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*Flathead Lakers:  
Working for clean water, a healthy*

October 4, 2017

**Legislative Finance Committee  
Oct. 4, 2017  
Exhibit 7**

To: Legislative Finance Committee

Dear Chairwoman Ballance and Members of the Legislative Finance Committee:

The Flathead Lakers urge you to maintain funding for the Flathead Basin Commission staff, proposed to be cut from the DNRC budget.

The Commission plays an essential role in protecting Flathead Lake, water quality, and the aquatic resources of the Flathead Basin, and has done so for over 30 years.

Flathead Lake, along with the waters that flow through it, is not only a natural treasure, but also provides significant economic benefits to the basin and state.

The Flathead Lakers is a nonprofit, grassroots organization dedicated to protecting clean water, healthy ecosystems and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed. Founded in 1958, our organization currently has over 1,500 members. We have partnered with the FBC over the years to achieve common goals.

The FBC was attached to DNRC as an administrative convenience, and the state funding dedicated for it should simply be passed on to the Commission, perhaps with a more reasonable 10% funding cut.

The multi-jurisdictional membership of the FBC is unique and makes it vital for coordinating water quality protection and defense against invasive mussels, as well as for securing grant funding. It also makes it virtually impossible for the FBC to function without dedicated staff to provide coordination, implement the Commission's decisions, write grants, and work with partners in the watershed.

With modest state funding that sustains an Executive Director, the FBC secures benefits that far exceed that investment. It has a long history of securing significant outside grant and other funding, regularly as much as 8 times the E.D.'s salary.

The FBC has been instrumental in defending Flathead waters from upstream coal mine proposals in B.C., planning and coordinating water quality monitoring efforts, and working with partners and the MT DEQ to establish water quality targets (TMDLs) for Flathead Lake and a voluntary nutrient reduction strategy.

With invasive mussels now in Montana and the expanded state efforts to prevent their spread, it is critical that the FBC be able to continue its leadership in defending Flathead waters from this threat. We believe the Flathead Pilot Program authorized by the 2017 Legislature is absolutely critical. Since the FBC was given authority in HB 622 to establish and manage the Pilot Program, it would be a disservice to the best interests and economic health of the state to eliminate funding for Commission's sole staff position.

We greatly appreciate the Legislature's support for increasing Montana's invasive mussel response and prevention capacity this year. We understand very difficult budget choices need to be made, but we believe sustaining adequate funding for a functional FBC will truly return abundant long-term benefits for our watershed, the state, and the entire Columbia Basin.

Thank you for your consideration.

Robin Steinkraus  
Executive Director

Greg McCormick  
Board Member and Past President