



## Funding Crisis Hits Flathead Lake Monitoring Program

by Robin Steinkraus, Executive Director

Over the past several years, partners in the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) consortium that has funded water quality monitoring in Flathead Lake and its major tributaries have been dropping out, leaving continued monitoring in jeopardy.

Funding reached a critical low two years ago. At that time, Jack Stanford, Director of the Flathead Lake Biological Station, stated in a letter to the FBC, "... I cannot begin another monitoring year for the FBC without a clear commitment in advance of the work, of funds needed to do a credible job."

A timely infusion of additional funding from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) salvaged the program last year, after

Flathead County discontinued its support for the program, citing budgeting shortfalls and other funding priorities.

The current monitoring program was established by the FBC in 1986 at a cost of \$75,000 per year. Consortium partners have included Flathead County, Lake County, the Montana Power Company, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Bureau of Reclamation, in addition to the DEQ. Lake County dropped out in 1989, the Tribes' contribution has shifted to an in-kind contribution of personnel and equipment, and MPC support has been sporadic since 1990.

The Flathead City-County Health Department became a participant in 1996. But this past January, the Flathead County Commissioners intervened to stop that contribution, saying it entailed an improper budgeting procedure.

Subsequently the commissioners and board of health agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a water quality district. Funding monitoring could become one of a water quality district's projects, but establishing a water quality district will probably not happen soon.

Since 1991, the monitoring program has been operating at a substantial deficit. Stanford said he has tapped into other funding to keep monitoring going, but he is no longer able to do so.

As past Lakers' president Dick Wollin so aptly described it, "Flathead Lake is a mirror that reflects how well we are living in balance with our environment." Monitoring is the tool that tells us how well we are doing, and that warns us when problems are beginning so actions to correct them can be taken.

In the past, the citizens of the Flathead Valley have heeded those warning signals by improving our sewage treatment plants and banning phosphate-containing detergents. Now those signals are leading the FBC to initiate a voluntary program to reduce nutrients reaching our waters from non-point sources. In fact, at the February 18 FBC meeting, Flathead County Commissioner Dale Williams (also on the FBC) spoke about the necessity of base-line water quality monitoring to understand the efficacy of any new measures taken to reduce nutrients. With this new program being planned, it would be especially unfortunate for monitoring to stop.

The Flathead Lakers have written to the FBC to encourage the commission to develop a coordinated plan for securing adequate long-term and short-term (this year) funding for the ongoing monitoring program. And we have offered to help ensure that such a plan is implemented. We have also written to the Flathead County Commissioners to support exploring the idea of a water quality district, and to encourage them to find the appropriate mechanism to authorize the county board of health's \$6,800 contribution to monitoring this year. We've received no responses.

The Flathead Lakers board of directors is committed to making sure monitoring continues. A committee has been formed to research options. Please contact the Flathead Lakers if you are interested in helping with this project.



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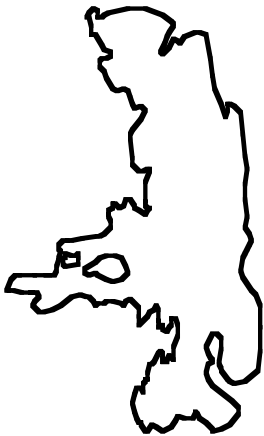
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Members are encouraged  
to attend  
Board Meetings

The Board of Directors meets  
every six weeks. Call the office for  
the location if you'd like to attend a  
meeting.

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### President's Column

## *It Shore Can Be Confusing*

In February I raised a stink in a letter to newspapers about the possibility that offshore revetments, or dikes, might be built along the north shore of Flathead Lake extending east and west from the mouth of the Flathead River.

The plain language of the agreement between Montana Power and the federal Fish and Wildlife folks allowed building any sort of revetments - offshore, maybe, or onshore, maybe. The agreement said the revetments would be "shore-aligned." I took the term "shore-aligned" to mean roughly parallel to the shore.

The reaction from MPC and the Fish and Wildlife folks could be characterized as courteous, and patronizingly impatient. It will be onshore, said they, and (under the breath) why do we have to endure such ignorance?

Very good. I stand corrected. But I'm still confused. Carol Sampson, director of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Office of Hydropower Licensing, was kind enough to drop me a note to clarify matters. Her note said that on June 22, 1990, Montana Power defined that "shore-aligned" means "located along the general trend of the existing high pool shoreline and offset from the existing pool shoreline *only enough* to avoid significant removal of vegetation." She emphasized the words "only enough."

