



Vol. 32 No. 1 JANUARY 2003

ORIENTATION FOR NEW OFFICIALS

Five weeks after elections, more than 110 current and new county officials gathered in Helena to learn requirements for their new positions. Intense sessions featured a variety of speakers in subjects of interest to all elected officials. In attendance were county commissioners, clerk and recorders, treasurers, county superintendents of schools, county attorneys and sheriffs.



Gary Hall, Flathead County



Cheryl Liedle, Lewis & Clark County



Mack Cole, Treasure County



Pedro Hernandez
Yellowstone County

The Orientation began on the evening of Monday, December 9, with keynote speaker Alec Hansen, Executive Director of the League of Cities and Towns. The workshops during the next two days were coordinated by MSU's Local Government Center Director, Jane Jelinski, and covered topics such as:

- Surviving the First Months in County Government*
- Rules of Lobbying*
- Hiring, Discipline and Employment Issues*
- Basics of Governmental Fund Accounting*
- Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships of Elected County Officials.*
- Budget Policy*

The sessions featured presentations by:

- UM Professor of Law Dave Patterson
- Missoula County CAO Ann Mary Dussault
- MACo Personnel Services Jack Holstrom
- Attorney General Mike McGrath
- Norm Klein, Department of Revenue, and



WELCOME TO BUTTE-SILVER BOW MACo'S NEWEST MEMBER



a host of current county officials from across the State. Officers from the respective associations for the different county offices presided in break-out sessions.



FAREWELL FROM VIC MILLER

To my MACo Family,

As you know, I left elected office as of January 1. Someone asked me the other day, "Who is the ultimate commissioner in Montana?" I thought long and hard on this and decided there is no perfect commissioner, just as there is no completely bad commissioner. Yet, if I look at our membership, I know I can find at least one quality in each of us that goes toward being the ultimate commissioner.

We have put in place sponsors for the legislative session and it has truly been a team effort. The message, in concert with our leaders in cities and tribal governments across Montana, is a simple one: decisions made impact citizens. The same citizens that vote for us also vote for our legislators. I am confident that we are going to the hill with the idea of partnership. We share the same responsibilities to the same people.

I am very happy with the increase in messaging and increased press releases. It is getting our message out about the role of local government on a daily basis. It shows our constituents how involved we are in making their lives better.

I hope that you will all remember my two challenges: One, mentor our young people and put the fire of local government in their eyes and their guts. Remember, as I have, the people that shared their passion with you and made you the leaders you are today. Two, I hope that we become a 100% membership state in NACo. Our local issues must be represented not only in Helena, but Washington, D.C. as well.

I wish the best to Carol and the leadership of MACo. I know that Carol is one of the most capable leaders I have had the pleasure of working with. I know the depth of commitment in our executive leaders, our board of directors, and in our membership. The staff at MACo is top shelf. Thank you all for keeping the engine running.

I pray that you all have had a good holiday season. I look forward to seeing you at the Mid-Winter Conference. Most important, I hope our paths cross often.

Keep up the good fight and God Bless!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

JANUARY

January 6	58th LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS
January 14-16	Loss Control Conference; MACo Office
January 15	JPIA Trustees Breakfast; 7:30 am
January 20	Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
January 29	Consensus Council; MACo Conf. Rm.; 8:30 am
January 29-30	BOS Joint Workforce Council; Helena

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 5-7	County Superintendents of Schools; Helena
February 17	Presidents Day Holiday
February 18	State Drought Council
February 19	MACo Board of Directors
February 19-21	Midwinter/ DES Conference; Colonial Hotel
February 20	JPIA Membership; Colonial Hotel; 7:00 pm
February 28-Mar. 4	NACo Legislative Conference; Washington DC
March 28-30	National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition
April	GASB Training—Management & Analysis
April 7-10	County Road Supervisors; Fairmont
April 28-May 2	Magistrates Association; Lewistown
May 2	JPIA Trustee Renewal Meeting
May 5-23	MACo District Meetings
May 14-15	BOS Joint Workforce Council; Great Falls
May 28-31	Western Interstate Region (WIR); Reno
June	GASB Training--Reports; Supplementary Info.
September 21-24	MACo Annual Conference; Lewistown

