

Legislative Finance Committee Administrative Committee

Testimony of Celestine Duncan, Owner/operator private business

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Legislative Finance Committee and support continued funding for the Executive Director position with the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC). I have worked as a private consultant on invasive species issues and programs in Montana for more than 35 years, and have been involved with the aquatic invasive species (AIS) effort since 2008.

The Department of Natural Resources proposal to cut the only FTE staff position with the FBC could not come at a worse time in with threat of invasive mussels and other aquatic organisms. The Columbia River Basin is the only watershed in the U.S. where invasive mussels have not been reported, and the FBC is the first line of defense for protecting the Basin. Prevention programs currently in place and proposed by the FBC are critical to stop introduction and spread of mussels and other AIS.

The proposed cut to the FBC program is also not needed to save money, since there are other avenues just within the existing AIS budget that would save an equal or greater amount of money, and programs would continue to function effectively and perhaps even more efficiently. For example:

- There are two new outreach/education FTE positions proposed for the invasive species program (1 in DNRC and 1 in FWP). This is redundant, and the current FTE which began October 2, 2017 is more than capable of conducting the statewide invasive species outreach program. This position should be shared between the two agencies which will reduce confusion in the state, improve coordination between the agencies, and reduce redundancy in state government. Savings estimated at \$90,000+/year.
- It is my understanding that \$880,000/biennium (\$440,000/year) from the invasive species budget was transferred to DNRC for 2 FTE, support for two councils, a grant administrator, and funding for other AIS projects (grants or Heritage Program-data mgt?). This funding can be made more strategic, and the council and FTE's should be able to function fine with a 10 to 15% reduction in revenue. Savings estimated at \$44,000 to \$65,000/year.

I think we all want the same thing...the BEST protection we can get for Montana waters. Removing funding to the FBC is not in the best interest of protecting Montana or the Columbia River Basin..

Legislative Finance Committee
Oct. 4, 2017
Exhibit 5