

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Western Montana Conservation Commission Hosts First Meeting; Members Appointed

HELENA, Mont. – Last month, Governor Greg Gianforte announced eight appointments to the Western Montana Conservation Commission (WMCC). Their work began during the inaugural meeting of the WMCC on November 2 and 3.

“Each of you brings your own background expertise, and together you’re better because of that combined knowledge and experience,” said Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras. “Thank you for taking this commitment on and for working to preserve our Montana waters.”

The following individuals were appointed to serve on the commission:

- Private Industry Representative: Sandy Beder-Miller – retired Pulp and Paper Process Engineer
- Electric Cooperative Representative: Duane Braaten – Flathead Electric Co-op Trustee
- Flathead River Basin Representative: Mike Koopal - Executive Director, Whitefish Lake Institute
- Private Citizen At Large: Phil Matson – Research Coordinator, Flathead Lake Biological Station
- Kootenai River Basin Representative: Lech Naumovich – Director and Ecologist, Greater Than Image, LLC
- Private Landowner: Matt Peterson – Civil Engineer, NewFields
- Hydropower Utility Industry Representative: Arthur Potts – Terrestrial Program Manager, Avista
- Upper Clark Fork River Basin & Blackfoot River Basin: Onno Wieringa – Recreation Business Owner and Manager
- Lower Clark Fork River Basin & Bitterroot River Basin: *not filled*

Mike Koopal, Executive Director of the Whitefish Lake Institute, was appointed to chair the commission with Onno Wieringa as vice chair. Koopal previously served on the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) Executive Committee and on the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission (UC³) Early Detection and Monitoring Committee.

“We have an opportunity and responsibility to expand the successes of Flathead Basin Commission’s long 40-year history across western Montana. Coupled with the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission’s five-year history of successes in AIS monitoring and outreach efforts across the region, WMCC can engage with more groups and communities to address important water quality and natural resource issues,” said Koopal. “The Governor’s Office has assembled a group of talented individuals to serve as commissioners and I look forward to working with them to protect our connected waters and our connected economy.”

Together with the governor-appointed voting members, WMCC's membership consists of seven additional voting members representing county commissions, conservation districts, wastewater or stormwater utilities, and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) natural resource department. The remaining eighteen members of the commission are nonvoting and advisory, along with representatives from state and federal agencies.

[Senate Bill 83](#) combined the roles and jurisdiction of the FBC and the UC³ effectively creating WMCC on July 1, 2023.

The November 2 and 3 meeting focused on commission foundations including: introductions, an overview of the history of FBC and UC³, duties and responsibilities, financials, by-laws, committees, and future work directions. In adherence to the statutory duties of the commission, potential and past projects include community education and outreach, supporting a comprehensive aquatic invasive species prevention program, and monitoring and preventing point and nonpoint source pollution.

“Since WMCC was established in July, we have been busy building upon the incredible foundations of FBC and UC³ to create a new organization. We’ve been meeting with new partners, continuing the work in our communities, sharing success at conferences across the US, and working with the Governor’s office to establish a diverse commission,” said WMCC Executive Director Casey Lewis. “I am impressed by the engaging energy of our new commission members as we begin this next chapter together to protect Montana waters.”

The next WMCC meeting will be held in early 2024. For more information and to sign up for the WMCC newsletter, visit WesternMTWaters.com or contact Executive Director Casey Lewis at casey.lewis@mt.gov.

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