

# NFLA Newsletter

## Spring 2008

### **Commissioners vote to adopt neighborhood plan**

On May 1, the Flathead County Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution of intent to adopt the North Fork Neighborhood Plan.

The resolution followed some four years' work by the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee to draft the plan, several work sessions with the Flathead County Planning Board to hammer out minor revisions, and a unanimous recommendation to enact the plan by the planning board.

The county will publish a public notice of the commissioners' resolution, at which time will begin a 30-day period during which protest of the plan may be presented to commissioners by letter or e-mail.

For more information, contact the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office, Earl Bennett Building, 1035 1st Ave., West, Kalispell, MT 59901; telephone (406) 751-8200. Director of the office is Jeff Harris.

A full rundown of the committee's work—including links to the neighborhood plan, our zoning regulations, and news stories about our efforts—is on the NFLA Web site, [www.nflandowners.org](http://www.nflandowners.org).

### **Proposed mines in Canada remain worrisome**

*Coal-bed methane drilling, open-pit coal mine threaten our water quality, wildlife*

Two proposed mining operations north of the border in British Columbia continue to pose a danger to the North Fork's water quality, environment, wildlife and human residents.

Ed Heger, North Fork Landowners' Association past president, reports that Cline Mining Corp. of Sudbury, Ontario, is moving ahead with the permitting process for its Lodgepole open-pit coal mine on the Flathead River drainage in British Columbia. While Cline plans no field work there this year, there is no indication that efforts by Montanans and Canadians opposed to the mine have been sufficiently effective to stop the mine. Debris, silt and pollutants from the mine would wash into the headwaters of our river.

Recently, however, British Columbia officials have acknowledged the environmental sensitivity of the Flathead, and appear to be more willing to work toward a long-term solution. Talks based on mutual-gains negotiations are in the preliminary stage, Heger reports.

Last spring, the Montana Legislature passed a bill designating \$300,000 for water-quality monitoring on the North Fork of the Flathead River, and to hire a full-time transboundary specialist to work on issues related to proposed coal mine applications in the Canadian Flathead.

In December, Montana Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester secured \$885,960 in federal funds for environmental and risk-assessment studies that can be used to protect the

Flathead from mining activity in British Columbia—the Lodgepole mine and BP (British Petroleum) Canada Energy Co.'s coal-bed methane exploration, as well as any future mining operations. U.S. officials as high up as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have expressed our concerns to Canadian officials.

BP Canada's proposed coal-bed methane drilling operation involves a larger geographical area, poses a greater environmental threat, and has a higher public profile.

On April 14, the City Council of Fernie, B.C., passed a resolution strongly protesting BP Canada's plans to drill for coal-bed methane gas in the Crowsnest Coalfield, which drains into the Flathead River east of the Whitefish range and into the Elk River and Kootenai basin to the west. Complementing the official protest was a parade by some 300 Fernie residents who passed in front of BP Canada's downtown office.

These actions followed BP Canada's renegeing on a promise to eliminate the Flathead from its plans. The announcement of BP Canada's decision not to drill was made by Baucus at a Feb. 21 town-hall meeting in Kalispell. Baucus said that just hours before the meeting he received a telephone call from BP America President Malone informing him of the decision. However, a few days later, that decision was reportedly rescinded.

Heger reports that BP Canada's more-immediate plans are to drill in the Kootenai basin, and the company has applied for drilling rights there. No drilling operations are planned for this year. However, Heger adds, BP Canada's baseline research will still include the Flathead. Also, a drilling operation west of the Whitefish range would still adversely affect wildlife corridors into the Flathead.

BP Canada's planned coal-bed methane drilling operation will involve an initial \$100 million investment plan and some two dozen coal-bed methane test wells in the Crowsnest Coalfield over the next five years, even before full-scale drilling begins.

Extraction of coal-bed methane involves pumping out the ground water, which releases the gas. The resulting wastewater often contains contaminants such as barium, copper, iron and ammonium.

In our own front yard, in March, Baucus and Tester expressed support for a Flathead Basin Commission resolution to retire decades-old oil and gas leases in the Flathead National Forest. The leases were granted in the 1970s, but have remained unconsummated because of a lawsuit by environmental groups demanding full environmental-impact studies before mining began.

