

A scenic view of a large lake, likely Flathead Lake, with mountains in the background and a tree in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the water.

FLATHEAD BASIN COMMISSION

2015-2016 BIENNIAL REPORT

www.flatheadbasincommission.org

Letter from the Chair

About ninety years ago, Charlie Russell expressed the central message of his lifework: “Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no afterlife for a place that started out as Heaven.” Russell’s words are often quoted by Montanans, and for good reason. Love of our shared home remains among the strongest of the ties that bind us.

Of all the pieces of heaven under the Big Sky, none surpass the Flathead Basin. Flathead Lake remains one of the cleanest large lakes in the world. The culture and economy of the Basin rest upon our internationally recognized environmental quality.

That’s why the Montana Legislature, in an overwhelming bipartisan consensus, established the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) in 1983. It is why Republicans and Democrats have stood together to support the FBC for over thirty years. We are working to fulfill the obligation to future generations that has been modeled for thousands of years here by native peoples: to hand down a place as healthy as the one we have been privileged to enjoy.

Montana created the FBC primarily out of concern over proposed industrial energy development in the Flathead’s headwaters in British Columbia. That threat is now in abeyance, but other dangers remain. Two issues now occupy much of our time and energy.

One is the continuing menace of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). Of particular concern are zebra and quagga mussels, now present in the Missouri system, just a few hours away. Once established, invasive mussels can reproduce in unimaginable numbers, quickly devouring the base of the aquatic food chain and causing devastating economic harm. The cost of prevention would be dwarfed by the expense of managing invasives once established.

The second urgent threat to the Flathead Basin is the daily rail transport of hazardous materials. One spill of toxic and/or volatile compounds would cause irreparable harm to our waters. An explosion could bring catastrophe to our communities, and could ignite our increasingly fire-prone forests.

With a small base budget and limited staff, the FBC performs vital functions that would not otherwise get done. We have a can-do spirit and take initiative. In regard to AIS, the FBC has helped establish and manage numerous inspection stations, often in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the Blackfoot Tribal Business Council, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. In regard to the rail issue, we continue to work with Burlington Northern Santa Fe to reduce the risk of derailments.

Our success is due to our unique role, the ability of our Executive Director and consultants, and the tremendous dedication of our 23 members, comprised of citizen volunteers, government representatives and energy producers. Over the biennium, the FBC thrived despite budget shortfalls, which reduced our small base budget by about a third. Yet to protect the resource, we raised or helped leverage over eight times our base budget in grant funds and donations. The FBC also partnered with the Flathead Community Foundation to improve our fiscal sustainability.

We look forward to working with our partners, including the Governor’s office and the Legislature, to ensure the vitality of the FBC—and the well-being of the Flathead Basin.

Thompson Smith
Chair, Flathead Basin Commission

Table of Contents



Aquatic Invasive Species	3
Transboundary Management	5
Drought Planning	6
Wastewater Management	7
Rail Safety	8
Upcoming Activities	9
Budget	10
FBC Members	11
FBC Partners	12
Photo Credits/Donate	13



The Montana Legislature created the Flathead Basin Commission in 1983 to protect the existing high quality of the Flathead Lake aquatic environment; the waters that flow into, out of, or are tributary to the lake; and the natural resources and environment of the Flathead Basin.

Flathead Basin Commission
Caryn Miske, Executive Director
655 Timberwolf Parkway
Kalispell, MT 59901
cmiske@mt.gov
406.240.3453

Visit us at: flatheadbasincommission.org

300 copies of this document were published at a cost of \$4.12 per copy for printing for a total cost of \$1,235. Persons with disabilities needing an alternative, accessible format of this document should contact the FBC.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)



The FBC continues to serve as a leader in the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species (AIS). However, in light of the recent detection of non-native mussels in the Missouri River system, we must now bolster our defenses. The next biennium may well be our last opportunity to keep these devastating invasives out of the Flathead Basin.

Over the last two years, the FBC has pursued numerous projects to protect the Flathead from AIS.

