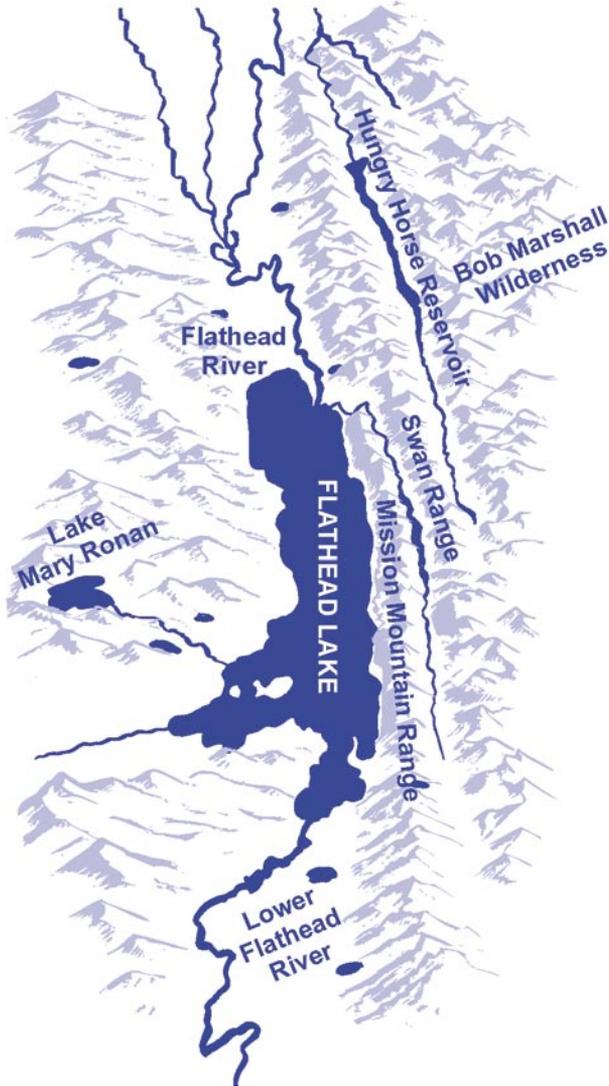


FLATHEAD LAKERS

What We Accomplished in 2010



"Flathead Lake serves as a mirror that reflects how well we are living in balance with our environment."

– Dick Wollin

(Flathead Lakers President, 1988 to 1994)

Flathead Lakers

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

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Message from the Lakers' President



Dear Members and Friends,

We have proof that perseverance pays off. After over three decades battling a dire threat to Flathead Lake and its North Fork headwaters, success in preventing the Canadian North Fork from becoming an industrialized mining zone is at hand.

What was at stake? Clean water, native fish and their spawning grounds, iconic wildlife and their ancient travel corridors, snowy peaks that are the water tower of the Flathead, recreation that renews our spirits, and the economic benefits to our commu-

nities these amenities provide.

The litany of threats may sound familiar:

- † Rio Algom/Sage Cr. Coal Company's proposed open pit coal mine at Cabin Cr.
- † Fording Coal Company's Flathead Coalfield coal exploration
- † Cline Mining Corporation's coal mine proposal at Cabin Creek
- † B.C. coalbed methane tenure auction
- † Cline Mining Corporation's open pit coal mine proposal at Foisey Creek
- † Western Canadian Coal Company's Lilyburt planned coal exploration in the North Fork floodplain
- † attempts to move the Dominion Coal Block from federal to provincial control
- † BP Mist Mountain Coalbed Methane Project
- † Max Resources Crowsnest gold exploration.

