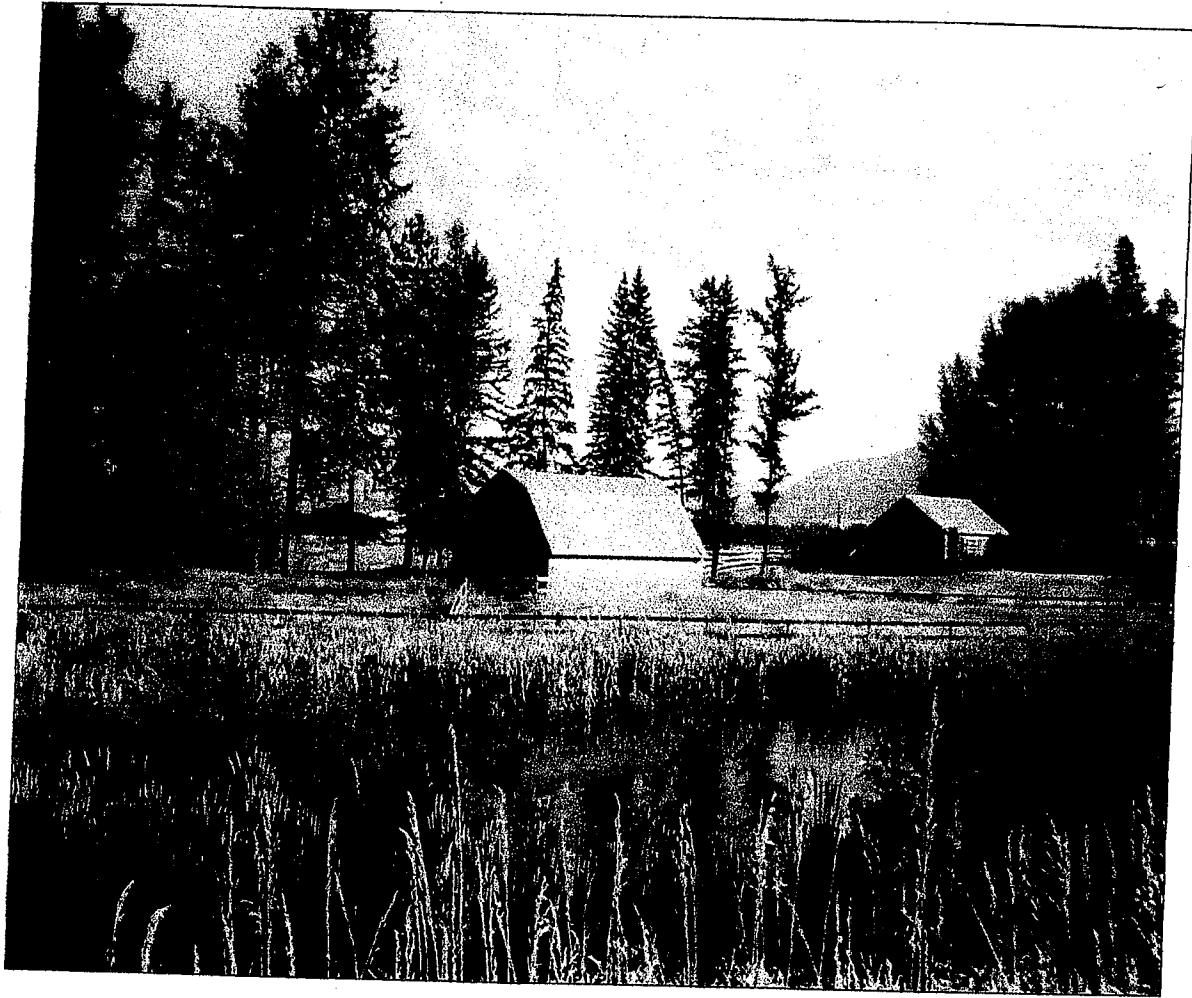


HELENA FLATS



NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN



Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan

RESOLUTION NO. 789 AA

WHEREAS, Helena Flats Land Use Coalition, has requested a revision to the Flathead County Master Plan by the adoption of the Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan as an addendum to the Flathead County Master Plan. The Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan covers approximately 4,800 acres between U.S. Highway 2 on the West and the Flathead River on the East and between Rose Crossing on the South and Pioneer Road on the North;