MACo BOARD OF DIRECTORS

January 2003

President Carol Brooker, Sanders County
 First Vice President Bill Kennedy, Yellowstone County
 Second Vice President Doug Kaercher, Hill County
 Fiscal Officer Dan Watson, Rosebud County
 Urban Representative Howard Gipe, Flathead County
 Past President Gary Fjelstad, Rosebud County

District 1 Bill Nyby, Sheridan County
 District 2 Todd Devlin, Prairie County
 District 3 Joan Stahl, Rosebud County
 District 4 Art Kleinjan, Blaine County
 District 5 Arnold Gettel, Teton County
 District 6 Joy Schanz, Golden Valley County
 District 7 John Prinkki, Carbon County
 District 8 Elaine Mann, Broadwater County
 District 9 Charles Bernie Lucas, Meagher County
 District 10 Paddy Trusler, Lake County
 District 11 Alan Thompson, Ravalli County
 District 12 Tom Hatch, Powell County

Attorney Leo Gallagher, Lewis and Clark County
 Clerk and Recorder Janice Hoppes, Pondera County
 Clerk of District Court Marilyn Hollister, Rosebud County
 Coroner Tim Wong, Cascade County
 Justice of the Peace Gary Olsen, Broadwater County
 School Superintendent Dottie Donovan, Beaverhead County
 Sheriff John Strandell, Cascade County
 Treasurer Jess Anderson, Cascade County

**MACo / DES
MIDWINTER MEETING
WESTCOAST COLONIAL HOTEL**

**PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS:
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2003**

1. The Basics of Budgeting
10:00 am - 3:00 pm; Colonial Hotel
Lunch provided; no registration fee
2. Governor's State Drought Advisory Committee
Metcalf Bldg.—Director's Conference Rm.
1:30 pm; Counties are invited to report.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

3:00 - 5:00 Registration

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

8:30 - 5:00 DES Conference

3:00 - 6:00 Registration

5:00 - 6:30 No-Host Social

6:00 MACo Board of Directors
Dinner Meeting

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20

7:30 - 8:30 Reservation Counties

8:00 Registration

8:30 - 9:30 General Session

10:00 Buses to the Capitol

10:15 - 11:30 Visits with Legislators

11:30 - 1:00 Lunch with Legislators

1:15 Buses to Colonial Hotel

1:30 - 4:30 Legislative Follow-up

4:30 Hard Rock Mining Counties
Oil, Gas and Coal Counties
Forest Counties
Fort Peck Lake Counties

7:30 JPIA Membership Meeting

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21

8:30 - 9:30 Federal Law Enforcement Issues
Bill Mercer, Montana's US Attorney

10:00 - 10:15 DES Presentation
Jim Green, DES Administrator

10:15 - 11:00 GIS / GPS Data
Skip Nyberg, DOT

11:00 - noon Closing General Session

From PRESIDENT BROOKER

As many of you already know, MACo President Vic Miller has resigned his presidency effective December 31, 2002. In anticipation of this vacancy and in accordance with the MACo Bylaws (Article III, Section 3), I have chosen to fill the balance of his term and will then continue for the year I was elected to serve. In a like manner, Bill Kennedy has chosen to move from Second to First Vice President.

For the vacated second vice-presidency, the MACo Bylaws state:

- c) SECOND VICE PRESIDENT - A vacancy in the Second Vice Presidency shall be filled by appointment by the President, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors. Said appointment may be nominated and run for the office at the next annual conference.

After much consideration, I invited Hill County Commissioner Doug Kaercher to accept appointment to this position, subject to Board approval. I am delighted to announce that he has agreed. Doug was elected to the Hill County Commission office in 1997, following his service for five years on the Havre City Council. He has also served as a Hill County Study Commissioner.

In MACo, Doug was serving on the Board of Directors as Chair of District 4. Since he moves onto the Executive Board, District 4 Vice Chair, Blaine County Commissioner Art Kleinjan, moves to the District 4 Chair and, consequently, to the Board of Directors.

Past President Dean Harmon chose not to run for re-election, and so his position as past president is also vacant. MACo Bylaws state:

- e) PAST PRESIDENT - A vacancy in the Past Presidency shall be filled by the appointment by the President of the next most immediate Past President.

I welcome back our most immediate Past President, Rosebud County Commissioner Gary Fjelstad.