And you may recall some of the successes along the way:

- † 1983 Flathead River Basin Environmental Impact Study
- † 1988 International Joint Commission recommendation against the Sage Creek Coal Company's mine proposal
- † 2003 Montana–British Columbia Environmental Cooperation Arrangement
- † 2004 B.C. Coal Land Reserve imposing a 10 year moratorium on mining for the Cabin Creek area, terminating Cline Mining Corporation's leases
- † 2004 Fernie City Council Resolution asking B.C. to defer activities on coalbed methane tenures until a comprehensive environmental assessment is completed
- † 2005 Crown of the Continent Transboundary Science Summit
- † 2005 Montana Legislature Resolution supporting a transboundary environmental assessment
- † 2008 B.C. Flathead land withdrawal from the BP coalbed methane tenure award in the Crowsnest Coalfield
- † 2008 B.C. Flathead River declared endangered by B.C. Outdoor Recreation Council
- † 2008 North Fork transboundary environmental research study
- † 2009 North Fork Flathead River listed on American Rivers 10 Most Endangered Rivers list

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Clean Water Solutions

Flathead Lakers education, advocacy and stewardship programs help sustain clean water in Flathead Lake and its watershed. 2010 was a banner year for clean water protection. Together, we are leaving a legacy of clean water for the future.

Zebra Mussel Scare

Our huge sense of loss last fall turned into a huge sense of relief in January. A suspected zebra mussel larvae collected in Flathead Lake turned out to be a common type of phytoplankton.

Flathead Lake Biological Station Research Scientist Jim Craft, who has been working on Flathead Lake for decades, identified the organism as the dinoflagellate *Peridinium* sp. This is a very common dinoflagellate in Flathead Lake, found in the majority of

— *continued on page 4*

President's column, continued —

- ♦ 2009 Secretary of Interior Salazar visit to the Flathead and commitment to protect its natural values from mining
- ♦ 2009 UNESCO World Heritage Commission visit to assess impacts of proposed coal development, resulting in a recommendation for a moratorium on North Fork mining.

Which brings us to the amazing achievements of the past year:

- ♦ the landmark agreement between Montana and British Columbia banning mining and oil and gas development in the North Fork Flathead Watershed,
- ♦ S. 3075, the North Fork Watershed Protection Act to withdraw public lands from mining and energy extraction introduced in Congress,
- ♦ voluntary retirement of over 80% of existing oil and gas leases in the North Fork
- ♦ agreement by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Montana Nature Conservancy to provide \$9.4 million to B.C. to compensate current mineral tenure holders for their past sunk costs related to exploration
- ♦ agreement by B.C. to introduce legislation to codify in statute the protections for the B.C. Flathead Watershed adopted by executive order last year.

At our annual meeting last year we celebrated the Montana–B.C. agreement and honored Governor Schweitzer and Premier Campbell for the achievement. We also thanked the many groups and individuals who played a role in this success. We again thank you all, with a special thanks to Senator Baucus who has worked to protect our precious Flathead waters since the first coal threat arose.

And, a special thanks to our members and supporters who have made it possible for us to work on your behalf for over 50 years to keep Flathead Lake and the waters that feed it clean. With your continued support, we can enjoy the benefits of many more successes.

—*Dick Siderius, President*

plankton samples Craft collects, identifies and counts as part of the Biological Station's long-term monitoring program.

Labs in California and Oregon had previously suggested that the organism might be a dinoflagellate, while labs in the midwest had said the organism shared characteristics of zebra mussel larvae. DNA testing could not be completed due to sample quality.

Divers who searched the lake bottom, boat ramps and docks in bays around the lake found no evidence of adult zebra mussel colonization.

This is a huge relief, as a zebra mussel infestation would be devastating for Flathead Lake and the entire state. But this scare is a warning that we need to step up prevention efforts to protect Flathead Lake from destructive aquatic invaders.

We encouraged Governor Schweitzer to include in his budget proposal a continuation of the \$333,500 annual funding for aquatic invasive species prevention and education which accompanied the Aquatic Invasive Species Act passed in the 2009 session, which he did. This funding supports statewide prevention and education work. We asked Flathead Basin legislators to advocate for this important funding. We have been working with our partners in the Flathead Basin Aquatic Invasive Species work group to seek additional funding for Flathead Basin prevention and education efforts.

We continued to share the story about how damaging a zebra mussel invasion would be and information about how to help prevent it.

Please help us get the word out to anyone bringing a boat here from out of state. Tell them how important it is to thoroughly inspect, drain, clean and dry their boat before launching into Flathead Lake or any other Montana waters. To learn more about zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species, visit our website's Thwarting Aquatic Invaders page.



Quagga mussels coat a pipe from Lake Mead. We don't want them in Flathead Lake!

Big Victories for Flathead Headwaters!

