



Natural Resources Conservation Service
Federal Building, Room 443
10 East Babcock
Bozeman, MT 59718

February 26, 2004

Larry Mitchell
Environmental Quality Council
PO Box 201704
Helena, MT 59620

RECEIVED

FEB 27 2004

**LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE**

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the State of Montana's effort addressing water quantity and quality issues in our riverine areas. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is also concerned about limited water resources in the arid West. Indeed, NRCS provides private landowners with both technical and financial assistance to make sound resource conservation decisions, and this year alone NRCS will provide in excess of \$31 million in direct financial assistance to Montana's farmers and ranchers for conservation work.

It has been brought to my attention that the Montana State House Joint Resolution No. 40 and Concepts for Possible Changes (1-26-04) has language that could negatively impact some ongoing NRCS conservation activities. It is also my understanding that an interim committee has been formed to evaluate several issues regarding water resources related to "private ponds."

While I agree that the negative impacts to our streams, rivers, and wetlands resulting from the over allocation of water resources should be identified and addressed accordingly, I am equally concerned about unintended consequences.

Addressing the specific issue of "ponds" has ramifications that touch upon several other important areas such as the decline of both aquatic and terrestrial species. NRCS resource information indicates that approximately 60 percent of the wetland acres in Montana are in private ownership, and in 2004 NRCS has about \$5 million available for wetland restoration work in the state. I would hope that any effort directed toward solving the issue of "ponds" would not inadvertently limit wetland and floodplain restoration activities.

Accordingly, I would like to offer the support of NRCS to assist the Environmental Quality Council and request that NRCS be involved as you address this issue. Please let me know if this request meets with your approval.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me at (406) 587-6813, or Jeff Combs at (406) 587-6795. I looked forward to both your response and the opportunity to work with you in the future on this important topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dave White". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

DAVE WHITE
State Conservationist