



Flathead Lake, Montana

Spring, 2001

Second Critical Lands Workshop a Success

The Flathead Lakers held the second Critical Lands Workshop on May 1 to evaluate the process used to identify critical areas and discuss future goals and strategies to protect and restore these areas in the Flathead Basin.

The workshop brought together 26 people from government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and land conservation groups. The people attending the workshop work on diverse topics, from water quality research to wildlife habitat protection and helping landowners protect unique areas such as wetlands and sloughs in the Kalispell valley. But there is one thing they all share – their concern for protecting clean water in the Flathead Basin.



I have greatly enjoyed my first five months as the Lakers' Critical Lands Project Leader. I've been learning a lot about this beautiful and inspiring place and the committed folks who care about it. Originally from an agricultural area outside Buenos Aires, Argentina, I came to the U.S. in 1989 to study at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. A continuing love for nature led to my Masters in Environmental Studies at Yale School of Forestry. I then spent two years in Brazil working on community development and resource protection. After returning to the U.S. to get married, I worked for The Nature Conservancy helping identify critical areas in western Massachusetts. I feel fortunate to be continuing to work on community based resource conservation in the Flathead Basin. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the Critical Lands Workshop.

Workshop participants provided useful comments on how to evaluate critical lands, and further identified areas that are most critical for protecting the water quality of Flathead Lake. It was agreed that the Flathead Lakers, led by the Critical Lands Project Leader, will continue to coordinate efforts to evaluate those areas. The results will allow us to prioritize land and waters critical for water quality in immediate need of protection or restoration.

Janet Camel, the Resource Planning Coordinator for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, presented a study which identifies significant areas for water quality and wildlife, evaluates growth and land use, and guides planning on the reservation.

Dr. Jack Stanford, Director of the Flathead Lake Biological Station, presented the University's research

and findings on floodplain areas. In the afternoon, Anita Dupuis, a professional facilitator, helped the group agree on criteria for critical lands selection and the project's next steps.

Workshop participants agreed that floodplains and river corridors are among the most productive and diverse habitats, as well as most critical for maintaining water quality in Flathead Lake. If land use and development are not carefully planned in these areas, degradation is likely to ensue. In order to protect water quality in Flathead Lake we must carefully protect critical lands along rivers and floodplains.

The Critical Lands Project will continue this collaborative process to evaluate critical areas and work in partnerships to protect and restore them.

— Constanza von der Pahlen

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Visit our web

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 board meetings. Please call the office for the time and place if you'd like to attend a meeting.

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Flathead Lake Monitor

Newsletter of the Flathead Lakers, the **Monitor** is published in print and on the internet. The current issue and many back issues can be viewed on and downloaded from our web site (www.flatheadlakers.org). The opinions expressed in the **Monitor** are those of the authors. We welcome comments and submissions. Copyright 2001, Flathead Lakers, all rights reserved.

Robin Steinkraus, Editor

President's Column

Spring Greetings —

Spring is on its way and summer must be just around the corner! How do I know? Mother Nature is telling me so through the sounds of the forest grouse drumming, the rooster pheasants crowing, the vibrant colors of the willow trees' golden hue and the dogwoods' bright red. It is the time of renewal in our forests, meadows, and mountains after a long winter of rest.

In the mountains the snow pack has begun to give up its moisture to runoff which will increase the flows in our local streams and rivers. Soon Flathead Lake, which receives much of its water from Glacier Park, the Bob Marshall, and the North Fork, will be rising toward full pool, which will allow us all better access to its clean water.

Many of us more recent arrivals don't remember that the lake's water was even cleaner 25 years ago.

What's causing the lake's gradual water quality deterioration? Certainly a major contributor is human activity, such as development along the lakeshore and river corridors, poor land use practices associated with careless logging and ranching practices, and air pollution from within and outside our watershed. Lake and Flathead counties are among the fastest growing areas in the state, so some impact can be expected.

What can we as Lakers members and our friends and neighbors do to combat this decline in water quality? We can lead by example in demonstrating good stewardship practices on our own property. Collectively by being a Lakers member and by volunteering our talents to Lakers projects, we can make our voices heard, our desires known, and educate the broad public on issues affecting water quality. We should all encourage our friends and neighbors to join the Flathead Lakers and work for clean water in the Flathead Basin.