First, we developed a solid working partnership with the Blackfoot Nation, whose lands and waters are the eastern gate to the Flathead Basin. In 2015, we assisted the Blackfoot in developing and implementing the most robust AIS ordinance in the state. It requires all boats to be inspected prior to launching on

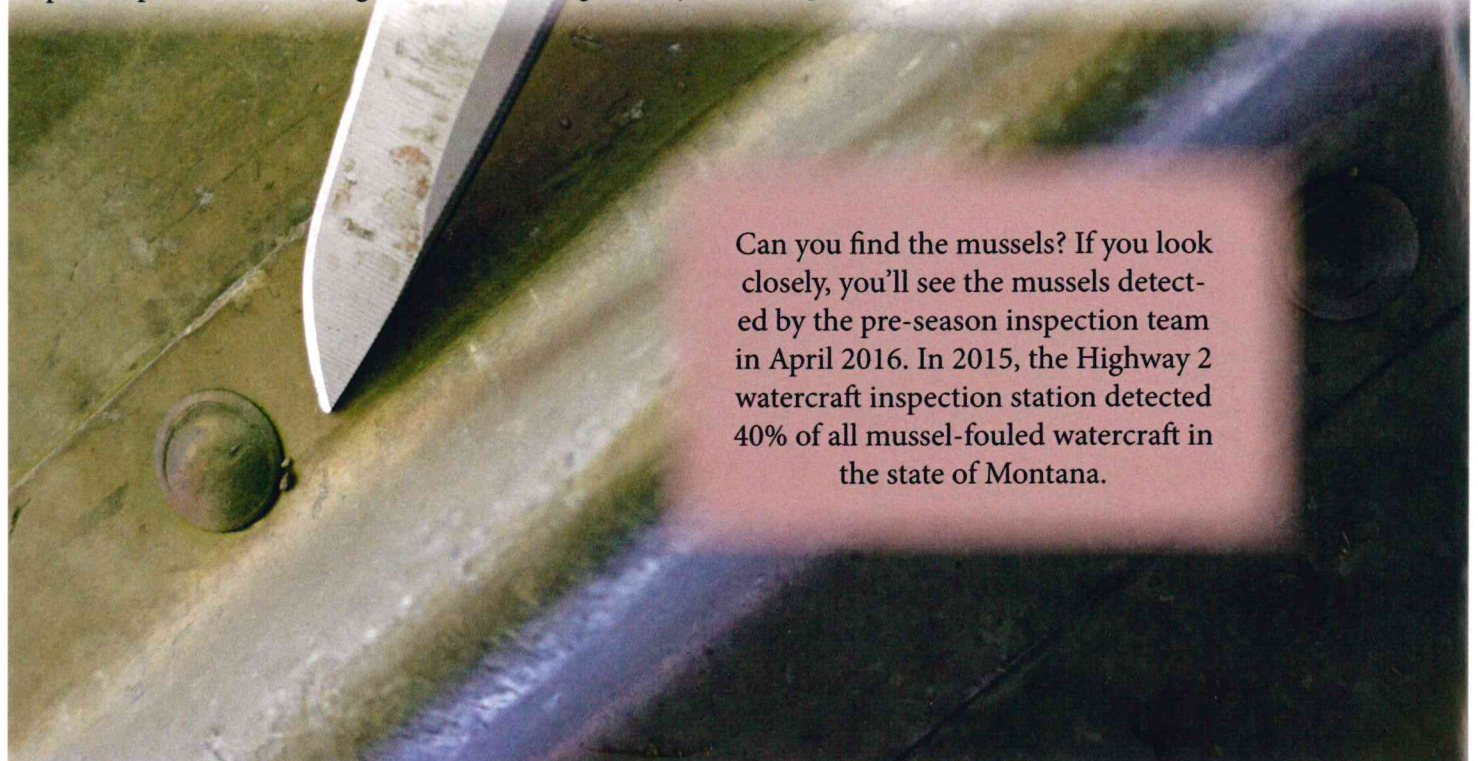
Blackfoot waters. This successful program can now serve as a model for what can and should be done in the Flathead and the state as a whole.

In 2015, in support of the Blackfoot AIS program, the FBC began helping establish watercraft inspection stations on the Blackfoot Reservation. That year, we moved the Coram station to Highway 2 in Browning; 40% of the mussel-fouled boats in the state in 2015 were found by inspectors at that station. In 2016, to improve our perimeter defense, the FBC helped open a second station at Seville (Cut Bank). For 2017, we are planning a third station to further strengthen our northeastern perimeter.

Second, in 2016, the FBC also obtained funding for and managed early season operations

at the Pablo and Clearwater Junction stations (March 1-Memorial Day). This enabled inspection of watercraft arriving from high-risk states such as Arizona and Nevada.