WHEREAS, the Flathead County Planning Board recommended that the Board of Commissioners adopt the revision to the Flathead County Master Plan;

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners passed a resolution of intent (Resolution No. 789 Z) to consider the requested plan change on July 21, 2005, and gave notice that it would consider public comment received prior to August 26, 2005; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners has considered the information presented to it since the adoption of that resolution of intent.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to Section 76-1-604, M.C.A., by the Board of Commissioners of Flathead County, Montana, that it hereby adopts the Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan as a revision to the Flathead County Master Plan, covering approximately 4,800 acres between U.S. Highway 2 on the West and the Flathead River on the East and between Rose Crossing on the South and Pioneer Road on the North. The property described is shown on the attached map as Exhibit A, Flathead County, Montana. The Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan, as adopted, is attached hereto as Exhibit B.

DATED this 13th day of September, 2005.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Flathead County, Montana

By


Gary D. Hall, Chairman

By

Robert W. Watne, Member

By


Joseph D. Brenneman, Member

ATTEST:

Paula Robinson, Clerk

By


Deputy

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INTRODUCTION

On March 15th and 16th 2004 the Helena Flats community held three meetings at the Helena Flats School to discuss growth and development in their neighborhood. The meetings were organized in large part because of a recent spate of development proposals in the area that the residents felt would greatly alter the character and quality of their neighborhood.

Out of the above-mentioned meetings came the following main sentiments: a desire to preserve the rural atmosphere and all of its associated amenities (wildlife, agriculture and forests); a concern for the water supply due to the lack of public sewer and an increase in waste water systems; a concern that the roads are inadequate and unsafe to support increased traffic in the area; and a desire to see well-planned development in the area.

With input from the Helena Flats Land Use Coalition Committee, a draft Neighborhood Plan was prepared to reflect the sentiments expressed at the March 15 and 16, 2004 neighborhood meetings. Using June 1, 2004 county records at the Plat Room and a current GIS map, landowners in the area were notified by mail that the draft had been prepared, they were provided summaries of pertinent elements of the draft and they were advised how to review and obtain copies of the draft. All landowners were invited to attend one of two neighborhood meetings held on June 22, 2004. Public input at those meetings resulted in additional changes to the draft plan.

This document represents a formalized plan of the community's vision for how growth should occur in its neighborhood and is meant to serve as a guideline for developers and property owners wishing to develop their land. Based on concerns and opinions expressed by the residents, this plan outlines goals and policies for the Helena Flats neighborhood.

The Helena Flats Neighborhood Plan is bounded by the Flathead River to the east; U.S. Highway 2 on the west; Pioneer Road on the north and Rose Crossing/Addison Roads close the planning area to the south. The entire area within these boundaries is included in the neighborhood plan. The planning area contains approximately 4,870 acres.

I. HUMAN AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

A. HISTORY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

In the mid 1930's the population of the entire Flathead County was approximately 19,200 people. At that time, the Helena Flats area was sparsely populated compared to today's standards. Helena Flats was primarily made up of 80 and 160 acre parcels that were used for agricultural purposes. Land owners made their living off of the land. In addition to agricultural lands, there was quite a bit of timber remaining among the fields. Highway 2, which forms the western boundary of the Helena Flats neighborhood, did not exist, as it is known today. Rather, LaSalle Road from Columbia Falls to Kalispell was nothing more than a dirt road. Helena Flats Road only went as far north as Reserve Street. Residents of the Helena Flats area were able to reach Kalispell by train from a siding at Rose Crossing and generally only did so about once a week or as the necessity arose.

