

Flathead County
Board of Commissioners

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June 30, 2023

Jennifer Carrington, Regional Director
Bureau of Reclamation
Columbia-Pacific Northwest Regional Office
1150 North Curtis Road
Boise, ID 83706

To Regional Director Jennifer Carrington,

As the Chairman for the Flathead County Commission, I write to you today to urge you to prevent a pending crisis at Flathead Lake located in Flathead and Lake Counties, Montana.

As you are aware through your years of service working at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Flathead Lake is the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River. Located in the Columbia River Basin, it is an absolutely vital body of water for Montana's environment and economy. As a resident of Idaho yourself, you know how intricately woven our resources and economies are tied.

This year, however, both are at risk due to historically lower pool predictions.

Flathead County relies on our natural resources, including pristine waters of Flathead Lake, to drive tourism. This outdoor recreation and tourism economy is largely seasonal with some tourism in the winter, but the vast majority occurring in the summer months as anglers, boaters and other recreationists flock to our trails, shores and peaks. These tourists support more than \$600 million in spending and more than 9,500 jobs in the county, according to a 2016 report by the University of Montana. These numbers have no doubt increased since.

Tourism supports consumer spending on lodging, fuel, restaurants, and souvenirs. They support hundreds of small businesses which generate tax revenue to fund our schools, roads and other public services. In short, we rely on the health and wellness of Flathead Lake to support our people and our livelihoods.

It is the understanding of the Flathead County Commissioners that the Technical Management Team (TMT) has been working with the BoR Region to update models using updated July forecasts which show Flathead Lake to drop more than 18-inches, possibly as low as 22-inches, below full pool.

Should this happen, the economic consequences could be dire. Millions of dollars in infrastructure damage to docks and piers, untold numbers of boating accidents caused by hazards in previously navigable waterways, and then there's the scores of cancellations that will occur in hospitality and tourism.

It is my and my fellow commissioners hope that the Bureau of Reclamation increases the flow from Hungry Horse Dam to help alleviate the drastic drop we are forecasted to see in Flathead Lake. Any relief will be welcome and will make a meaningful difference to the people of Flathead County.

Sincerely,
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA



Randy L. Brodehl, Vice Chairman



Cc: Congressman Ryan Zinke, Regional Representative Steve Howke