



Protect Missoula County's Western Tradition: Seeley Lake Regional Plan Update

September 2009

www.mtvotersedfund.org

Loggers, bears and loons may make odd bedfellows, but the motley crew makes up the fabric of life in Western Montana. Pothole lakes remind valley inhabitants of the glacial history that carved the Flathead, Missoula and Clearwater valleys, while our craggy peaks make the cathedrals of Europe seem diminutive.

This year, Missoula County has an unprecedented opportunity to protect the timbered, rural western landscapes that define us. Folks from the northeastern portion of the county, from Seeley Lake to Greenough, are offering the Missoula County Commissioners an update to the Seeley Lake Regional Plan that protects rural livelihoods as well as landscapes.

Missoula County residents must act now to encourage the Missoula Planning Board and the Board of County Commissioners to support the Seeley Lake Regional Plan.

Why Plan in Missoula County?

The Seeley Lake Regional Plan area encompasses the Clearwater watershed, situated at the southern end of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. The area includes Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, Mission Mountain Wilderness Area, and other public lands critical to endangered and threatened plant and animal species like the grizzly bear and Canadian lynx. In addition, many private landowners currently manage large tracts of land for hunting and outfitting, farming, and ranching. These uses demand largely undeveloped areas, and provide an

important link to our western cultural heritage.

The Seeley Lake Regional Planning area is vast, and needs an update as land use patterns change and more people move to the area. If adopted by the Missoula County Commissioners, the Plan will guide growth and land use in an area encompassing 388 square miles. Furthermore, the Plan could help guide other residents by setting up a framework to write their own plans that eventually update the County Growth Policy. The Seeley Lake Regional Plan does not include and regulatory measures, but could provide the foundation for future zoning.

Missoula County is growing and changing. The remaining timber jobs that sustained generations of families may be at risk, even in the heavily forested Seeley Lake area. Timber giant Plum Creek, is selling hundreds of thousands of acres of working forests. Fortunately, the community can generally determine how these lands should be used to keep folks working, protect access to public lands, and maintain the rural qualities and wildlife habitat in the County that make it special.

Seeley Lake Regional Plan Highlights

- **The Plan is grassroots and inclusive.** It was written by a diverse group of rural residents, the Seeley Lake Community Council, over a period of three years with hundreds of hours of public input, and technical assistance from the Missoula County office of Rural Initiatives.
- **The Plan maintains current land uses, while thinking ahead.** The Seeley Lake Community

Council carefully drafted the Plan to grandfather in all existing uses, so folks who currently own a business or home can keep using the land just as they are today.

- **The Plan protects people and wildlife.** It directs most new housing and business activity to areas that already provide critical services like water, police and fire protection.
- **The Plan maintains open space and working forests.** Without the Plan, vast acres of private lands currently managed for timber could be chopped up and sold for major real estate development. The Plan identifies places highly valued by the community for other values, like wildlife habitat or timber harvest, and directs high-density housing toward places with currently available services.

How Folks in Missoula County Can Help

The Crown of the Continent is an international treasure, and one of the last places in North America with an intact ecosystem. The Clearwater watershed provides the rich, lower-elevation habitat that connects wildlife populations in Glacier National Park to the Mission Mountain Wilderness, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and south into the Blackfoot Valley.

All Montanans have a stake in protecting this important rural landscape, but folks in Missoula County who live, work and play here can act now to help pass the Seeley Lake Regional Plan.

The Seeley Lake Community Council passed their final version of the Plan this Spring. Since June 2009, the Missoula County Planning Board has hosted public hearings and is likely to vote on the Plan this summer. After the Planning Board finishes with the Plan, it heads to the Missoula

County Commissioners for a final round of public hearings and a vote, which could happen anytime between September and November of this year.

1. **Urge the Missoula County Planning Board to support the Plan.** Direct written comments to Missoula County Consolidated Planning Board, c/o Missoula County Rural Initiatives, 200 W. Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802. Comments may also be emailed to ri@co.missoula.mt.us.
2. **Contact your Missoula County Commissioners, and ask them to please support the Seeley Lake Regional Plan.** Commissioners Jean Curtiss, Bill Carey and Michele Landquist need to hear from Missoula residents who want to plan for the future and protect our rural county landscapes and livelihoods.
3.
 - a. **Call the Board of County Commissioners** at 258-4877,
 - b. **Email all three Commissioners** at jcurtiss@co.missoula.mt.us, bcarey@co.missoula.mt.us, and mllandquist@co.missoula.mt.us, and
 - c. **Write the Commissioners** at Missoula Board of County Commissioners, 200 W. Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802.

Don't pass up the opportunity to shape our future. Rural residents stood together and produced a great plan. It is time for all Missoula County residents- rural and urban alike- to join the conversation. Protect Missoula County's rural way of life and world class wildlife habitat. Together, we can help pass the Seeley Lake Regional Plan update.