

Flathead County
Board of Commissioners

(406) 758-5503

Pamela J. Holmquist
Gary D. Krueger
Calvin L. Scott



September 6, 2013

The Honorable John Brenden
Environmental Quality Council
P. O. Box 201704
Helena, Montana 59620-1704

RECEIVED

SEP 09 2013

**LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE**

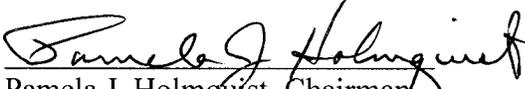
RE: SJ15 Survey

Dear Senator Brenden:

Please find enclosed the completed SJ15 Survey for Flathead County.

Should you need further information or have any questions, please contact me at (406) 758-5508.

Best regards,
FLATHEAD COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS


Pamela J. Holmquist, Chairman

Enc: As stated



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

PO BOX 201704
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1704
(406) 444-3742

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DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE
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HELEN THIGPEN, Staff Attorney
NADINE SPENCER, Secretary
JOE KOLMAN, Legislative Environmental Analyst

Flathead

SJ-15 SURVEY OF MONTANA COUNTY COMMISSIONS

This official state survey is required by the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 15 by the 2013 Legislature for a study evaluating the management of certain federal lands in Montana, assessing risks, and identifying solutions. Your county was selected for this survey because 15% or more of the land in your county is managed by a federal agency.

Surveys returned by Aug. 23 will be distributed to the EQC for the September meeting. If it is not possible to meet that deadline, please return the survey by Nov. 1. Attach any supplemental explanations, comments, suggestions, or other information your board finds pertinent.

PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

1. Do current wildfire conditions on federal lands within your county pose a significant threat to:

Public Health and Safety Public Property Private Property

2. Do you believe fire hazard on federally managed lands should be reduced to protect public health and safety within your county?

Yes No Unsure

3. Regarding the water supply your citizens use, does current federal land management of watersheds:

Optimize water yield Diminish water yield Have no impact

4. How important is it for people of your county to have motorized access to public lands for sustenance activities such as gathering wood, picking berries, harvesting wild game, etc.?

Very Important Not Important Unsure

5. Is there an adequate supply of motorized roads on federal lands in your county to accommodate emergency ingress/egress, facility maintenance, public access, and resource management?

Yes No Unsure

6. Regarding multiple-use recreational access routes on federal lands, does your county desire:

Increased Multi-Use Access Reduced Multi-Use Access Keep

Access As Is

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

7. Do you believe current fuel loads on any of the federal lands within your county could result in severe, uncontrollable, or catastrophic wildfires? (If so, provide geographic location in attachment)

Yes No Unsure

8. Is a high intensity wildfire on federal lands likely to cause a loss of important fish & wildlife habitat or harm Threatened or Endangered Species in your county (e.g. grizzly bears, lynx, sage grouse, black-footed ferret, bull trout)?

Yes No Unsure

9. Are environmental threats such as noxious weeds and bark beetle adequately controlled on federal lands within your county?

Yes No Unsure

10. Does the air quality in your county fall below acceptable health standards due to smoke originating from fires on federally managed lands?

Yes No Unsure

ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

11. Is the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT revenues) your county derives from federally managed lands equivalent to the amount that actual land taxation of these lands would bring?

Yes No Please estimate PILT as a percentage of county budget.

12. Is the amount your county derives from the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funds equivalent to the amount that your county could derive from responsible harvest or extraction of natural resources?

Yes No Please estimate SRS as a percentage of county budget.

13. Is the economic productivity and number of related private sector jobs commensurate with the resource production capacity of the federally managed lands within your county?

Yes No Unsure

14. Are federal policies for Threatened or Endangered Species adversely impacting private land owners, businesses, industries, or citizens within your county?

Yes No Unsure

15. Has federal land management resulted in adverse impacts to your county's economy?

Yes No Unsure

16. Do you believe changes in federal land management are necessary to increase your county's economy, employment opportunities, or tax base?
 Yes No Unsure

CONSISTENCY WITH STATE AND LOCAL OBJECTIVES: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

17. Are federal land management actions consistent with your county's objectives?
 Yes No Unsure

18. Would your county like state assistance incorporating local government objectives into federal land management actions?
 Yes No Unsure

OWNERSHIP AND JURISDICTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

19. Has your county experienced conflicts with federal ownership or jurisdictional responsibilities?
 Yes No (Please attach detailed description of conflicts)

20. How much influence do you believe special interests have on the ability of federal agencies to develop and implement effective land and resource management plans on federal lands in your county?
 None Moderate (please explain) Significant (please explain)

21. On a separate sheet, please describe your county's most significant concerns with federal land management, including current and past relations and communications with federal agencies and other relevant factors you believe legislators should be aware of, and provide any ideas that may help reduce risks or resolve concerns.

