

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION



"...to protect the natural resources that make the North Fork an unparalleled environment for wildlife and people."

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Completing the "Gentleman's Agreement" in the Trans-boundary Flathead

By John Frederick

Last year the Premier of British Columbia, Gordon Campbell, and the Governor of Montana, Brian Schweitzer, made a most unusual agreement: to "remove mining, oil and gas, and coal development as permissible land uses in the Flathead River Basin." The Canadians have already done this on their side of the border. What is missing on the U.S side is the elimination of the mineral leases in the North Fork to protect the watershed from future oil and gas development and mining.

Montana Senator Max Baucus has for many years championed the protection of the North Fork from whatever threatened it. For approximately 35 years this has primarily been the potential for open pit coal mines to the north causing serious pollution downstream in the North Fork of the Flathead River, including the western boundary of Glacier National Park.

The North Fork Watershed Protection Act of 2011, sponsored by Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester, will eliminate mineral leases in the North Fork of the Flathead River as well as other locations within the Flathead River drainage of Montana.

Besides the work by governments on both sides of the border to eliminate further resource development in the trans-boundary Flathead Valley, another significant part of the agreement involves compensation for the companies on the British Columbia side who invested money in minerals exploration in the area. Nature Conservancy Canada has said they will pick up the tab. Originally estimated to be 17 million dollars, this amount was lowered to 9.4 million dollars after some negotiation. These funds will be given to the B.C. government once there is legislation in place to insure no further oil, gas or coal development or mining. The province will then distribute the money to the appropriate companies.

The Nature Conservancy of the United States is also working on raising donations to help pay compensation to these companies and complete the terms of gentleman's agreement. U.S. residents may send donations to the following address.

The Nature Conservancy
32 South Ewing Street
Helena, MT 59601

On the "for" line on the check or via note or email state that the donation is for the "North Fork Now! Campaign".

If you have questions, phone Allen May at 406-600-0078 or email him at amay@tnc.org.

If you would like to make a gift with a credit card, you can phone Gail Moser at 406-443-0303 or email Gail at gmoser@tnc.org. Again, remember to mention the "North Fork Now! Campaign".

The following article appeared on June 8, 2011 in the online media publication New West (<http://www.newwest.net/>). It is reprinted here with their permission.

U.S.-Canadian "Gentleman's Agreement" To Protect Montana River

A federal proposal would set aside the North Fork watershed from mining interests – and several energy companies are behind it.

By Kate Schwab

An ongoing effort to protect a shared river drainage on the Montana-Canada border from mining damage will not inhibit recreational users, hunters or logging activity, Montana's senior senator promises.

According to a statement from Sen. Max Baucus, D-Montana, the North Fork Watershed Protection Act would solidify an agreement between Montana and British Columbia to prohibit new mining and energy exploration in the million-acre northern Flathead River basin, which extends across the Canadian line. As part of the American contribution, federal leases for coal and oil extraction in the area would be rescinded. About 80 percent of them have already been voluntarily surrendered.

It's a big moment for the senator, who first introduced legislation to have the Flathead listed as a "Wild and Scenic River" in 1975.

"We owe it to our kids and grandkids to protect the North Fork on all fronts - through legislation and by working hard to get oil and gas companies to retire their leases in the North Fork without asking taxpayers to pick up the tab," Baucus said, calling the North Fork region both "a pillar of Montana's outdoor heritage" and an "economic driver" for the state. Montana's junior senator, Jon Tester, also a Democrat, is a co-sponsor.

Opponents decry the move as a government "land grab" and say the act will damage Montana's economic interests. In a scathing post, PolyMontana's Ed Berry argued that the bill has already harmed the state because of energy companies returning leases on roughly 200,000 acres in the Flathead. Passing the bill, Berry said, would cut jobs and tax revenues from mining and oil and gas exploration in the region.

John Frederick, president of the North Fork Preservation Association, a local conservation group, said the most recent drilling attempt in the area happened around 1984.

"There's no oil or gas here. That was figured out by the U.S. Geological Survey almost 20 years ago," he said. "It was dry. They went down 11,000 feet and didn't find anything."

The bill, Frederick said, is simply the American end of a "gentleman's agreement" to halt, and prevent, resource exploitation in the Flathead. Canada has already done its part—and with coal on their side, and likely oil and gas, Canadians have more to lose.

