



# Flathead Lakers 2012 Annual Report

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

– Dick Wollin Flathead Lakers  
President 1988-1994

## *Clean Water Connections*





***Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land.*** – Luna Leopold

## Greetings Fellow Lakers,

Since 1958, the Flathead Lakers have led efforts to protect Flathead Lake and the clean waters that feed it. We know our clean lake and its connected river system matter – for our health, our economy, our communities, our natural heritage.

Flathead Lake and its tributaries matter on a personal level, too. As we've held workshops and given presentations around the watershed over the last year, we've heard some of your stories about why Flathead Lake holds a special place in your heart. Stories about family, about beauty, about exploration, about learning, about joy.

Memories of special times at the lake and on the river connect us to family and friends, to nature and its bounty, to why we care about this special place.

Those life experiences have shaped all of us and brought us together. Our shared love for the lake, for clean streams and rivers, for the life these waters sustain and the memories they have helped make – all these connect us. Together, we are the heart of the Flathead Lakers. And, together, we are protecting Flathead waters to enjoy now and in the future.

We hope this report will give you a sense of what we accomplished together for Flathead Lake and clean water in 2012. Thank you for your support. There is still much to do to protect our waters and it takes all of us. Together, we can meet the challenges ahead and continue to lead the way for clean water in the Flathead Watershed.

***Robin Steinkraus***, Executive Director

***Greg McCormick***, President

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### **Flathead Lakers**

Dedicated to protecting clean water, healthy ecosystems and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed.

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[www.flatheadlakers.org](http://www.flatheadlakers.org)

# Thwarting Aquatic Invasive Species

## Great News From the Governor's Office

Governor Bullock released a "blueprint" for state Aquatic Invasive Species programs and funding in January.

We are delighted that his plan includes nearly all the elements we identified as critical needs, including improving the state structure for its multiple programs administered by different agencies, creating an oversight group, and improving the boat inspection program.

The new plan consolidates the state program and boat inspections in Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and moves the program from FWP's Hatchery Bureau to the Habitat Bureau. The Department of Transportation will be given new responsibility for assuring that commercially-hauled boats are adequately inspected at state Ports of Entry.

It is clear from the blueprint that the Governor is making AIS prevention and control a priority and will ensure the state program is more transparent and accountable.

You can read the entire blueprint on our website. And, please drop the Governor a note to tell him thanks for his leadership on AIS prevention and control!

**We are grateful for your special contributions during 2012 to support and expand the Flathead Lakers' efforts to thwart aquatic invaders. Your contributions supported our volunteer boat inspection project, education and outreach, and participation in the partnership sponsoring AIS consultant Erik Hanson as the Flathead Basin AIS Coordinator.**

**Erik's expertise has been invaluable for building an effective Flathead Watershed AIS program. Together, we are making a difference!**

## Progress Protecting Flathead Lake

You might have wondered why the Flathead Lakers got involved in attempting to eradicate a noxious aquatic weed in Beaver Lake. Perhaps you've never even heard of Beaver Lake.

One reason is that Eurasian Watermilfoil is a very harmful aquatic invader. It can severely damage a lake's fisheries, require expensive ongoing management, limit recreation, and interfere with irrigation and dam operations. There have even been cases of people becoming trapped in the dense vegetation and drowning. We definitely want to keep it out of Flathead Lake.

The other reason is that Beaver Lake is upstream. The water in Beaver Lake flows into Whitefish Lake, which, via the Whitefish River and Flathead River, eventually reaches Flathead Lake. Small fragments of the plant can start new plants. Fragments can break off naturally or can be broken off by boat traffic or other disturbance. Fragments can float downstream infesting every water body in their path.

Or the plant fragments can be caught on a boat, motor, or trailer and be moved to Flathead or other lakes by a careless or unaware boater.

Significant progress was made in 2012 to eliminate the Beaver Lake infestation with bottom barriers and suction dredging. We are hopeful that, in this situation with a small lake and limited access, eradication will be possible.

For the same reasons, the Lakers also participated in the effort to quell curlyleaf pondweed at the Eagle Bend Yacht Harbor.

These are examples of why we take a watershed perspective to protecting Flathead Lake and clean water. And why continuous vigilance is needed to protect Flathead Lake and the waters that feed it.



photo by Laney Hanzel

# Educating Watershed Stewards

Helping people become good watershed stewards is an essential part of the Flathead Lakers' role. Over the past three years, we have improved our outreach programs to provide information and tools to help you, your neighbors, students, boaters, and others make choices that protect and improve water quality. Thanks for being part of the clean water team!

## Landowners Learn About Clean Water Practices at Living by Water Workshop

Thirty-seven landowners participated in our Living by Water Workshop focused on the lakeshore. The workshop included presentations and a field trip to two lakeshore sites to learn about both good and poor lakeshore management and clean water best management practices. Follow up showed that half of the participants had begun implementing new BMPs.