Thank you for your assistance. Please return your County Commission's response to:

Environmental Quality Council
ATTN: Joe Kolman, SJ15 Survey
Room 171B, Capitol Building
P.O. Box 201704
Helena, MT 59620-1704

Submitted by:

Date:

Attested by:

If you have questions or would like more information please contact Joe Kolman, staff for the EQC, at (406) 444-3747 or jkolman@mt.gov or Sen. Jennifer Fielder, the sponsor of SJ15, at (406) 210-5944 or by email at Sen.JFielder@legmt.gov

SJ-15 Survey of Montana County Commissions

Explanation for each response:

1. The condition of the forested federal lands in and around Flathead County is such that a wildland fire will most likely become a crown fire resulting in total stand replacement. The fuel load on federal lands is at an all time high with little or no logging or fuels reduction on these lands. Public health and safety from the smoke from these large fires is of great concern, as well as wildlife fleeing to escape the fire. Public and private lands adjacent to or near the federal lands are also put at risk with the high probability of a fire on federal lands as stand replacement crown fires can throw sparks ½ mile ahead of the fire.
2. Watershed areas should be actively managed not passively managed to remain healthy. Federal lands need to be better managed to limit the probability of a wildland fire becoming a large stand replacement fire that has negative impacts on the health and safety of the public. Better management would also provide economic value by providing timber, jobs, and recreational opportunities. This could possibly be achieved through private enterprise and partnerships.
3. Federal lands have fires with a high probability for stand replacement fires that burn out large canyons and very large tracts of land which creates erosion and a host of other issues. When this occurs, there is little or no vegetation left that inhibit the watershed from naturally filtering the water and the water quantity is diminished.
4. When there were more open roads for wood cutting, berry picking, and hunting, the public was spread out over a fairly large area. With the few roads currently open, the same number of citizen's are more concentrated in those areas with motorized access. When citizens had greater access to open roads, they were instrumental in identifying wildland fires. With more roads, open, local response forces were able to move fire engines closer to some fires, allowing for quicker and more effective response. For instance, the 2003 Wedge Canyon fire started very close to a road that had been closed for years and was so brushed in that a truck could not drive to

the fire. That fire burned 70,000 acres and cost the county a substantial amount of money providing structural protection to homes downwind of the fire.

5. There are adequate roads in our county however many or most of the federally controlled roads are not readily accessible for emergency vehicles or for the general public to use. So many roads have been closed for so many years most are now impassable. At this point, when there is a fire or timber sale, a dozer is required to open the road to make it passable. The taxpayers initially paid to build these roads and if they were to be reopened it would cost them a second time. The timber industry could also be a player in improving and managing these roads if they were allowed to harvest timber in these areas.
6. The advantage to increasing Multi-Use access on federal lands is increased ability for emergency ingress/egress both with respect to using four wheelers to scout fires and fire engines to fight fires. Increased multi-use access is also an economic driver in Flathead County.
7. See attached map. We have already seen catastrophic fires since 1988. There has been minimal logging or fuels reduction completed for 20-30 years in Flathead Valley. In addition, there are areas of the eastern front that have large patches of Douglas fir with dead red needles that pose a significant fire danger. In both the middle fork and north fork of the Flathead River drainages, federal lands border private lands. There has been some fuels reduction work in the north fork but very little work in the middle fork. Fuel loading from years of fire suppression has made these areas problematic and they now have a high likelihood of catastrophic wildland fire. National critical infrastructure is located both on Columbia Mountain (Bureau of Reclamation Hungry Horse Dam and Bonneville Power Administration Lines) and in the middle fork (BNSF Railway running along US Highway 2 corridor) that would be impacted by a catastrophic wildland fire. History has proven that the current management or lack thereof has failed.
8. The critical habitat designations for species such as the Lynx, Grizzly, Bull Trout, Westslope Cutthroat, etc. are partially located within the urban fire