"The oil and gas folks have been giving up their leases, so this is more for the future, to make the Canadians happy," Frederick said. "They're giving up stuff; we should be giving up stuff, too."

Concern about mining activities in key watersheds is well founded. The Denver Post reported recently that the western states are home to an estimated 500,000 abandoned mines, and toxic runoff from them has polluted about 40 percent of the river headwaters in the area. In Colorado alone, waste leaked from about 450 vacant mines have contaminated an estimated 1,300 miles' worth of the state's waterways with arsenic, zinc, cadmium and more. However, the mines responsible for that damage comprise only about 6 percent of Colorado's empty mines.

It's worth protecting the Flathead, Frederick said, because the area, which is sparsely populated and has never been fully developed, remains remarkably well insulated from invasive species.

"We have all the same critters that were here when Lewis & Clark got in the neighborhood," Frederick said. "That's saying a lot: grizzly bears, wolves, wolverines. No cows up here at all, just a handful of horses, and I have two of them."

The Flathead's history is unique, too, in that despite years of attempts by private companies to explore the region, no full-scale production of any energy resource has ever taken place there, Baucus told the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in May. Even major energy players ConocoPhillips and Chevron have signed on as supporters.

The Senate's Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests held hearings on the bill May 25 but took no further action.

Exxon Megaloads and the North Fork

An editorial by Paul Edwards

Exxon has a plan to ship enormous machinery modules—30 feet high, long as a football field, weighing 650,000 pounds—in “megaloads” on giant trailers from Lewiston, Idaho up the Clearwater and Lochsa River, over Lolo Pass, and up the Rocky Mountain Front.

This scam to turn Idaho and Montana two-lane roads—including the one along the Wild and Scenic Lochsa River—into a “High Wide Transportation Corridor” for Korean-made equipment to the most environmentally destructive disaster in North America is being pushed by the governors of both states and their Departments of Transportation.

It is being fought actively and in court by a wide and varied coalition of citizens who are defending themselves and their cherished outdoor recreation areas from being run over roughshod by one of the most monstrous, arrogant multinational corporations on earth.

It sounds grim and it is. But what has this to do with our North Fork? Why should we be concerned? For one fundamental and undeniable reason: it is yet another example--a particularly glaring and flagrant one--of what happens when the massive financial and political power of a giant corporation decides it wants anything, whether it's a land or water concession, access to a public resource, or right of way through private land. The land, water, and wildlife, the environment, and the rights of private property lose.

The North Fork has recently been very fortunate, with significant help from some rather surprising quarters, in dodging a whole series of bullets in the form of potentially ruinous industrial development schemes. To those of us who have been involved in endless fights to preserve some of the wildest portions of The Last Best Place, it has seemed almost unbelievable that ecological sanity has prevailed in saving for now the peerless jewel of our North Fork from conscienceless exploitation of massive extractive industry.

This megaloads power play will not touch us directly but we ignore it at our peril because what it represents is exactly the kind of brutal, indifferent attitude toward citizen rights and the natural environment that we all prize that has threatened the North Fork through the decades, and will again.

A wise and decent man once said that injustice anywhere threatens justice everywhere. That principle holds in this case. If Exxon can get away with treating Montana as it does Third World countries, that is, as powerless and defenseless places where it's will is all that matters, it will reinforce a precedent that can only have the most threatening implications for the fabulously wild and healthy river valley that we love.

We all need to do what we can to stop the megaloads now.

A Gentle Reminder: Time to Pay Your Dues!

If you have not yet paid your NFPA membership dues for 2011, it's time!

Regular membership dues are \$20/year; \$25/year for the whole family.

"Living lightly" (students and such like) dues are only \$10/year.

NFPA Annual Meeting Features Bylaw Changes, Well-Known Speaker

At the January board of directors meeting it was decided to add two new board member positions (an increase from nine to eleven) as a way of introducing new blood without losing board experience. This is a change to the bylaws requiring a vote of the members at the annual meeting on July 30th. Volunteers wanted. If you would like to be on the board or know someone who should be on the board, please let us know.