Andrew Belz discusses the benefits of a native plant lakeshore buffer at the Living by Water Workshop.

## Lakers Partner to Offer Storm Water Conference

The Flathead Lakers helped plan and organize the 2012 Montana Storm Water Conference held in Kalispell. Engineers, general contractors, excavators, and land use planners from the Flathead and around the state learned about managing stormwater. The Lakers gave a presentation on natural landscapes for stormwater management and led a field tour to a restoration project on the Flathead River, a wetland, and the Bigfork Storm Water Project.

## Clean Water Tool Kit Offers Many Ways to Learn

Last year, the Lakers completed our review and evaluation of over 50 BMPs outreach programs and best education practices used around the country to craft our Clean Water BMPs (Best Management Practices) Tool Kit.

The tool kit is designed to help waterfront landowners make choices for managing their land and household that will protect clean water. The tool kit has various components, including one-

page fact sheets about specific practices, like lake-friendly lawns and maintaining septic systems, more in-depth information resources, an interactive "We Care" map on our website, and education and training opportunities, like the Walk & Talk tours.

## Students Becoming Watershed Stewards

Our Becoming Watershed Stewards program for students was in great demand last year.

We expanded our education program for students to three additional schools, reaching nearly 200 students. We organized and led 3 field trips.

We trained teachers at two schools using our Flathead Watershed education trunk.

And, with the Flathead Conservation District, we conducted a Project WET and Clean Water Education Workshop attended by 21 teachers from throughout the Flathead Valley.



Volunteer Libby Smith demonstrates how stormwater runoff can pollute rivers and lakes during a field trip to the Bio. Station.

## New Volunteer Boat Inspection Project Off to a Great Start – Thank you, Volunteers!



The Flathead Lakers launched the first volunteer boat inspections on Flathead Lake last summer.

Thirteen trained volunteers spoke with 72 boaters during the 4 days of the pilot project to inform them about harmful aquatic invasive species and how they can help prevent their spread. Boaters were grateful for the information and supportive of the volunteer project.

We encouraged the boaters to clean their boats every time they leave a water body to help prevent new invasions.

Aquatic Invasive Species expert Erik Hanson trains volunteers on inspecting boats for zebra and quagga mussels.

## First Walk & Talk Tour Focused on Vegetated Lakeshore Buffers

More than 20 intrepid landowners, contractors and realtors braved a brisk November breeze to learn about the value of vegetated buffers at the Flathead Lakers first Walk & Talk Tour.

Participants learned about clean water best management practices (BMPs) and the lakeshore buffer demonstration project that is planned for the tour site. They learned how vegetation filters nutrients and sediment from stormwater runoff to provide a natural water cleaning system.

Watch for an announcement later this spring about our next Walk & Talk tour.



Walk & Talk Tour participants examine the crumbling sea wall that will be replaced with a more natural shoreline when the vegetated buffer is planted on this property. *photo by Laney Hanzel*

## Landowner Visits Provide Site-Specific BMPs Ideas

In the second year of this program, the Lakers met with 8 lakeshore owners at their request to identify opportunities and provide recommendations for site-specific best management practices to protect Flathead Lake and clean water.

Of the 21 landowner visits completed during the past two years, every landowner has adopted at least one new practice to help protect water quality. We are impressed with their commitment to clean water!

Contact Heidi for more information or to schedule a site visit.



The Flathead Lakers celebrated River to Lake Initiative conservation successes at our 2012 annual meeting. President Dick Siderius presented the 2012 Stewardship Award to River to Lake Initiative partner Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Kris Temple, Gael Bissell, and Joel Tohtz (l-r) accepted the award on behalf of FWP. *photo by Laney Hanzel*

## Volunteers Share the Lakers' Clean Water Message at Summer Events

The Flathead Lakers' dedicated volunteers and board members were busy last summer spreading the word about how to protect Flathead Lake and clean water.

For the third year, we staffed a display at the *Antique and Classic Boat Show* in Lakeside, where we had the opportunity to talk to a lot of boaters about the threat of aquatic invasive species and how they can help protect Flathead Lake.

We sponsored a Flathead Lakers team and had our display at the inaugural *Dragon Boat Festival*. This event attracted over 3,000 spectators and paddlers from near and far, providing a great opportunity to inform people about protecting beautiful Flathead Lake. Our team had a great time and we're already planning to participate in the 2nd annual festival.

Long-time members hosted a "*get to know the Flathead Lakers*" party at their lakeshore home. Board and staff members met new and old friends and shared stories about the Lakers' lake protection work.

We also gave *presentations* on Flathead Lake and clean water threats and solutions to several community groups. Please contact us if your group would like a presentation.