Third, in partnership with Working Dogs for Conservation, the FBC also launched its K-9 program, training two dog handler teams to assist at inspection stations and enhance our outreach to the public. Ky Zimmerman and his yellow lab Tobias worked the Highway 2 station, as well as Glacier National Park and City Beach in Whitefish. Deb Termenstein and her black labs Ismay and Rosebud worked the Highway 93 and Clearwater Junction stations.



Can you find the mussels? If you look closely, you'll see the mussels detected by the pre-season inspection team in April 2016. In 2015, the Highway 2 watercraft inspection station detected 40% of all mussel-fouled watercraft in the state of Montana.

Fourth, with funding from the Crown Managers Partnership and the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative, the FBC conducted focus group testing of AIS messages in both Montana and Alberta. The results will help us refine the public education campaign to encourage boaters to “Clean, Drain, and Dry” their watercraft.

Again, given the presence of invasive mussels in Montana, all of the above activities will need to not only continue, but also be bolstered with stronger

enforcement, additional K-9 units, more effective education campaigns, and longer hours of operation at inspection stations.

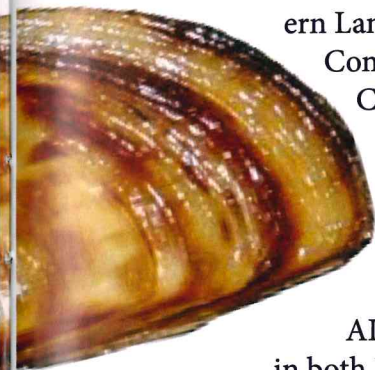
The FBC has also worked hard to address non-native aquatic weeds. By 2013, curlyleaf pondweed (CLP) was detected in Flathead Lake in at least eight bays, as well as in a ten-mile reach of the Flathead River above its entrance into the lake. CLP, if left uncontrolled, poses a serious threat to the economy and environment of Flathead Lake. The amount of CLP in Flathead Lake was dense, but was limited to a handful of acres in each of the fouled bays. The CLP discovered in the river, by contrast, was diffuse and more difficult to detect.

Employing refined monitoring techniques combined with diver dredge mitigation efforts, we have

greatly reduced the amount of CLP in the lake—from eight bays in 2013 to only two in 2015. With continued efforts, we should be able to eliminate the remaining infestations at Lakeside and Bigfork.

However, in the Flathead River, the CLP removal effort has been stymied due to difficult field conditions and lack of funding (no state funds were allocated for this work in 2016). The FBC is seeking funding to resume this work to prevent an increase in CLP populations and its spread throughout the Flathead system.

The Flathead Basin Commission continues to advocate for programmatic improvements at the local, state, and regional levels to deliver the strongest possible protection against aquatic invasive species.