Being so close in proximity to Kalispell, the area began to feel the pressures of development as early as the 1950's. In the early 1950's, the Harvey Aluminum Company purchased approximately 1500 – 2000 acres to install an aluminum plant. After purchasing the land for the aluminum plant, the Harvey Aluminum Company realized that the soil in the area was too unstable for construction of the proposed facility. Soil samples revealed a layer of quicksand under the topsoil and gravel layers. The Company had no use for the land so they sold it to Jim Edmiston. Mr. Edmiston turned the land into a large cattle ranch and farm, which fit in well with the uses of his many neighbors. The large cattle ranch and farm proved to be financially viable until sometime in the mid 1970's. At that point Mr. Edmiston divided the ranch into fairly large acreages and sold most of it to a rancher from Roundup. The rancher from Roundup did the same thing as Mr. Edmiston. He used the land for a period of time as a ranch and then again divided it up into smaller parcels and sold a number of them. This trend continues to date. Many ranchers and farmers, as their profession becomes less and less financially viable, choose to subdivide and sell small portions of their land.

Currently, the highest density development in Helena Flats is in the southern portion of the Helena Flats Neighborhood. This is largely due to its proximity to the City of Kalispell and to the Helena Flats School.

It is important to note that the current settlement pattern in the Helena Flats Neighborhood has not been influenced much by government standards. There have been no zoning or other land use controls enacted in the area. The only type of governmental regulation in the area has been through the county's subdivision review process.

B. POPULATION

Helena Flats' population in 1990 was 566. The 2000 census claimed a population of 662. That equates to a population increase of 96 people or a rate of 16.9% over the decade. This is significantly lower than the growth rate for the entire Flathead County, which experienced a 25.8% rate of growth during the same period. Based on these previous years, it can be assumed that the population of Helena Flats will grow at least 1.7% per year.

C. HOUSING

Existing Conditions

The residents of Helena Flats realize that there must be adequate housing for future growth. At the present time there is a fairly wide spectrum of housing in the area. The densest development in Helena Flats is located in the southwest portion of the neighborhood. The housing in that area is, generally speaking, more affordable than the other housing throughout the area. The homes in the southwest section include a large proportion of manufactured homes and trailers. The southeast portion of the neighborhood, near the Flathead River, is less dense, with larger parcel sizes than the southwest. The southeast portion of the Neighborhood contains a mix of housing. There is some affordable housing as well as some modest homes in this area. The northern portion of Helena Flats is still composed of large parcels, many being used for agriculture. The development in this area is generally much less dense than in the southern sections and generally contains a mix of newer, expensive homes as well as older homes, barns, and outbuildings associated with agriculture.

There are currently 468 recorded lots in the Helena Flats Area (see Map 1), owned by 283 individual property owners. Clearly, some owners own multiple lots at this time. The lots are held by a number of different entities. Individuals own some of the lots, some are held in trust, some are held by various corporations, and some are held by speculators. Due to the varying types of ownership present in the area, not all lots are used for residential purposes.

It should be noted that unlike Flathead County as a whole, the population of Helena Flats is not seasonal and therefore the housing production is not expected to occur at a pace faster than the area's population growth.

Goals

- Recognize the need for housing and cooperate to provide well-planned subdivided lots within the constraints of infrastructure and natural resources.
- Develop housing in appropriate locations in a manner that makes reasonable use of the land and respects natural resources.
- Develop housing in a manner that recognizes the economic value of variables such as open space and scenic view in maintaining a rural atmosphere.

Policies

- Encourage mixed use of land to enable agricultural landowners to develop portions of their land that are no longer suitable nor economically feasible for agricultural production.
- Allow development throughout the Helena Flats Neighborhood that respects the historic development patterns and the natural resources of the area.

- Encourage higher density development in the southern portion of Helena Flats realizing that section is the closest to Kalispell, has the best access to the school, is consistent with existing development patterns, and will most likely be the first section of Helena Flats to receive public sewer.
- Encourage cluster development in the areas of Helena Flats identified for less dense development in order to preserve agricultural lands, open space, wildlife habitat, and the rural atmosphere valued by residents.