To all of our volunteers and friends who helped spread the clean water message last summer – ***Thank You!***



# Saving Critical Lands - *Water, Wildlife, Way of Life*

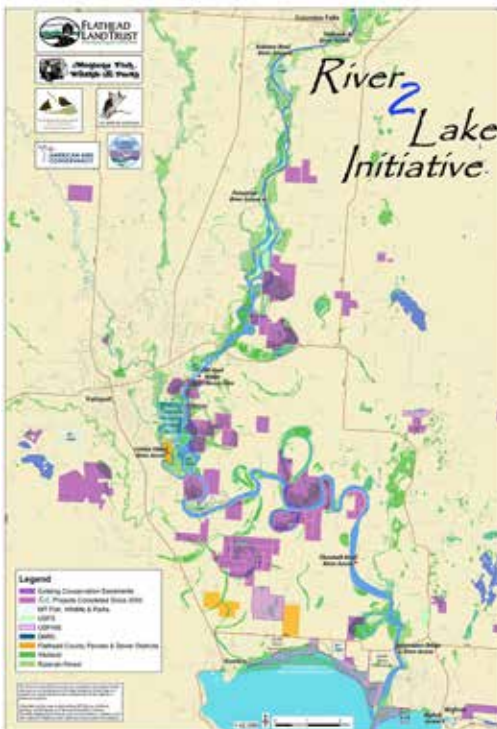
## Conservation Success

Over the past decade, numerous landowners along the Flathead River and North Shore of Flathead Lake have worked with River to Lake Initiative partners to conserve a significant amount of what we call “Critical Lands.”

The results are impressive. Together, we have protected over 5,000 acres of critical wetlands, riparian areas, and prime farmland, and restored nearly 3 miles of riparian habitat along the river. The conservation network has grown to 11,000 acres of private and public protected critical lands.

Nearly half of the total amount of land conserved is due to the work of the River to Lake Initiative

The benefits? Sustaining our Flathead River and Lake natural heritage of clean water, abundant fish and wildlife, outstanding recreation values, prime farm soils, and scenic character.



The purple areas on this map show private land conservation.

## New Projects



“The presence of the river and the wildlife it supports defines what we love about our property.” – Eric Smith

The River to Lake Initiative completed two conservation projects in 2012, protecting 400 acres of critical lands.

Erik and Becca Smith placed a conservation easement on 97 acres of exceptional riparian habitat on the Flathead river through the Montana Land Reliance.

Their property north of McWenneger Slough includes side river channels that support a wide variety of waterfowl and other wildlife.

The second project protected 305 acres of important wetlands and productive farm land near the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production area, a popular bird watching area.

The Flathead Land Trust facilitated a complex project which included placing a conservation easement on the property, selling one-third of the property to a neighboring farmer who will keep it in agricultural production and transferring one-third to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for addition to the Wildlife Production Area.

**The Flathead Lakers work with our River to Lake partners to help plan, secure funding for, and implement projects like these.**

**For more information, visit: [www.flatheadrivertolake.org](http://www.flatheadrivertolake.org)**



“This project... significantly increases the wetland habitat of the Smith Lake Wildlife Production Area, helps improve water quality, keeps another parcel of agricultural land in local food production..., and preserves the beautiful scenery we all enjoy.” – Marilyn Wood, Flathead Land Trust

# Protecting Transboundary Headwaters

## Work Continues to Enact North Fork Protection Legislation

Over the past year, the Flathead Lakers continued to support federal legislation to prevent new oil and gas leasing in the North Fork Flathead Watershed.

Senators Baucus and Tester reintroduced the North Fork Watershed Protection Act (now S 255) in the Senate in February, 2013.

The Flathead Lakers greatly appreciate our Senators' leadership and perseverance in protecting Flathead waters. Passage of this legislation will help fulfill the terms of Montana's agreement with British Columbia.

“This bill is about doing the right thing today that will pay dividends for tomorrow...We owe it to our kids and grandkids to protect the North Fork on all fronts - through legislation and by working hard to get oil and gas companies to retire their leases in the North Fork without asking taxpayers to pick up the tab.”

– **Senator Max Baucus**

photo by Garth Lenz



## Successful Fundraising Effort Protects British Columbia North Fork

The Flathead Lakers were delighted to learn last fall that another important part of the transboundary North Fork protection effort was achieved. The Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Nature Conservancy Montana were successful in raising \$10 million to protect the British Columbia Flathead River Watershed by funding compensation for mining companies' exploration expenses incurred prior to B.C.'s North Fork mining ban. We congratulate and thank these organizations for achieving this significant goal.

## Challenges Remain for North Fork

The achievements over the past few years in protecting North Fork headwaters have been tremendous, starting with the landmark agreement between British Columbia and Montana in 2010.

