



Date: October 3, 2017

To: Legislative Finance Committee

I apologize that I could not attend the hearing in person, but I am traveling for work. The City of Whitefish is very concerned about the dramatic cut in the Flathead Basin Commission's funding. In light of the discovery of invasive mussels in Tiber Reservoir, it is even more urgent to increase protection of our local waterbodies. For the past five years, the City of Whitefish has committed funds to help in the regional effort to curb the risk of invasive species infestation to Northwest Montana waterbodies. The City of Whitefish provided the lion's share of funding for the Browning, and then Coram, AIS check stations, recognizing that a more regional approach is the most effective tool in AIS protection, regardless of jurisdiction and municipal boundaries. This year, the City of Whitefish funded two AIS check stations. We did this to the tune of close to \$80,000, because it was the right thing to do. However, the City's program alone cannot protect the water alone, nor can the State of Montana do the job alone. We need to marshal all of our resources and work together. The extra protection the FBC provides when the state inspection stations are not open is essential. Relying on a perimeter defense only fails to catch boats coming when stations are closed.

The Flathead Basin Commission has been an important partner with the City of Whitefish, and Whitefish Lake Institute, in implementing these critical AIS protection measures for the past five years. Through partnerships and collaboration, stations have been set up by numerous non-state sponsored governmental agencies including the City of Whitefish, the Blackfeet Nation, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The FBC's ability to collaborate with state, federal and tribal entities has been invaluable.

We all recognize the necessity to balance the state budget and tough decisions must be made. However, we ask that you consider the important value FBC has provided in AIS protection, in addition to the excellent job the organization fulfills in terms of protecting the water resources of the entire Flathead Basin. As Mayor, protecting Whitefish Lake is of critical importance not only because the lake serves as our community's water supply, but because it is one of the City's main economic drivers.

Please reconsider the recommendation to reduce funding to FBC. If funding is slashed to levels as proposed, the City's ability to make the up the difference to continue our AIS efforts, will be significantly comprised next budget cycle.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Muhlfeld, Mayor

Legislative Finance Committee
Oct. 4, 2017
Exhibit 3