



Coming Soon: *New Opportunities to Protect Flathead Lake*

Only in the last 30 years or so have large numbers of people come to understand that:

- * the solution to pollution is not dilution;
- * everybody lives downstream from someone else;
- * we all have a stake in the world lasting as long as possible;
- * we all have a stake in *our* part of the world lasting long enough for our grandchildren (some say seven generations) to know the places we've known, as we know them;
- * we all bear some personal responsibility to keep it that way.

We'll have several opportunities to try to keep it that way in the next phase of the Flathead Basin



INSIDE

New Executive Director	
<i>Board appoints Steinkraus</i>	2
Contest Winners	
<i>7th graders write about home</i>	3
Ways to Protect Water	
<i>Septic systems/runoff</i>	4
Donors	
<i>Thanks for support</i>	5
'97 Legislature	
<i>Dismal for natural resources</i>	6
Basin Issues	
<i>Bull trout, Swan L. and more</i>	7
Zoning	
<i>Proposed regs. changes</i>	8

Commission's Watershed Education Project (Voluntary Nutrient Reduction Strategy), where we'll take the information from the just-completed water study, figure out specifically where the problems are, and figure out workable, voluntary solutions to them.

It is important to realize that the study did not find huge individual problems - just manageable little ones.

- * But lots of manageable little ones.
- * Lots of room for improvement.
- * Lots of room for everyone to get into the act.
- * Lots of opportunity for successful efforts.

With this scientific background and awareness we can cooperate together to bring Flathead Lake back into compliance with the federal Clean Water Act.

In the 1980s the Flathead region led the way to reduce nutrients in the lake by proposing a state law allowing counties the option of banning detergents containing phosphorus from sale. Flathead and Lake counties promptly did that. The move was fantastically successful. It solved an important "point source" pollution problem. That was called "point source" because the pollution came from an identified point, like the end of pipes at all of our urban waste water treatment plants.

To solve the remaining problems - called "non-point source" pollution because the nutrients come from diffuse areas, such as runoff - we're not looking at new laws or regulations,

because the non-point problems that remain are more readily solvable through individual, voluntary means, fueled by information.

Right now, the Basin Commissioners are getting comfortable with the scientific data and determining - through consultation with EPA, Montana's Department of Environmental Quality and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes - how the "target," or goal, of the project needs to look to fulfill the requirements of the Clean Water Act. I'm eager to start involving the public in finding solutions. However, if our result doesn't comply with the law, we will have wasted a lot of time on the project and still not have a satisfactory product. So Lakers and others must be patient while we work this out.

Yes, there will be meetings to attend, materials to read, ideas to discuss, plans to be made. The Commission will try to find funds to pay for necessary, voluntary projects that need help. We'll try to find helpers where those are needed. We'll try to do our individual and group best to reduce nutrients in the lake. You and us together.

Nobody will *have* to do anything. But real Montanans will want to.

-Elna Darrow, *Chair,*
Flathead Basin Commission

Members are encouraged
to attend
Directors Meetings

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

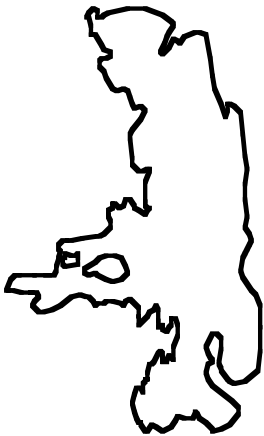
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New Executive Director:

Board Appoints Steinkraus

Robin Steinkraus was appointed executive director by the board of directors at its April 15 meeting.

The appointment removes the word "acting" from her title. She was appointed acting executive director after Ron Selden resigned as executive director effective Feb. 14.

The reasons for the board's action are simple: Robin is doing an excellent job, is enthusiastic about the work, and has both the academic credentials and experience to take over the task without missing a beat. She has been the Lakers' administrative aide since 1992.

Raised in Waterloo, Iowa, Robin received her bachelor's degree in English and philosophy from Bemidji State University in Minnesota in 1977. That year, she and her husband, Mark Potter, moved to Missoula, where she received her master's in environmental studies from the University of Montana in 1984. While in Missoula she worked as a water rights analyst for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Water Rights Bureau.

After moving to the University of Montana's Biological Station at Yellow Bay, where Mark is maintenance supervisor, Robin worked as a water quality research aide. She and Mark live at the station with daughter Teal, 10, and son Luke, 8.

Given the high quality of her work, the Lakers' board also felt that the word "acting" in her job title conveyed a sense of uncertainty, of transition, that was unjustified. We weren't conducting a talent search, were comfortable with Robin's energy and effectiveness, and so signed her to a one-year contract.

