



FLATHEAD LAKE Monitor Newsletter of the Flathead Lakers

Flathead Lake, Montana

Summer, 2000

Options for Fish Management Released

by Arlen Roll, Advisory Committee member

The Flathead Lake and River Advisory Committee held its last meeting June 7. The committee was formed by the Salish & Kootenai Tribes (SKT) and the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to develop recommended fishery management alternatives for the Flathead Lake and River system. The 12 committee members, composed of both tribal and non-tribal members, recommended four alternatives for consideration by the Tribes and State.

The Tribe's vision is to restore the native fishery and the State's vision is to maintain the native fishery while maintaining a viable recreational fishery. All alternatives were to be both biologically and

economically viable.

Early meetings were devoted to furnishing the committee with information needed to fulfill its role. I believe the most important and fundamental information that emerged, and drove the majority of the committee's decisions, is what I call the Flathead Lake water quality — food web story.

High water quality is critical to every activity related to the lake and river. Without it there would be no fishing, boating, swimming, recreation or even living near the lake. The enemy of quality water is phytoplankton, the plant material (algae) in the water which flourish when the concentration of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) entering the lake increases. So, it is vital to reduce the nutrient load entering the lake.

Phytoplankton is principally controlled by being eaten by crustacean zooplankton, the tiny, pin-head size or smaller animals that live in the water. Not all phytoplankton are eaten and the remainder falls to the bottom where it is decayed by bacterial action which takes oxygen from the water. Oxygen depletion can eventually become severe enough to have serious negative impacts on the lake and its fish — another reason to reduce the nutrient load.

In the early 1980s, Mysis shrimp reached Flathead Lake. Their primary food supply is the crustacean zooplankton. So, as these are eaten by the Mysis, there are fewer to eat the phytoplankton, and water quality declines — a third reason to control the nutrient load. The answer then seems to be to get rid of Mysis. Unfortunately, there is no known way to do that.

But it turns out that Mysis are a food source for bottom feeding fishes such as lake trout and lake superior whitefish. Their predation on Mysis seems to have reached a point where Mysis numbers have stabilized. Questions remain about the effect a decline in lake trout would have on numbers of Mysis and, consequently, zooplankton and phytoplankton. It is possible that it might cause Mysis numbers to go up, zooplankton numbers to go down, and phytoplankton to increase, resulting in poorer water quality. Simply put, the challenge becomes to do everything possible to reduce the nutrient load entering the lake and be very cautious about disrupting the current situation where bottom-feeding fish may be controlling Mysis levels. The committee's four recommended alternatives range

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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 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

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Robin Steinkraus, Editor

President's Column

Greetings Fellow Lakers — Summer is upon us as boating, sailing and other water recreation activities are in full swing around the basin. Visitors, neighbors and relatives have descended on our area to enjoy its scenic beauty and sparkling waters. Several visitors I've encountered recently commented they didn't realize that a place like the Flathead Basin existed anymore.

We're entering an era in which we'll see more summer residents who stay longer plus significant growth in year-round residents. This growth will be driven by two principal factors: the "baby boom" generation moving into retirement coupled with the increased wealth many have enjoyed, and the technological changes that allow people to connect with each other no matter where they might be. Distance becomes increasingly irrelevant when we can access facilities and services at any time and business and livelihood are not limited to a particular place.

It's easy to see that this will change the character of our area forever. As many of us have learned, change is inevitable. If we collectively wish to preserve those things most near and dear to us, including clean water and a healthy and beautiful environment, we will need to put forth an effort. Each and every one of us must demonstrate good land and water stewardship as well as demand that our elected officials support good environmental policies and practices. For example, continually granting developers variances to rules and regulations only confuses the issue and can degrade water quality. It also can make the variance the rule rather than the exception.