D. ECONOMICS

Existing Conditions

The Helena Flats area is primarily a residential area and most residents no longer make their living by utilizing the land as an agricultural resource. However, some residents of the Helena Flats area still engage in farming and ranching as their primary economic activity. These farms and ranches are beneficial in that they provide an economic base for the community. There are also numerous commercial and industrial operations in the area. The majority of the commercial and industrial uses are located in the southwest and northwest portion of Helena Flats.

In the southwest portion of Helena Flats, the largest commercial use is the JTL gravel pit. The gravel pit is an extractive industry that, once the gravel pit is no longer feasible, will be reclaimed by JTL. Other than the gravel pit, the businesses in the southwest portion of the neighborhood are mainly service and supply oriented. The northwestern portion of Helena Flats contains a nursery and greenhouse, a forest products supplier, and a construction company.

The commercial activities in the Helena Flats area are generally located in the northwest and southwest sections of the Neighborhood for several reasons. U.S. Highway 2, which makes up the western border of Helena Flats, is paralleled by railroad tracks the entire length of the neighborhood. There are three primary access points where traffic is able to cross the railroad tracks and enter Helena Flats. The first is Rose Crossing, the southern boundary of the neighborhood. The second is Pioneer Road, the northern boundary of Helena Flats. Lastly, there is an access at Birch Grove, which is just north of the midpoint between Pioneer Road and Rose Crossing. Most commercial activities in Helena Flats have located near these access points. In addition to the three primary access points, there are accesses which are limited to existing dwellings.

It is impractical to locate commercial activities in the interior of Helena Flats until the interior road system is sufficient to handle commercial traffic. (See Roads II.H). Because the current condition of the roads cannot handle commercial traffic, commercial activities should be confined to areas near the access points of Rose Crossing, Birch Grove and Pioneer Road to Helena Flats from Highway 2. Those areas adjacent to Highway 2 but without direct access to Highway 2 or Rose Crossing, Birch Grove Road or Pioneer Road will require a frontage road.

With the current trend of farms and ranches being subdivided into housing developments, Helena Flats is growing increasingly dependent on the City of Kalispell for employment. As was previously stated, at one point the Helena Flats area was self-sufficient in that residents of the

area primarily relied on their land to provide a source of income. This is no longer the case. A large number of the residents in the Helena Flats area work in Kalispell and the surrounding communities. As ranch and farmland is continuously lost, the Helena Flats area can expect to generate less and less income. If the current trends continue, the Helena Flats area will develop into a residential community providing housing for a population that looks to Kalispell and the surrounding area for employment.

Goals

- Provide opportunities for business and industry to develop in Helena Flats.
- Encourage business and industry that does not infringe on the quality of life of the residents of Helena Flats.

Policies

- Encourage commercial activities to develop near access points to Highway 2 and existing commercial activities or on frontage roads parallel to Highway 2.
- Discourage commercial activities that pose a risk to surface and groundwater quality.
- Encourage uses that will have minimal impact on the roads of Helena Flats.
- Where commercial activities will be located adjacent to residential properties, encourage commercial activities that are compatible with the residential character of adjacent properties.
- Encourage commercial activities to minimize the amount of outdoor lighting and to utilize lighting fixtures shielded to avoid glare on adjacent properties and designed to avoid unnecessary illumination of the night sky.

II. FACILITIES AND SERVICES

A. WATER SYSTEMS

Existing Conditions

Private wells are the sole source of clean water for residents of Helena Flats. The wells tap into the fast-flowing aquifer running beneath the neighborhood. See Map 1 for the location of existing wells.

Currently there is no public water system infrastructure to Helena Flats.

Goals

- To maintain a clean, safe and sanitary water supply for all the residents of Helena Flats, free from the threats of degradation and depletion.

Policies

- Monitor areas of increasing density which utilize septic systems as the primary sewage treatment method to ensure that private wells continue to be safe. In areas where degradation is apparent, alternative solutions should be offered.

B. SEWAGE

Existing Conditions

Private septic systems that drain into individual or shared drain fields are the sole means of treating sewage in Helena Flats.

Currently there is no public sewage infrastructure to Helena Flats.

