



Flathead Lakers 2013 Annual Report

Clean Water Connections



*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



Greetings Fellow Lakers and Friends,

Your generosity during the past year helped us reach out to more people to engage them in clean water and lake stewardship. Together, we are making a difference for the future of the lake and watershed we love.

Building connections with waterfront landowners, boaters, anglers, public officials, resource managers, scientists, teachers, students, contractors, landscapers, citizens, prospective members and donors is key to the Flathead Lakers' future success.

We created our Education & Outreach Coordinator position in 2009 in order to strengthen the Lakers' capacity to make those vital connections. Christi Buffington helped build our education program, centered on helping people understand how their choices affect water quality.

When Christi moved to Helena, we were fortunate to have Heidi Sedivy come on board. Heidi enthusiastically plunged into creating those vital connections among people and resources to better protect the clean waters that sustain our communities, livelihoods, and quality of life.

We saw great results from our efforts in 2013, and we expect even bigger achievements in 2014.

For example, with the generous support of a Lakers' member, we will be creating a new vegetated lakeshore buffer to serve as a demonstration for lakeshore landowners on how a buffer can protect water quality and be beautiful.

Everyone can make a difference, so the more people we can reach with information and tools to help them make choices that protect and improve Flathead Lake and its tributaries, the brighter the future for the lake, its watershed, and everyone who loves this special place.

We are grateful to all of you who made our progress and accomplishments in 2013 possible. Thank you for being part of our "clean water team!"

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Flathead Lakers

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

213 1st St W, #208

PO Box 70

Polson, MT 59860

406-883-1346

www.flatheadlakers.org

Thanks Steve!

Flathead Lakers Board Member Steve Rosso went above and beyond last year to help the Lakers thwart aquatic invaders.

The Flathead Basin Commission honored Steve with their 2013 Paul Williams Stewardship Award. FBC Executive Director Caryn Miske thanked Steve for his “outstanding work” on the curlyleaf pondweed removal project. “Steve took the initiative to make the project a success, personally contacting homeowner associations and meeting with dozens of property owners” to gain support for the project.

Lakers Legacy Circle

Thank you to everyone who made a legacy gift to the Flathead Lakers in the past year. We are grateful for your vision and support for the long-term success of our work to protect Flathead Lake and clean water.

Thank You Volunteers!

Our volunteer program is expanding every year. More than 100 people helped teach students about our watershed, clean up litter along the highway, plant trees and shrubs to restore riparian buffers, maintain our new Facebook page, provide pro-bono professional services, and much more! We accomplish so much because you give so generously of your time and expertise.

Saving Critical Lands

A Great Start for New Flathead River Steward Program

Big Sky Watershed Corps Member Kirstin Gruver, our 2013 Flathead River Steward, reluctantly left last November after completing her 11-month term working with River to Lake Initiative partners and landowners to restore vegetated riparian buffers along the river.

Kirstin and volunteers planted more than 1,400 new trees and shrubs. She watered them and pulled weeds around them, measured their growth, and reported back to landowners and partners about progress. Kirstin grew to love the Flathead River and the beautiful patchwork of farms, forests, and wetlands that harbor such an array of fish, birds, and other wildlife.

Kirstin's enthusiasm and success helping landowners restore riparian buffers to protect clean water and healthy habitat gave partners encouragement to continue the program for a second year. With the help of our partners, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and a new partner, the Flathead Conservation District, we are hosting Big Sky Watershed Corps Member Aaron Clausen as the new Flathead River Steward.



Kristen and volunteers planting a riparian buffer.
—photo by Constanza von der Pahlen



Welcome 2014 Flathead River Steward
Aaron Clausen.

Aaron brings an impressive background in river ecology and a desire to learn and build partnerships. He is already busy working with partners to plan restoration projects for this spring and summer.

In 2013, the Flathead Lakers received grant funding to start the program from the High Stakes Foundation, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. We thank our members and funding partners for making this new program possible.