In accordance with our mission of working for clean water, healthy ecosystems and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed, the Flathead Lakers have embarked upon a new initiative along with basin partners: to identify, prioritize and preserve/restore those lands most critical to maintaining and improving water quality in Flathead Lake. This initiative, the Critical Lands Project (discussed in the last newsletter), will help all participating organizations to get out ahead of haphazard development in sensitive areas, thereby heading off problems before they occur while still accommodating reasoned and thoughtful development. The Critical Lands Project will use existing information and resources to plan and implement conservation strategies.

Partnering with other basin stakeholders (private and governmental) and building from existing information and experience will increase the effectiveness of each group's efforts while reducing risks as we work toward achieving project goals. This project is important to the long term health and well-being of the water quality in Flathead Lake. It also affords the numerous participating groups the opportunity to build trust and cooperation in addressing problems and threats to water quality.

The Flathead Lakers are taking on the leadership of this project. We are currently in the process of hiring a Project Leader to fulfill this important responsibility. In addition, we are looking for volunteers with communications, grant writing, and/or natural resources protection and restoration skills and experience who might be willing to work on this project or a committee. Offering your service will certainly help build the momentum and expertise the project needs to protect the lands and waters critical to keeping this area a special place. With your help and support, the Lakers and their partners will make a difference in the Flathead that helps ensure lasting quality of life in the future.

— Sid Rundell

Please Attend the Flathead Lakers

Annual Membership Meeting

Keynote Address:

“Indian Cultural & Historical Perspective of Flathead Lake”
Dr. Joe McDonald, President, Salish & Kootenai College

State of the Lake Report:

Dr. Jack Stanford, Director, Flathead Lake Biological Station

Photography Contest winners announced / Entries displayed
 Progress report on the Critical Lands Project
 Personal Watercraft questionnaire
 Election of Directors

Sunday, August 27, 7:00 p.m.
KwaTaqNuk Resort, Polson

Thank You!

The Flathead Lakers wish to thank the following businesses for their support and contribution to the success of our Friends Appreciation Reception on July 9:

Flathead Lake Lodge	Bigfork Inn
Echo Lake Cafe	Fun Beverage
Hap's at Eagle Bend	Hotel Bigfork
Lakehills IGA	Marina Cay/Quincy's
Mountain Lake Lodge	Showthyme
Swan River Inn	Tuscany's

Our “Friend of the Flathead” members and other supporters such as those listed help make possible the Flathead Lakers’ work for clean water, healthy ecosystems and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed.

It's not too late to enter our **Photography Contest!**

Prizes: First Prize: \$100 Second Prize: \$50
Categories: Flathead Lake scenic, Flathead Lake recreation, Flathead Basin lakes, rivers & streams
Format: 8 x 10 glossy color (Put your your name, address and phone number on the back)
Submit Entries: Flathead Lakers, P.O. Box 70, Polson, MT 59860 or drop off at:
Bigfork: Bigfork Photo Plus
Polson: Yogi's Sure Shot Photography
Whitefish: Lacy's Studio
Kalispell: 1st Avenue Camera, Photo Video Plus, Sam's Camera or Tidyman's One Hour Photo
Deadline: August 15, 2000

Personal Watercraft

The Flathead Lakers' Role

Of all the problems, concerns and issues members and the public bring up to the Flathead Lakers' board and staff, personal watercraft (PWC), better known as Jet Skis™, top the list. We have heard stories of inconsiderate and dangerous operator behavior (to put it politely) and wildlife harassment. We've also heard about long-time area residents responsibly and courteously enjoying using their PWC.

Due to repeated requests that the Lakers "do something" about PWC and new information about their environmental impacts, the board of directors decided to take a serious look at the issue and the role the Flathead Lakers should play in it.

Following is a summary of information we have gathered about PWC and two-stroke engines. If you are concerned about this issue and would like to help shape a Flathead Lakers position or action plan, please complete the questionnaire below and return it to us. The questionnaire will also be available at our annual meeting on August 27.