But there are still challenges. Cline Mining Corp. filed a lawsuit last spring against British Columbia over its ban on mining in the North Fork seeking \$500 million in damages. And the Dominion Coal Block, which straddles the North Fork and Elk River Watersheds in B.C., is not yet secure from mining as it is owned by the Canadian federal government.

# Advocating for Clean Water

## Lakers Host Meeting with Legislators

Last summer the Lakers' board of directors held a joint meeting with area legislators and the Flathead Basin Commission to discuss needs for aquatic invasive species prevention and for Flathead Lake water quality monitoring.

We followed up by providing fact sheets on both topics. Through the summer and fall we worked with partners to develop legislation to increase funding for and improve the state AIS program. At the time this is written, the news from Helena is positive for funding these programs. We greatly appreciate our local legislators' support on these issues.

## Flathead County Weakens Water Protection Policies

Last October, the Flathead County Commissioners revised the county Growth Policy, including weakening policies that protect shallow groundwater, riparian areas, and floodplains.

The Flathead Lakers participated in the comprehensive public process that developed the Growth Policy adopted by the Commissioners in 2007. The Lakers provided extensive comments, testimony, and supporting documentation to support

strong water quality protection both during the Growth Policy's development and throughout the review process over the past two years.

We are disappointed the Commissioners chose to weaken policies that help safeguard Flathead Lake and other waters. The Lakers' board and staff discussed building relationships to broaden the constituency for clean water policies at our recent strategic planning retreat.

## Lakers Comment on State Plan

The Lakers commented on the draft Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan. The plan guides actions by the state and others to reduce polluted runoff.

## Lakers Participate in Lakeshore Regulations Review

The Lakers supported strengthening the Lake County Lakeshore regulations to better protect water quality. We shared information with the county planners, engaged experts on relevant topics, and presented recommendations during the planning board's review sessions.

# Heidi Sedivy Joins the Flathead Lakers' Staff

The Flathead Lakers welcome Heidi Sedivy as our new Education and Outreach Coordinator. Heidi joined our staff in November and she immediately dove in planning projects and events, meeting with partners, and bringing new ideas to our education program.

Heidi brings to the position experience and knowledge about aquatic invasive species in addition to experience in water education. She previously served as the Education Coordinator for the Sanders County Eurasian Watermilfoil Task Force, where she developed and administered their aquatic invasive species public outreach program. She has worked with the Flathead Basin Aquatic Invasive Species Work Group since 2009. And she worked on the Flathead Basin aquatic plant survey with consultant and Flathead Basin AIS



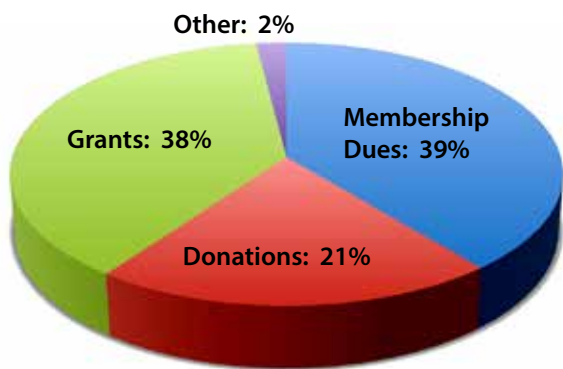
Coordinator Erik Hanson last summer.

While earning a B.S. in Resource Conservation at the University of Montana, Heidi spent her free time teaching local students about water quality with the Watershed Education Network. Her enthusiasm and dedication working with K-12 students was recognized with UM's Student Volunteer of the Year Award in 2009.

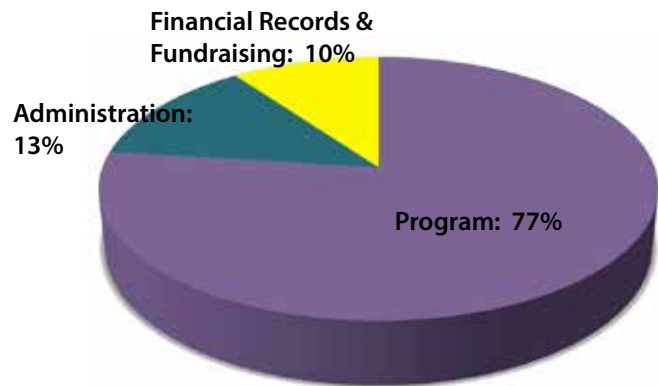
Heidi loves exploring new trails and back roads on her bicycle when weather permits, and knitting things for friends when it doesn't.

If you would like to learn more about the Lakers education program, schedule a presentation for your community group, or schedule a visit to your lakeshore or stream bank property, please give Heidi a call.

## 2012 Income & Expenses



Total Income: \$212,089.64



Total Expenses: \$187,411.38

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**Thank you** – members, businesses, donors, foundations, partners and volunteers for your generosity and commitment that make our work possible. You are all making a difference to protect Flathead Lake and clean water.

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