Goals

- To maintain and encourage safe, efficient, environmentally sound sewage disposal throughout the Helena Flats neighborhood.
- To maintain surface and groundwater resources free from contamination or the threat of contamination by sewage effluent.

Policies

- Monitor areas of increasing density, areas of known septic tank failures and areas of severe soil limitations to avoid health related problems and the ground and surface water contamination associated with ineffective on-site sewage disposal systems.
- In critical or sensitive locations or areas of failing septic systems, efforts should be made to utilize alternative disposal methods to safeguard the existing human and natural environment.

- Approach sewage disposal practices around surface water with extreme precaution to safeguard water quality.

C. SOLID WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL

Existing Conditions

Private contractors employed by individual residents primarily perform collection and disposal of solid waste in Helena Flats. Additionally, some residents occasionally burn some solid waste such as natural debris and paper products.

Goals

- To maintain environmentally-sound disposal of solid waste to preserve the quality of Helena Flats.
- To minimize accumulation of refuse, including junk vehicles.

Policies

- Encourage the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office and the Board of County Commissioners to review all subdivision applications for multi-family, commercial and industrial developments to ensure suitable access by refuse collection vehicles.
- Encourage residents to dispose of hazardous wastes according to state and federal law.
- Encourage the county to rigorously enforce state and local laws regarding the storage of abandoned, discarded or junk vehicles.
- Encourage Flathead County to rigidly enforce its County Decay Ordinance.
- Discourage commercial salvage yards.

D. LAW ENFORCEMENT

Existing Conditions

The Flathead County Sheriff's Department is responsible for law enforcement in Helena Flats.

Goals

- To establish and maintain a crime-free neighborhood.
- To encourage a responsive, well-trained and well-maintained Flathead County Sheriff's Department.
- To encourage a neighborhood crime prevention program.

Policies

- Encourage the county sheriff's department to patrol Helena Flats (particularly areas public use) on a regular basis.
- Encourage the development of Neighborhood Watch programs.

E. FIRE PROTECTION

Existing Conditions

Helena Flats is located within the Evergreen Fire District, which is bounded on the east by the Flathead River, the north by Pioneer Road, with irregular east and south boundaries extending almost to Highway 93 and Highway 35 in places.

The Evergreen Volunteer Fire Department ("EFD") has 28 active volunteers, seven trucks, a 55' aerial ladder truck, and two tenders. The main fire station, located on LaSalle near its intersection with East Evergreen, houses five trucks. A satellite station, located on Birch Grove across from Costco, houses two trucks and provides quicker response time to the northern part of the Evergreen Fire District.

Goals

- A coordinated fire protection program that serves the needs of the entire Helena Flats Neighborhood, emphasizing access, response time, and well-trained, well-equipped stations and personnel.
- To have an EMT Basic as a member of the Evergreen Fire District.

Policies

- Encourage neighborhood support for the invaluable alert services
- Encourage structures built within the Helena Flats Neighborhood be constructed and maintained to minimize fire risk and permit efficient fire suppression.

F. PUBLIC RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Existing Conditions

Public recreational facilities in the Helena Flats neighborhood are limited, consisting only of the Presentine Bar fishing access and the Helena Flats School playground.

Presentine Bar fishing access, located on the eastern boundary of the Helena Flats neighborhood, is owned by the state of Montana and managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It is a relatively undeveloped access, consisting of little more than an unimproved parking area and boat ramp.

The Helena Flats School playground has a swing set, jungle gym, basketball court, and a few other amenities.

Goals

- Develop natural recreational areas for neighborhood residents.
- Create a regional park serving Helena Flats.
- Encourage development of Pressentine Bar Fishing Access for greater public safety and use.

Policies

- Expand and enhance seasonal and year-round recreational opportunities for neighborhood residents.
- Encourage open and well-maintained recreational areas for neighborhood residents.

G. SCHOOLS

Existing Conditions

The Helena Flats School District draws from a three mile radius. The very northern portion of Helena Flats is located within the Columbia Falls School District.