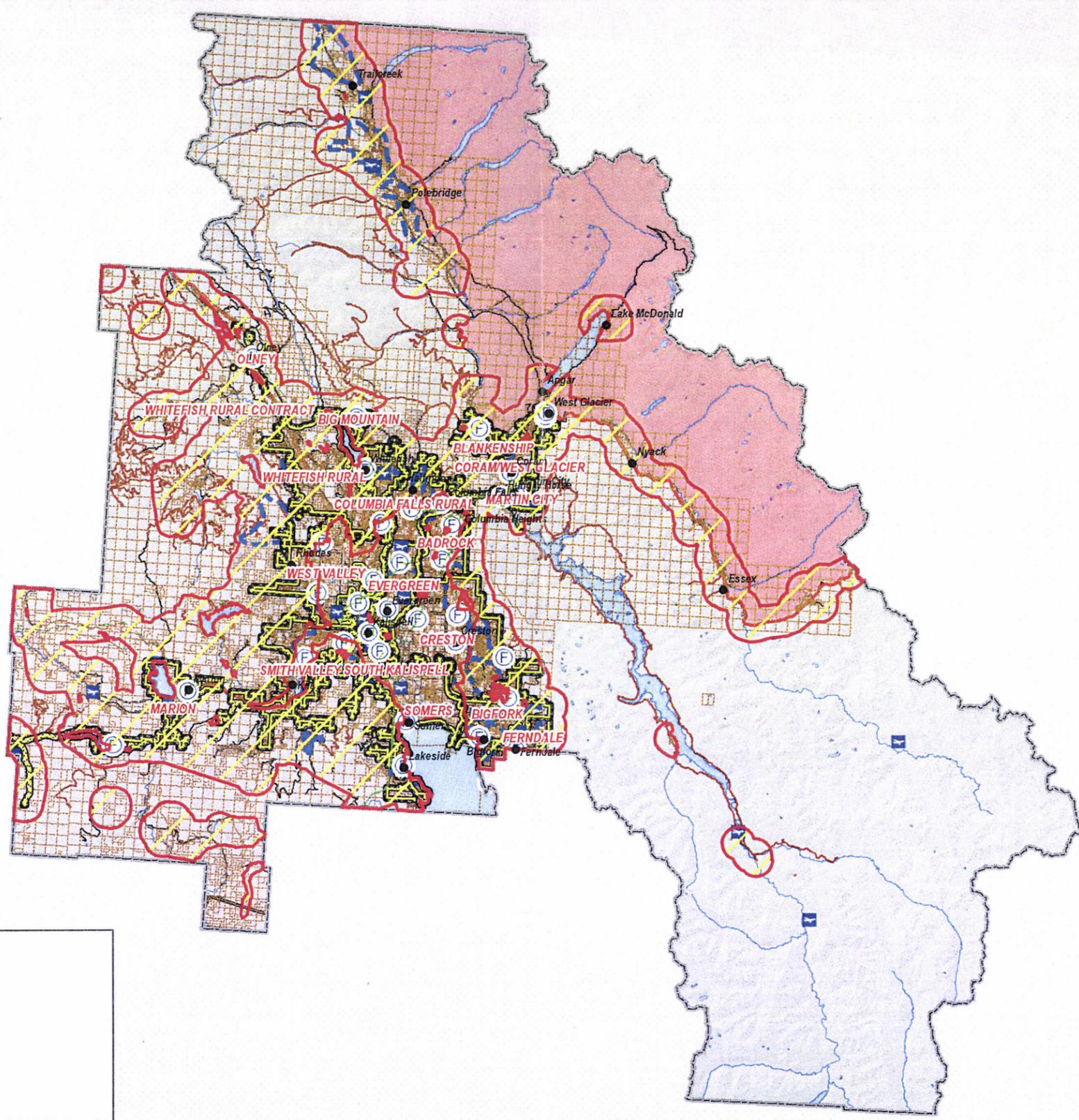
risk hazard areas. Having a high intensity wildfire that burns large tracts of land will degrade the water quality and habitat for each of these species driving them towards settled areas and people.