During the winter months of limited lake activity and reduced highway traffic, our staff and volunteers have been engaged and making good progress on three major initiatives: the Critical Lands Project, personnel watercraft harmful effects mitigation, and the Walstad Fishing Access (Big Arm) buffer strip demonstration. Additional information on these initiatives is provided elsewhere in this publication.

Your Flathead Lakers organization has very limited people resources and depends on volunteer participation to accomplish many of its goals. I respectfully request that you join me and the other board members by volunteering your talents and some finite amount of time to help keep Flathead Lake and the surrounding environs a clean and healthy place to live.

For information regarding how you might help, please call 883-1346, and talk to Executive Director Robin Steinkraus.

Thank you for caring enough to be a Flathead Laker!

— Sid Rundell

Please Attend the Flathead Lakers

Annual Membership Meeting

Keynote Address: "*Pristine Water – Not a Partisan Issue*"

Dave Wanzenried, State Representative, Missoula

State of the Lake Report

Dr. Jack Stanford, Director, Flathead Lake Biological Station

Raffle drawing for Hobie Pursuit Kayak

Refreshments

Sunday, June 24, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Flathead Lake Lodge, Bigfork

A Kayak For Clean Water

Would you like an intimate experience on Flathead Lake? It can be yours with a Hobie Pursuit deluxe package lake kayak.

Yes, the Lakers are holding a raffle to raise funds for our general operating budget. On June 24 at our annual meeting, the lucky winner will be awarded this kayak. The Hobie Pursuit comes with padded seatback, paddle and water bottle. It is 12 feet long, 28 inches wide and weighs only 44 pounds. It has three storage compartments for your picnic and a tie-down bungee system for easy transport.



On meeting, the lucky winner will be awarded this kayak. The Hobie Pursuit comes with padded seatback, paddle and water bottle. It is 12 feet long, 28 inches wide and weighs only 44 pounds. It has three storage compartments for your picnic and a tie-down bungee system for easy transport.

These boats have become extremely popular on the lake. They are suitable for teenagers to adults of any age. They are easy to paddle, very stable, great exercise and lots of fun. The Lakers are grateful to *Bear Dance Outdoor Gear and Clothing* for providing this super boat.

Buy Your Tickets Now!

The tickets are \$5 each or five for \$20.

We have enclosed tickets for your convenience. Simply fill out the ticket stubs and send them with your check to the Lakers office at PO Box 70, Polson, MT 59860. Or drop them off at our office or give them to any board member listed on page 2 of this newsletter.

Thanks for Your Support!

Board Approves PWC Recommendations

The Flathead Lakers formed a Personal Watercraft (PWC) Task Force last winter to look at the negative impacts of PWC (also known as jet skis) on Flathead Lake. The task force met initially in January and submitted recommendations to the Board of Directors. The Board approved the recommendations at its April meeting.

Notice of forming the task force was sent to all Lakers' members who indicated an interest in this issue on the PWC questionnaire last summer. Of the 60 who showed interest, many were away from the area for part of the winter, but around 25 were able to lend their talents to the task force.

The task force identified topics to be explored and broke into groups to delve into three topic areas. The "legal" subgroup looked into laws and jurisdictions around the lake. The "education" subgroup decided to set up a questionnaire to sample a broader cross-section of people to find out how much concern there is about PWC impacts. The "pollution" subgroup took on the task of finding credible evidence of negative impacts to water quality, the quiet enjoyment of the lake and its shores, wildlife and safety, and also reviewed how problems were handled elsewhere and the effects of old and new PWC technology.

The task force produced a report on the results of its investigations along with recommendations for action. The short-term recommendations include:

- Post boating rules and regulations at all boat launches.
- Conduct a survey of lake-area residents and lake users to better determine public attitudes toward PWC.

- Host a meeting on enforcement with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Sheriffs, County Commissioners, Tribes, and Coast Guard representatives .
- Include an article about FWP's Neighborhood Water Watch in the Lakers' newsletter.
- Ask Jesco and Seadoo to include noise and water pollution demonstrations in their Safety Day program and help publicize this event.
- Publicize phone numbers to call for complaints/enforcement when violations are observed.

Long-term recommendations include projects to improve enforcement of rules and regulations, compile better information on PWC violations and incidents, develop a certification program for PWC rentals, evaluate EPA emission standards, and explore the possibility of incentives for replacing older 2-stroke PWC with newer, less polluting machines. A copy of the full report will be posted on the Flathead Lakers' web site.