Just a few years ago, it would have been hard to imagine all that has happened during the past year that will protect Flathead Lake and North Fork headwaters for generations to come. 2010 was a year of victories in protecting Flathead Lake from the threat of upstream coal mines.



North Fork Flathead River now protected from mining. photo by: Patrice Halley

The Flathead Lakers celebrated the Montana-British Columbia agreement banning mining in the North Fork Watershed at our annual meeting last summer, which included presenting Governor

Schweitzer with our annual stewardship award.

And, due to the efforts of Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester, over 80% of oil and gas leases in the North Fork were voluntarily given up. Although the bill they introduced last year to end oil and gas leasing in the North Fork did not make it to a vote in the Senate, it did pass the Natural Resources Committee, and our Senators have reintroduced it in the 2011 session.

Just this month, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Montana Nature Conservancy agreed to buy out the leases and pay for the costs already incurred by the two companies that British Columbia had already given permission to move ahead with coal and gold exploration and mine planning. At the same time, British Columbia announced it will introduce legislation to prohibit future energy development and mining in the B.C. Flathead watershed.

This is a tremendous victory for Flathead Lake and clean water that the Lakers have worked toward for three decades.

Saving Critical Lands

Critical Lands Project and River to Lake Initiative partners brought in more funding, conserved more land, and restored more river banks in 2010, expanding the network of protection for vital riparian areas and wetlands along the Flathead River corridor that sustain clean water in the river and lake.

Conservation & Restoration Projects

Individual landowners, with assistance from our partnership, voluntarily conserved another 400 acres of critical lands, adding to a growing network of protected areas along the river which protect clean water downstream, as well as important fish and wildlife habitat and some of the best farm land in the valley. Three new river bank restoration projects were initiated to plant a buffer of trees and shrubs along the river banks to help protect clean water and restore fish and wildlife habitat. Over \$1 million in grants were secured to help families complete on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects. In addition, partners developed a River to Lake Action Plan to guide our work through next summer, and launched a website to improve outreach and communication efforts (www.flatheadrivertolake.org).



Participants in the Stormwater Erosion Education Program class learned how to correctly install erosion control blankets that help prevent erosion during construction projects. photo by Constanza von der Pahlen

Mapping Projects

Since rivers move, it is a good idea to know where they might be headed. The Flathead Lakers produced new Channel Migration Zone maps of the Flathead River from the Old Steel Bridge to the lake. These maps, prepared by Applied Geomorphology, provide information about where the Flathead River can be expected to move laterally in the future. The Flathead Conservation District contracted with the Biological Station to map the depth and velocity of the Flathead River channel, which complements the CMZ maps. These maps provide much-needed tools for river conservation and restoration planning and for Flathead River bank landowners, planners, and anyone who makes decisions that could be affected by river movement.

Workshops

The Flathead Lakers were instrumental in bringing the Stormwater Erosion Education Program class for contractors to the Flathead last spring. Working with partners, including the City of Kalispell Public Works Department, Lake County Departments of Environmental Health and Planning, and the Flathead Basin Commission, a successful class was held for 20 participants. Based on what we learned, we are now working to improve the program, add a riparian buffer component, build a team of local trainers, and develop a certification program for contractors who complete the class.

We also held our fifth annual Living by Water workshop for 20 stream and river bank landowners to help them learn about ways to protect water quality. Numerous partners helped deliver the workshop, including the Flathead Conservation District, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, consultants with Forestoration and Watershed Consulting, and landowner Rusby Seabaugh who guided a tour of his restoration projects.

Planning for Clean Water

The Flathead Lakers were actively involved in reviewing and commenting on a new planning policy, Large Tract Rural Zoning, proposed by Flathead County. The concept provided new opportunities to protect clean water, but the actual language in the proposal fell short, even after numerous planning board workshops and meetings.

At the public hearing, the Flathead Lakers recommended changes to the proposal to improve protection for water quality, without which we opposed its adoption, as it would have provided too little oversight of major, potentially high-density development projects on rural, undeveloped lands. The County Commissioners rejected the proposal.

