated, and will help maintain the broad participation desired.
5. The proposed schedule for the Planning Committee – two to three day meetings once a month for nine months – is unrealistic and arduous for non-agency representatives who have their own businesses/organizations to run. There must be an alternative that would allow the task to be accomplished within an acceptable timeframe. We recommend this schedule be reconsidered.
6. Consensus as described will be very difficult to achieve, and we recommend the use of a majority vote process if needed. In any voting scenario, consideration should be given to allowing state and local governments a vote. It should, however, be designed so they do not automatically carry a majority by simply having the largest number of representatives.

Submitted for the NACD Northern Plains Region Board by
Debra Bogar, NACD Region Representative