Transboundary Management



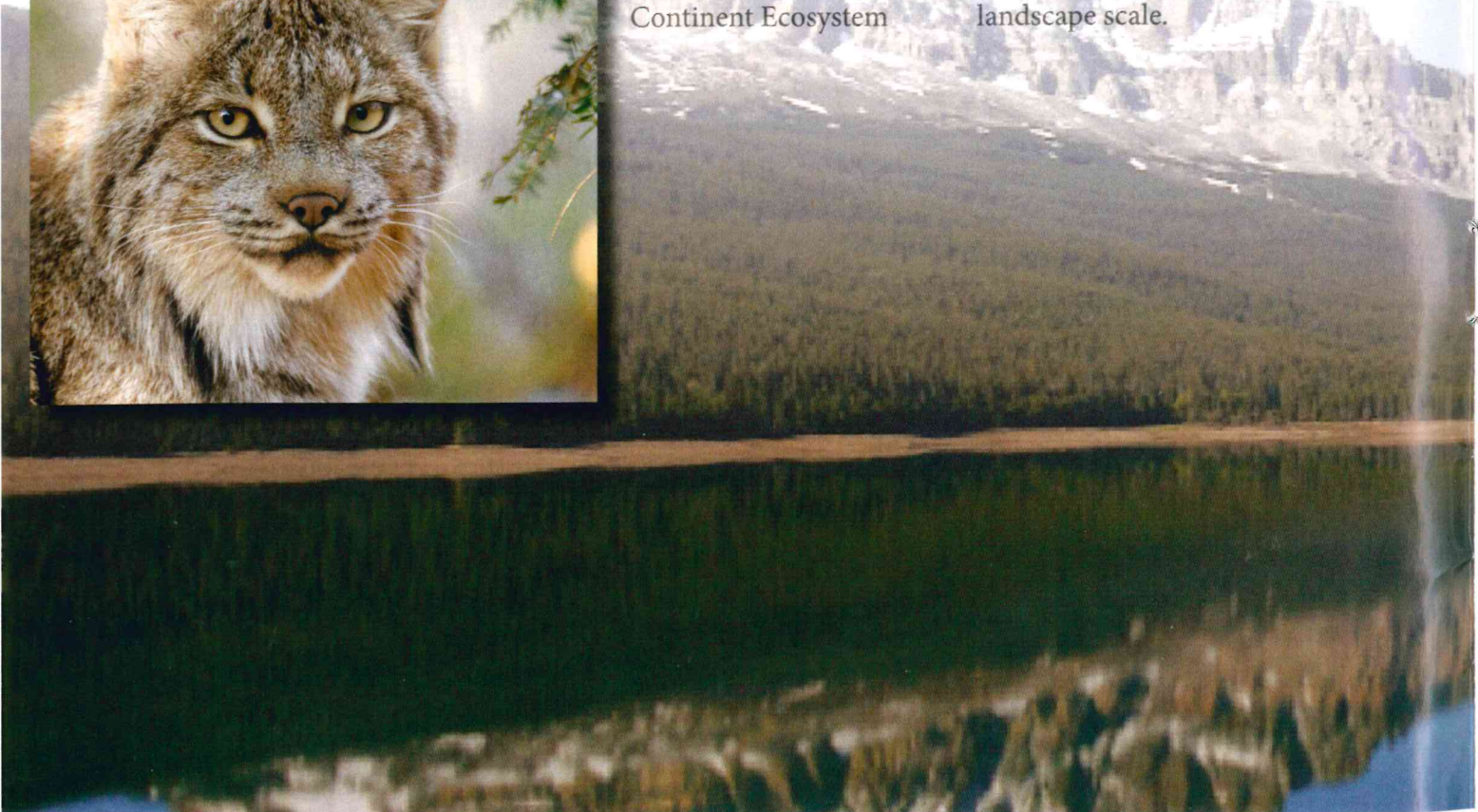
The Flathead Basin is located at the heart of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem (CCE). In order to more effectively manage natural resources within this regional landscape, we have recognized that jurisdictions will be more successful when working cooperatively. To this end, the FBC participates in the Crown Managers Partnership (CMP), the Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent, and the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC). All of these entities are designed to facilitate various aspects of transboundary

management efforts. They have enhanced communications, reduced costs for on-the-ground projects, and provided gap funding for critically needed research. The FBC serves on the CMP steering committee and has taken the leadership role on aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention for the Crown of the Continent, which includes portions of Montana, Alberta and British Columbia. In addition, the CMP is currently working on collaborative studies related to the restoration of five-needle pine (i.e. whitebark pine), reduction of terrestrial invasive plants, and the preservation of native salmonids.

The GNLCC supports protection of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem

in a variety of ways, including but not limited to funding the FBC's AIS focus group testing project (see page 3), as well as developing the transboundary AIS protocol which has driven AIS prevention efforts at the Crown scale. In addition, the GNLCC leads the effort between the State of Montana and the province of British Columbia to implement the Memorandum of Understanding which permanently banned strip mining in the headwaters of the Flathead, thereby protecting Flathead Lake from devastating impacts.

In the next biennium, as we strive to address issues such as drought management, these transboundary partnerships will play an important role in facilitating success at the larger landscape scale.



Drought Planning



In 2016, with funding from the Bureau of Reclamation Watersmart grant program, the Flathead Basin Commission partnered with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) to develop a Phase I drought management plan for the basin. Taking a holistic approach to drought management, Phase I addresses a variety of areas potentially impacted by drought including fisheries, agriculture, invasive species, water quantity and quality, fire regimes, hydropower operations, cultural resources and endangered species, among others.

The CSKT drought plan will ultimately be designed to facilitate capacity building and provide

decision support tools for managers across the landscape. Moreover, the Plan can be used as a regional model for managing resources when water quantity is constrained.