The November election caused a shift in the District 3 Chair. District 3 Vice Chair, Rosebud County Commissioner Joan Stahl, moves into the Chair and to the Board of Directors.

I extend my gratitude and best wishes to the three fine commissioners who are leaving the MACo Board of Directors:

Victor Miller, Blaine County
Dean Harmon, Roosevelt County
William Duffield, Fallon County

MACo AT WORK
SELECTIONS FROM REPORT BY
L. HAROLD BLATTIE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
COUNTY-WIDE BLOCK GRANTS

HB 124 (2001 Session) contained a provision for block grants to counties for three county-wide education funds (Transportation, High School and Elementary Retirement). The original amounts contained in HB 124 were based on estimates, using the most recent data available. HB 18 (2002 Special Session) changed these estimates to reflect the actual FY 01 dollar amounts, as reported to OPI by county treasurers. Entitlement Share calculations were done by formula, while the education block grants were "hard-coded" (specific dollar amounts) into both bills.

HB 18 corrections, from estimates to specific dollar amounts, made some significant changes in the block grant amounts for the current fiscal year.

For example, Powder River County's block grant amount was reduced from \$45,648 to zero. Concerned with this change, Powder River County Commissioners discovered that the funds reimbursed by SB 184 had not been included in the report to OPI. This caused their base amount to be under-reported. They contacted MACo and the Governor's Office to see what could be done to correct the error.

Because the dollar amounts had been specified in the bill, legislation would be needed to make any corrections. MACo worked closely with the Department of Revenue Tax Policy and Research Division, the Governor's Office and Representative Story (HB 124 and HB 18 sponsor) and obtained agreement that a thorough review of the block grant amounts should be done.

This examination was contingent upon four factors:

1. ALL counties were to be reviewed.
2. Adjustments were made irrespective of winners or losers.
3. This was the FINAL opportunity to make adjustments.
4. Documentation must be provided to validate the amounts.

Neither the Governor's Office nor DOR Tax Policy and Research Division had staff available to undertake this project. MACo, realizing its importance, agreed to conduct the review, which began in early September by contacting all county treasurers to advise them of this development. MACo also attended the Treasurer's Annual Conference to discuss the review and to emphasize the importance of this one-time opportunity.

In the end, 23 counties were unchanged; nine were over-reported and 24 were under-reported. Most of the changes were a result of incorrectly reporting SB 184, HB 20 and SB 417, light vehicle and corporate license amounts. The net difference was +\$196,752. This

amount increased the base and, when the growth factor is applied and prior payments (FY 02 and first half FY 03) are considered, the FY 04-05 biennium impact is a gain of over \$375,000. As a result of this cooperative effort, an additional appropriation is included in the Governor's proposed budget. Legislation must be approved to make the additional payments a reality, but being included in the budget is a great step forward.

This is not a one-time amount. It is a change in the base, so counties will be receiving over \$180,000 each year in the future.

MACo would like to thank ALL 56 county treasurers for their assistance and willingness to undertake the review. In the most extreme case, less than a day's work resulted in an annual increase of over \$65,000.

There is a theory that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable.

There is another theory that this has already happened.

Philosophy from DOT

LAKE COUNTY ELECTION SAGA

In the June primary election, Lake County Commissioner Mike Hutchin won a three-way race for the Republican nomination for his County Commission seat. However, after the election, the Democrat candidate withdrew because he did not live in the Commissioner district. The Lake County Democrat Central Committee nominated the second-place Republican candidate as the Democrat nomination for the General Election.

After the canvass of votes for the November election, Hutchin was declared the winner by 38 votes. His opponent, Jeanne Windham, requested a hand-count and filed suit asking a judge to lower the bond amount required for the count. As soon as the case was assigned, Windham's attorney, her spouse Wilmer Windham, asked that the judge disqualify himself and assign another. A week later, she filed a second lawsuit to void the entire bond amount because the recount board did not comply with the open meeting law.

The County waived the bond and planned to bill Windham for the actual costs.

The re-count was finally held December 16 and 17 and confirmed incumbent Hutchin as the winner by a 35 vote margin.

The Windhams will continue the lawsuits.