If the Flathead Lakers are to play any role in this issue, we need the support and participation of the membership. The board of directors will carefully consider the responses we receive. At the fall planning meeting, the board will determine whether sufficient interest and resources exist to take further action.

The Flathead Lakers' board and staff work hard to be effective and productive on numerous fronts related to protecting and improving water quality. In view of the organization's limited resources, any action on this issue would require the dedication of several new volunteers to research, develop and analyze options, and make recommendations for addressing problems associated with PWC. If you are concerned about the impacts of PWC, here is your chance to make a difference!

Personal Watercraft

PWC are propelled by a water jet drive which allows them to achieve planing speeds. They differ from conventional motor boats in their design, operation and use. They are highly maneuverable and capable of speeds greater than 65 mph. Their design allows them to be operated at high speeds in shallow water.

Noise

PWC produce noise levels in the range of 85 to 105 decibels (dB). A busy city street produces about 85 dB. The American Hospital Association recommends

hearing protection above 85 dB. The sound is not constant, but changes in loudness and pitch during normal use as the jet drive emerges from the water when crossing waves.

Pollution

PWC are powered by two-stroke engines which run on a mixture of oil and gasoline. In addition to PWC, two-stroke engines power 75% of all motorized boats in the U.S. (as well as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, etc.). Typically, as much as 25 to 33% of the fuel used by two-stroke engines is discharged unburned into the water.

Two-stroke engines emit about 156 grams of hydrocarbons per kilowatt hour. The next generation of two-stroke engines will emit about 40 grams. Four-stroke engines emit four grams. But four-stroke engines emit more nitrogen oxides than two-stroke engines.

According to the California Air Resources Board:

- an average two-hour PWC ride dumps three gallons of gas and oil into the water,
- PWC have twice the hourly annual use rate of boats,
- PWC emit eight times more pollution than equivalent motor boats.

Safety

A study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that the PWC injury rates were 8.5 times higher than the injury rates for motor boats. Most accidents are blamed on excessive speed and operator inexperience. PWC have no brakes or clutch, making them difficult to steer at high speeds when the throttle is cut.

Wildlife Disruption

Numerous studies have shown that PWC affect waterfowl and have a greater impact than motor boats. Waterfowl flush from PWC at greater distances than from motor boats. PWC can displace nesting birds and are considered one of the greatest threats to breeding loon populations in the U.S. They have been known to repeatedly flush osprey from their nests. Wildlife disturbance is compounded when PWCs are operated in one area for extended periods of time.

Regulations

A 1995 Montana law established a 100-foot no-wake zone in lakes and a 50-foot zone in rivers next to any dock, swimmer, swimming raft, nonmotorized boat or anchored vessel.

Action Needed?

The 1999 legislature amended boating and PWC laws. The new requirements took effect June 1, 1999 and include the following:

- increase the distance vessels must stay from anglers (and waterfowl hunters) from 50 to 75 feet,
- increase the distance vessels must stay from diver buoys from 100 to 200 feet,
- increase the distance PWC must operate at no-wake speed to within 200 feet of a dock, swimmer, swimming raft, nonmotorized boat, and anchored vessel on a lake or river (except when traveling to or from a dock or shore at minimum operating speed or when towing a water skier to or from a dock or shore).
- expand the authority of the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission to adopt and enforce rules governing operation of PWC and the resolution of conflicts between users of motorized and nonmotorized boats.

The Flathead Lakers were actively involved in developing the original PWC legislation and strongly supported both the 1995 and 1999 legislation. Restrictions recently adopted by the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission include no-wake zones on parts of the Swan River and the Thompson Chain of Lakes.

Proposed Boating Rules

The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission has proposed new boating rules this summer. Last winter the Region One Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks con-

ducted public scoping on "motorized watercraft conflicts and opportunities." A public opinion survey was distributed. Of the 438 surveys returned by the deadline, "325 felt a problem exists with motorized use of Montana waters; while 107 said no and 6 were undecided." The concerns most frequently identified were: PWC (171), Safety (150), Noise (132), Lack of courtesy (120), Wildlife disruption (87), Shore erosion (81) and Pollution (75). The most frequently proposed solutions were: Restrictions on PWC (203), Restricted areas on lakes (155), More law enforcement (153), Lake size restrictions (117), Restricted areas on rivers and streams (111).