Heger has been actively involved in keeping the NFLA informed of these developments. For much more about proposed mining operations in Canada—including links to media stories about these issues—go to our Web site, [www.NFLandowners.org](http://www.NFLandowners.org).

### **Porch replacement planned**

The North Fork Landowners' Association is moving ahead with plans to replace the front porch on Sondreson Hall. On Feb. 24, the board of directors put South Director Frank Vitale in charge of the project.

Hiring a contractor was ruled out, and it will be a community project. Vitale recommended the use of poured concrete piers and new composite materials that will render the new deck safer and relatively maintenance-free. Because of the costs involved, the new porch might not have a roof, as had been discussed at the October business

meeting.

A railing next to the stairs and around the deck, and built-in seating are under consideration. Donations of materials and labor will be appreciated. Please call Vitale after 5 p.m. or on weekends at (406) 752-2909.

Also on Feb. 24, the board voted to increase the hall-rental fee from \$50 to \$75 for NFLA members, and from \$100 to \$150 for non-members. The board also voted not to rent hall furniture.

### **Committee evaluating NFLA's mission, policies**

The North Fork Landowners' Association "ReVision" Committee was formed, in part, in response to a member vote at the Sept. 1 meeting to contribute money from the NFLA treasury to help fund a dust study commissioned by the North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety.

Committee members appointed by NFLA President Molly Shepherd last fall are Steve Berg and Ed Heger, former NFLA presidents, and Suzanne Daniell, Margaret Heaphy, Richard Hildner and Shepherd.

The committee held its first meeting March 16. On the agenda were consideration of:

- The role of the NFLA in the North Fork community
- The association's mission statement
- The circumstances in which the NFLA will take a position on divisive issues
- The division of labor between the elected board of directors and the membership
- A policy or bylaw to govern contributions by the NFLA to other organizations

Summaries of the "ReVision" Committee's meetings are on the NFLA Web site, [www.nflandowners.org](http://www.nflandowners.org).

### **Permit burning May-June**

From May 1 through June 30, burning will be allowed by permit only. A landowner may apply for as many 10-day permits as needed.

For more information, go to the **Interagency Burn Permit Center's Web site** or call (406) 752-7376 or (800) 545-7376 (in Montana).

### **NFLA Web site at your service**

The North Fork Landowners' Association Web site is your year-around connection to our special place. On our ever-expanding Web site you'll find:

- The up-to-date NFLA activity schedule
- Business-meeting news and minutes

- Committee news
- Wildfire updates
- Fire Mitigation Committee news and advice
- Important land-use planning news and zoning regulations
- Other news about issues affecting the North Fork, including mines planned in Canada that would pollute our river
- Links to North Fork weather; county, state and local government; Glacier National Park and the Flathead National Forest

Go to [www.nflandowners.org](http://www.nflandowners.org).

### **Grant money still available for landowner fire protection**

The North Fork Landowners' Association's Fire Mitigation Committee reminds landowners that cost-share grant money is still available for fuels reduction around homes.

The original \$150,000 grant, which was awarded after the Wedge Canyon and Robert fires in 2003, will expire this year. A supplementary grant in the amount of \$104,000 was obtained in 2005; it will expire in 2010.

Both grants, administered by the Northwest Regional Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D), provide cost-share assistance to eligible landowners, with the grant contributing 75 percent of the cost of the fuels-reduction treatment and the landowner contributing the remaining 25 percent.

The rate of payment depends on the work that must be done to create a defensible space against wildfire. The maximum rate currently is \$900 per acre. As of early 2008, 58 North Fork landowners had entered into fuels-reduction agreements for their properties, and 46 of those contracts had been completed.

To determine whether your property qualifies for the program, call Bill Swope, RC&D community forester, at (406) 892-3866 or **e-mail him**.

In other news, representatives of the Flathead National Forest will explain the use of naturally caused fires to manage forests, as well as its plans for implementing fire use on the North Fork at 7 p.m., Thursday, June 12 at Sondreson Hall.

Ed Burlingame of the Montana State Fire School will address wildfire "do's and don'ts" during a workshop preceding the July 5 NFLA business meeting.

