MEMO

To: Interested Parties
From: Whitney Tawney, Montana Conservation Voters Executive Director
Date: June 2023
Re: Montana Conservation Voters 2023 Municipal Endorsement Process

ABOUT

Montana Conservation Voters, and its affiliated state political action committee Montana Conservation Voters Action Fund, protect our clean air, clean water, public lands, communities, and future generations by electing and holding accountable pro-conservation leaders.

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

Montana Conservation Voters has a record of supporting pro-conservation candidates for over 20 years. We have elected conservation leaders to all levels of government from city councils to the U.S. Senate and everything in between. MCV seeks to support candidates who share our commitment to conservation and democracy and demonstrate a commitment to running a competitive campaign.

To become an endorsed MCV candidate, interested parties must complete a questionnaire that will ask the candidate’s stance on a range of issues that MCV cares about. The questionnaire can be found on our website and HERE. After returning a completed candidate questionnaire, staff will reach out to set up an endorsement interview with both members and staff of MCV. Members of those endorsement interviews will then make an endorsement recommendation to the MCV Action Fund board. If the members who make up an endorsement interview cannot agree on who MCV should endorse in a race, they will submit recommendations for each candidate to the MCV Action Fund board, who then will make the final decision.

To expedite the process, when only one candidate returns the questionnaire in a race, MCV may opt to skip the endorsement interview if the candidate’s questionnaire answers are sufficient. Candidates who have been endorsed by MCV previously do not need to complete a questionnaire, they just need to confirm that they would like the MCV endorsement. All endorsement decisions are ultimately up to the MCV Action Fund board.

Then, MCV will communicate to candidates whether they receive an endorsement or not.

ENDORSEMENT ROLLOUTS

When MCV endorses a candidate, it is our responsibility to inform our membership that we have officially put our support behind the candidate because of their public commitment to conservation. This member communication can come in many forms and often varies from race to race. Endorsed candidates seeking higher office, like mayor, or those in competitive races should be given higher priority when MCV allocates staff time and resources to promote a candidate. Communicating to our members about our endorsements is a permissible 501c4 activity.

Member communications can include:

● Press releases announcing an endorsement (all municipals)
Press releases will be sent out as soon as endorsements are finalized. Press releases will include quotes from the candidates being announced and should be sent to all media contacts in the respective communities.

- **Emails to our membership (all municipals)**
  - Emails regarding endorsements are sent to MCV’s membership typically in both September and October. These emails can incorporate all of the endorsed candidates for a community. For example, the Missoula membership email will include all endorsed city council/commission and mayoral candidates. These emails will also include donation links to the MCV Action Fund.

- **Social media posts (municipals)**
  - MCV will strive to do at least one social media post for every endorsed candidate in October. One post per candidate enables each candidate to easily share a unique post on their endorsement on their social media channels. MCV will also tag the endorsed candidates’ social media to ensure they see and can re-post the communication. Social media platforms used include Facebook and Instagram and sometimes Twitter.

- **Including our endorsements in our monthly newsletter (municipals)**
  - MCV will mail a hard copy of our newsletter in October to our members across the state and include an extra page listing our local endorsements. This requires separating the mailers by region so we only include the relevant endorsements for each community. We will also send our newsletter via email and follow the same practice.

- **Listing candidates on our endorsements page (municipals)**
  - All endorsements will be featured on the endorsement page of the MCV website. Included on the website is a bio for each candidate as well as a link to their campaign website and/or Facebook page. The MCV website will be updated as soon as endorsements are finalized.

MCV strives to do as much member communication about our endorsements as possible, given our resources and without jeopardizing our primary purpose. All member communications and relevant timelines should be done in partnership with MCV’s Program Director.

**INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES AND CANDIDATE SUPPORT**

The MCV Action Fund is the primary vehicle in which MCV can support endorsed candidates. The MCV Action Fund mainly conducts independent expenditure campaigns but can also support candidates with direct contributions or candidate support. Independent expenditure work is firewalled off from candidates and campaigns, while candidate support can be done on the “coordinated” side of the firewall as long as it doesn’t exceed the maximum contribution ($400 per election) allowable by Montana state law.

Independent expenditures can include:

- Direct mail to voters
- Canvassing
- Calls, or texts to voters
- Paid digital ads

Candidate support can include:
● Providing talking points, polling or other resource information
● Recruiting earned media
● Recruiting volunteers for campaigns
● Helping turnout MCV members to candidate events
● Hosting or supporting events

All MCV Action Fund work will be reported to the Commissioner of Political Practice and will be done in close consultation with the MCV Action Fund compliance team.

2023 MUNICIPAL ENDORSEMENTS

In 2023, MCV plans to endorse municipal candidates all across the state, but we’re particularly excited to endorse candidates in more rural and historically split ticket geographies. We plan on making endorsements in the following communities:

● Billings
● Bozeman
● Livingston
● Helena
● Great Falls
● Missoula
● Whitefish
● Havre
● Flathead County

All MCV endorsements can be tracked HERE.

ENDORSEMENT TIMELINE

Please note, MCV will not be participating in primary endorsements.

● 6/30 to 7/14 - Begin endorsements for all incumbent, previously endorsed MCV candidates
● 7/15 to 8/15 - Begin endorsements for competitive general election races that have no primary
● After 8/15 - Begin endorsements for non-competitive races with pro-conservation candidates
● 8/15 - MCV candidate endorsement deadline
● 9/13- Begin endorsement process for races with primaries
● 9/20- Finalize post-primary endorsements
● 10/17 - MCV endorsement edition newsletter (mailed and emailed)

IMPORTANT DATES

● 6/19 - Deadline for candidates to file for office/deadline for candidates to withdraw primary election candidacy
● 7/14 - Deadline for write-in candidates to file a Declaration of Intent for the primary election
● 8/14 - Deadline for candidates to withdraw general election candidacy
● 8/14 - Close of regular voter registration for Primary Election
• 8/15 - Beginning of late registration for the primary election
• 8/23-8/28 - Absentee ballots mailed for the primary election (if election is being conducted by mail)
• 9/5 - Deadline for write-in candidates to file a “Declaration of Intent” for the general election
• 9/12 - Primary Election
• 10/10 - Close of regular voter registration for General Election
• 10/11 - Beginning of late registration
• 10/18-10/23 - Ballots mailed to electors for General Election (if election is being conducted by mail–date must be chosen that is 20-15 days before the General Election)
• 11/6 (noon)–Deadline for election administrator to receive applications for absentee ballot
• 11/7 - General Election