BASICS OF BUDGETING

a pre-conference workshop

This nuts and bolts workshop on preparing budgets is for new officials and anyone interested. It is offered Tuesday, February 18, from 10:00 to 3:00 at the Westcoast Colonial Hotel. There is no registration fee and lunch will be provided. Please note that this is offered the day before the Midwinter Conference is to begin.

STATE DROUGHT PROGRAM

The Governor's Drought Advisory Committee will meet in conjunction with the MACo DES/Midwinter meeting. The State Committee meeting will be Tuesday, February 18 (the day before the DES/MACo sessions begin) at 1:30 pm in the Director's Conference Room in Lee Metcalf Building (DEQ), 1520 East Sixth. The meeting will give all counties a chance to report the current impacts of drought and local conditions to the Advisory Committee.

REMINDER!

Please submit the name of your 2003 County Commission Chair to the MACo office!

Phone: 442-5209 FAX: 442-5238

Email: maco@maco.cog.mt.us

A.C.L.U. LAWSUIT ON PUBLIC DEFENSE

The Governor's Office announced that it would not take on legal defense of counties in the ACLU lawsuit claiming inadequate public defense. Governor Judy Martz was named along with seven counties, the State of Montana and appellate court officials in the suit.

The American Civil Liberties Union (A.C.L.U.) alleges that criminal defendants who are represented by court-appointed counsel are denied adequate legal representation because the state does not provide enough training, funding or oversight of the public defense services. The counties named in the lawsuit believe that because the State Constitution requires indigent representation, the State, not the counties, has the obligation to defend the case against all of them.

In response to a request from Ravalli County Attorney George Corn, the governor's office wrote that the state will neither represent the counties in the case nor pay the counties' portion of legal fees.

The seven counties named in the suit are Flathead, Glacier, Lake, Ravalli, Missoula, Teton and Butte-Silver Bow.

NOVEMBER ELECTION CORRECTIONS

CUSTER COUNTY

Public Administrator Jan Alexander was re-elected to the position.

FLATHEAD COUNTY

Auditor Anita Hoye's position was combined with the clerk and recorder and she did not run for the combined position.

GALLATIN COUNTY

Auditor Jennifer Schmidt was inadvertently not listed on the "Farewell to Outgoing County

2002 - 2003 ELECTED OFFICIALS SALARY INCREASES

COUNTY CLASS COUNTY 2002-2003 COLA 2.8%

1A	CASCADE	1.8%
1A	FLATHEAD	2.8%
1A	GALLATIN	4%
1A	LEWIS and CLARK	5%
1A	MISSOULA	4%
1A	RAVALLI	0
1A	YELLOWSTONE	2.8%
1B	BIG HORN	3.4%
1B	BLAINE	5.7%
1B	BUTTE-SILVER BOW	3%
1B	FALLON	2.8%
1B	HILL	2.8%
1B	LAKE	2.8%
1B	RICHLAND	7.8%
1B	ROSEBUD	2.8%

CLASS TWO

2	CARBON	4%
2	LINCOLN	3.8%
2	MADISON	2.8%
2	PARK	2.4%
2	PHILLIPS	2%
2	ROOSEVELT	4%
2	SANDERS	2.8%
2	SHERIDAN	2%
2	STILLWATER	2.8%
2	VALLEY	3.25%

CLASS THREE

3	CHOUTEAU	2.8%
3	DAWSON	2.8%
3	FERGUS	3%
3	GLACIER	4%
3	JEFFERSON	2.8%
3	TOOLE	2.6%

COUNTY CLASS COUNTY 2002-2003 COLA 2.8%

CLASS FOUR

4	BEAVERHEAD	2.6%
4	CUSTER	2.8%
4	PONDERA	6.7%
4	TETON	2%

CLASS FIVE

5	ANACONDA-DEER LODGE	4%
5	BROADWATER	3%
5	CARTER	5.9%
5	JUDITH BASIN	0
5	LIBERTY	3%
5	MUSSELSHELL	2.8%
5	POWELL	5%
5	SWEET GRASS	2.8%
5	WHEATLAND	3.3%
5	WIBAUX	2.8%

CLASS SIX

6	DANIELS	10%
6	GARFIELD	5.2%
6	GOLDEN VALLEY	4.6%
6	GRANITE	2.8%
6	McCONE	8%
6	MEAGHER	2.8%
6	MINERAL	2.8%
6	POWDER RIVER	5.5%