"I am excited about taking on a larger role in the Lakers' work to protect water quality, and about having an opportunity to help make sure the qualities that make this area so special endure," said Steinkraus. "When I began working for the Lakers my children were quite young, and the part-time job working mostly at home allowed me to have time for my family while still being involved in an organization making a worthwhile contribution to land and water conservation. During the past couple years, with Teal and Luke in school, I've been anxious to find a path toward a career in which I could use my education and experience. This opportunity could not have come at a better time."

Ron Selden resigned because, as he said in the February *Monitor*, "...in my heart I'm simply not cut out to be an administrator." We're sorry it didn't work out because Ron is a talented man, and a friend, who did excellent things for this organization. He deserves the Lakers' gratitude.

Now we look ahead, with Robin. She is proving to be an energetic administrator, a font of good ideas, with verve and enthusiasm for tackling the enormous work involved in keeping the waters of the Flathead watershed clean. "I am honored by the trust and confidence the Lakers' board of directors has in me," Steinkraus said, "and I will do my best to further the goals of the Lakers so we can all be proud of the legacy we leave for future generations."

-*Sam Reynolds, President*

-*Sam Reynolds, President*

Letters Home Contest Winners

The Flathead Lakers and Citizens for a Better Flathead jointly sponsored a letter, poem and poster contest again this year. This spring, seventh graders from throughout the Flathead watershed were invited to write a poem, design a poster or write a "letter" reflecting their hopes for the future of the Flathead, their home.

Sixty-five entries were received, and five were chosen to win cash prizes, with five additional entries awarded honorable mention. An awards presentation was held at the Earth Day celebration at Depot Park in Kalispell on Saturday, April 19. The five winners are Adrienne Maxwell of Somers, and Ryan Bowman, Joel Menssen, Teresa Schillereff and Marisa Schottelkorb, all of Kalispell. The insight and creativity of the entries inspired us, and we've reprinted two of the winning entries below for you to enjoy also.

Life in the Flathead Valley

*The Flathead Valley
So wonderous and clear
Where you leave behind the city life,
With all of its fear.*

*The lakes are so pure,
The mountains so high,
What a scene you would see
If like an eagle you could fly.*

*In all of its beauty
The Valley will give
The loveliest sights
For as long as you live*

*Spring is a time
When the flowers awake.
In summer we swim
In a crystal blue lake.*

*The leaves in the fall
Float down from the sky
In winter the snow
Is piled up high.*

*All four seasons
Of the Valley we cheer,
Because all of us choose
To live and die here.*

*by Teresa Schillereff
(age 13)*

Dear Someone Living in My House, Sometime in the Future:

A while ago my Dad was remodelling this house and he found a letter written in August, 1945. It was from a girl to her friend, inviting her to a swimming party at the Somers beach. Now that beach is gone. Dams were built at Hungry Horse and Polson and the dams control the level of Flathead Lake so that in the summer there is no beach at all. I wish we still had the beach where those girls swam. The letter made me think about how things that seem permanent can change over time. It made me wonder what things about the environment I enjoy now could be different for future generations.

So, I write to you, someone maybe my age, who will maybe live in this house in the future and find *this* letter, about the reasons I live where I live.

From my house, I can see the north shore of Flathead Lake. I enjoy the many moods and colors of the lake and the many birds that make the shoreline their home. My favorites are the Arctic swans who visit for a few days in the spring and fall. I love the cooing sounds they make. Beyond the lake are the Swan and Mission mountains. They are majestic, especially when the setting sun casts on them a pink alpenglow. It is a quiet and peaceful view. The Flathead Valley has so many other beautiful places, and I enjoy them in all the seasons. In winter, I ski on Big Mountain and sometimes go cross country skiing in the woods - there are lots of places to go. In summer I like to hike with my family: my favorite hike is Siyeh Pass in Glacier National Park. On the climb up to the pass, you walk through fields of wildflowers. When you reach the top the view is spectacular. On the way down the other side, you can see huge glaciers and usually, mountain goats. There are many lakes and the water in the lakes is clear and clean (and cold!). I like to swim and paddle a canoe. I love looking down to the bottom of a lake through crystal clear water and seeing the patterns the pebbles make, and sometimes a fish. When the sun shines here, it shines brilliantly. I am so lucky to live here.

I hope that it is still this way for you, and the many generations to come. I hope that not so much development comes that the natural beauty is hidden. I hope you can look out from your yard and see the same view I do. I hope the air and lakes are still fresh and clean. I hope the wildlife still runs free. I hope people stay environmentally aware and are not just greedy takers-of-the-land. Changes must happen, but I hope every generation makes changes with future generations in mind.

