



Flathead Lake, Montana

Spring, 2008

Commissioners Deny North Shore Ranch Subdivision

Our conservation vision for the North Shore took a big step forward on April 23rd when the Flathead County Commissioners voted to deny the North Shore Ranch Subdivision proposal on a 2-1 vote.

The North Shore Ranch proposed 290 lots on 367 acres adjacent to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Area on the North Shore of Flathead Lake.

The Lakers opposed the proposed project since its inception in 2006. We were concerned not only about the likelihood that the subdivision could derail a major conservation effort at the North Shore, but also about its density in this special area, impacts on waterfowl and other wildlife, the potential for flooding and groundwater contamination, and questions about sewage treatment capacity.

During their deliberations on the pro-



The wetlands on Flathead Lake's north shore provide critical wildlife habitat. Photograph by Karen Nichols.

posal, the Commissioners brought up concerns about flooding and the flood easements on the property held by PPL Montana, the operator of Kerr Dam, wildlife impacts, and safety due to the shallow groundwater and soil types that could liquify in the event of an earthquake.

The developers have subsequently exercised their option to appeal the Commissioners' decision to Flathead County District Court.

The Flathead Lakers will continue to work with our partners to secure financial incentives and provide land owners with choices to help conserve the unique combination of special qualities the North Shore provides — its waters, wildlife, prime farm lands, hunting heritage, and scenic beauty.

— Robin Steinkraus

Lakers President Dan Barz Applauds Commissioners Gary Hall & Joe Brenneman

"The Flathead Lakers applaud Flathead County Commissioners Gary Hall and Joe Brenneman for their votes to deny the North Shore Ranch subdivision. We greatly appreciate their careful review of the impacts of this proposal and their leadership in protecting the public interests at stake. We look forward to continuing to work toward a conservation solution for the North Shore."

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Visit our web site!
www.flatheadlakers.org

DIRECTORY

Flathead Lakers: Working for clean water, a healthy ecosystem, and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed.

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The **Board of Directors** meets quarterly. The executive committee meets monthly. We encourage members to attend meetings. Please call the office or check the web site for the time and place if you'd like to attend a meeting.

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Flathead Lake Monitor

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The opinions expressed in the *Monitor* are those of the authors. We welcome comments and submissions. Copyright 2007, Flathead Lakers, all rights reserved.

Robin Steinkraus, Editor

President's Column



Greetings Fellow Lakers –

Fifty years ago a small group of people had the foresight to see that Flathead Lake needed a champion. The Flathead Lakers became that champion. Today, that small group has become a membership of 1,500 strong.

This year we celebrate five decades of defending Flathead Lake and its sparkling, clear waters. The challenges have been great. But so have our successes. The Flathead Lakers helped ban phosphate detergents in Flathead and Lake counties, intervened to ensure citizen input to improve the mitigation plan for Kerr Dam, worked to assure upgrading of sewage treatment plants for phosphorus removal, insisted that a drought management plan be completed to better manage summer lake levels during droughts, worked to secure funding for water quality monitoring, and much more.

Over the years, the Flathead Lakers broadened our vision, our scope of work and our membership. We now know that the lake is intimately connected to its watershed and that what we do on the land inevitably is reflected in the quality of our waters. And we know that the lake is intimately connected to our communities, their people, their values and their economies.

It is our job to advocate for the lake and clean water, to encourage wise stewardship of our lands and waters and to provide members, citizens, public officials and students with accurate information they can use to make good decisions about how to use our lands and waters – good decisions that will sustain our clean waters, our quality of life and our communities.

There will always be a need for a champion for Flathead Lake. As you can see from the numerous issues reported on in this newsletter, our work is never done. We are proud of our contribution to the achievements described in this issue. Major strides have been made toward North Shore conservation and protecting our waters from coalbed methane development upstream in British Columbia.

We couldn't do it without you – our members, donors, volunteers, partners, and everyone who loves this jewel of the Flathead and cares about its future. Thank you for making our work possible.

As we celebrate our past accomplishments, we also look forward to the future with resolve to be an effective champion for Flathead Lake for the next 50 years. With your help, that goal will become reality.

