

Flathead Coalition Supports Senate Joint Resolution 7

The 30-year-old Flathead Coalition represents diverse U.S. and Canadian advocates for clean water and healthy fish and wildlife in the transboundary Flathead and Kootenai watersheds. Its primary focus since 1975 has been large-scale coalfield development schemes in the remote Canadian headwaters of the North Fork of the Flathead River. The Coalition was resurrected in early 2004 to examine proposed coalbed methane drilling in the Flathead as well as the Wigwam and Elk rivers, which feed Lake Kootenai. For more information: www.flatheadcoalition.org

We support SJ 7 because:

- It embraces the concept of "look before leaping." Despite numerous requests from **Governor Judy Martz**, the British Columbia government declined to conduct baseline studies prior to auctioning drilling licenses for coalbed methane. Even BC's own consultants called for three years of baseline water monitoring studies prior to drilling. Oil and gas companies agreed with Gov. Martz's logic and decided not bid on the auction.
- Future coalfield development proposals are likely, but there is **no immediate controversy**. The nations should assess the region's natural, cultural and economic resources and values to guide future decisions. The transboundary wildlands provide some of the finest hunting, fishing, camping, and wildlife appreciation in North America.
- The purpose of the **International Joint Commission**, established by the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty, is to prevent and resolve disputes relating to boundary watersheds. The IJC has stated its willingness to facilitate a transboundary study if called upon by the American and Canadian governments.
- **Sen. Conrad Burns**, in a letter to the Flathead Coalition strongly supports completion of a transboundary environmental assessment. After meeting with IJC Chairman Dennis Schornack in September, Sen. Burns wrote: "... [Although] there have been no bids for the B.C. coalbed methane tenure ... I believe it is still very important to complete an environmental assessment and allow for a review of the potential impacts before making any final decisions. I encouraged Mr. Schornack and the IJC to complete a comprehensive analysis and determine a course of action that is in the best interest of citizens on both sides of the border."
- The **Fernie (B.C.) City Council** passed three resolutions in 2004 asking the government of British Columbia to defer any auction of coalbed methane tenures for the Crowsnest Coalfield until completion of a comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts of large-scale gas exploration and production on the environment, economy and human community of the Elk Valley.
- The Wigwam River, which begins in Montana and empties into the Elk River in Canada, is the most important bull trout spawning stream for Lake Kootenai, which supports a bull trout fishing season. Coalfield development is being considered in the Wigwam watershed.

Senate Joint Resolution 7 affirms Montana's bipartisan support for applying sound science and economic sense to decisions that may impact the transboundary Flathead and Kootenai region's world-class natural values. It calls on the two federal governments and the International Joint Commission to fulfill their mission to **prevent disputes** before a new international controversy needs to be resolved.