This year's featured speaker is Charlie Russell, the son of famed Albertan outfitter/writer Andy Russell. Charlie, besides writing several earlier books on grizzly bears, is also famous for adopting three orphaned cubs from a Russian zoo that were destined to die because they were outgrowing their cage. These were the first of many orphaned grizzly cubs that Charlie taught to live in the wilds of a very remote part of Russia. He has a book and a DVD, *Grizzly Heart*, telling about his successes in living with the bears in Russia. The premise he wanted to prove was that grizzly bears are not naturally aggressive and mean, but may become so if their only experience with humans is always aggressiveness and meanness towards them.

The annual meeting will be held on Saturday, July 30 at Sondreson Hall. The potluck starts at 5:00 p.m. with the business meeting and elections beginning at around 6:30 p.m. Charlie's talk begins at 7:30 p.m.

Don't Feed the Bears; Do Feed the Web Site

Yes, thank you, the web site did rather well this year, with a steady stream of articles and links and a noticeable uptick in traffic. Oddly enough, the weather was responsible for some of the extra visits. This year's long, snowy winter and late spring triggered substantial interest in river levels, pushing a lot of traffic to our newly created "Flood Information" page. We also got a lot of visits from people concerned about disruptions to Glacier Park's schedule, especially the delay in opening Logan Pass. Despite the weather-related push, web traffic was up overall, reflecting a continued interest in local environmental issues and North Fork activities.

As usual, we're always on the lookout for contributions – photos, articles, pointers to useful material and so forth. Suggestions are always appreciated, as is the occasional compliment.

The NFPA web site is at <http://www.gravel.org/>.

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2011

Saturday, July 30. North Fork Preservation Association annual meeting at Sondreson Hall. Potluck at 5:00pm. Business meeting and elections at about 6:30 p.m. 7:30pm program features speaker Charlie Russell, author of *Grizzly Heart*, *Grizzly Season* and *Spirit Bear*. Russell rescued 3 grizzly cubs from cages in Russia, the first of many orphaned cubs he taught how to survive in the wild. All are welcome.

Saturday, August 13, 8:30 a.m. Trail maintenance on Tuchuck Ridge Trail. Meet at Tuchuck Campground at 8:30 a.m. Subject to change. Phone John at 888-5084 or Frank evenings at 752-2909.

Other Activities

These events are sponsored by the North Fork Landowners' Association. See their web site (<http://www.nflandowners.com>) for further details and listings of more activities.

Tuesday, July 26, River corridor weed roundup. Come join your fellow weed wranglers going from the border to Ford Station starting at 11 a.m. This event is sponsored by the Weed Committee and is open to the community.

Friday, July 29, Hike to Coal Ridge Lookout. Come join the fun on a hike to Coal Ridge Lookout. This is a moderate 8 mile round trip hike. Meet at the intersection of Hay Creek and North Fork roads at 8:30 a.m.

Thursday, August 11, Come join hosts Carl and Linda Pittman for a float trip from West Glacier to Blankenship. Meet at the Pittman's at 10 a.m. This is a more challenging float, Class II with one Class III. We recommend that you talk with the Pittmans if you're a beginner. Don't forget your watercraft and life jacket. If you need a place in a raft, stop by the Merc and sign up. This event is open to the community.

Thursday, August 18, Hike to Upper Quartz Lake. Come join the fun on a hike to Upper Quartz Lake in Glacier National Park. This is a moderate 8 mile round trip hike. Meet at the Polebridge Ranger Station at 8:30 a.m.

Friday, August 19, River corridor weed roundup. Come join your fellow weed wranglers going from Ford Station to Polebridge starting at (TBA). This event is sponsored by the Weed Committee and is open to the community.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES YET, IT'S TIME!

If you have paid your dues for 2011. ***Thank you!***

I want to help protect the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley at the western edge of Glacier National Park.

_____	New	Name	_____
_____	Renewal	Address	_____

		Phone	_____
		Email	_____

I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$20.00/year _____
family membership of \$25.00/year _____
living lightly membership of \$10.00/year _____

I want to help. Here is my donation of _____ for _____

Please remove me from your mailing list. _____

NFPA is a 501(c)(3) organization. Your contribution is tax deductible.

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
c/o Ellen Horowitz
880 Blackmer Lane
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
(406) 752-2909

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Bill Walker, Web Master/Newsletter Editor wkwalker@nvdi.com

Officers are elected for a one-year term; board members for two. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact a board member.

Don't forget to keep an eye on our web site! – www.gravel.org

North Fork Preservation Association

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Polebridge MT 59928

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Please remember to pay your dues!