The FBC and CSKT anticipate that Phase II of the drought plan will be finalized in the latter part of 2017. Once finalized, the plan will provide a blueprint for a variety of actions that can be taken to proactively protect natural resources in times of drought. For example, reduced water quantity typically means increased impacts associated with nutrient loading. Anticipating such impacts in advance will enable us to work together to (1) identify current non-point pollution sources; (2)

develop working partnerships with non-point polluters; (3) develop mitigation strategies for non-point sources; (4) obtain funding for mitigation activities; and (5) implement on-the-ground mitigation efforts. Similar action plans for preserving flows for agriculture, protecting native fisheries, preventing invasive species, etc., will be incorporated into the final drought plan. This type of win-win planning effort is a hallmark of FBC programmatic success, and we anticipate that additional partners will join the effort as we progress, as has been the case with our aquatic invasive species prevention effort.



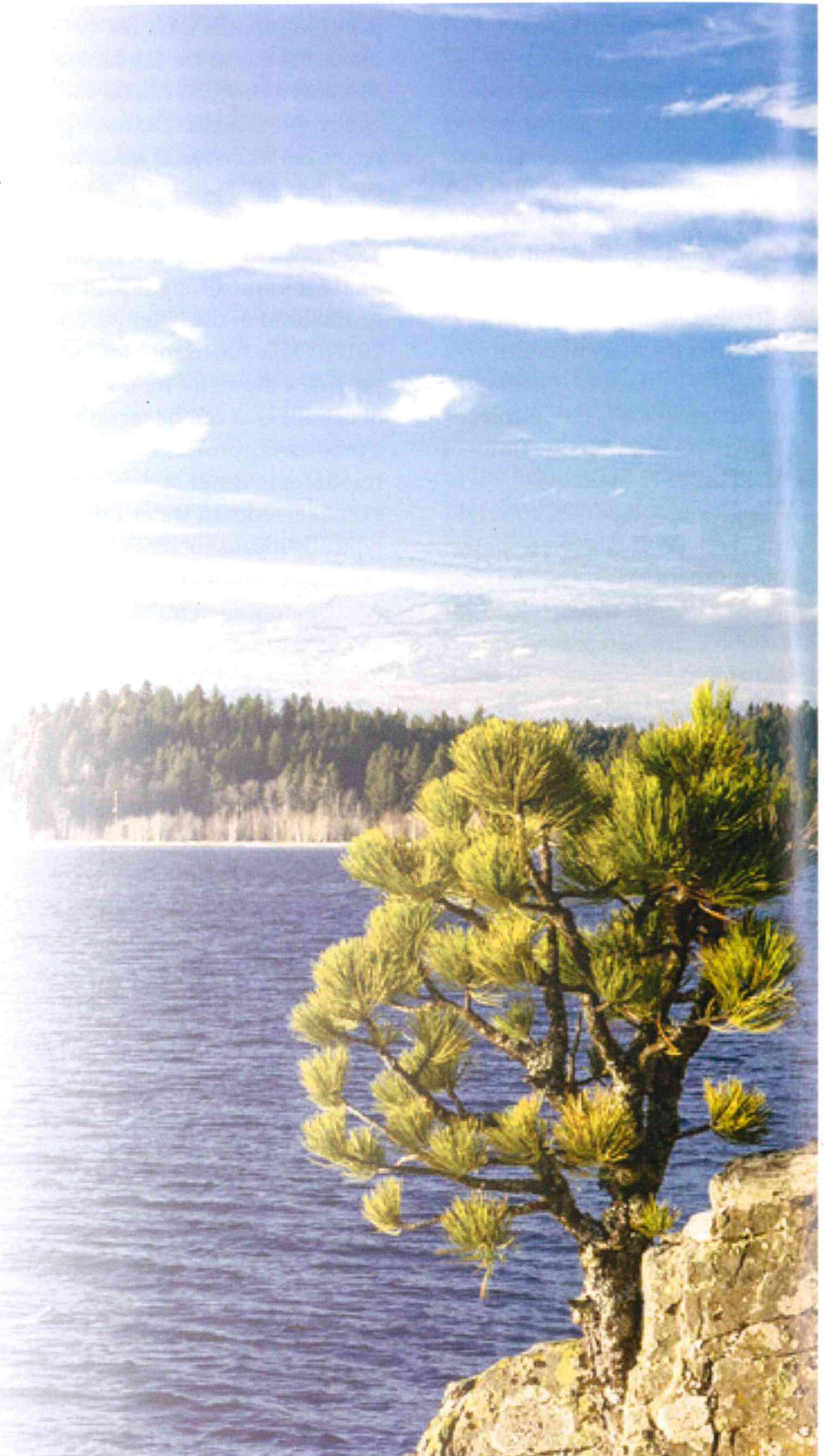
Wastewater Management



A Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP) is a document that provides a framework for managing, protecting, and restoring water resources on a watershed scale. In 2016, the Flathead Conservation District commenced development of a WRP for the Flathead-Stillwater sub-basin in order to address non-point source pollution – focusing specifically on excess sediment, excess nutrients, and high stream temperatures.