Helena Flats School, located at the intersection of Helena Flats and Rose Crossing, offers classes K-8. The school's maximum capacity is 240 -250 students, depending on where increases occur. The pupil/teacher ratio varies from 12:1 to 28:1. Approximately 210 students are currently enrolled. The School also serves as a local community center for meetings, etc.

The Helena Flats School District does not provide any bussing. After eighth grade, students transfer over to the Kalispell Junior and Senior High Schools.

Valley Adventist Christian School is a private school located on Helena Flats Road within the Helena Flats neighborhood.

Goals

- Ensure the Helena Flats School is adequately staffed and maintained to serve students in the Helena Flats School District.
- Ensure safe access for all school children via a bike/pedestrian path.

Policies

- Encourage the maintenance of the Helena Flats School as a center for education and community activity.

- Encourage the Helena Flats School District to comment on school issues related to subdivisions in the Helena Flats School District.
- To lessen traffic throughout the Helena Flats Neighborhood, encourage residential growth in the southern end of the Helena Flats Neighborhood near the Helena Flats School at a higher density than other areas of Helena Flats farther from the Helena Flats School.
- Encourage the Board of County Commissioners to require all subdividers to provide easements to the extension of bike/pedestrian path's serving the Helena Flats area and the Helena Flats School.

H. ROADS

Existing Conditions

The Flathead County Road Department is responsible for maintaining and snowplowing the public roads within Helena Flats. From south to north in Helena Flats, these public roads include:

- Rose Crossing
- Addison Square
- Capistrano Drive (portions)
- Helena Flats Road
- Aspen Lane
- Eid Lane (portions)
- Dirt Road (portions)
- Birch Grove Road
- Bayou Road (portions)
- Pioneer Road
-

Many of the public roads within Helena Flats were built to minimal standards, never intended for long service or heavy traffic, and are now expensive to maintain. Additionally, most of the public roads are very narrow with little to no shoulder, and frequently they parallel deep ditches immediately adjacent to the road surface. The Flathead County Roads Department has conducted road counts in the area that reveal an increase in traffic in the last four years. The Supervisor of the Flathead County Roads Department has identified the following issues with the public roads in Helena Flats:

- Lack of Adequate Right-of-Way. Many of the roads have less than the required minimum 60' right-of-way. This inhibits expansion to accommodate proper drainage, utility access, and pedestrian facilities. Additionally, these roads often are not located in the center of the existing right-of-way.
- Lack of Pedestrian Facilities/Bike Trails. Due in part to the lack of adequate rights-of-way along these roads, there is also a lack of pedestrian facilities and bike trails.

- Lack of County Funding. Given Flathead County's countywide population and use demographics as compared to those for Helena Flats, only a very small portion of county road funding is spent on maintaining and plowing roads in Helena Flats.
- The Need for Better Standards for Private Driveway Encroachments onto County Roads. The County standards for private driveway encroachments onto county roads do not adequately address drainage and access issues.
- Building and Fence Setbacks. Buildings and fences are often located very close to the road surface, damaging snowplows and hindering maintenance.
- Increasing Traffic. The roads were not designed to handle increasing traffic, particularly from commercial and industrial uses.
- Subdivision Roads. Subdivision road requirements should require county-approved paved interior and access roads for minor subdivisions as well as major.

In addition to the public roads, there are also several miles of private roads, most of which are dirt surfaces, with characteristics otherwise similar to those described above.

A bike/Pedestrian trail has been completed. The trail will extend from the intersection of Rose Crossing and Helena Flats Road one mile north, south almost one mile to Reserve, and then angled over to Camelot Estates and Spring Creek, and one mile west to the railroad tracks.

Goals

- To improve pedestrian safety by constructing a pedestrian and bicycle pathway and mitigating unnecessary traffic through the Helena Flats neighborhood.
- To resolve the issues identified immediately above.
- To expand the bike trail, once constructed, first to areas south of Helena Flats/Eid Road, and then to areas further to the north within the Helena Flats neighborhood.