Your friend,
Adrienne Maxwell (age 12)

Where Oh Where Does the Sewage Go?

At last you scrimped and scraped enough to make a down payment on that beautiful piece of land on the lakefront or down by the old mill stream. In the very near future, that little lot may take the rest of your money, most of your time, and cause you to seriously consider becoming a permanent resident of the Australian outback. There is probably not much you can do to avoid paying mega bucks to build that little bungalow, these days everything seems to come in \$10,000 chunks: thinning the trees, removing the brush, grading the driveway, digging the basement, pouring the foundation, framing, electrical, windows, walls, roof, water supply and where to put the sewage.

If your little slice of paradise is near a municipal water and/or sewage system, you are going to miss a wonderful experience which has brought many new landowners to the brink of murder or suicide. If a municipal system is not nearby, figuring out where to put the sewage disposal system should be step #1, as a matter of fact it should be step #minus 1, meaning this should be resolved even before you cough up the down payment or any earnest money.

Finding a suitable location for the septic tank and drainfield is pretty easy if your intended purchase is not a swamp, isn't in a floodplain, has some high and dry ground, isn't steep as a cow's face, isn't a bedrock outcrop, doesn't sit on a bed of clay, or have some other secret condition which the Realtor either didn't know about or forgot to mention. Even the best lots usually have only a limited number of locations suitable for the drainfield and many lots have only one suitable site for a standard system. If the new landowner chooses that location for the house and proceeds to start turning dirt, pouring concrete and nailing boards before he pays a visit to the health department, he may have to resort to a significantly

more expensive engineered sewage system or may find himself in need of a house mover.

One of the most common problems encountered by health department inspectors is with respect to the location of wells on adjacent lots. The drainfield cannot be less than 100 feet from a well. This is necessary to insure that the drinking water doesn't come up yellow and smell like dirty socks. Many landowners like to put their well as close to the property line as possible so they have more room for the location of their septic system, (regulations usually require at least 10 feet between the well and property line). If you buy a lot which is between a couple of homeowners who got there first, you could be looking at over six-tenths of an acre which they have eliminated for your use as a drainfield. If you only bought half an acre, you now own a small park or a large garden. On small lots, (less than an acre), location of your well will no doubt be dictated by where your sewage system is going to be. The 100 foot setback requirement can also dictate well location on much larger lots which have other limiting conditions.

Everyone interested in land is usually interested in where the house will be and which direction it will face. If you bought a *large* piece of ground, this may be a safe approach, but unless you are a movie star, bought Microsoft stock fifteen years ago or picked the right numbers on a two dollar ticket, you can't afford to buy a Texas size ranch in western Montana, and the only safe approach is while keeping in mind where you would like to put the house, *first* select where you will put the sewage system and the well, get a sewage system permit from the county health department and then get serious about what the view will be from your front door. Phone numbers for the health departments are: Lake County 883-7236 and Flathead County 758-5760.

—Dick Montgomery, Director

How Can You Minimize Runoff?

In the spring, and after major rainfalls, water flows down the path of least resistance until it reaches a larger water body like a lake or stream. During especially high flows, flooding or erosion can occur, increasing the amount of sediment and other pollutants entering water bodies.

Planning ahead is the first step in preventing or minimizing damage due to runoff. Other steps can be taken with existing or planned landscapes:

- * Install a 40 foot (or more) buffer made of natural vegetation along shorelines. This will help filter nutrients from the runoff, provide fish and wildlife habitat, and help stabilize the shoreline, reducing future erosion.

- * Install rain gutters on the edge

of all rooftops, and keep existing gutters free of debris.

- * Use gravel or landscaping stones instead of pavement for roads and walkways. These porous surfaces allow more water to filter into the ground without causing erosion.

- * Retain trees and shrubs; trees provide a natural umbrella by shedding water and can reduce runoff by as much as 50%.

- * Limit clearing and grading on slopes and minimize cutting and filling for roads, sidewalks, and footpaths to reduce erosion.



THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT! Donations above the basic dues amount received in 1996 and the first quarter of 1997

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Mail to: Flathead Lakers • PO Box 990 • Bigfork, MT 59911

Natural Resource Protection Fares Poorly at 1997 Legislature

The 1997 legislature gave us little to be pleased about. Some good legislation died, but some bad stuff died too. Not much good happened in the area of natural resources. Some of the bills that *didn't* make it:

SB 82 was gutted, then tabled in committee. It would have established a state Scenic Historic Byway program to allow communities to designate certain routes, provide signage, and some protections of scenic amenities. Trucking and billboard companies opposed the measure, fearing it would impose restrictions on them. Just before being tabled, the only roads eligible to be designated were county roads!