With funding from the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSmart Grant Program, the FBC partnered with the Flathead Conservation District by assisting in the development of a wastewater management segment of the WRP. In particular, the FBC focused on addressing the impacts of septic systems on impaired water bodies. The wastewater management segment identified how septic sources threaten impaired waters and provides possible solutions to reduce nutrient loading associated with septic leachate on impaired water bodies. We helped identify the septic sources affecting those waters, as well as possible solutions.

After completion of the WRP, the Flathead Conservation District and the FBC will collaborate with other watershed groups and riparian landowners in the Flathead-Stillwater sub-basin, with the goal of employing best management practices and other techniques to restore impaired streams and streams of concern.



Rail Safety



The daily transport of toxic and volatile chemicals and hydrocarbons through the Flathead Basin presents a clear and present danger to our waters. With these substances, the most important and effective approach is prevention and reduction of risk. As the spills in the Yellowstone River have shown, emergency response can only capture a small percentage of the toxic chemicals released into water bodies when a spill occurs. The impacts are often costly, far-reaching, and irreparable. Even after clean-up, water bodies rarely, if ever, return to their previous biological condition.

The FBC believes that we need stronger proactive measures to protect both our communities and our sensitive and pristine resources, including fish spawning areas. In 2015, we convened a group of stakeholders to meet with Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF). Our primary goal was to shift the focus from emergency response to prevention, identifying actions that can help reduce the risk of spills in the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. We are continuing to pursue communication with BNSF, seeking consensus between the company and stakeholders on appropriate measures. The FBC is also helping

identify actions that can be taken by land management agencies adjacent to the rail corridor, including Glacier National Park and the Flathead National Forest. Our collaborative approach looks for common ground in developing a more robust, stakeholder-supported prevention plan.

Over the next biennium, the FBC anticipates that the conversation with stakeholders and BNSF will continue, along with an exploration of other options that could enhance prevention efforts, such as increased engagement with the Montana Public Service Commission.



The Flathead Basin Commission worked with Burlington Northern Santa Fe to explore ways to better protect sensitive aquatic habitats.

Upcoming Activities

In addition to the work described in the preceding pages, the Flathead Basin Commission will be undertaking a number of other projects and initiatives over the coming two years:

- Establishment of the Flathead Basin Protection Fund, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, to assist in funding the work of the FBC.
- Sustainable development initiatives for the local business community.
- The use of the arts to enhance educational messaging related to resource management.
- Climate change adaptation planning and implementation.
- Total Maximum Daily Load implementation projects.
- Continuation of core programs, including, but not limited to, aquatic invasive species; rail safety; and drought planning.



Budget

	2015	2016
Personnel Services	\$90,064.62	\$90,064.62
Operating	\$10,067.38	\$10,067.38
Subtotal:	\$100,132	\$100,132
DNRC Budget Shortfall	-\$16,000	-\$33,000
Total:	\$84,132	\$67,132

Contracts/Grants/Donations Managed by the FBC during the Biennium

Blackfeet Tribe/US FWS	\$20,000
Burlington Northern SF	\$10,000
City of Whitefish	\$5,000
Conoco Phillips	\$168,000
CSKT	\$10,000
Flathead Conservation Dist.	\$13,000
Flathead Electric Coop	\$35,000
Glacier Electric Coop	\$2,000
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$8,000
US BOR Hungry Horse	\$25,000
US BOR Watersmart Grant	\$100,000
US Forest Service	\$30,000
Whitefish Water & Sewer	\$7,500
Other Misc	\$8,000
Total:	\$441,500



Leveraged funding secured during the Biennium: \$350,000

Leveraged Resources: With a base budget of now well under \$100,000, the FBC has been able to directly raise almost \$450,000 to better protect the resource. In addition, we have been able to assist government agencies in leveraging approximately \$350,000 to support work critically needed in and adjacent to the Basin, not including in-kind contributions. The modest investment in the FBC pays significant dividends, with approximately \$800,000 coming into the Basin to support critically needed resource projects.

