

Garfield County Conservation District

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Dean Rogge- Chairman, Alan Pluhar- Vice Chair, Casey Coulter- Treasurer,
Monte Billing- Supervisor, Shay Whiteside- Supervisor, Joe Gibson- Supervisor,
Pat Murnion –Urban Supervisor

October 04, 2017
Legislative Finance Committee

Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address our concerns.

Garfield County has experienced the worst fire year combined with the worst drought year on record.

We will speak mostly of the knowledge of the veteran district board members of 16 years and 26 years.


Our District has had more request for advice, assistance, and direction from proudcers and the community in the last 5-6 years than previous years combined.

We feel that comes from our proven ability to put conservation on the ground economically and efficently.

We cannot invision where the state can get a better bang for the buck than through conservation districts considering all the volunteer service form conservation district supervisors.

We ask that you take a hard look at how a reduced budget to districts and DNRC would effect the conservation we put on the ground of which we are proud to do.

Respectfully


Dean Rogge
Chairman

Legislative Finance Committee
Oct. 4, 2017
Exhibit 8

Thompson Smith
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**Testimony regarding the Flathead Basin Commission
before the Legislative Budget Committee, Helena, MT
October 4, 2017**

Madam Chair
Dear ~~Chairman~~ Ballance and Members of the Legislative Finance Committee:

My name is Thompson Smith. I'm the immediate past Chair of the Flathead Basin Commission. I had the great honor of serving twelve years on the FBC, including several years as chair, as a volunteer citizen member from Charlo. I was appointed twice by Governor Schweitzer and once by Governor Bullock. Governor Bullock also appointed me to the Montana Invasive Species Advisory Council.

When the legislature established the FBC in 1983 and charged it with the broad purpose of protecting the waters and environment of the Flathead Basin, it made the new entity a commission, rather than a department of an existing agency. The legislature did so for two reasons.

First, as a commission, the FBC could be composed of a broad array of stakeholders—state, tribal, county, federal, and industry representatives, as well as private citizens. That composition defines the FBC's way of operating, of bringing together many people in the shared cause of protecting the Flathead.

The second reason was to give the FBC independence. The legislature saw that the FBC would best serve its purpose by providing the Governor and legislature with accurate, well-informed, and unvarnished advice and recommendations. To ensure that independence, the legislature made the FBC only "administratively attached" to DNRC. As stated in MCA 2-15-121, section 1a, that means the FBC "shall exercise its ... policymaking functions independently of the department and without approval or control of the department."

Given the critical moment we face here, I will be blunt. My experience on the FBC showed me repeatedly that we have too many people in state government, some in key positions, who regard the FBC's independence as a problem rather than the asset that it is. In fact, they too often view natural resource issues through the lens of whether things are under their absolute control, rather than whether the resource is being protected.

The FBC has been remarkably effective and efficient in fulfilling its mandate, not only in protecting the transboundary North Fork from mining, but in addressing the other challenges that now threaten this crown jewel of Montana. In recent years, foremost

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among those threats has been the menace of aquatic invasive species. The FBC has been the leader in the state on AIS, often in spite of the obstruction and inaction of state agencies. In large measure that has been because of an exceptionally dedicated, capable, resourceful, and knowledgeable executive director. For years, Caryn Miske has raised 5 to 8 times the FBC's entire base budget in grants, most of it to protect the Flathead against the threat of aquatic invasive species.

Thank God we have had that protection in place, even as other areas of Montana have become infested. Given the continuing gaps and problems in the state's AIS effort, the administration's proposed elimination of the staff budget of the FBC would leave the Flathead far more vulnerable to the introduction of AIS. As you well know, the cost of AIS infestation of the Flathead would dwarf the FBC's small annual budget. More importantly, it would result in the permanent ruination of a resource that Montanans have dedicated themselves to protecting for decades.

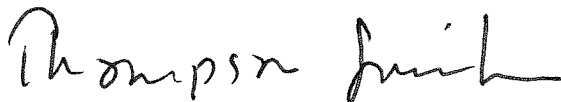
John Tubbs's recommendation of defunding the FBC also contravenes the legislature's intent. It does so in three ways:

- First, it would in effect punish the FBC for its lawful exercise of its legislatively established independence. We have emails confirming this as DNRC's motivation for the budget cuts.
- Second, these cuts would countermand the 2017 legislature's passage of not just the maintenance of the FBC's modest budget, but also an increase of \$40,000 to meet our need for administrative help.
- And third, these cuts would directly undermine House Bill 622, passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor. HB 622 recognizes the urgent need to strengthen protection of the Flathead against AIS, and therefore mandates, in Section 7, that the FBC create a robust pilot program of "no launch without prior inspection." The DNRC's proposed budget cut would prevent the FBC from being able to develop the rules and implement the Flathead pilot program. The cuts would therefore gut a duly enacted law.