Let me take this opportunity to encourage any Lakers members who would like to further explore this topic to get involved. The groundwork has been done by a quite able group of your peers. We will sincerely need a co-chair of this task force to continue action on the recommendations in a timely manner. If you can contribute, please join in by calling the Lakers' office at 883-1346. Many thanks to those who have already put in quality time toward finding solutions.

— *Rose Schwennesen, PWC Task Force Co-Chair*

Buffer Strip Demonstration Project Underway

The Flathead Lakers are creating an educational display on vegetated buffer strips for the Walstad Fishing Access site near Big Arm.

The Flathead Lakers have long recognized the impact nonpoint source pollution has on water quality. Nonpoint source pollution, commonly referred to as polluted runoff, occurs when water (rain, irrigation, or snowmelt) carries nutrients or toxic substances into our lakes and rivers.

Flathead Lake's polluted runoff comes from such sources as irrigation of heavily fertilized or herbicide-treated fields, livestock concentrated along river corridors, golf courses and lawns, streets and driveways, or disturbance of lakeshore or river front soils or ground cover.

Buffer strips consisting of various types of native trees, shrubs and plants placed along shorelines or river banks help contain polluted runoff and use up much of the nutrient load before it reaches the water. The Lakers have previously suggested the use of buffer strips between the lake and lakeshore homes and lawns as a means of helping to protect Flathead Lake's water quality.

The Walstad Fishing Access demonstration project is a collaborative effort involving the Flathead Basin Commission, Bitterroot Restoration, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the Montana Conservation Corps as well as the Lakers to show the public what buffer strips can look like and plants that work well in this area. A display board will

inform site visitors about what polluted runoff is, why it's harmful to lake water quality, and how common sense practices like buffer strips can mitigate its effects. The display will have a graphic layout of the Walstad site and it will show what kinds of shrubs, trees, and plants are used on the site for runoff mitigation.

Volunteers Needed!

Would you like to make a "hands-on" contribution to the Flathead Lakers and clean water? Join us in building the Walstad demonstration project display. We don't know the date yet, so call the Lakers' office at 883-1346 for more information or to volunteer!

The display board will also provide brochures that include much of the information contained in the display. University of Montana students Marilyn Pratter and Clara Weygandt helped us develop the display and brochure.

The intent of the buffer strip demonstration and education project is to inform the public about polluted runoff with the hope that lakeshore owners will consider planting buffer

strips on their own property. We hope seeing a buffer strip will encourage lakeshore property owners to step forward and do their small part in keeping Flathead Lake clean and healthy.

— *Sid Rundell*

Time to Check Your Tank?

*We've made it through another year and the snow is gone at last
But now there's a nasty odor that's not been there in the past.*

*You've also noticed that the toilet flush is getting kind of slow
And water in the sink would rather stay than go.*

*It may just be the weather or a bird nest in the stack
But then again it just could be the sewage coming back!*

*It may be time to get some help before things start to smell,
Old time friends avoid your house and neighbors start to yell.*

*You can also save some money and have yourself to thank —
Use the coupon (see below) — have someone pump your tank.*

It has been five years since the Flathead Lakers' spring newsletter started including a septic tank pumping discount coupon for those people who have an on-site sewage system. Each year there have been a few more coupons used, but considering the total number of systems and the recommended service of pumping every four to seven years with inspection every other year, the number of coupons used should be much greater.

The only conclusion I can jump to is that people who have used the coupons and have had their tank pumped don't realize the value of the coupon to others. Don't just read the newsletter and note the wonderful things we Flathead Lakers are doing to

protect Flathead Lake: clip out the coupon and use it or give it to your mother-in-law for her birthday. Get more coupons from newsletters that other members throw away, have a yard sale and encourage your non-member neighbors and friends to purchase a coupon to use or give to *their* mother-in-law for her birthday! If you have a neighbor who brags that he "hasn't pumped out the old septic tank in fifteen years," you could send him the coupon in a plain brown (quite appropriate) envelope. Maybe he will use it and not only will you be able to sit out in your yard without a gas mask, but the other neighbors will vote you "neighbor of the year."