The North Fork again has been designated a Firewise Community. The award is given by Firewise Communities/USA for taking action to protect lives and property from the risk of wildfire.

Criteria for Firewise status, including community investment, must be satisfied annually. Among other benefits, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) gives a Firewise Community priority in consideration for pre-disaster mitigation planning and project grants.

## **One Flathead N.F. project done, another awaiting EA concurrence**

The Flathead National Forest's Trail Fuels Reduction Project is essentially finished. Slash piles will be burned in the fall, when conditions permit.

The project involved treating some 1,350 acres in the Trail Creek and upper North Fork river areas to reduce hazardous fuels, and create a forest condition that will lower the risk of future high-intensity wildfire.

The project was given priority status because of the large number of residential buildings along Trail Creek Road. Fire Mitigation Committee members are pleased by the extent to which the fuels-reduction project complements efforts by private landowners.

As of mid-February, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service had not signed a concurrence on the forest's environmental assessment for the proposed Red Whale fuel-reduction project, reports District Ranger Jimmy J. DeHerrera. That EA was release in the spring of 2007. The delay in obtaining the concurrence has affected the timetable for the project. The forest still hopes to let the contract in 2008, reports DeHerrera.

Major drainages in the area are Lower Whale, Red Meadow, Moose and Hay creeks. The project will involve mechanical thinning and prescribed burning.

For Web page, [click here](#).

## **Montana DNRC's North Fork by Two Project**

In March, the Montana Department of Resources and Conservation completed its environmental assessment for the North Fork by Two Timber Sale Project.

The project, which will involve harvesting timber in the state-owned Mud Lake and Moose sections, will be implemented over several years, reports DNRC Stillwater Unit Manager Brian Manning. Both sections of State Trust Land are scattered parcels that are not part of the Coal Creek State Forest.

Project objectives include reducing fuel hazards, especially along the North Fork Road and near residences, and improving the species composition, growth and health of treated stands. Manning says the timber is scheduled to be marketed for sale after July 1.

For more information, [e-mail Manning](#) or telephone him at (406) 881-2663.

## **2008 schedule highlights**

The North Fork Landowners' Association conducts business meetings at 8 p.m. the first Saturday of the month, June through October.

In addition, there are several other regular and new events on this year's schedule:

- Saturday, May 31—Sondreson Hall cleanup day starts at 10 a.m. (scheduled earlier this year). North Forkers are encouraged to help with the upkeep of their community hall.

- Thursday, June 12—Flathead National Forest fire-use workshop; 7 p.m. (See “Grant money” story.)
- Saturday, June 28—Debo Powers will instruct line dancing and square dancing (for all skill levels); 8 p.m.
- Saturday, July 5—“Wildfire Do’s and Don’ts”; prior to the 8 p.m. business meeting. (See “Grant money” story.)
- Wednesday, July 9—The Inter Local Agreement meeting features representatives from agencies that affect the North Fork; potluck dinner at 5 p.m., meeting at 6:30.
- Saturday, July 12—Annual Pie & Ice Cream Social with square dancing, 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, July 23—The North Fork Compact will host a Q&A session about conservation easements with a representative of the Montana Land Reliance; 8 p.m.
- Saturday, July 26—Annual North Fork Preservation Association meeting and elections; dinner at 5 p.m., meeting at 7:30 p.m. (Program TBA.)
- Monday, Aug. 11—Annual North Fork Compact meeting, 8 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 27—Annual Thanksgiving dinner, hosted by Steve Berg; doors open at 3 p.m.

This activity schedule is subject to change. It is updated regularly with notices posted at Sondreson Hall and on our Web site.

**North Fork Landowners’ Association**  
*Polebridge, Montana*

President Molly Shepherd  
Vice President Oliver Meister  
Immediate Past President Ed Heger  
Secretary-Treasurer Pat Cole  
North Directors Jon Cole & Lynn Ogle  
South Directors Gerry Stearns & Frank Vitale  
Newsletter/Webmaster Richard E. Wackrow  
Web site [www.NFLandowners.org](http://www.NFLandowners.org)

*End Spring 2008 newsletter*