CLASS SEVEN

7	PETROLEUM	30¢ / hr.
7	PRAIRIE	2.8%
7	TREASURE	3.6%

“No matter how old you are, you’re
younger now than you’ll ever be again.”
Rev. Raymond and Winifred Shaheen
Susquehenna University, Pennsylvania

COUNTY NEWS

PLANNING & SUBDIVISIONS

STILLWATER COUNTY has denied waivers for its new policy that all proposed minor subdivisions outside a one-mile radius of towns must include a dry hydrant for fire fighting purposes.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY is considering house-moving regulations to require fees to cover county costs to roads and to require that the moved building be permanently situated within a year.

FLATHEAD COUNTY's four planning jurisdictions have no growth policies in place. So, they have rescinded recent master plan amendments, considering them illegal under the recent AG opinion.

GRANITE COUNTY, as did BROADWATER COUNTY last year, is offering two \$100 cash prizes to be drawn from names of residents who respond to the planning board survey, which has been mailed to all households.

PARK COUNTY has dissolved its city-county planning board and its jurisdiction **over the 4 1/2 mile "donut" area around the city of Livingston.** The county planning board will assume these duties.

PERSONNEL

FALLON COUNTY met in grievance procedure concerning dispatch shifts being changed from twelve to eight hour shifts. The dispatchers want twelve hour shifts.

BEAVERHEAD COUNTY agreed to allow its employees to receive flu shots, with a \$12 payment to come from each department's budget.

GLACIER COUNTY approved budget authority for a grant to the sheriff's office to add three full-time officers, two assigned to work narcotics investigations in the county full time.

FACILITIES

FLATHEAD COUNTY sold "Courthouse East" and its one-block parcel. It was built in 1912 and recent operating costs have skyrocketed.

STILLWATER COUNTY Courthouse has a serious mold problem from years of water damage from a leaking roof. The fourth floor may be evacuated because some mold can cause significant allergic reactions. Employees are being tested for possible allergies.

DAWSON COUNTY is replacing the courthouse basement concrete floor which was built in an old streambed. Adequate drainage and a new floor will solve the water problem, which has caused so much deterioration over the years.

CASCADE COUNTY moved the clerk/recorder and the treasurer to new offices to make room for remodeling the courthouse for the new District Court judge.

GALLATIN COUNTY is resurrecting a plan to hold people convicted of DUI and other low-level crimes at a temporary fairgrounds jail. A private firm is offering to run the weekend jail.

TETON COUNTY, under a court order to build a new, handicapped accessible building for law enforcement, has drawn criticism from constituents on the incarceration parts **of the proposed building.** "The proposal is a de facto jail and instead should be for an **administrative facility,**" said JP Pete Howard, former sheriff.

GALLATIN COUNTY will auction ten acres of land, seized four years ago for unpaid taxes. The money from the land sale will be divided among all the funds that lost out on the tax revenues in the past years. County Treasurer said, "It doesn't even look like we're going to recover half of what's owed to all the different districts."

MADISON COUNTY reversed its original decision and allowed a minister to conduct an "election sermon" in the courtroom on Election Day.

In CHOUTEAU COUNTY, a chunk of plaster ceiling fell onto the copy machine area in the clerk and recorder's office.

NATURAL RESOURCES

LINCOLN COUNTY is hiring a county forester, using federal timber harvest

funds. YELLOWSTONE COUNTY has two **bridges, sixty feet apart, near Pompey's Pillar,** which has a sliver of privately owned land between the two. The landowner threatens litigation of they plan recreation use in the area of her 1/2 acre.

McCONE COUNTY has identified salt cedar in a dam in the southwest part of the county and will submit a grant application for assistance in addressing the problem.

ORDINANCES

RAVALLI COUNTY's new open container ordinance prohibits drivers and passengers from possessing open alcoholic beverages and consuming alcoholic beverages inside moving vehicles.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY has ordered involuntary cleanups for six different parcels and/or buildings in the county, in accordance with the year-old community decay ordinance.

BROADWATER COUNTY did not pass an ordinance in time to keep a SOB (sexually oriented business) from opening in the county.