Conservation Success

The network of conservation along the Flathead River and the lake's north shore continues to grow. With our Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners and landowners who love and value their land's unique qualities, we protected over 205 acres of critical wetlands and riparian areas along the Flathead River and the lake's north shore in 2013.

In addition, the 147-acre Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area on the Flathead River, previously purchased by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, was successfully transferred to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. FWP plans to protect and restore the riverbanks and associated habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Protecting the floodplain and riparian forests will help maintain clean water in the river and in the shallow groundwater aquifer. FWP will manage the area for open space, native fisheries



River to Lake partners have been working for a long time to protect this 189-acre North Shore property that had been for sale for several years. Its recent purchase by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks increases the amount of contiguous wetlands protected and managed to conserve and enhance waterfowl and wetland habitat at the North Shore.

—photo by Karen Nichols

habitat, and public recreation.

Flathead Lakers Critical Lands Program Director Constanza von der Pahlen coordinated a major grant writing effort that, if approved, will protect over 400 acres and provide funding for new riparian restoration projects over the next three years. Completing the nearly \$1 million North American Wetland Conservation Act grant proposal was a tremendous team effort. Thanks, team!

Thwarting Aquatic Invaders

We've come a long way since 2006 when Flathead Lakers board and staff members met with Biological Station scientist Bonnie Ellis and then Montana Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator Eileen Ryce to explore ways to improve local efforts to thwart zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species.

From our vantage point at that time, the threat was huge, the consequences of an accidental zebra mussel introduction into Flathead Lake were dire, and the actions to prevent it were meager. The threat is still huge and the potential consequences dire, but awareness and understanding of the threat and prevention efforts have flourished.

In 2013, your support helped:

- **Pass legislation** that improves the state AIS program and provides additional funding for statewide AIS prevention and control, including boat inspection stations at the state borders and key locations within the state, like the Ronan station.
- **Contain, control, and nearly eradicate the only infestation of the harmful aquatic weed Eurasian watermilfoil in the Flathead** – it looks promising that with a little more weed removal next summer, eradication of this invader at Beaver Lake will be achieved!



Flathead Lakers Education & Outreach Coordinator Heidi Sedivy cleaning a boat at the Lake Mead Level 2 Watercraft Inspection Training last spring. This 2-day training included field inspections of quagga mussel contaminated boats and hands-on training in the protocols and procedures for watercraft decontamination.

- **Initiate efforts to remove the invasive curlyleaf pondweed from Flathead Lake** and the Flathead River - diver dredging will continue next summer.



Ace Diving personnel removing the invasive aquatic weed curlyleaf pondweed from a site on Flathead Lake. —photo by Jim Simpson

- Support our collaborative effort with Lake County, the Flathead Basin Commission, and others to **retain aquatic invasive species expert Erik Hanson to provide expertise** for AIS prevention, control, rapid response, and local and regional coordination.
- Expand Lakers’ outreach to **inform more people about the threat** and how they can help thwart aquatic invaders. In 2013, the Lakers:
 - created a new informational display that was exhibited at eight events around the watershed reaching hundreds of people last summer
 - trained volunteer boat inspectors and led a volunteer boat inspection and education program at Flathead Lake boat ramps for a second year
 - gave presentations about AIS threats and solutions to community groups
 - installed additional “Tiny Critter, Huge Threat” warning signs at boat ramps and replaced missing or damaged signs.

Safeguarding Flathead Lake

Your support fosters a strong and credible voice for clean water. The Flathead Lakers advocate, on your behalf, for the lake and water quality.

Water quality monitoring: Last year, we continued to champion this essential program by working with local legislators to ensure that the state continues to fund it. We also supported the Flathead Lake Biological Station’s efforts to raise funds for their monitoring endowment, the proceeds of which supplement the state funding.

TMDL: We continued to participate in the process led by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency to determine the sources of nutrient pollution in Flathead Lake and its tributaries. The agencies completed their nutrient loading model and it is now being tested and refined. It will be used in TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) Phase II to determine the best opportunities to reduce nutrient pollution.