Please join us in celebrating 50 years of lake stewardship at our annual meeting at the Glacier Presbyterian Camp on July 16th!

– Dan Barz

Win a New Toyota Prius!

The Flathead Lakers are raffling a new, fuel efficient **Toyota Prius** gasoline-electric hybrid as a fundraiser to launch our organization into its next 50 years! You could be the winner! *Order your raffle tickets now.* Tickets are only \$25 each or 5 for \$100.

Here's how: (1) send us your check using the coupon on the back page, or (2) go to our web site, www.flatheadlakers.org, and click on the photo of the Prius. We'll promptly send you your raffle tickets.

The drawing will be held at noon on Wednesday, September 3rd at the Polson Chamber of Commerce's meeting at the KwaTaqNuk Resort.

Look for the blue Prius with the "Win Me" sign displayed at businesses around the Flathead Valley this summer. Tell your friends!

Flathead Lakers Celebrate 50 Years of Lake Stewardship!

Special Photo Exhibit of Historic Flathead Lake

You won't want to miss our traveling exhibit of historic photographs of Flathead Lake. Produced to commemorate the Flathead Lakers' 50th Anniversary, the exhibit displays outstanding photographs of the lake and surrounding communities.

On our website, we will publish any additions and changes to the exhibition's schedule.

Location	Date
Crow's Nest Gallery 214 Main Street Polson	June 5–17
Community Bank Highway 93 Polson	June 18–30
Flathead Bank of Lakeside Highway 93 Lakeside	July 1–15
Flathead Lakers 2008 Annual Meeting Glacier Camp Lodge Lakeside	July 16
First Interstate Bank Highway 93 Polson	July 17–31
Central School Museum 124 Second Avenue East Kalispell	Aug. 1–17
344 Gallery 344 Main Street Kalispell	Aug. 18–31
Glacier Bank 8251 Highway 35 Bigfork	Sept. 1–12
Grey Leaf Gallery 4 Second Avenue E Polson	Sept. 13–30 (tentative)
D'arcy McNickle Library Salish Kootenai College Pablo	Oct. 1–30

Bring a Friend to the 2008 Flathead Lakers Annual Meeting & 50th Anniversary Celebration

Wednesday, July 16th
Glacier Camp & Conference Center
Lakeside, Montana

The camp is 4.5 miles south of Lakeside, just south of mile marker 94 & the Deep Bay Overlook
<http://www.glaciercamp.org/index.php?p=contactus#directions>

6:00 pm Party

Sumptuous hors d'oeuvres & cash bar

Book signing: "Montana's Flathead" by Rick & Susie Graetz

Photo exhibit: historical photos of Flathead Lake

Displays on:

Transboundary coal issues, Flathead Lake's North Shore,
Zebra mussels & other invasive species threats

7:15 pm Program

Crown of the Continent

Photographers and authors Rick & Susie Graetz

Stewardship Award Presentation

Past, Present & Future: State of the Lake

Dr. Jack Stanford, Director,
Flathead Lake Biological Station

British Columbia and British Petroleum Agree— No Coalbed Methane Exploration in the Flathead

Senator Max Baucus made a surprise announcement last February that British Petroleum (BP) was abandoning its plans to explore for coalbed methane in the Flathead Watershed. Baucus, Senator Jon Tester and Governor Brian Schweitzer all participated in the meeting in Kalispell that had been planned to share information about BP's proposed coalbed methane project and its potential downstream impacts.

Baucus had received a call that morning from BP head Bob Malone making the commitment not to proceed with a project in the Flathead. British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell later affirmed that BP's proposal for coalbed methane extraction would not be permitted in the Flathead Watershed.

Baucus and Tester had previously met with BP executives to express their opposition to the proposed project.

Baucus said he told Malone "I'm not going to let this happen. There will be no CBM development in the Flathead." Baucus has a long history of working to protect Montana waters from upstream coal proposals.

Tester also spoke of his efforts to protect Montana's waters from upstream coal development, saying "Keep in mind, our most valuable resource is clean water and we need to protect it for generation after generation."