On July 5, Fish, Wildlife & Parks announced adoption of tentative boating rules that will apply to all public lakes and reservoirs (any lake with legal access) in western Montana. These rules include:

- all watercraft must maintain no-wake speeds within 200 feet of the shoreline of all lakes,
- all watercraft must maintain no-wake speeds on all lakes of 35 acres or less.

The minimum operating speed and water skier exceptions described above would also apply.

Comments on the proposed watercraft rules will be accepted through August 22. Send your comments to: FWP Region One, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell, MT 59901 or dvincent@state.mt.us. A hearing is scheduled in Kalispell on August 12 from 9AM to noon at FWP headquarters.

— Robin Steinkraus

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Flathead Lakers PWC Questionnaire

Please return to: Flathead Lakers, P.O. Box 70, Polson, MT 59860

1) Do you own a PWC?

Yes No

2) Do you think PWC are a problem at Flathead Lake?

Yes No

3) Do you think PWC are a problem at rivers & streams?

Yes No

4) If yes, what are your greatest concerns?

Noise Safety
 Pollution Other _____
 Disturbing Wildlife

5) Do you think the Flathead Lakers should take action to help reduce negative impacts of PWC?

Yes No

6) What measures do you think would reduce the concerns you identified in question 4?

education better enforcement
 new regulation other _____

7) Would you be willing to help the Flathead Lakers work on this issue?

Yes No

Name:

Phone:

Address:

News From Around the Basin

Peaceful Bay Peaceful Again

Judge Ted O. Lympus' court order of June 30 brought to an end the confrontation of concerned citizens and neighbors regarding lake bed excavation and maintenance of a man-made channel. A permanent injunction was issued prohibiting the developers or their successors from doing any further dredging or excavation in Peaceful Bay. The order further states that work done in the bay must be smoothed out to expedite the reformation of the lake bed's oxygenated cap. The developers were allowed to excavate the sloughed materials that clogged the channel and armor the channel with riprap. The final point, and probably the most significant, stated that the parties agreed to relinquish the preexisting non-conforming use status of the canal and that once work was finished this past spring, no further excavation or maintenance work on the channel can be undertaken unless considered under applicable laws and regulations at the time.

— *Laney Hanzel*

Bigfork Canal Dredging Planned

The Flathead County Planning Board included water quality protection measures recommended by the Flathead Lakers in their approval of dredging the North Shore Harbor canal at Bigfork last month.

Dredging of the canal is planned for next spring when the lake is at low pool. The 50-year old canal is surrounded by about 60 homes and the Bigfork Marina.

The Lakers recommended requiring that the dredged material be removed from the site and disposed of away from the canal and lake for draining.

Typically, as much as 25% of the gas and oil used by outboard motors is released unburned into the water. Emissions contain the highest concentrations of unburned fuel during the first 10 to 15 minutes after starting the engine, resulting in the accumulation of hydrocarbons and heavy metals in the canal sediments. Allowing the dredged materials to drain on site could release these toxic materials back into the canal and lake. We also recommended that the North Shore Harbor Association be required to evaluate and document the effectiveness and impacts

of the proposed crane and dragline method of dredging, as previously used methods have proved relatively ineffective. This information will be useful in evaluating future proposals and options, and will help ensure that the most effective, least damaging methods are used.

— *Robin Steinkraus*

Swan R. Corridor Board Formed

The Swan River Corridor Committee has formed a Board of Directors to undertake the mission of acquiring the land at Bigfork currently owned by PacifiCorp, including Sliter's Park, the Swan River Nature Trail and the adjacent "non-project" land, and maintain the public's right to access it for perpetuity.