In-kind assistance from FBC partners totals over \$200,000 for the AIS program alone.

FBC Board of Directors



Tim Baker, Natural Resources Advisor
Office of the Governor
Helena, MT

Ray Beck, Deputy Director
Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation
Helena, MT

Ann Brower, Lake County Commissioner
Polson, MT

Chas Cartwright, Governor Appointee
Columbia Falls, MT

Jasmine Courville-Brown, Governor Appointee
Ronan, MT

Julie DalSoglio
Communities & International Policy Advisor
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Helena, MT

Kate Hunt, Governor Appointee
Kalispell, MT

Rich Janssen, Natural Resources Dept. Head
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Polson, MT

Brian Lipscomb, CEO
Energy Keepers
Polson, MT

Jan Metzmaker, Governor Appointee
Whitefish, MT

Phil Mitchell, Flathead County Commissioner
Kalispell, MT

Jeff Mow, Superintendent
Glacier National Park Headquarters
West Glacier, MT

Kathy Olsen, Manager
Kalispell Regional Water Office
Kalispell, MT

Dennis Philmon, Superintendent
Hungry Horse Project Bureau of Reclamation
Hungry Horse, MT

Jack Potter, Governor Appointee
Columbia Falls, MT

Mark Reller, Montana Liaison
Bonneville Power Administration
Helena, MT

Christian Schmidt, Administrator
Dept. of Environmental Quality
Helena, MT

Jim Simpson, Supervisor
Lake County Conservation District
Polson, MT

Dean Sirucek, Supervisor
Flathead County Conservation District
Kalispell, MT

Thompson Smith, Governor Appointee
FBC Chair
Charlo, MT

Vacant, British Columbia Liaison
Ministry of Environment
British Columbia

Chip Weber, Supervisor
Flathead National Forest
Kalispell, MT

Jim Williams, Region 1 Supervisor
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Kalispell, MT

Partners

FBC Partners 2015-2016

In-kind support/donations

- Blackfeet Tribe
- Bretz RV & Marine
- Cabelas
- Salish Kootenai College
- Glacier National Park
- Glacier Raft Company (pledged)
- Gull Boats and RV
- Veronica Kempfert
- Province of Alberta
- St. Mary's/East Glacier KOA
- Summit Mountain Lodge
- Working Dogs for Conservation

Under \$1000

- Bill Caras
- Kate Hunt
- Mission Valley Power

\$1000 – \$2499

- Glacier Electric Cooperative
- Swan Lakers

\$2500-\$4999

- Environmental Protection Agency (via partnership with Watershed Education Network)
- Flathead Lake Protection Association

\$5000 – \$9999

- City of Whitefish
- Flathead Lakers (to FBC and Lake County AIS fund)
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Whitefish Water and Sewer District

\$10,000 – \$19,999

- Burlington Northern Santa Fe
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- Flathead Conservation District
- Lake County (to Lake County AIS fund)
- Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation (via AIS grant to Lake County)

\$20,000 – \$49,999

- Bureau of Reclamation, Hungry Horse Dam
- Flathead Electric Co-op
- Flathead National Forest

\$50,000 and above

- Bureau of Reclamation, Watersmart Grant Program
- Conoco Phillips Spirit of Innovation Award
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (via grant to Blackfeet Tribe)



Photo Credits



Cover: Flathead Lake, Troy Smith*

Background Photo, pages 2, 10, 12: Clouds over Flathead,
Michael Hewston, www.michaelhewston.com

Page 2: Pika, Mahalie Stackpole*

Page 3: Mussel settlers on hull, Ky Zimmerman

Page 3 - 4: Zebra mussel, USGS

Page 4: Dog/Handler team, Flathead Beacon

Page 5: Canada lynx, Eric Kilby*

Page 5 - 6: Waterton-Glacier, schmeeve*

Page 7: Flathead Lake, Troy Smith*

Page 8: Oil Train, Russ Allison Loar*

Page 9: Ripples in Flathead, Paul Yong*

Page 10: Hungry Horse Dam, Bureau of Reclamation*

Page 12: Grizzly cubs hand-in-hand, Anna*

* Obtained under Creative Commons

DONATE:

Please support our efforts to protect the Flathead Basin

To donate please make checks out to:

Flathead Community Foundation

P.O. Box 1422

Kalispell, MT 59903

In the memo line of your check please write "Flathead Basin Commission"

Thank you!



655 Timberwolf Parkway
Kalispell, MT 59901