SB 149 was tabled. It would have allowed MT Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Board of Outfitters to "identify public reservoirs, public lakes, rivers, and streams that are in immediate or potential danger of resource degradation or conflict over recreation uses. It is also intended that the commission develop rules to reasonably control the public recreational use of identified problem waters in order to address impacts or conflicts caused by recreational users, while maintaining a diversity of recreational opportunities." In other words, it would have given MTDFWP some new authority to deal with social, not only safety, issues on Montana waters. Read jet skis.

SB 174 was tabled. It would have added lake trout to the list of fish legal to catch and sell in Montana. The bill was meant to protect bull trout and kokanee, which lake trout find tasty. The bill was opposed by the charter boat industry, which wanted to preserve the large macs for their customers.

SB 334 was tabled. It said it would *implement* the provisions of our constitution guaranteeing Montanans a clean and healthful environment. "... the legislature finds that the delegates of the 1972 constitutional convention meant to create a strong constitutional provision regarding Montana's environment and did not intend that the environmental life support system be applied on a literal, site-specific basis, but rather as a general concept that applies to the environmental life support system of the state of Montana as a whole." We don't know which groups other than environmental groups opposed this, but it worked.

HB 181 was tabled. "... conservation easements should be written so that property owners do not have to sell their property rights forever and therefore should be written with options for termination within 5 to 10 years to allow property owners to retain options for their valuable rights and futures." This proposed legislation forgot that when you give a con-servation easement, you get something in

return.

Some of the bills that *did* make it through the legislature:

SB 224 has been signed by the Governor. It was a major revision of the Major Facilities Siting Act, originally passed to give the state the opportunity to have some control over the construction of large power plants, pipelines, transmission lines, etc. This year's changes raise the threshold for coverage, and remove the question of "need" for the product from consideration. You can imagine who favored this one.

HB 285 was passed in amended form and has been sent to the Governor for his signature. Designed to add Flathead and Lake County Conservation Districts to the Flathead Basin Commission, the legislature decided that two present members would need to be removed in order to add two. They picked the Bonneville Power Administration and the Corps of Engineers to evict. The Commission supported the original bill, but has objected to the amended form because it removes two important voices from the table for no reason. It is not known whether the Governor will heed the objection and veto the bill.

HB 293 has been signed by the Governor. Called the Environmental Audit Bill, it excuses from civil or administrative penalties any company that discovers an environmental violation itself, reports it (very briefly) to the Department of Environmental Quality, and works out a plan to prevent its continuance. It lets the company keep any extra money it made by violating laws intended to protect the environmental health and safety of Montana and its citizens. The only good thing about this law is that it sunsets October 1, 2001.

HB 546 has been signed by the Governor. Designed by DEQ and mostly industry, this new law responds to a lawsuit filed this winter meant to put Montana's feet to the fire about its responsibility under the federal Clean Water Act to develop TMDLs (total maximum daily loads) for impaired water bodies. It sets a ten year time frame for completion of TMDLs on all currently designated impaired stream segments or lakes, unless that water is removed from the list. The list has over 900 entries, many of them in the Flathead. We have reservations about the makeup of the advisory group to oversee the work, but this is an improvement over DEQ's reluctance to conduct TMDLs in the past.

What's New Around the Lake: Roundup of Regional Events

STANFORD HONORED

Dr. Jack Stanford, director of the Flathead Lake Biological Station at Yellow Bay, was recently honored by his colleagues at the University of Montana. Stanford was awarded the 1996-97 Distinguished Scholar Award during a reception at the University on April 9. Stanford has been at the forefront of international research in aquatic ecology for many years.

WINTER SNOWS BRING SPRING FLOODS

Mother Nature has been sending us some reminders of her power this year. Record-breaking snowfall occurred in the valleys this winter (over 12 feet in Kalispell). Snowpack in the Flathead Basin was at 54% above average as of April 1.

Flooding is occurring in parts of the valley. On Sunday, April 27 state officials closed U.S. 93 just north of Woods Bay on the east shore of Flathead Lake due to flooding on the highway. Snow melt enlarged an existing pond, covering the highway with more than 12 inches of water. No prediction was made about when the highway will reopen. If rains or rapid warming occur during spring runoff this year flooding could become more widespread.

BULL TROUT LISTING LIKELY

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that by June 10 it will recommend protecting bull trout under the Endangered Species Act. The recommendation will be to list bull trout in the Columbia Basin as threatened and bull trout in the Klamath Basin as endangered.