BUDGETS

RAVALLI COUNTY will postpone opening some offices to the public and answering phones until 9:00 am to allow staff to concentrate on the extra work load. This is in lieu of hiring more staff.

BROADWATER COUNTY, expecting an electronic transfer of federal grant funds for airport repairs, discovered no funds had arrived. Several contractors had not been paid. After a search, they found a federal check in their mailbox.

SERVICES

RAVALLI COUNTY is considering in-kind match to show support for a proposed clinic to offer health care on a sliding scale. 44% of county residents live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

LINCOLN COUNTY is providing a "stream restoration school" for local contractors to learn how to restore streams damaged by logging and other land use.

IN MEMORIAM

JOHN VICTOR KERR

John Kerr, Carter County Commissioner, passed away December 5 at his home after a sudden heart attack. Kerr, 58, had previously served on the Carter County High School Board, County Weed Board, and was instrumental in the completion of Highway 323. John is survived by his wife, Marion, and his beloved family.

EUGENE E. COWAN

Gene Cowan, former Phillips County Commissioner, died November 18 at the Phillips County Hospital after battling cancer for 7 years. Cowan, 78, served Phillips County during 1983-1994 and was on many boards such as library, museum, school and hospital. He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Barbara, and family.

SPENCER "OLE" REDLAND

Ole Redland, former Treasure County Commissioner, passed away of natural causes on November 2 at his Hysham ranch. Redland, 70, served Treasure County during 1991-2000. He was active in Farmer's Union and raised Redland Red Angus. He is survived by his wife, Shirley, and three children and families.

ROBERT "BOBBY" PHIPPS

Bobby Phipps, former Garfield County Commissioner, died November 28 surrounded by his family. Phipps, 62, served Garfield County during 1989-1994. He received the Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Service Award and served on a wide assortment of boards. He is survived by his wife, Margie, and family.

WORKSHOP FOR ROAD INVENTORY

PASER, Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating, will be presented by MT Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) in four different locations in January:

January 8	Billings Sheraton Hotel
January 9	Great Falls Civic Center
January 21	Hamilton City Hall
January 22	Kalispell Westcoast Hotel

Contact LTAP (800-541-6671) for more information.

SURPLUS PROPERTY

Petroleum County has the following surplus property for sale by sealed bids. Bids are to be in the Office of the County Commissioners by 8 am February 3, 2002. Mail bids to:

Sealed Bids
Petroleum County
PO Box 226
Winnett, MT 59087

For further information call Stephanie Downs, County Manager at 406-429-5551. Petroleum County reserves the right to accept or reject all or any bids.

1. Lexmark 4226 wide carriage dot matrix printer with extra ink cartridges
2. 1972 Ford 5000 tractor (serial #C10405351023) with cab and new rubber; needs repair
3. 1993 Tiger side-mount rotary mower TM-60; spindle & bearings were replaced in 2000
4. Fisher Speedcast pickup mount angle snow plow; hydraulic angle left/right cab controlled; 9' X 3' plow includes all mounting equipment and controls

Water Year Slow; Montana's Drought Persists

Recently completed water year (October 1, 2001 to October 1, 2002) was the 63rd warmest and 24th driest of the 107-years of record keeping. Signs that Montana was starting toward recovery from a three-year statewide drought are already fading. Precipitation totals seem to indicate that the forecasted El Nino event has arrived. Depleted groundwater aquifers, lagging soil moisture, and low streamflow across much of the state has prevented the Governor's Drought Advisory Committee from declaring the current cycle of drought over or even in a state of recovery. Stalling improvement of moisture and water supply conditions in most regions, coupled with a report from the National Weather Service (NWS) of an impending El Nino event, prompted the Committee to classify the conditions statewide as "Continuing Drought."

A moderate El Nino unfolding in the eastern Pacific Ocean can be expected to bring warmer and drier conditions to Montana this winter, according to the NWS. The Natural Re-

sources Conservation Service (NRCS) Snow Survey currently indicates that mountain snowpack of river basins west of the Continental Divide is about 90 % of average precipitation, and about 85% of average east of the Divide. About 70 % of the state's new mountain snowpack should be in place by mid-February and will provide water resource planners with an indication of the seasonal snow-water supply.