A setback for clean water policy occurred when the Flathead County Commissioners rescinded subdivision regulation protections for shallow groundwater. Shallow groundwater maps produced by the Flathead Lakers and the Biological Station supported protection of this vulnerable aquifer in the county's subdivision regulations two years ago, in particular limiting density in areas where the groundwater is eight feet or less from the surface.

The commissioners based their decision on the belief that the groundwater provision did not comply with state planning law. We hope to explore opportunities for further

legal research on this topic and, more importantly, ways to protect the vulnerable shallow aquifer, which helps sustain clean water in the Flathead River and Flathead Lake.

Informing Stakeholders

New and Improved Website

If you haven't seen it yet, we encourage you to check out our great new website, still at www.flatheadlakers.org. After 10 years it was time for an update and some new features, including the ability to join, renew or donate online and our new online Store, where you can purchase posters, maps, and Lakers' caps. Check back regularly for all the latest news about Flathead Lake.

New Flathead Lake and Surrounding Watershed Poster

The Lakers created a beautiful new poster depicting an aerial view of Flathead Lake and much of its watershed. We are selling the poster to help fund our work. Check it out at our website. It is also on display at the Somers Bay Cafe, Buns by the Lake in Lakeside, and First Interstate Bank, Gull Printing, and Crows Nest Gallery, all in Polson. We are grateful to William Bowen of the California Geographical Survey for providing the image.



Governor Schweitzer signs a Flathead Watershed poster at the annual meeting. photo by: Karen Swan

Annual Meeting Highlights North Fork Success

We held a terrific annual meeting last summer honoring the governor and premier and celebrating their agreement banning mining in the North Fork. Over 200 members and friends enjoyed a delightful evening on the shore of Yellow Bay. Our meeting was the inaugural event for the Flathead Lake Biological Station's new conference room in the remodeled Elrod Hall.

Educating Watershed Citizens

Our new Education & Outreach Coordinator was busy expanding our education program and spreading the word about water quality threats and solutions. We increased our outreach to community groups, shared information about Flathead Lake and water quality at the Polson Water Daze and Antique & Classic Boat Show events, held teacher trainings for our Becoming Watershed Citizens student education program, and provided a one week watershed-focused summer day camp for kids.

We started work on our new Clean Water Best Management Practices (BMPs) Campaign, which includes creating a BMPs Tool Kit for lakeshore and river bank landowners, BMPs workshops for contractors and lakeshore landowners, providing recommendations to improve lakeshore protection policies and regulations, and evaluating kindergarten through 12th grade watershed education programs and curriculum.

Our new Volunteer Program attracted over 25 new volunteers who helped with out

reach and other projects. Volunteers made it possible to expand our outreach and share our clean water message with more people.

The new Flathead Watershed Sourcebook, authored by Lori Curtis, was released last October. It serves as a primer to the Flathead Watershed and is a great resource for educators. The Lakers helped plan the book, edited selected sections, and supported its development through the Community of Resource Educators (CORE) Watershed Education Committee. The Sourcebook weaves science and art, nature and human nature into an appealing and informative publication. In addition to a wealth of factual information about natural, cultural and economic aspects of the watershed, it includes over 50 "Watershed Perspectives," short stories about interesting people, places and projects. Visit the Sourcebook website at www.flatheadwatershed.org to see what it is all about or contact us for a hard copy.

Be Part of the Clean Water Solution

We are grateful for your support. All of our work to protect Flathead Lake and clean water depends on it! Please consider the following opportunities to make a difference for clean water and give us a call if you would like to learn more.

Leave a legacy for clean water.

Including the Flathead Lakers in your estate planning is a great way to provide lasting support for the protection of clean water in Flathead Lake and its watershed.

Volunteer.

There are many ways your skills and talents can be put to use in the cause of clean water.

Invite a friend or neighbor to join.

Please consider asking friends or neighbors to join the Lakers. More members means greater influence on important decisions affecting Flathead Lake and clean water and additional funding for our important work.

Schedule a Lakers' presentation at your community or service group.

If you belong to a service or community group that would like to learn more about Flathead Lake and threats and solutions for clean water, give the office a call.

Check our website for announcements and action alerts.

We regularly post news and announcements on the home page of our website (www.flatheadlakers.org) and action alerts for actions you can take to support the cause of clean water (on the menu on the left side of the home page). Check back often!