Schweitzer has regularly communicated with British Columbia officials to discuss Montana's concerns about coal and coalbed methane proposals. He declared "There are some places where we can not and should not develop energy and the Flathead and Kootenai are two of them."

The Flathead Lakers congratulate Senators Baucus and Tester and Governor Schweitzer for their hard work and the significant result it has achieved. And we commend BP and Premier Campbell for recognizing the important attributes of the Flathead and removing the Flathead from the BP coalbed methane proposal.

BP is still moving forward with its plans for coalbed methane exploration and development in the Elk River Watershed portion of the Crowsnest Coalfield and has submitted a tenure application for that area to the British Columbia government.

– Robin Steinkraus

Flathead Coalition Conveys Concerns About CMB at BP Stockholder Meeting

Dave Hadden, the president of the Flathead Coalition board, along with Katarina Hartwig, representing Wildsight, a British Columbia-based conservation organization, attended the BP Global annual meeting in London in April. Their purpose was to impress upon the company and its shareholders the irreparable effects of coal and coalbed methane mining in the remote southeast corner of B.C.

Although BP promised Senator Max Baucus that it will not pursue coalbed methane exploration in the Flathead Watershed as the company had originally planned (see above article), some questions have been raised about the permanence of that commitment.

Hadden and Hartwig were able to ask questions at the board meeting in front of more than 500 share holders and bring the images of B.C. coalbed methane exploration impacts to London. They asked BP to comply with the company's own environmental guidelines. A power point program showed the proposed location of coal and coalbed methane exploration and the area's wildlife diversity, unique habitat and the purity of its waters. It also showed the destruction caused by just preliminary test holes. Hadden and Hartwig came away with assurances from BP board members that they would view the project proposals critically and follow a rigorous environmental protocol.

– Rose Schwennsen

Critical Lands Partners Help Landowners Restore River Banks

by Constanza von der Pahlen

Four new restoration projects along the Flathead River and two associated wetland sloughs were completed by Critical Lands Project partners, including Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the American Bird Conservancy, the Flathead Lakers, and four landowners.

The Critical Lands Project is a collaborative effort led by the Flathead Lakers to identify, protect and restore lands critical to maintaining or improving water quality in Flathead Lake and its tributaries.

Two years ago, project partners identified several river banks and wetlands that could benefit from restoration. Placing native plants along rivers, lakes and wetlands:

- slows down runoff, allowing water and nutrients to be taken up by plants;
- reduces flooding and mitigates its effects;
- provides shade and habitat for fish, including native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout; and
- provides habitat for birds to nest, feed and travel.

Project partners first approached landowners who had expressed interest in conservation. In 2007, Tom, Charles, and Dan Siderius placed a conservation easement on 670 acres of their properties along the Flathead River. The conservation easement allows the landowners to continue farming their land while protecting important riparian areas, sloughs, forests and prime agricultural soils.

To complement the Siderius' conservation effort, the Flathead Lakers joined efforts with FWP and NRCS to help fund restoration projects along the river banks. The funding helped pay for fencing to keep cattle out of the riparian areas, developing a cattle watering facility, and reestablishing riparian vegetation along the river and associated wetland sloughs.

John and Amy Waller also worked with partners to restore the banks along Egan Slough, an old channel of the Flathead River. The funding secured by partners helped pay for revegetation of native plants, heavy weed mats to exclude the invasive canary reed grass, and temporary fences that will protect the young native plants from deer.



Revegetation projects clockwise from left: Eagan Slough, Eagan Slough, Flathead River, mats, Flathead River.



Continued from Page 5 —

The restoration projects helped establish over 4,000 linear feet of riparian buffers. More than 3,000 trees and shrubs were planted.

Watershed Consulting was hired to design and implement the projects. A team of Trout Unlimited volunteers helped plant and fence the restoration projects.

The projects were made possible by funding from an NRCS EQIP All-Bird Conservation Initiative grant, FWP funding for native fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, an Intermountain West Joint Venture grant managed by Ducks Unlimited and granted to the Flathead Lakers, and the landowners' time and labor. Special thanks are due to John Wachsmuth, FWP, for project coordination, to NRCS for project funding, and to Dan Casey, American Bird Conservancy, who will be conducting bird surveys to assess whether the restoration projects provide benefits to native birds.