OK. It means generally parallel to the shoreline and so close to the shore that the revetment may brush against onshore vegetation. For common purposes, "shore-aligned" means onshore.

The revetment to be built

under the MPC-Fish and Wildlife agreement east toward Bigfork from the mouth of the Flathead River will be onshore. The agreement says so. Because it says that that revetment will be "shore-aligned."

West of the river, toward Somers, the agreement says, "MPC will . . . construct a shore-aligned revetment . . ." and will develop "approximately 37 acres of wetland habitat in the area between the west side shore-aligned erosion control structure (the revetment) and the existing shoreline."

Wait a minute. The west "shore-aligned" revetment won't always be onshore. Along a big stretch it will be far enough offshore to form a 37-acre pond between the revetment and "the existing shoreline." Still, being offshore doesn't prevent that offshore stretch from being called "shore-aligned," which means onshore.

So "shore-aligned" means onshore except, of course, when it means offshore. (This would have tickled George Orwell.)

The revetments will be built. Where the issue counts, they will be on the shore where they belong. The 37-acre wetland area will do lovely things for birds until it silts up or the offshore revetment collapses. So I'll quit blowing whistles.

Still, what does "shore-aligned" in practice really mean? I shore am wondering.

-*Sam Reynolds*

*Please Attend  
the Flathead Lakers*

## *Annual Membership Meeting*

Hear guest speaker *Pat Williams'* thoughts about the connection between environmental quality and economic prosperity. Pat is a senior fellow at the University of Montana's Center for the Rocky Mountain West, and formerly served Montana in the House of Representatives.

Learn about the current "state of the lake" from Flathead Lake Biological Station Director, *Dr. Jack Stanford*.

Learn more about the Flathead Lakers' programs and projects.

Celebrate the solstice (and Father's Day!) with a sunset cruise on the Far West.

*Date: June 21, 1998*

*Time: 7:00 PM*

*Place: Flathead Lake Lodge,  
on the lake just south of Bigfork, at the BBQ Area*

## *What's New Around the Lake?*

### *FBC Moves Toward Nutrient Reduction Plan*

Last year the Flathead Basin Commission agreed on an interim target for reducing nutrients reaching Flathead Lake. The commission indicated that reaching the target, 80 grams of carbon per cubic meter per year (a measure of primary productivity or algal growth), would result in a cleaner lake. It would likely eliminate the chance of pollution algae blooms occurring (as they did in 1983 and 1993), and thereby allow Flathead Lake to be taken off the list of impaired water bodies.

In addition to primary productivity, the commission agreed the target should also include no measurable blooms of pollution algae and no declining trend in oxygen concentrations at the midlake monitoring site, as well as no increases in algal biomass on rocks near the shore.

To achieve these targets, the amount of the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus reaching the lake must be reduced. The commission adopted the recommendation of its technical advisory committee, setting a goal of reducing the total annual nutrient load to Flathead Lake from nonpoint sources by 15%.

Subsequently, the commission adopted a strategy to encourage voluntary development and implementation of a variety of methods to reduce nutrients. The commission's strategy includes:

- focusing primarily on education
- supporting compatible efforts by other groups
- identifying problem areas, based on present data
- prioritizing problem areas where action is most likely to achieve results
- developing an action plan
- helping develop local watershed groups where there is interest and no one else is taking the lead
- providing forums for interest groups and stake holders to communicate with each other, and help them coordinate their actions
- monitoring results of actions taken, in a plan designed around the TMDL (total maximum daily load) targets and benchmarks
- providing a facilitator to accomplish these goals.

### *Kerr Dam Mitigation*

Last February, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved an agreement between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai

Tribes, and Montana Power Co., amending its Kerr mitigation order issued a year ago. The agreement settles some of the issues which led each of these parties to file an appeal to that order.

The agreement allows the erosion control revetment required for a portion of the north shore of Flathead Lake to be placed onshore rather than offshore (see President's Column on page 2), along with development of 37 acres of wetland habitat.

The agreement also allows the transfer of the 3,112-acre Lost Trail Ranch and 799 acres at McGregor Meadows from Montana Power to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to replace wildlife habitat lost to dam operations. And it requires Montana Power to pay \$750,000 for habitat development for these areas.

