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*Flathead Lakers:  
Working for clean water, a healthy  
ecosystem, and lasting quality of life in  
the Flathead Watershed*

March 21, 2008

Flathead County Planning Board  
Flathead County Planning & Zoning  
1035 1st Ave W  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
via e-mail: msevier@co.flathead.mt.us and bgrieve@flathead.mt.gov

Re: North Shore Ranch subdivision proposal

Dear Planning Board Members:

Please accept the following comments submitted by the Flathead Lakers opposing the North Shore Ranch subdivision as currently proposed. The Flathead Lakers is a nonprofit organization working for clean water, healthy ecosystems and lasting quality of life in the Flathead Watershed. The Flathead Lakers was founded in 1958 and currently has over 1,300 members.

Some places are too special and too vulnerable to rely on numerous mitigation measures, multiple permit conditions, special construction methods, and difficult to enforce covenants in order to protect the Flathead's waters, wildlife and quality of life. The North Shore of Flathead Lake is one of those places.

The North Shore comprises a special combination of beautiful scenery, farm lands, lakeshore, wetlands and riparian habitat. It is a hot spot for waterfowl and other birds and for bird hunting. The area's wetlands and vegetated buffers help protect water quality in Flathead Lake. These natural assets contribute to Flathead County's quality of life and economy. In fact, the county's quality natural environment has become a competitive advantage and a major force driving economic growth in the valley. High density development at the North Shore could seriously damage these assets.

The density of the proposed North Shore Ranch subdivision has not been substantially changed from the original application and remains inappropriate for this unique area due to:

- the shallow groundwater,
- prime agricultural soils,
- risk of flooding,
- the significant impacts on the adjacent U.S. Waterfowl Production Area, waterfowl, and other wildlife,
- remaining questions about the capacity of the Lakeside Sewer District to serve this project,
- lack of guarantee that the proposed buffer area and wetlands next to the Waterfowl Production Area will be permanently protected through a conservation easement and managed to protect wildlife values,
- potential safety hazard of building over very shallow groundwater with the soil types in the project area.

### ***Flathead County Growth Policy and Subdivision Regulations***

Several goals and policies of the Flathead County Growth Policy, the Montana Subdivision Regulations and the Flathead County Subdivision regulations are relevant to this subdivision proposal and support giving serious consideration to its environmental impacts.

*Flathead County Growth Policy:* Although the new Flathead County Growth Policy, adopted over a year ago, includes many policies that would indicate that the proposed North Shore Ranch subdivision is inappropriate for this location, the county has yet to pursue many of the growth policy implementation strategies relevant to this proposal. The county's Subdivision Report #FPP-07-32 dated February 1, 2008 indicates those policies cannot be applied to this proposal. We believe that this disregards the intent of the Growth Policy.

The Growth Policy states that its purpose is to "establish goals and policies that build a foundation for safe and healthy growth that preserves Flathead County's most valued characteristics." (Chapter 1, Introduction). Approval of the North Shore Ranch subdivision, as proposed, would assure that the Growth Policy does not achieve this purpose. The following policies are all relevant and should be considered in the context of this subdivision proposal:

- P.4.2 Identify lands most suited to agriculture (appropriate soils, access to water, shape and size of parcels etc.).*
- P.4.3 Identify a desirable gross density for rural residential development that retains land values, preserves the agricultural character of the community and allows for efficient provision of government services (law enforcement, fire protection, transportation, etc.).*
- P.4.7 Create a n agricultural/private timber lands board, with significant representation from the ag/timber community and the Flathead County Planning Board, to propose plans for conserving working farms and ranches, clean water and key wildlife habitat.*
- P.8.2 Identify required criteria for various densities that support the seven elements of the public's vision outlined in Chapter 1.*
- P.9.1 Identify open spaces that serve a critical role in public and environmental health, safety and general welfare.*
- P.9.2 Create regulatory incentives for the preservation and protection of open spaces during the development process.*
- P.9.3 Consider and develop specifications for various buffers to protect open spaces.*
- P.10.7 ~~On lands that contain areas both suitable and unsuitable for development,~~ encourage open space development design techniques to cluster dwellings away from hazardous and/or unsafe areas.*
- P.11.3 Determine road and recreational waterway corridors with scenic resources that are valued by both residents and visitors.*
- P.21.2 Develop methods to enhance a sustainable agricultural and timber industry through community-based incentives.*
- P.21.5 Preserve the natural amenities that characterize the county in order to attract industries and businesses that maintain the high quality of life that attracts visitors and new residents, and sustains the tourism sector of the economy.*
- P.23.4 Areas in proximity to employment and retail centers should be recognized as more suitable for higher residential densities and mixed use development.*
- P.40.4 Encourage rural low-intensity land uses in areas where the groundwater is less than eight feet unless scientific evidence shows that a higher or lower intensity of land use is appropriate.*
- P.41.2 Discourage unmitigated development in areas identified as critical wildlife habitat.*