Please urge the Governor to stop this defiance of legislative intent, and restore fairness, reason, and lawfulness to this process. If the overall budget cuts must be done, the FBC should take its fair share, a 10% cut. But we must not allow the budget to be used for unwise and short-sighted political purposes that would result in permanent harm to a priceless resource.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thompson Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thompson Smith



Flathead Basin Commission

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Caryn Miske, Executive Director
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Patrick Holmes, Natural Resources Advr
Office of the Govern

Tom Bell, Regional Manager
British Columbia Liaison
Ministry of Environment, Canada

Dave Stipe
Lake County Commissioner

Chas Cartwright
Governor Appointed Member
Columbia Falls, MT

Jasmine Courville-Brown
Governor Appointed Member
Ronan, MT

Julie Dalsoglio, Office Director
Region 8, U.S. EPA

Kathy Olsen, Area Manager
Montana DNRC
Northwest Land Office

Kate Hunt
Governor Appointed Member
Creston, MT

Rich Janssen, Department Head
Division of Environmental Protection
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

Phil Mitchell
Flathead County Commissioner

Mark Bostrom, Administrator
Montana DNRC

Tim Davis, Administrator
Montana DEQ

Jan Metzmaker
Governor Appointed Member
Whitefish, MT

Jeff Mow, Superintendent
Glacier National Park

Dennis Philmon, Superintendent
Hungry Horse Dam
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Jack Potter
Governor Appointed Member
Columbia Falls, MT

Mark D. Reller, Montana Liaison
Bonneville Power Administration

Jim Williams, Supervisor
Montana Dept. of FWP

Jim Simpson, Supervisor
Lake County Conservation Dist.

Dean Sirucek
Flathead County Conservation Dist.

Thompson Smith, Chair
Governor Appointed Member
Charlo, MT

Chip Weber, Supervisor
Flathead National Forest

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Ms. Nancy Ballance Chair and the Legislative Finance Committee

Re: Testimony in Support of Continued FBC Funding

Good morning, Chair Ballance and members of the legislative finance committee. My name is Caryn Miske, and I have served as the Executive Director of the Flathead Basin Commission for over 11 years. You have heard from many of my colleagues today about the mission and importance of the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC). Based upon our legislative mandate, the FBC was created to protect the waters that flow into, and out of, the Flathead Basin. The legislature, in its wisdom, recognized that the FBC was not just a single mission agency. Instead the legislature recognized the importance of safeguarding the resources of the Flathead from myriad threats as they arise over time. If this was not the case, the mission of the FBC would have read, "protect the Flathead from the threat of mining in British Columbia." Instead, the FBC is charged with protecting the waters of the Flathead, and the threats to the ecological and economic integrity of the Basin still exist today.

The resources of the Flathead Basin are not simply local treasures. They are treasures of regional, tribal, state-wide, U.S. and global importance, and include but are not limited to:

- Glacier-Waterton, the first world peace park;
- UN Biosphere Reserve;
- UN Heritage site;
- Flathead Lake, the largest lake west of the Mississippi;
- Full complement of carnivores present at the time of Lewis and Clark;
- Vascular plant diversity that exceeds that of the Serengeti Plain;
- Headwaters for the Columbia River system – the last river system in the continental US that is free of invasive mussels; and
- Headwaters for 3 of the world's oceans.

These resources, if fouled, would represent an irreplaceable loss for the citizens of the state of Montana.

Now that I have set the context I would like to make three key points.

First, in protecting the resource, the FBC's role includes that of a "watchdog" agency. This function is critically important if we are to accurately evaluate the programs that protect our waters. If such functions are eliminated, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to identify programmatic flaws and make needed improvements to better protect our resources. While this function has been unpopular with a small handful state agencies, it is nonetheless of critical value – and it is something that is in short supply in state government.

Second, much has been made of the FBC's ability to raise dollars, and it is true that we have been relatively successful at finding funds to implement our programs. However, it would appear that we are being punished for our success. It is important to note that funders generally seek to fund on-the-ground efforts – whether it's an inspection station or a K-9 team. It can be very difficult, if not impossible, to raise money for staff salaries. Yet, without staff to implement and manage programs, these on-the-ground efforts cannot exist. Programs cannot manage themselves. In other words, a very modest investment in staff yields results far larger than the initial investment from the state. Without this small investment in staff, the larger programmatic goals cannot be brought to fruition.

Third, the FBC's success, and one of its primary roles is that of convener and consensus builder. In the Flathead, many of the threats we have faced or are facing today are multi-faceted and multi-jurisdictional. The issues are complex, and can only be effectively solved by involving all of the Tribes, agencies and stakeholders in the Basin or broader region. For example, in developing an effective AIS prevention program, the FBC convened the Flathead AIS workgroup in 2009 to develop our first AIS Strategic Prevention Plan. The workgroup, with over 30 members, includes Tribes, federal agencies, state agencies, local government, NGOs, local businesses and individual citizen members. The congressional delegation has supported our work, along with both republican and democratic members of the state legislature. In a world divided, the FBC develops consensus and finds solutions.

In closing, I would like to say that I have been fortunate indeed to work for more than a decade with the 23-member FBC board – a board that has consistently supported the development of innovative solutions to complex problems. The FBC is a unique entity. To risk losing it now, at such a critical junction, would not serve the citizens of Montana well. Therefore, we respectfully request that our funding be cut by only 10% -- in line with the cuts being borne by most other agencies. Thank you for your time and consideration.