### *Flathead Lake Information Available Via Internet*

As more and more people are looking to the Internet for information, the Flathead Lakers board of directors decided to develop a web page. Board member Laney Hanzel is coordinating this effort, with assistance from member Art Thompson and executive director Robin Steinkraus. Webmaster and publisher James Conner of Kalispell is designing the Lakers' initial web page.

We hope to have the web page up and running soon, with plans for additions to it throughout the year. The board of directors is excited about this new way to communicate with members and the public. The web page will soon be found at [www.flatheadlakers.org](http://www.flatheadlakers.org).

Information on issues and problems affecting Flathead Lake and its watershed is already accessible through Conner's personal web site at [www.digisys.net/highwater/](http://www.digisys.net/highwater/). This well-designed site contains the latest information on North Fork coal mining plans, the Flathead Basin Commission's TMDL report, and information about flooding in the watershed, as well as great maps and photos, and links to other water quality sites. If you're "connected," surf on over and take a look!

## *Roundup of News and Events*

### *New Canadian Policies May Affect North Fork Mining Plans*

Two recent developments north of the border complicate the picture for potential coal mines in the drainage basin of the North Fork of the Flathead River.

A major new initiative to "support the sagging mining industry" is being established by British Columbia Premier Glen Clark, reported Dennis McDonald, B.C.'s liaison to the Flathead Basin Commission. This initiative includes a mineral exploration tax credit as a financial incentive for exploration, and appointment of a "mining advocate" to make sure mining has a voice in the cabinet.

Certain areas called "no staking reserves" had been off limits to any exploration or development until a land use planning process determined the area's "best use." Now that land use plans are completed, some areas will receive permanent protection, while others will be released from the protected status. In addition, Fording Coal, the same company that has shown interest in North Fork coal fields, is considering building a coal-fired power plant in the Upper Elk River valley (Elk R. is a tributary to the Kootenai River). The result of these changes, said McDonald, is likely to be an increase in coal exploration.

Also, mining exploration and development could be affected by a recent Canadian Supreme Court decision acknowledging that aboriginal rights have never been extinguished on publicly-owned lands. A process to settle aboriginal land claims is underway with 80 to 90 "First Nations," and includes much of the area just north of the U.S. border in B.C. A lengthy consultation process is required when land use decisions may affect aboriginal rights.

### *New Federal Clean Water Plan*

President Clinton announced a major new clean water initiative in his 1998 State of the Union Address. The Clinton administration will build partnerships with state and local governments to achieve most of the goals in the initiative to improve water quality nation-wide.

The plan targets nonpoint source pollution for clean-up. Four tools are outlined to achieve water quality goals: 1) taking a watershed approach to building cooperation to set priorities and take action to clean up rivers, lakes and coastal waters, 2) strengthening water quality standards where needed to make existing programs more effective, 3) applying federal agency expertise and resources to reduc-

ing runoff from agricultural and forest lands, and 4) improving the information government agencies provide to the public and local governments.

### *Dan Burden Visits the Flathead*

Nationally recognized land use and transportation expert Dan Burden spent three days visiting communities throughout the Flathead Valley in April. "We've forgotten what our grandparents knew," said Burden, and in recent years we've been "building cities, towns, and neighborhoods that don't make sense."

Through his organization, Walkable Communities, Inc., Burden travels throughout the country to assist communities in designing and retrofitting their towns, streets, and highways so they do make sense - for people, not just cars.

"If you don't prepare for growth," Burden said, "you'll have disastrous consequences." The towns that are doing best at coping with the problems growth can bring are those where all the governments and agencies are working together with citizen involvement. The place to start is with a good vision of what you want your communities to become.

Burden gave slide show presentations and discussions in Kalispell, Whitefish, and Ronan during his visit. He also met with downtown business groups in Kalispell and Columbia Falls, made presentations at schools in Columbia Falls and Somers, participated in the Somers bike trail dedication, and led a traveling workshop through the Mission Valley with stops at Arlee, Ravalli Hill, Ninepipes, Ronan, Pablo and Polson. The Flathead Lakers co-sponsored his visit.