News from Around the Watershed

Gas Spill on East Shore Renews Highway Safety Concerns

It happened again, this time on April 2, 2008. A tanker truck carrying gasoline overturned on Highway 35 spilling approximately 6,400 gallons of gasoline. Emergency responders contained as much of the spill as they could, but 5,000 gallons soaked into the ground.

Residents of five lakefront homes were evacuated because of gasoline vapors. It is unknown when they will be able to return to their homes.

The insurance carrier for the trucking company is paying for the cleanup, which includes a filtration system to remove gas "product" from springs in the area before the water enters Flathead Lake. Fortunately, the lake level was 2883.22 when the spill occurred, 9.78 feet below full pool. The lake filled rapidly in late May due to heavy snow melt and rains, and was less than two feet below full pool by early June. Product has been reported in the lakebed.

A few weeks after the gas spill, a semi-truck with a more benign load of nursery stock turned over on Highway 35 around the

11 mile marker. It took out a guard rail, which according to the driver, "saved my life."

Prompted by the hazardous spill and the threat of damage to lake and livelihood, residents and others who travel on Highway 35 requested that Jim Lynch, Director of the Montana Department of Transportation, look into restricting truck traffic on the highway.

This is not a new issue. Efforts in 1985 and 1991 to enact legislation restricting long, heavy and hazardous through-trucks on scenic Highway 35 were dashed by the Montana Motor Carriers lobby.

Director Lynch has indicated that some action may be possible through federal transportation authorities and he has requested public input on the problem and potential solutions.

A group of about 85 East Shore residents met on May 16th at the Yellow Bay Clubhouse to discuss the highway safety issues and ask questions and provide comments to Missoula District Highway Administrator Dwane Kailey.

After Kailey left, the discussion continued regarding the history of spills, accidents and near misses, and ideas for alternative restrictions, such as prohibiting pup trailers and restrictions based on truck length, width, weight, speed, hazardous loads, etc. Those in attendance concluded that the solution to recommend to the MDT should be to prohibit "through traffic trucks."

The Highway Department is sponsoring two public meetings in early June. After those meetings, the Flathead Lakers board will again review the issue as it relates to the lake. Comments on this issue are due by July 7th and can be submitted to:

Dwane Kailey

MDT, Missoula District Office

PO Box 7039

Missoula, MT 59807-7039

Online at: http://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/comment_form.shtml

– Rose Schwennesen

Proposed Marina Provokes Concern for River and Lake

A Flathead River land owner withdrew his application to the Flathead Conservation District last month for a commercial boat storage, boat ramp and dock facility proposed for eight miles upriver from Flathead Lake off Riverside Road.

Overwhelming opposition by the public was heard on this planned facility that would have included five storage buildings capable of storing up to 270 boats. Peak use from this facility was estimated at 80 boats per day. The Flathead Lakers opposed the proposal due to its likely impacts on the river and lake.

At a meeting held by the Conservation District last February, the public brought up the concern that not only should the direct impacts on the floodplain by a project be considered but also secondary impacts to the river, its banks and the lake. In this case, the

anticipated increased boat use and wave action in Flathead River above the lake would have significant impacts on riverbank erosion. This stretch of river is influenced by the elevation of the lake, which is controlled by Kerr Dam.

The permitting agencies contended they have no jurisdiction over such secondary impacts of a project.

Several suggestions surfaced during and since that public meeting on what could be done and which agency would have that responsibility. The Montana Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks, in cooperation with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, is assessing seasonal boating use in the section of the river influenced by the lake level, information that can be used in future considerations.

Although the applicant withdrew his proposal and the public had the opportunity to express concerns about protecting the river above the lake, other similar projects are likely to surface. The applicant did subsequently apply for a permit for a boat ramp for a single-family residence, which was approved by the Conservation District for a width of 12 feet, rather than the 20 feet the applicant requested.