The Flathead Lakers are represented on the board by Rose Schwennesen of Bigfork. She joins Jeff Capps, President; Elna Darrow, Vice President; Walter Kuhn, Secretary/Treasurer; David Genter, Peter Leander, Marilyn Wood, Amy Eaton, Lou Ann Conrad, George Darrow and Dan Vincent.

The project's goals include preserving public access to the property, preserving the scenic quality of the corridor, maintaining ecological integrity, maintaining water quality and access, preserving recreation areas, preserving and maintaining the sustaining economic contribution to the community, and preserving an expected quality of life.

The committee welcomes donations and pledges to support the project. The second annual Bigfork River Walk will be held Saturday, July 29 to raise funds for the land purchase. For more information, contact Andrea Goff, Executive Director at P.O. Box 1191, Bigfork, MT 59911; 406-837-6433; or info@swanriver.net.

— *Andrea Goff*

Septic Tank Need Pumping?

If it's time for you to have your septic system inspected or your tank pumped, don't forget you can save 10% by using the Flathead Lakers' special coupon which appeared in the last issue of the newsletter. Help protect clean water by maintaining your system! For more information or a coupon, call the Lakers office at 883-1346 or e-mail lakers@cyberport.net.

Fisheries Plan, continued from page 1 —

from the status quo to some aggressive activity involving netting. All four however, contain many common recommendations. They include:

- continuation of an aggressive water quality monitoring program for the lake and river,
- reduction of aerial nutrient load of dust and smoke through paving roads and reducing burning during periods when the lake is stratified,
- a sewage collection system for all homes around the lake,
- a more intense review of ongoing land management practices to reduce the negative impact on the lake and river system,
- improved boating and shore access to the lake to put more angling pressure on non-native fish,
- increase fisheries habitat protection,
- explore potential of releasing white sturgeon into Flathead Lake,
- increased education and enforcement in several areas, and
- increased fisheries monitoring and research.

Space prevents presenting the entire package. If you use the lake or river or have any interest in the future of their fisheries, I urge you to review the draft document, which is available from the Tribes in Pablo, area libraries, Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Kalispell or the Flathead Lakers web site, and make your thoughts known. Time is running out – the comment deadline is August 4.

Flathead Lake Fisheries Management Options

Option 1: Manage for bull trout, cutthroat trout and lake trout, encouraging harvest of smaller lake trout and retaining a large (trophy) lake trout component. Retain current limits on nonnative fish to continue recreational fishery at current levels. Replace current slot limit (30 to 36 inches) with a regulation requiring anglers to release lake trout longer than 28 inches.

Option 2: Continue current management direction by maintaining current fishing regulations (including slot limit) and adopting adaptive management strategies to correct the management course if native species do not increase or if there are unacceptable losses in the recreational fishery.

Option 3: Reduce lake trout and other non-native fish to reduce predation, competition and hybridization by eliminating slot limit for lake trout and increasing harvest of lake trout by commercial hook and line angling if necessary.

Option 4: Aggressively harvest lake trout and lake whitefish by commercial and recreational angling. Increase harvest of lake whitefish through commercial netting, and, if bull trout redds drop below a minimum threshold, take more aggressive steps such as netting lake trout.

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

Your Vote Counts!

Make sure our elected government officials support policies that protect clean water, a healthy environment and lasting quality of life:

- ✓ Register to vote by October 10. (Call 1-888-884-8683 or your county clerk & recorder for information.)
- ✓ Attend candidate forums and find out where the candidates stand.
- ✓ Ask the candidates questions about their leadership experience, their priorities on environmental quality, and whether they support water quality monitoring funding.
- ✓ Request an absentee ballot if you can't make it to the polls. (Call your county election office for more information; Flathead County: 758-5535; Lake County: 883-7268.)
- ✓ *Vote on November 7!*



FLATHEAD LAKERS
Post Office Box 70
Polson, MT 59860

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

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