— Dick Montgomery

Between now & October 1, 2001

The following septic services will honor this Flathead Lakers coupon with a

10% discount

on their standard price for cleaning your septic tank

A-1 Sanitation	755-3938	Mel's Pumping Service	752-5318
Ray Baier Septic Service	752-6904	Ready Freddy Septic Tank Pumping	752-4552
Bjork's Valley Pumps	883-4898	Smith's Septic Pumping	883-6708
J & M Septic Pumping	892-4787	Shur Clean Septic Service	257-4714 & 837-4714
Ken Pedersen Pumping Service	837-6711 & 752-4321	Rainbow Septic Service (Ronan) (tollfree)	1-877-676-2400

News From Around the Basin

Legislative Action

Multiple bills that weaken the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) were passed during the recent state legislative session and signed into law by Gov. Judy Martz. The Flathead Lakers opposed these bills. HB 473 prevents using information generated during the MEPA process to mitigate negative consequences of a proposed project unless another specific state law requires that information to be considered. HB 459 requires project alternatives analyzed under MEPA to be "economically feasible." SB 377 accelerates the MEPA process with stricter time requirements. SB 376 exempts the Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation from complying with MEPA for planning activities on state school trust lands.

The Flathead Lakers supported SB492 which would have increased the boat decal fee from \$2.50 to \$5.00, with the additional funds to be used for safety education and enforcement of boating rules. The bill passed by 36-12 in the Senate but failed in the House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee.

Help for the North Fork

The northern part of the Flathead Watershed straddles the U.S.-Canadian border. That area we call the North Fork and our Canadian neighbors call the Flathead is renown for its water quality and diverse wildlife populations.

Efforts are underway to protect this magnificent landscape from the many threats it faces. In the past, proposed coal mining in Canada threatened water quality, fish, and wildlife, leading to a study of baseline water quality and the formation of the Flathead Basin Commission. There are no guarantees that threat won't loom again. In 1997, another coal mining venture was contemplated, and changes in energy markets could bring new proposals forward. Large-scale timber harvest, gold mining, and the potential for subdivision and commercial development also pose threats.

Renewed momentum is building to establish an International Conservation Reserve in the North Fork. First proposed in 1988 by then governor Ted Schwinden and later endorsed by succeeding governors Stan Stephens and Marc Racicot, an International Conservation Reserve would guide natural resource management on both sides of the international boundary to ensure that water quality and wildlife values are protected.

Such an agreement would not curtail logging or affect hunting or other recreational pursuits. The

Flathead Basin Commission supports developing an agreement and sent a delegation to meet with British Columbia officials in January.

An agreement between Montana and British Columbia now could help prevent future conflicts over resource use and management. It may be the most effective way to protect water and wildlife, neither of which recognize political boundaries.

Flathead Lake Honoring

The first Flathead Lake Honoring will be held June 16. The citizens advisory committee for the Flathead fisheries co-management planning effort recommended creating the event to raise awareness about Flathead fisheries and water quality issues.

Activities in this year's pilot project include volunteer clean-ups at state parks and other locations around the lake (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.) with free admission to the parks, an open house at the Flathead Lake Biological Station with tours on their research boat (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.), and a lake honoring ceremony with a drumming group in Polson at Sacajawea Park (9:15 – 10 a.m.).

An informational flyer will be distributed at event activities. It will include a depth map of Flathead Lake, information about the event and recreational opportunities around the lake, and facts about the lake. A certificate will be given to clean-up project participants to recognize their lake honoring efforts.

The Flathead Lakers are co-sponsoring this event which is being coordinated by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes. For more information contact John Fraley at FWP at 752-5501.

Everyone is encouraged to participate. Organizers hope the Lake Honoring will grow into a major annual event.

Flathead Wildlife Donates to Monitoring

Warren Illi, President of Flathead Wildlife, Inc., presented a \$400 check to Flathead Lake Biological Station Director Jack Stanford on March 19. The money is for the Station's water quality monitoring fund. In presenting the check, Warren stated that the organization's membership recognizes the importance of high quality water to the area's fishing resource and the significant work the Station is doing to help keep the Flathead's waters as pure as possible. "We wanted," Warren said, "to demonstrate our commitment, along with others such as the Flathead Lakers, to keep this critical work going."

Flathead Drought Update

The Flathead Basin is experiencing a very dry water year (October through September), comparable to or drier than 1977, one of the driest water years in history. For October through April, precipitation stood at 73 percent of average. Although the first three weeks of April brought 160 percent of average precipitation to the Flathead Basin, it was not nearly enough to eliminate the precipitation deficit. In the north and middle forks of the Flathead River, runoff is at record or near record lows. In its May 8 water supply forecast, the Northwest River Forecast Center predicted that the most probable inflow to Flathead Lake would be 56 percent of average.

