From: Linehan Outfitting Company
To: Mohr, Jason
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Lake Koocanusa Selenium Standard Comments
Date: Friday, October 9, 2020 10:16:14 AM

Members of the Water Policy Interim Committee:

I'm writing to strongly encourage the Water Policy Interim Committee to enable the MT DEQ to immediately complete the lengthy and thorough process of setting a water quality standard for selenium in Lake Koocanusa. This work is critical, and has waited far too long already.

My wife and I own and operate Linehan Outfitting, located in Lincoln County Montana. For 28 years we have provided top-quality fly-fishing adventures here on the Kootenai River. We are a small, entirely family-owned business. The health and integrity of the Kootenai River is literally married to the success of our business, and we are literally married to its future. We have a crew of eight guides, some with young families, who depend on the work Linehan Outfitting provides. Obviously, their livelihood depends on the health of the Kootenai River as well. Additionally, as I'm certain you're aware, millions of dollars of tourism revenue pass through our community thanks to the Kootenai River, which is a substantial and sustainable boon to a county as rural as ours.

Selenium can be extremely toxic to native species of fish and aquatic invertebrates, and subsequently to humans as well. We are already seeing selenium toxicity in native trout here in the Kootenai River. It's ugly. Imagine a trout with half a gill plate. Now imagine catching one with a paying client who has to ask what's wrong with the fish he just paid good money to catch. And imagine how awful it is to explain to him that a coal company in British Columbia, in part owned by the Chinese no less, is being allowed to pollute the Kootenai River. We are being treated as a holding pond for Canadian mining waste. It's not enough that the towns of Libby and Troy are dubiously noted as being asbestos Superfund sites, but now we're left to wonder if another black eye is headed our way in the form of a polluted Kootenai River!

There is no down side to empowering the DEQ complete this process immediately. There are no Lincoln County industries that would be negatively impacted by a strong water standard. Quite the contrary, all parts of our economy will benefit by limiting Canadian pollution on our side of the border. As you on the WPIC committee likely know, considerable taxpayer dollars have been spent collecting and analyzing data over many years. In coordination with the EPA, USGS and university researchers, the MT DEQ has been working for several years to establish a water quality standard for selenium that will protect all fish species in Koocanusa Reservoir and downstream in the Kootenai River. Additionally, British Columbia mine regulators and staff from Teck have been deeply involved in this very lengthy and public process. It's time to simply and responsibly utilize the science and set the standard of .8 microgams per liter. There can be no delay, nor should there be.

It is up to Montana, not Canada or an industry in Canada, to protect our very own natural resources and the outdoor recreation industry now valued and responsible for over $7 billion dollars of annual revenue. Protecting our waters from Canadian mine pollution also protects our industrial interests in Lincoln County. Lake Koocanusa and the Kootenai River are an integral part of our state's income.

On another level, leave the money out of it. Enabling DEQ to finally set the water quality standard for selenium in Lake Koocanusa is also just the right thing to do at this point. It is past time to get this done.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment and thanks for doing the right thing for our heritage and our future.

Tim

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