Throughout his visit, Burden offered suggestions for rebuilding highways and streets to enhance community character. Communities making the changes Burden suggests have found their communities become more attractive, safer, friendlier to children and the elderly, and more profitable. Burden urged citizens to think of the legacy they leave for their children, "go out next week, next month, and put something in your community for the children."

Burden summarized his message in a letter to the Lake County Leader, "If we accept and build a transportation system characterized by super-strips, that's what we'll get - strip development, subdivisions, sprawl, loss of our sense of community, and unnecessary environmental damage. But by marshalling the vision and courage that your community has already shown so clearly during my visit you can avoid the California-ization of Montana."

## *Flathead Lake Fisheries: Dilemma and Confusion*

by Joe Biby, Director

I went out on Flathead Lake recently, on an after dark fishing trip, to collect a net full of Mysis shrimp. I hauled them out of the lake and placed them in a tank so I could show them to some students who are interested in water quality related topics. I wanted to impress on these students a lasting visual image of this exotic species, introduced into the Flathead watershed from Canada, that singlehandedly turned the food web of Flathead Lake upside down, and put the native species, cutthroat and bull trout (in addition to kokanee salmon, a popular non-native), on a fast ride toward elimination within the lake fishery.

It is this fishery that has been the subject of considerable debate in recent months, and it is this fishery that has had the agencies charged with the management and stewardship of our lakes' resources struggling for direction. Federal, state and tribal agencies could manage Flathead Lake to maintain the current popular lake trout fishery, or they could drastically reduce their numbers in an attempt to restore populations of native cutthroat and bull trout.

Mysis shrimp avoid light, and therefore migrate up from the depths of the lake and back again each night to feed. The once abundant kokanee salmon, which use their vision to find prey, never came in contact with their intended food source (the introduced shrimp). Instead, mysis shrimp literally outcompeted the salmon for its zooplankton prey, and carried that food energy down to the depths of Flathead Lake where lake trout and lake superior whitefish live. Populations of both those fish skyrocketed, and immense numbers of maturing lake trout (a top level predator) fed on other fish, including young bull trout and cutthroat trout. Cutthroat and bull trout populations are in serious decline in the lake, and both species have been proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

An international panel of fisheries experts was assembled last November by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss the implications of various fisheries management strategies. After listening to the local scientists and managers, and two days of discussions about what could be done, the expert panelists each offered his opinion about what *should* be done. Nine of the 12 panelists maintained that lake trout populations should be reduced to protect native fish species.

David Beauchamp of the Utah Cooperative Fisheries & Wildlife Research Unit, suggested that managers have a moral obligation to try to maintain native species, especially the increasingly rare bull trout populations. Michael Hansen of the University of Wisconsin stated that bull

trout and other native species in Flathead Lake, "are a national and international resource." He maintained that managers "owe the rest of the world to do the very best to restore" bull trout populations. David Evans of the University of British Columbia echoed that sentiment when he argued that bull trout populations in Flathead Lake are part of a global resource, and Montana has a responsibility to manage for the conservation of bull trout.

In a FWP newsletter article issued prior to the panel in the summer of 1997, the agency stated that, "Their (the panel's) report, as well as input from anglers and the general public, will help guide future fisheries management for Flathead Lake." Writing for the Missoulian in February following the release of the panel report, Daryl Gadbow pointed out that "Because of the biological complexity of Flathead Lake, and the tangled web of political interests involved, the ultimate direction the managing agencies will take is uncertain." Tribal biologist Barry Hansen, speaking in early March at a meeting in Kalispell regarding the Flathead Lake fishery, maintained that the local fishery managers, "do defer to that expert panel," and added, "our first responsibility is biodiversity. I don't think you can separate bull trout from the Flathead system." Speaking at that same meeting, FWP fisheries manager Jim Vashro emphasized that the scientific panel report was good stuff, but still not enough to work on because there is too much "flux in the system." Vashro emphasized that final decisions were still well off in the future, "We've got a lot of footwork to do in the next months, maybe a year."

Since the release of the panel report, pressure from sportsmans groups, anglers and guides to maintain the existing lake trout fishery in Flathead Lake has been building. Apparently in response to public pressure, the FWP Commission recently reached an earlier than anticipated decision, and announced that it will not support efforts to save Flathead Lake bull trout by reducing lake trout populations. Commission Chairman Stan Meyers criticized the idea of reducing lake trout numbers, and called on local anglers to oppose it.