This commercial proposal spurred Riverside Road neighbors to begin working together to explore options to ensure that new development in their neighborhood occurs in ways that are compatible with the character of the area and does not damage the Flathead River.

— Laney Hanzel

Bigfork Stormwater Study Released

Bigfork is making progress in its efforts to improve storm water management. With support from the county, Bigfork

contracted with Morrison-Maierle to study its storm water problems and propose solutions. The Flathead Lakers com-

mend Bigfork for tackling this problem and we have provided letters of support for grants to pay for the study.

Storm water in Bigfork streets tends to end up in Bigfork Bay. At a public meeting in April, Morrison-Maierle reported on the results of its study. Even though there are storm drains, heavy runoff overpowers the old system and sends water into the bay at Bridge Street, Lake Avenue and River Street. Storm water flows off streets and the Bigfork School's asphalt parking lots. Last year there was flooding through some homes on Grand Avenue.

Visually this is obvious, but studies get to the specifics. Morrison-Maierle reported that in 1997 the Flathead Lake Biological Station sampled the storm water near the Bigfork public dock and found unacceptable levels of fecal coliforms. A normal coliform count would be 235 to 298. The count was an extremely high 145,270. This was determined to be a "threat to public health and safety."

The sophisticated filter treatment system proposed would cost \$850,000, with additional costs for annual operation and maintenance. More storm drainage improvements for the Grand Avenue, River Street and Bridge Streets areas could be phased in over a few years for about \$2 million. Funding options include various grants and low interest loans. A Bigfork advisory committee is working on this project.

- Rose Schwennessen

New Beach Protecting North Shore from Erosion

A new gravel beach was built on the North Shore of Flathead Lake east of the Flathead River this past winter for erosion control. The "dynamic equilibrium beach" consists of strategically placed gravel berms designed to absorb wave energy as waves move the gravels around on the shore.

Erosion control at the North Shore was mandated by the renewed license for Kerr Dam issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 1998. At that time, a concrete seawall was proposed. But Dr. Mark Lorang, a research assistant professor at the University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station, had a better idea and finally convinced the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and PPL Montana to choose the dynamic beach alternative.

Erosion on the North Shore has been a problem since the construction of Kerr Dam in 1938, with up to nearly a mile of lakeshore lost to erosion in some locations.

The new beach will protect the F&WS Waterfowl Production Area from further losses. Future erosion control work is being planned for areas west of the Flathead River.

New Salmon Recovery Plan Adopts Montana's Proposal for Dam Operations

Montana's proposal for how Hungry Horse and Libby Dams should be managed to augment downstream flows in the Columbia River for salmon recovery has finally been included in Columbia Basin salmon recovery plans.

The federal government recently issued new "biological opinions" governing recovery of threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin.

Montana has long advocated limiting reservoir drawdown in all but the lowest water years and a gradual change in the amount of water released from the dams in late summer for salmon rather than the previous series of sudden surges. The change helps protect Montana's threatened bull trout.

"We've been working on this for nearly two decades and it's finally being implemented," said Montana fisheries biologist Brian Marotz in a Daily Inter Lake story. "We won on the science a long time ago, and this is very important for our natural resources."

For additional information: www.cbulletin.com/Free/273909.aspx.

YES! I want to be a member of the Flathead Lakers!



Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone _____ E-mail _____
 Summer Address (if applicable) _____

- \$40 Member \$75 Sustainer Other \$ _____
 \$100 Patron \$250 Benefactor \$500 Protector \$1,000 Advocate

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*Friends and neighbors
working for clean water,
a healthy ecosystem, and
lasting quality of life in the
Flathead Lake watershed.*

Lakers 50th anniversary issue. Inside — historical photographs exhibit, 2008 annual meeting, and more.

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Look for the blue Prius with the "Win Me" sign displayed at businesses around the Flathead Valley.

Yes! I'm buying tickets to win a new, fuel efficient Toyota Prius!

_____ Tickets @ \$25 each _____ Books of 5 tickets @ \$100 each \$_____ enclosed

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

Mail this coupon and your check to: Flathead Lakers • PO Box 70 • Polson, MT 59860