In a normal water year, Flathead Lake is filled to 2890 feet above sea level by Memorial Day and to 2893 by June 15. This year, however, the lake is filling slowly and may not reach full pool by the target dates, if at all. It was at 2887.58 on May 14, compared to 2888.15 on that date in 1977. In 1976-77, the lake reached 2892.9, but not until July 10. On May 8, Pennsylvania Power and Light (PPL MT), which purchased Montana Power's interest in Kerr Dam, issued the following statement:

"Flathead Lake is currently at elevation 2887 feet above sea level, which is 6 feet below the full elevation of 2893.0 feet. Because of the low runoff volume forecast, lake refill started early in February. The lake will continue to fill toward full elevation of 2893.0 feet. The rate of fill will depend upon May and June precipitation. The required minimum flow for the river downstream of Kerr contained in the new FERC license, combined with the low runoff forecast, will make refill difficult to achieve/maintain. The PLL Montana hydro hot line number is 1-800-247-9131."

The June, 1997 order by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) requires certain minimum flows be maintained in the Flathead River below Kerr Dam. PPL MT asked FERC to authorize reduced flows below the dam (the full text of PPL MT's March letter to FERC is on our web site). The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes did not endorse PPL MT's proposal.

On May 9 PPL MT announced it is suspending further increases in outflow from Kerr Dam and will maintain

releases of about 9,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). At that release rate, they expect to reach a lake elevation of 2892.5 by June 30. FERC requires increasing flows to 12,700 cfs by May 15 and maintaining that rate until June 30. PPL MT will continue working with FERC, the Tribes and other agencies to "develop a plan for this year that addresses all the competing demands for the limited amount of inflow to Flathead Lake that we expect this year."

Larry Gruel of PPL MT said that in a conference call with FERC on May 8 they were not able to reach agreement. PPL MT decided to modify Kerr operations anyway, according to Gruel, because if they continue to increase outflow the chance of adding storage to the lake is reduced, and once flows in the river are increased they can't be decreased until fish spawning has ended or fish eggs have hatched.

Contributing to the slow refill of Flathead Lake is the effort to refill Hungry Horse Reservoir, which also is filling slowly, and is expected to peak at least 20 feet below full pool. On April 27, releases from Hungry Horse Dam were chopped to 500 cfs and may remain that low through most of June. That's just 25 percent of the lowest predam flow on record for May and June, and well below the 11,200 cfs predam median, but more than double the 200 cfs releases from Hungry Horse for May-June 21, 1977.

Links to realtime information on streamflows, lake levels, and inflows and outflows at Kerr and Hungry Horse Dams are available on the lake levels page on the Lakers' web site, www.flatheadlakers.org. We will publish updates on this issue on our web site.

— James Conner, webmaster & creator of our lake levels web page

Lake Levels Web Page Updated

We have updated our lake levels web page with hydrographs of the lake for the 2000 water year and with additional historical information on the lake and the effects on it of Kerr and Hungry Horse Dams. The hydrographs were generated from a database of daily lake elevations and streamflows that dates back to 1907.

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



Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Summer Address (if applicable) _____

Member: \$25 Member \$50 Sustainer Other \$ _____

Friend of the Flathead: \$100 Patron \$250 Benefactor \$500 Protector

Mail To: Flathead Lakers • PO Box 70 • Polson, MT 59860



Plan Now for the Flathead Lakers 2002 Photo Contest!!

The Flathead Lakers plan to hold a second photography contest next year. You have a full year to look for new photo opportunities!

Skidoo Bay Docks by David Werner was the 1st Place Winner in the "Lake - Scenic" category in the 1999 Flathead Lakers Photo Contest. More details about next year's contest will be announced in a future newsletter.

Attention Members!

If you have a second address — because you spend only summers at the lake or because you head south for a few months in the winter — please let us know. When you renew your membership, please include your second address and the dates you are there. We have a great new membership database that can automatically select the correct address (thanks to our computer consultant, James Conner). Make sure you receive all the Lakers' newsletters and correspondence!



FLATHEAD LAKERS
Post Office Box 70
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*Friends and neighbors
working for clean water,
a healthy ecosystem, and
lasting quality of life in the
Flathead Lake watershed.*

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