Flathead Lake Water Quality Standards: When we learned that DEQ intended to propose new water quality standards for Flathead Lake that were less stringent than the

current TMDL water quality targets, we urged DEQ not to do so, as information coming soon from the TMDL Phase II modeling work and from a lake food web study conducted by the Biological Station is critical for setting appropriate standards. We are pleased that DEQ Director Tracy Stone-Manning responded that DEQ would not proceed with a primary productivity standard for the lake at this time.

Concerns about polluted runoff: Lakers' board and staff members met with Dayton residents, at their request, to discuss stormwater runoff problems and potential water contamination by septic systems. We reviewed old documents and engaged Lake County, the Flathead Lake Biological Station, and others in an effort to better define the problem and possible solutions.

Montana Water Supply Initiative: Flathead Lakers Board Member Ted Williams continues to represent the Flathead Lakers on the Clark Fork Task Force. The task force was selected by Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation to serve as the advisory council for our watershed for its two-year project to develop strategies to meet Montana's future water needs and update the state water plan. The Flathead Lakers also submitted comments to the task force identifying topics we believe must be considered during plan development.



Flathead Lake Biological Station research scientists Jim Craft and Tyler Tappenbeck conducting lake monitoring on the Jessie B. research vessel.
—photo by Flathead Lake Biological Station

Advocacy to Safeguard Flathead Lake:

“Watershed Wednesday” at the 2013 Montana Legislature: At our display on Flathead Lake and its watershed, we had the opportunity to talk to legislators, agency representatives and others about threats to the lake and water quality and opportunities to address them.

Foys Bend gauging station: We supported the Flathead River Commission's effort to install a new gauging station at Foys Bend on the river above Flathead Lake to measure water flows. The gauge will provide information needed to better understand river levels, flows, and flooding at Foys Bend in relationship to the existing gauges near Columbia Falls and Polson.

Policies, plans and proposals: We continued to comment on proposed land use and resource management policies, plans, and development proposals to advocate for water quality protection measures.

Columbia Falls aluminum plant investigation: The Lakers supported EPA's study to determine whether environmental contamination at the closed aluminum plant site poses a risk to the community and environment.

Educating Watershed Citizens

Everyone cares about clean water, but sometimes people don't have the information they need to make choices that protect our waters. The Flathead Lakers provides information and resources to help people become better clean water stewards.

Clean water practices for landowners: In 2013, Lakers staff and board members visited 13 lakeshore landowners and 4 riverbank landowners, at their request, to provide site-specific information and recommendations. All but two of these landowners said they plan to adopt one or more new clean water practices.

Lakeshore Walk & Talk Tours: 75 people participated in our lakeshore tours last year to learn about ways they can protect water quality.

Restoration & Conservation Tours: Over 40 landowners, resource managers, and others participated in three tours of riverbank and wetland conservation and restoration projects. These tours provided information about the benefits of critical lands conservation, how restoration projects along the Flathead River are protecting water quality, healthy habitat, and improving river bank stability, and how the River to Lake Initiative partners can help landowners with conservation and restoration projects.



Flathead Lakers members chat with board members on the deck at the Glacier Camp and Conference Center at our 2013 Annual Meeting. —photo by Laney Hanzel

Presentations & Events: We shared information about threats to the lake and solutions to protect our waters with over 125 people at 3 community meetings. We spoke with dozens of people visiting our booths at the Antique and Classic Boat Show at Lakeside and the Dragon Boat Festival at Bigfork. We shared information and fun facts during our Tamarack Tap Night in Lakeside and at our first Flathead Lake Trivia Night at the East Shore Smoke House.

Our new aquatic invasive species information kiosk was seen by hundreds of people at 8 different events, including the Montana Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Kalispell, the Family Forestry Expo in Columbia Falls, the Huckleberry Festival in Swan Lake, the Dragon Boat Festival, and our annual meeting.

