

Montana Association of Conservation Districts

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Mr. Chairperson & Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee:

My name is Sarah Carlson and I represent the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD). We are testifying in support of HB 482 because it returns the shared coal account to its previous level, thereby making additional funding available for important conservation district (CD) programs.

Conservation district programs currently slated to be funded from this source include:

- Salinity Control,
- Rangeland Resource, and
- Envirothon Youth Education;

which are funded in full by coal tax dollars.

In addition:

- The 223 Grant Program,
- CD Administrative Assistance,
- Watershed Planning and Assistance,
- Engineering & Legal Assistance, and
- 310 Administrative Assistance;

which are funded in part by coal tax dollars.

The shared coal tax account percentage was reduced previously in order to increase the amount of coal tax money going into the – at the time – ailing general fund. The general fund is now more robust and so we support the percentage being returned to its original level.

Many of you are familiar with the work of CDs in your area. Montana's 58 CDs are state-created political subdivisions whose boundaries usually follow the state's county lines and are governed by locally elected supervisors. They have a decades-long history of conserving our state's resources by helping local people match their needs with technical and financial resources, thereby getting good conservation practices on the ground to the benefit of all Montanans.

These eight programs funded by coal tax money are critical to the continued success of Montana CDs in utilizing their locally-led and largely voluntary approach to natural resources.

Montana's CDs fully support HB 482 and hope the committee will as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Montana State Legislature

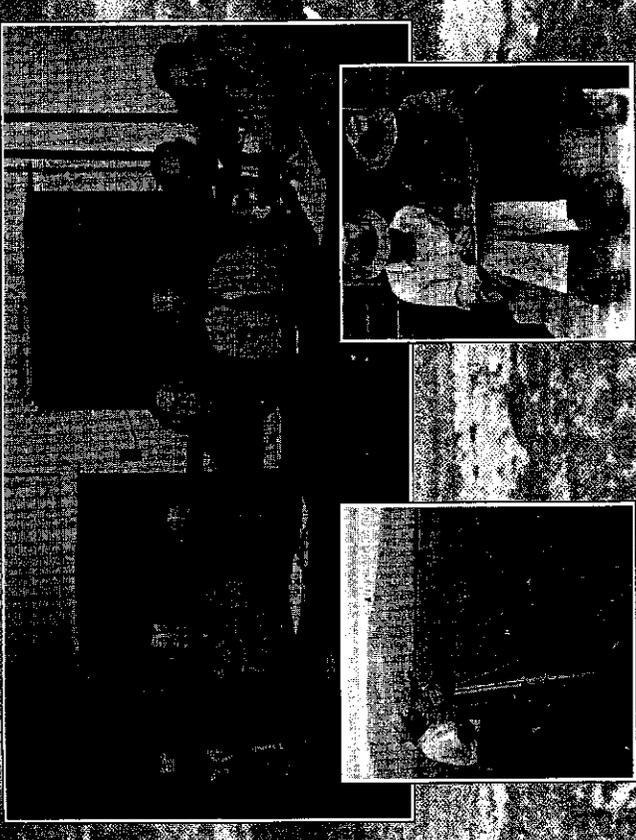
Exhibit Number:

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MONTANA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (MACD)



Organized in the 1950's as a response to the severe erosion problems of the "Dust Bowl" days.

Manages 58 conservation districts in political subdivisions of the state.

Funding for the each district comes from local property taxes.

Conservation districts manage water and other natural resources.



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CONSERVATION AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (CARDDD)

Administer financial assistance programs for CDS and provide a link to the state government. Verify the continued successful operation of CDS.

Natural resource districts work with the National Office of Federal Lands, federal agencies, and state agencies to help direct resource policy and federal activities. It is an information clearinghouse for and between counties and raises public awareness of the CDS activities.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCSS)

NRCSS works statewide with CDS to provide state and local technical assistance on Montana's private land offices across the state. NRCSS provides Agronomists, biologists, soil scientists, engineers, conservationists to help solve natural resource problems on site. Natural resource data, information and planning assistance to individuals, CDS, and other local groups.