MONTANA RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AWARD

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) was recently awarded the prestigious USDA Forest Service's Benjamin Franklin Award for its 2002 administration of the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program. The award was presented at the National Association of State Forester's (NASF) Fall Meeting in Vermont.

This national award is a tribute to the work by DNRC's Fire & Aviation program. Montana competed with all 50 states in the selection process. It is

awarded to the state forestry organization that demonstrates innovative and aggressive ways to ensure that programs such as State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) benefit statewide. DNRC was awarded for its efforts in VFA as well as its efforts in reaching underserved communities to assist with their fire protection capabilities.

"We were especially pleased to receive this award," explained Sandi O'Bryant, DNRC Rural Fire Program Manager. "We have spent a great deal of time and effort in assisting our volunteer fire departments in Montana. A good share of the wildland fire protection in Montana is provided by our rural and volunteer fire departments. Our (DNRC) mission is to provide them with assistance. This award proves that we are doing our job, although there is still a great deal of work to do." In the last two years, the Montana VFA program coordinated DNRC's Rural Fire Program and put \$664,713 into county fire protection.



NACo INFORMATION

Early Childhood Project

The Early Child Initiative is a new NACo project supported by a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Foundation has committed a grant of about \$140,000 for the first year, with a verbal commitment to funding a second year of work.

NACo's Early Childhood Initiative will educate county officials concerning the importance of early childhood development, provide technical assistance to counties to improve local programs that strengthen children and families, and highlight counties that are successfully addressing the needs of families and young children in their communities.

The 24-member task force held its first meeting in November. The goals of the task force are:

- To raise awareness of counties' roles
- To recognize great county programs
- To perform extensive research
- To provide resources to educate county officials.

NACo President Kenneth Mayfield stressed that the initiative should focus on children age 3 and younger, but also on all children who have yet to enter school.

Montana representative on the Task Force is Bill Kennedy, Yellowstone County Commissioner.

Rural Summit for State, Local Governments

For three days, rural county officials joined mayors, state legislators and others to discuss ways to work together to benefit rural America at the NACo-sponsored State and Local Government Rural Summit. The Summit, an outgrowth of the 2002 Rural Action Caucus retreat, took place in Warrenton, Virginia, November 20–22.

Participants at the meeting were the National League of Cities, National Conference of State Legislatures, Council of State Governments, National Association of Development Organizations and National Association of Towns and Townships.

The meeting's initial results included a joint agreement to support full funding and implementation of the Rural Strategic Investment Program (RSIP) and to advocate for a National Conference on Rural America (both of which are NACo priorities). RSIP was included in the recent farm bill reauthorization (PL 107-171) and would allow counties to conduct long-term strategic planning and project implementation region by region.

In addition, the groups discussed other pressing issues in rural America, including healthcare, telecommunications and transportation.

Joe Dunn
NACo Associate Legislative Director

No one nearly elected in Nevada

The second-place finisher in Nevada's Democratic gubernatorial primary spent no money, ignored opponents and did not shake a single hand during the campaign. Nevada's unique "none of these candidates" option defeated everyone except one candidate. The winner won with 36% of the votes, followed by "none" with 24%. "It's just an embarrassing thing for candidates," said the winner. "Like for me, when you're trying to make a difference, and you have to look back and see if 'none' is going to beat you."

No other state has such a voting option in statewide races, and periodic attempts to get rid of it have failed. The option was approved in 1975, although "none" cannot actually win a race. However it did come in first in congressional primaries in 1976 and 1978 and also finished ahead of both George H. Bush and Edward Kennedy in the 1980 presidential primaries. "None" has never finished first in a general election.

"I've voted for "none" in the past and it's OK with me. I would rather lose to "none" with principle than win a race without principle," said one candidate. "People can do anything they want, but why bother to vote if somebody is not going to vote for an actual person?" asked another.

Selections from AP article by Martin Griffith
WACO/WSAC "The Courthouse Journal" Issue 35

PLEASE SUPPORT MACo SUPPORTERS

Gordon E. Hoven
Montana Public Finance
406 443-4958



Securities products and services are offered through U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray Inc., member SIPC and NYSE, Inc., a subsidiary of U.S. Bancorp. 500-0634

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Billings, MT 59102

406 / 542-0345
5405 Momont Rd.
Missoula, MT 59802



MACo
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Training**
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