I keep a small vial containing a dozen mysis shrimp sitting on my desk. I look at that once in awhile as a reminder of the extraordinary impact humans have had on our natural world, and I'm reminded of a quote from William Shakespeare, "In nature's infinite book of secrecy, a little can I read." Despite all of our clever and creative strategies for engineering solutions to all sorts of problems, we will never completely reverse the food web change that so drastically impacted Flathead Lake.

## ***YES! I want to belong to the Flathead Lakers!***



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address \_\_\_\_\_

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  \$100 Patron   
  \$250 Benefactor  
 \$500 Protector   
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 Other \_\_\_\_\_

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

## ***Is This Job for You?***

*by Mickey Sogard, director*

If you have skills you'd like to share, are a self-starter, can work without close supervision, and have some time to give, we may have a job for you! Most of these tasks are fun, could be done at home on your own time schedule, and could be done with a friend.

If any of these jobs appeal to you, give Robin a call at the office. You would be doing the Lakers a great service.

**Speakers bureau coordinator:** Organize and administer a speakers bureau for the Lakers. Contact speakers, prepare a speakers booklet, contact civic groups, etc. This could all be done by telephone, mail and e-mail.

**Computer assistant:** Assist the executive director in establishing a new data base (Filemaker Pro), input data, and manage the database.

**Researchers:** Research specific topics related to the Lakers' mission. Compile the information in a form that can be easily accessible in our resource center.

**Public service announcements coordinator:** Coordinate the recording of public service announcements on various water quality and land use issues. Deliver the audio tapes to area radio stations and arrange air times.

**Mailing assistants:** Assist with mailing four newsletters per year, and with four or five additional mailings. Fold, stuff, and attach address labels. Ideal for friends who like to visit.

**Display coordinator:** Design new display boards on topics of concern to the Lakers. Use pictures, maps, graphs, diagrams and text to visually illustrate a concept on the boards, which are displayed at public events and meetings.

**Graphic artist:** Assist the executive director as needed. Help make our publications look better!

**Photographer:** Document examples of issues of concern to the Flathead Lakers. Photos would be used in educational programs, slide shows, display boards and publications.

**Volunteer coordinator:** Assist the executive director by maintaining a list of volunteers, contact volunteers as needs arise, coordinate and train volunteers for specific jobs. Mostly telephone work.



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POLSON, MT  
59860

*Flathead Lakers is a non-profit  
501-(c)-(3) corporation chartered in 1958  
to protect Flathead Lake and encourage  
economic development consistent with that  
protection.*

2nd Annual Discount Offer

## Another Chance to Save!

*by Dick Montgomery, Director*

Have you ever bought a lottery ticket? I've heard it said that the lottery is a tax system for those people who don't understand arithmetic.

Ever put a quarter in a one-arm bandit? I've heard it said that the odds of winning are somewhat better than in the lottery, but slot machines are really not just a means of distributing surplus tax money.

If you really want to be a WINNER, it's a good idea to invest your money on a sure thing, where the odds are in your favor.

How about a good old regular savings account in the trustworthy savings and loan? Your money will be

safe and will earn interest at a rate of about four percent. Hey, that's not bad. At the end of a year that \$100 will produce a sure bet gross profit of \$4. Then the IRS and State Dept. of Revenue tap you for their shares and that \$4 is now about \$2.80. Then you crank in the average annual rate of inflation and the remainder isn't even enough for a gum ball machine.

It's really hard to find an entirely safe and guaranteed profitable investment these days, but boy do I have a DEAL for you. It requires an investment of a measly couple of hundred dollars and the average return over the five to ten year life of the investment

will be about 30% per year. This means that in only nine years your \$200 will be worth about \$2,000. WOW !!!!! you ask,

"Where do I sign my name?" Well, the answer is, on the "10% SEPTIC TANK SERVICE DISCOUNT COUPON."

Getting your septic tank inspected and cleaned out for a measly \$200 will prevent coming up with about \$2,000 to replace the drainfield when it plugs up and your basement turns into an unpleasant smelling swimming pool.

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the following septic services will honor this coupon with a  
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Mel's Pumping Service	752-5318	Bjork's Valley Pumps (Polson)	883-4948
Ready Freddy Septic Tank Pumping	752-4552	Byrnes Septic Tank Pumping (Ronan)	676-2077
		Smith's Septic Pumping (Polson)	883-6708