

Letter to Editor 2/26/10 Daily InterLake

To the Editor:

During the past three decades, countless Flathead citizens, public officials, scientists and organizations, including the Flathead Lakers, have staunchly defended Flathead waters from the threat of upstream coal development proposals in the British Columbia headwaters of the Flathead River. All of that work has paid off. We are elated that British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell and Governor Brian Schweitzer signed a historic agreement banning mining in the Flathead Watershed.

What a tremendous achievement for the future of Flathead Lake and the waters that feed it, as well as for the magnificent wild lands along the North Fork River that straddle the U.S.–Canadian boundary. The Flathead Lakers are grateful to Premier Campbell, Governor Schweitzer and everyone who worked so long and hard for this result. And we look forward to a new era of transboundary cooperation to sustain the qualities that make the Flathead such a special place.

As we celebrate this achievement, the Lakers encourage our local public officials to demonstrate the courage and leadership of our transboundary neighbor.

The Flathead Lakers are celebrating the 10th anniversary of our Critical Lands Project in 2010. This project brought together resource managers, scientists, and land conservation groups to identify and protect the critical lands that sustain the Flathead's waters, wildlife, recreation opportunities and farming . It has been a tremendous success so far. With our River to Lake Initiative partners and the enthusiasm of many private landowners, the network of conservation along the Flathead River and at the lake's north shore has grown to 10,000 acres of critical lands protected.

One of our premier focus areas is the special landscape at the north shore of Flathead Lake that is unique in the valley. The north shore supports iconic Flathead scenery, wildlife (especially the tremendous flights of waterfowl), prime farmland, our hunting heritage, and clean water – all so important for now and the future.

We urge the county commissioners and the proposed North Shore Ranch subdivision developers to reconsider their proposed settlement which will have great costs in terms of both taxpayer dollars and damage to the special north shore values. We believe it is still possible for the county to work with the state to negotiate with the developers a buy-out of the North Shore Ranch site , based on federal, state and private funding already committed and additional funding that could be generated in a reasonable time frame. Please don't let this opportunity to protect such a special place on our side of the international border slip away.

Larry Ashcraft
President, Flathead Lakers