Bull trout numbers have been declining throughout their range and are extinct in California. In the Flathead, numbers of spawning bull trout have dropped by two-thirds since the mid-1980s in the North Fork and Middle Fork drainages, according to state Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologists. Populations in the South Fork and Swan River appear to be more secure. Damaged stream habitat and exotic fish species are the most serious threats to bull trout survival.

The announcement came a month after the agency declined to propose the fish for listing, but instead asked a federal court judge for more time to review the bull trout's status.

SWAN LAKE STUDY PLANNED

Extremely low levels of dissolved oxygen have again

been documented in the deep waters at the south end of Swan Lake. Plum Creek Timber Co. and the state Department of Environmental Quality found the same results last summer that an earlier study by Dr. Nancy Butler, formerly of the Flathead Lake Biological Station, reported.

Low levels of oxygen are a warning signal. Most of the phosphorus that comes into lakes is bound to sediments and sinks to the bottom before algae can use it. It stays on the bottom as long as there is plenty of oxygen in the water. But if increased concentrations of nutrients occur, algae production increases. When the algae die, the process of decomposition uses up oxygen dissolved in the water. If all the oxygen is used up on the lake bottom, phosphorus stored there can be released back into the water, greatly accelerating algae production and the decline in water quality.

An effort is underway to study the water quality of the Swan drainage basin, determine the sources of nutrients reaching Swan Lake, and develop a plan to reduce the amount of nutrients coming into the lake. This TMDL process (total maximum daily load) is being coordinated by the state Department of Environmental Quality, with participation by a variety of other groups and individuals. This effort is similar to the Flathead Lake TMDL process already in progress.

NEW POWER LINES FOR BIGFORK

Pacific Power plans to replace the existing wooden power poles running from Eagle Bend to downtown Bigfork with larger metal poles to support larger power lines. The new poles will be 10 feet taller than the existing poles.

Local community members have asked Pacific Power to instead bury the new lines. After initially claiming underground lines would be prohibitively expensive, Don Jordan, area manager, agreed to explore with the community the option of sharing the cost of burying the lines, according to reports in the *Bigfork Eagle*. Also, revised cost estimates are lower than first predicted.

The Flathead Lakers has urged Pacific Power to bury the power lines, commenting in a letter to the company, "The outstanding scenic views along Flathead Lake are part of what we all appreciate about this special place . . . huge power lines strung along the lakeshore would degrade that view . . . and show a lack of respect for Flathead Lake and its unique beauty."



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BULK PERMIT
NO. 230
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*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.*

Lakers Oppose Proposed Zoning Changes

Annual Membership Meeting: July 13

The Flathead Lakers annual membership meeting will be held on the afternoon of Sunday, July 13 at The Salish in Polson. Please mark your calendar to reserve this date!

Dr. Jack Stanford, director of the Flathead Lake Biological Station, will present the research results of the recent TMDL study in the Flathead Basin. Look for more information about this meeting in our next newsletter.

Montanans for Property Rights recently proposed changes that would gut Flathead County zoning regulations. The extensive proposal would restrict zoning's purpose to address only public health and safety.

"The restrictions would preclude protection of communities whose citizens want the protection and assurances that zoning brings," wrote Deputy County Attorney Jon Smith in his comments on the proposed amendments.

Under the proposal any requirement to protect wetlands, provide setbacks or protect fish or wildlife habitat would constitute a "taking" of private property and be subject to "full compensation." It would prohibit collection of mitigation or impact fees and prohibit requiring "studies, maps, plans or reports" for use in making decisions about land use. The penalty for violation of the regulations would be limited to a maximum of \$500 regardless of the extent of damage caused by the violation.

The Lakers opposed the zoning changes at the April 9 hearing before the county planning board. "Water is part of northwest Montana's identity, and clean water is something we all value," commented Lakers' executive director Robin Steinkraus. "Our water resources are one of the things that

contribute to the quality of life in this valley, which in turn is a magnet for population growth. What we do on land will affect our water -for better or for worse. The Flathead Lakers supports land use planning and local zoning regulations as useful tools to help guide growth and development in ways that protect the qualities we value here in the Flathead. The zoning amendments proposed would substantially weaken those tools and jeopardize our water quality."

At the hearing over two hours of testimony was heard by dozens of people both supporting and opposing the proposed changes. One supporter commented, "We are going to get constitutional law back in this land again. We gotta do it or we're going to lose everything." Other supporters threatened to take the proposal to voters in a referendum if not approved by the county.

The planning board voted unanimously to advise the county commissioners to reject the zoning changes. The proposal now goes to the county commissioners for another public hearing. The date for that hearing had not yet been set at the end of April.

- Robin Steinkraus