

SB199

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Letter to the editor of the Missoulian

January 9, 2004

On September 9, 2003, public works director Bruce Bender told the press that the City had bent over backwards to allow Rattlesnake residents opportunity for public comment about the Rattlesnake sewer project. On January 6 Mayor Kadas told reporters the City has made it easier for residents to participate in Missoula government decision making processes. Both of these individuals have misled the press and the public.

In Spring 2002, the City mailed a postcard to Rattlesnake residents inviting them to a "Public Meeting" where, according to the postcard, "public comment" was to be received. I was one of the people who attended that meeting. I raised my hand for more than an hour while City engineer Steve King and public works director Bruce Bender ignored me and others who tried to comment. Finally, I stepped out onto the gym floor where I told Mr. Bender I wanted to comment. He refused to let me talk, even though the meeting was supposed to be conducted in compliance with Montana state grant agency rules requiring that public comment be taken and recorded. In violation of the Montana Constitution, City officials refused to hear public comments at the December 4, 2002 "public meeting," at February 2003 public works committee meetings, and at the earlier April meeting.

Montana's laws have been enacted to ensure public involvement and input in government decisions. Recently I reviewed the Environmental Assessment for the Rattlesnake sewer project. Having worked on preparation and review of numerous EAs and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), I found the Rattlesnake EA document to be totally inadequate, misleading, and lacking in supportable facts. Public input is required by law and yet the public has been virtually excluded from the preparation of the EA. It is against the law to lock citizens out of the process.

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Hookups don't guarantee safety from dirty water

One cannot help but question the motives of the Clark Fork Coalition in its continued mantra of "sewer the Rattlesnake." Nearly 100 percent of well test data in the Rattlesnake, both by the city and private entities, show very good water quality. The worst water is found in several areas of Missoula with sewer.

For some reason yet to be revealed, the Clark Fork Coalition has failed to consider the contribution of nitrate-loaded lawn fertilizers and herbicides to Rattlesnake Creek, the aquifer and the Clark Fork River. Further, we have heard no words from it about nitrate contribution to our surface and groundwaters from horse and cattle operations along the creek. For some reason, the Clark Fork Coalition has blinders on and chooses to chant its sewer song. It has apparently failed to grasp the reality that the Clark Fork River is seriously polluted from sewers in Missoula and

communities upstream. State water quality specialist Gary Ingman's three-year study of nutrient pollution of the Clark Fork, cited in the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Basin Water Quality Study, traces river-greening algae to phosphorus and nitrogen discharged by sewer plants, industrial polluters and farms and ranches along the Clark Fork and its tributaries. The increased discharge volume from Missoula's \$19 million sewer plant upgrade will make matters worse.

The Clark Fork Coalition has also failed to address the issue of sewage sludge. This hazardous waste is spread on our lawns and gardens after its "recycling" at EKO Compost and then washed back into our waters through storm drains, which dump directly into Missoula's sole source aquifer.

The Clark Fork Coalition should address the obvious: the Missoula Sewer Plant has fouled the Clark Fork River and will continue to do so. The stench is apparent to nearby Wal-Mart shoppers and those who live downstream.

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The January 24 MISSOULIAN headline "Montana delegation brings home the bacon" might more accurately have read "...the tainted bacon." The appropriation for Rattlesnake sewer was requested by Senator Conrad Burns AFTER he was repeatedly informed by citizens that the paperwork submitted to him by Missoula Mayor Mike Kadas contained falsified information. The Kadas submission included language from the Rattlesnake Preliminary Engineering Report which falsely stated that residents were generally in favor of the sewer project AND that public comment had been taken. Those of us in the Rattlesnake who attended the City's so-called "public meetings" at Rattlesnake School know the truth: public comment was forbidden and suppressed. Rattlesnake residents were NOT in support of the project but opposed it by an overwhelming majority of 70%.

In addition, as part of his appropriation request, Kadas included the subdistrict of the Rattlesnake project which had successfully protested out of the SID with 82% signed opposition. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "fraud" as "deception deliberately practiced in order to secure unfair or unlawful gain." Let's call it what it is.

Perhaps serendipitously, the January 24 MISSOULIAN also carried, as their "Thought for the day" the following: 'Truth has no special time of its own. Its hour is now—always.'—Albert Schweitzer, German-born missionary and Nobel laureate (1975-1965). Both Senator Burns and Mayor Kadas should heed Schweitzer's words.

submitted 1/28/04 via email by Loreen Folsom
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