9. The USFS does not actively manage the federal lands for disease, insects, especially bark beetles, and noxious weeds. Noxious weeds are widespread on federal land. There is little indication of any kind of weed eradication taking place. Without weed management by the USFS these weeds eventually make their way to private land.
10. In past years, when wildland fires have occurred on federal lands, the air quality has consistently fallen below acceptable health level during both day and night for the duration of the fire. Those with allergies or chronic disease have been required to either stay indoors or wear masks if they need to leave home.
11. PILT accounts for 2.6% of our Flathead County budget. Summary of last six years attached. We took a tax bill for forested land and the taxes paid for this particular parcel came to .938/per acre. As you can see in the attached summary four out of the six years reported, we received less money with PILT, as low as .56/per acre in FY08.
12. PILT accounts for 1.33% of our Flathead County budget. Summary of last six years included. There is no doubt that our county would receive more funding through responsible harvest of our timber and extraction of natural resources. Not to mention the amount of jobs and economic vitality this would create to the benefit of not only Flathead County but the whole State of Montana.
13. The USFS doesn't even come close to utilizing the productivity (forest growth) of the Flathead National Forest, just utilizing the 650,000 acre suitable timber base they could generate 120-160MMBF a year on a sustainable basis.
14. More and more access is being denied because of the policies for threatened and endangered species. Jobs are lost with lumber mills shutting down. Forests are not being harvested, creating unhealthy forests

which become diseased and burn. Forest fires kill animals and fish, degrade air and water quality, and in some cases burn homes and infrastructure. Tourists come here to see healthy forests, not blackened trees and ground.

15. The forest service is not able to follow their plan, as timber sales are tied up in court. Loggers are not allowed to harvest trees in a timely manner after the fire. Jobs would be created if forests could be harvested.
16. USFS is not managing our forests for production, safety, jobs, economic well being, air and water quality, public access, wildlife habitat and etc.
17. Flathead County would like to see more timber harvests. Trees are a renewable resource and should be treated as such and harvested. I recently attended a meeting with forest service employees discussing public access, grizzlies, wolves, snowmobiling, and other recreational as well as economical aspects of our forests. I agree with a well respected gentleman in the audience who said "Most all of the issues being discussed here today could be solved if we were just allowed to cut a tree".
18. Land management decisions should be made locally.
19. Refer to questions and answers for 1 through 21.
20. Many of the special interests groups constantly file appeals and litigation on every USFS project to hinder active land management projects. The forest is being managed for the special interests groups and environmental extremists and not the general public.
21. Some comments received:
 - A. There is a lack of active forest management, high risk of catastrophic wildfires, a lack of adequate motorized access to much of the forest for immediate emergency response and recreation. There is a lack of recognition that the timber industry is an important economic driver for our community.

- B. The USFS operates as an entity separate and immune to issues relevant to Flathead County, the economy, and the population that shares the land and the management outcomes on the Flathead National Forest.
- C. Federal lands shouldn't be managed through political correctness, but rather with sound science providing for forest health and public recreation. Roads are removed and obliterated denying access for fire fighting. Motorized access has been virtually eliminated. Quality logs are being cut into firewood instead of being sent to the mill.
- D. Begin harvesting trees, open existing roads, allow for more dispersed camping. All of this will have positive economic benefits for Flathead County and the State of Montana.
- E. The USFS would not sign previous MOU of coordination and cooperation with commission.



- ▭ Wildland Urban Interface
- Electric Transmission Line
- ⊕ Fire Station
- ✈ Airport
- ▭ Fire District
- ⊕ Fire District Priorities
- ▭ Parcel Boundary
- US HIGHWAY
- MT HIGHWAY
- HIGHWAY
- MAJOR ARTERIAL
- MINOR ARTERIAL
- ROAD
- FS ROAD
- ▭ Glacier National Park
- ▭ Private
- ▭ US Bureau of Land Management
- ▭ US Bureau of Reclamation
- ▭ US Fish & Wildlife Service
- ▭ US Forest Service
- ▭ US Department of Defense
- ▭ Montana State Trust Lands
- ▭ Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- ▭ Montana DOT
- ▭ County Government
- ▭ City Government
- ▭ The Nature Conservancy

Wildland Urban Interface
Planning Map
Flathead County

Data Source:
Natural Resource Information System
Flathead County; USFS
Map created for fire planning purposes only.
County and contractor are not responsible
for any inaccuracies within.



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March 2010