Policies

- To encourage the County to address and resolve the issues identified immediately above.

III. NATURAL RESOURCES

A. SURFACE WATERS

Existing Conditions

The rivers and streams of the Helena Flats Neighborhood are important community assets. They supply aesthetic and recreational benefits, in addition to providing wildlife and fisheries habitat and refuge. Helena Flats residents recognize the value of these resources and wish to preserve their quality and character.

The two primary sources of surface water in the Helena Flats Neighborhood are the Flathead River and Spring Creek. The Flathead River flows from north to south and forms the eastern boundary of the Helena Flats Neighborhood. The water quality of the Flathead River is especially important due to the fact that it empties into Flathead Lake, which is listed as a high priority 303(d) list water body. There is concern that nutrient loading from the Flathead River may further contribute to the degradation of Flathead Lake. At present, the water quality of the River is good, but should be monitored as development increases to ensure that nutrients from Helena Flats and surrounding areas do not filter into the River and into Flathead Lake.

Spring Creek is a tributary of the Flathead River. It originates in, and flows through, the Helena Flats Neighborhood. The Creek empties into the Stillwater River and then into the Flathead River. From its point of origin to its terminus in the Stillwater River, Spring Creek spans a distance of eight miles. From 1988 to 1990 the Creek went through a series of improvements totaling approximately \$150,000. The improvements were needed because over the years, the water quality of the Creek was severely degraded by overgrazing, deposition from flooding of the nearby Flathead River, and urban development. The improvements made to the Creek, as well as presumably better management practices have restored the water quality of the Creek.

Goals

- Protect the quality of the various bodies of surface water in Helena Flats.
- Maintain the integrity of the shore land located in Helena Flats.

Policies

- Encourage the Board of County Commissioners to require subdividers to create a buffer next to streams, creeks, and rivers in Helena Flats to preserve water and shore land quality.
- Discourage impervious surfaces, the application of pesticides or fertilizers, or livestock facilities within the buffer.
- Improve water quality by minimizing erosion and sedimentation problems. Promote best management practices for any development adjacent to surface waters.
- Prevent increased storm water runoff from new development from adversely affecting surface water quality.

B. GROUND WATER

Existing Conditions

The groundwater quality in Helena Flats is vital to the well-being of its residents. It is equally important to the health of Flathead Lake as nutrients from the aquifer have the potential of being emptied into the Lake via the Flathead River. The aquifer serving Helena Flats extends from the mouth of Bad Rock Canyon to the confluence of the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers, bounded on the west by the Whitefish River and on the east by the Flathead River. The Helena Flats aquifer is very shallow as compared to other aquifers – ranging in depth from 2 to 12 feet below the ground.

A study done by the Flathead Lake Biological Station¹ indicates that the water quality in the area around Helena Flats is currently acceptable and has not deteriorated significantly. This is most likely attributable to the very high flow rate of the aquifer serving the Helena Flats area. Water travels in the aquifer from north to south at the rate of 15 to 20 feet per day (groundwater flow rates are generally measured in feet per year). While this high recharge rate seems able to support the current amount of development in Helena Flats, the effects downstream are of concern. There are many wells in the Helena Flats area less than 25 feet deep.

Goals

- Provide and maintain an adequate, safe, ground water supply to the residents of Helena Flats.

Policies

- Encourage the use of newer waste water systems that function more effectively, thereby minimizing groundwater pollution.
- Encourage the Board of County Commissioners to require subdividers to locate common sewer systems in the areas most suitable for such systems.
- Encourage monitoring the effect new development and waste water systems have on water resources.
- Encourage cluster development with common water and sewer systems.
- Discourage locating waste water systems within the 100-year floodplain.
- Prevent increased storm water runoff from new development from adversely affecting surface water quality.

¹ Craft, James A. and Bonnie K. Ellis, Flathead Lake Biological Station, University of Montana. *Groundwater Nutrient Assessment of Selected Shallow Aquifers in the North Flathead Valley and Flathead Lake Perimeter Area, Northwest Montana*. Open File Report Number 180-04. February 2004.