



# Where We're Going, Together

## Ideas from the

# 2023 MWCC Annual Meeting

### How have the past three years changed us?

- Changes in our relationships:
  - It's harder to connect personally and find solutions with the virtual culture.
  - It's been harder to steer clear of divisive political issues
  - Struggling to remain collaborative: Pressure to be more competitive in this new landscape.
- Changes in values and priorities:
  - Personal priorities have increased in importance (versus career priorities).
  - Greater need for staff support, resources, and recognition of diverse perspectives and needs.
  - More staff turnover: Brings new ideas and perspectives but can be challenging for collaboration, communication, and building and maintaining partnerships.
- Changes in our work and funding:
  - Work stalled some earlier in the pandemic and now is ramping up, leading to more opportunities and connections and also a sense of overwhelm.
  - Higher costs have hampered projects; grant funding hasn't always kept up.
  - There are also new grants and a pulse of money to some existing grants.
  - Unexpected funding opportunities have resulted in opportunities for collaboration.
  - Lots of financial resources are coming into the state, but not enough federal, state, and municipal government staff to use it.
  - Difficulty with getting projects permitted; more layers of bureaucracy
  - Changes in legislation and regulations
- Changes in our communities:
  - Many new people are moving in from out of state, potentially leading to changes in community structure, values, and identity.
  - Challenges and opportunities
    - We need to better understand these changes.
    - How do we reach new people? How do we help them to be good stewards of the land?

- Increased cost of living and land values.
- Political unrest and cultural upheaval.
- Changes happening to environmental laws.
- Changes in land use and pressure on natural resources, fisheries, recreation, invasive species, 310 permitting, etc.
- Lessons Learned:
  - Need to balance both virtual/digital and in-person outreach to engage different audiences.
  - Virtual meetings and communications are great for:
    - Bringing more people together across geographic boundaries.
    - Expanding opportunities for education and outreach.
    - Hosting shorter and more thoughtful meetings.
  - Virtual meeting and communications are hard because:
    - More meetings have led to busier schedules and less time to get the work done.
    - People are less engaged and less present in virtual meetings, often multi-tasking
  - Success is more likely and more sustainable when underlying relationships are there.

## Why do you participate in the MWCC Network? What value does that participation bring to your organization?

- Connections, connections, connections.
- Bringing people together and building relationships between and among local, state, federal, and other watershed conservation partners. The MWCC network is integral to watershed coordination, including between conservation districts and watershed groups.
- Creates a cohort of groups doing similar work who can provide resources and support one another.
- Opportunities to find out what everyone is working on and learn about innovations in conservation.
- Highlighting and supporting mutual benefits and reciprocal relationships and reducing competition.
- Learning from one another: Sharing knowledge, resources, and expertise.
- Opportunities for collaboration, larger-scale capacity building, and streamlining on-the-ground work. Seeing what is happening statewide to build big-picture understanding and identify gaps.
- Value of gathering in a room with diverse groups and partners and meeting people outside our usual circles.
- Connections between agency people and local conservation people to support local communities and make approaching agency people less intimidating.
- MWCC elevates local voices and highlights local efforts.
- MWCC seems most helpful for rural organizations and newer, smaller organizations.
- MWCC Watershed Fund grants, especially capacity and professional development funding.

- Learning opportunities
  - Workshops and trainings
  - Watershed Symposium
  - Conservation Conversations
  - Watershed Tours
- MWCC disseminates information widely through Watershed News and other channels, including funding, learning opportunities, and the job board for help with hiring.
- Watershed Coordinators' Forum is useful for crowd-sourcing, getting advice, sharing information and lessons learned.
- Direct support from MWCC staff.
- Support for Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) AmeriCorps program and young conservation professionals generally through:
  - BSWC host site support and funding.
  - Trainings relevant to AmeriCorps members and other young professionals.
  - Building network capacity generally.
  - Watershed organizations building partnerships by co-hosting BSWC members.
- Branching out from MWCC having a restoration focus to more ways to protect watersheds and water quality has been really beneficial. Please continue this work.
- Funding connections through the Watershed Fund and partnerships with other Montana conservation funders.

## What support do you anticipate needing to fulfill your organization's mission in the next 5-10 years?

- We need to better understand the changes happening in Montana and in our communities and reassess how to educate people.
- Guidance on overall, big-picture comprehensive planning efforts. Getting agency people, local watershed organizations, and citizens together and getting them good information so they can be part of solutions.
- Need to engage more people in our local and statewide efforts.
- Sources of non-federal matching funds for federally funded projects.
- Technical and nontechnical resources via virtual and in-person trainings and workshops
- Better communications between agencies and watershed groups.
- Unrestricted, baseline operational funding.
- Filling in funding gaps.
- Health care networking or benefit - maybe through Montana Nonprofit Association? Challenge is that not all conservation organizations are nonprofits
- Staffing and recruiting
  - Bringing new people into the natural resource field.
  - Assistance with housing costs and need to increase wages
  - Training new staff; connecting them to resources; building networks; onboarding

# What services can MWCC provide to help you fulfill your mission in the next 5-10 years?

- Building relationships
- Fostering collaboration over competition among watershed groups, and relationships that are lasting and sustainable
- Coordination with agencies, regional groups, and other collaborations
- Recognition of and support for watershed group efforts
- Providing resources
- Marketing and communications assistance
- Assisting local groups with community outreach, mediation, and facilitation
- Funding opportunities and connections
- Information storing and dissemination.
- Connecting state and local conservation organizations
- Events and other learning opportunities (technical and nontechnical)
  - Create peer groups that meet regularly to share and discuss challenges
  - Offer workshops on a recurring basis, possibly annually
- Support of statewide network in the Legislature, partnerships, and elsewhere
- To continue to receive support from MWCC, network partners also need to help promote MWCC so MWCC can grow. MWCC also needs to promote itself more.

\*These ideas have been condensed for sharing with the public. MWCC has an expanded version of these notes that we will use in our strategic planning later in the year. If you would like a copy of the expanded notes, reach out to Terri Nichols ([terri@mtwatersheds.org](mailto:terri@mtwatersheds.org).)