Our Flathead River Steward conducted education activities for over 350 young people, including an activity to demonstrate how aquifers work, a tree planting project for Girl Scouts, four watershed education activities for a Boys and Girls Club, a willow planting exercise with Pleasant Valley School students, and riparian education at the annual Flathead Forestry Expo.

Becoming Watershed Citizens: Through teacher training workshops, field trips, our Flathead Watershed educational trunk, and hands-on activities, we reached over 300 students, 10 teachers, and 6 schools with water and watershed learning opportunities.

Protecting Flathead Headwaters

In 2013, we saw continued progress in protecting the North Fork Flathead watershed from energy development. The achievements over the last three years that help ensure that North Fork waters remain clean are truly remarkable. *Thank you* for supporting the Flathead Lakers' efforts over the past three *decades* to protect Flathead headwaters.

North Fork Bill Passed by Congressional Committees

Both the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee approved versions of the North Fork Watershed Protection Act with unanimous support. The Lakers continued to support these bills that remove the North Fork from oil and gas leasing, and we are delighted to see our Congressional delegation realizing success in shepherding them through the legislative process.

Thank You, Max!

Protecting Flathead Lake and its watershed was a priority for Senator Max Baucus during his entire career representing Montana in Washington D.C. He has hiked, camped, and floated here and he understands the area's natural values and their contribution to Montana's economy.

When the Cabin Creek coal mine proposal in the North Fork Flathead headwaters in British Columbia emerged in the 1970s, Baucus, then a new member of the House of Representatives, found funding for the Flathead River Environmental Impact Study, the first comprehensive scientific study of the North Fork ecosystem.

He continued to fight for the Flathead and was a leader in efforts that led to achieving protection for the North Fork headwaters in place today.

In 2010, he introduced the North Fork Watershed Protection Act, while also working with numerous companies to encourage them to voluntarily relinquish oil and gas leases in the North Fork. His efforts resulted in retire-

ment of 80% of those leases. He has reintroduced the North Fork act in every session, achieving successful passage by the Senate Natural Resources Committee last year.

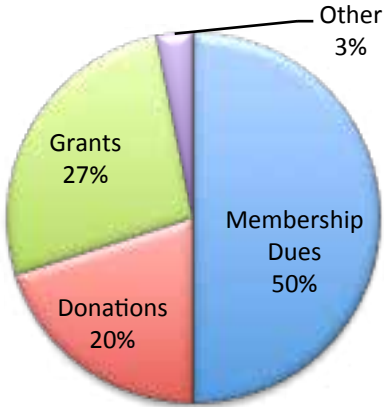
Thank you, Max, for your dedication and perseverance in protecting one of Montana's most iconic landscapes and the clean waters we cherish.



Former Lakers President Larry Ashcraft and Executive Director Robin Steinkraus met with former Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar and Senator Baucus on the banks of the Flathead River during their tour of the North Fork in 2009.

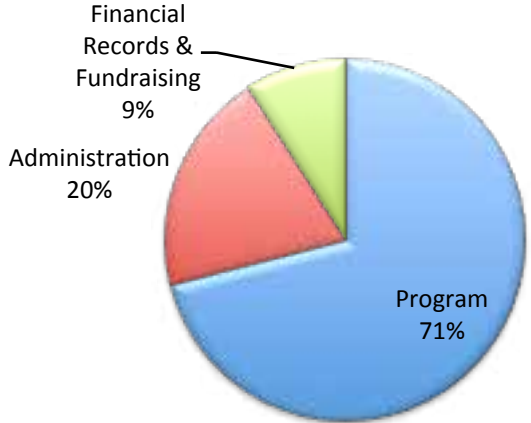
2013 Income & Expenses

Income



Total Income: \$167,598.00

Expenses



Total Expenses: \$166,196.00

2013 Supporters

Categories represent total annual gifts. We greatly appreciate your membership dues and your special contributions to support our aquatic invasive species prevention and control work and other projects.

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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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