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BILL NO. SB 138

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

January 7, 2005

Glenn Roush, Chairman
Montana Senate Natural Resources Committee
State Capitol
Helena, Montana

Dear Chairman Roush and members of the Committee:

As President of the Flathead Lakers, and a newly appointed citizen member of the Flathead Basin Commission, I write in support of Senate Bill 138.

Flathead Lakers, Inc. is a nonprofit, grassroots organization which has worked for 46 years to protect water quality in Flathead Lake and its watershed. Its membership presently totals in excess of 1,000 members, a number which is growing.

Flathead Lake and its tributaries are magnificent assets of the State of Montana. Their protection is a compelling purpose for the state, both in terms of good stewardship, and to foster and enhance the economic benefits they generate.

The Lakers are proponents of the Flathead Basin Commission. It plays a critical role in protecting all Flathead waters. The Commission brings together land and resource managers with jurisdictional responsibilities in the basin, including the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Province of British Columbia. This provides a multi-jurisdictional focus and the opportunity for cooperation on water quality and Flathead Basin concerns that does not exist in any other entity.

The Commission boasts many accomplishments. It was created twenty years ago to address the ramifications of proposed coal mining within the Flathead Basin watershed, in Canada. The Commission continues to play a leadership role in protecting the basin from potential threats of coal field development in Canada.

The Commission has achieved important education, water quality monitoring and stream restoration accomplishments. These include involving numerous citizens in protecting water quality through local watershed groups and educating citizens about how to mitigate contaminated water running off their property. The commission has coordinated volunteer water quality monitoring programs throughout the basin, complementing the core programs performed by the CSK Tribes, and by the University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station at Yellow Bay. It has restored a number of disturbed riparian sites.

With continued population growth, and the likelihood of new coalfield development proposals in British Columbia, the Flathead Basin Commission is needed now more than ever. The Commission has functioned with modest core funding authorized by the legislature to generate substantial grant funding for its programs, multiplying the state's financial support by seven to eight times.

SB 138 will assure continuance of this important governor's commission, make permanent the administrative basing of the commission in the DNRC, and strengthen its membership. I strongly urge the Committee to support SB 138.

Sincerely,

Paul Williams
President