

## **EPA should listen to public**

If there is one thing that EPA Region 8 (the Environmental Protection Agency for Montana, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, and 27 tribal nations) needs to realize after this recent election, is that the public expects to be heard and to see meaningful change now. Not in another 25 years, as was the EPA's loudly opposed recommendation for lead contamination cleanup in Butte last week. And not in another 35-60 years as allowed for in the EPA's proposed cleanup plan for a host of toxic wastes in a groundwater plume seeping into the Flathead River at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) Superfund Site.

Worse yet, at the CFAC Superfund Site, the EPA is currently endorsing and considering giving final approval to leave some two hundred acres of toxic waste in place on site, with some of that contained forever within an unproven, bottomless, slurry wall. EPA is claiming the waste found at CFAC is too toxic to move or treat. This clearly isn't EPA's only option, as we documented in our recent letter to the governor and to EPA, outlining quicker, more effective, cleanup alternatives from EPA's own research. This includes other alternatives EPA developed which we wrote about in our Oct. 31 op-ed in this paper.

We have never understood why a corporation like Glencore comes in to an area like the Flathead and buys an industrial site they clearly must know is destined to be declared a Superfund site. While it remains unclear to us, it appears that tax laws do allow for various ways that corporations can use such expenses to better their bottom line.

While we certainly aren't corporate tax experts and clearly state that our initial findings need additional confirmation, we hope that CFAC would step up now and publish their tax filings.

This would enable a quick study before EPA makes a final decision on which cleanup plan is best for restoring the region's clean water from decades of pollution. Pollution which has gone on for far too long, harming the health and vitality of the Flathead's fisheries, wildlife, residents, and economy.

Furthermore, it is high time, for EPA Region 8 to transparently, with outside independent review, document why alternative clean up strategies within their own proposed cleanup plan should not be their preferred alternative.

These alternative plans can provide more comprehensive, timely, and permanent restoration and protection of the Flathead's clean waters, rivers, fisheries.

It is time for EPA to revisit their preferred cleanup plan and current questionable ranking of the lowest-cost alternative clean up strategies, which also take the longest time to achieve. EPA is instead turning a deaf ear to the public's calls for science-based evidence that the cheapest cleanup alternatives benefit the public and the environment and not simply benefit the bottom line of a multi-national corporation.

Additional and legitimate concerns have been raised in recent letters from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe to the EPA. They rightfully assert that the proposed EPA cleanup plan, and this plan's unacceptable long-term containment strategies, fail to address the EPA's and federal government's current and immediate obligation to address the CSKT's treaty rights.

These treaty rights call on the EPA to protect and restore health of the impacted Flathead's fisheries and its clean water and actively address the CSKT's treaty rights now, not at some arbitrary distant time.

In light of the EPA's obligation to address these treaty rights, the fact that EPA is unjustly prioritizing cost savings to multi-national corporate interests over sound science and avoiding a more timely and complete cleanup, is totally unacceptable.

The Coalition for a Clean CFAC supports the legitimate concerns raised by CSKT and their call for independent review of a cleanup plan that more directly addresses their Treaty Rights and, truly, and in a timely, meaningful manner, protects the region's clean water, fisheries, human health, and economic future for all who call the Flathead home.

*The Board of the Coalition for a Clean CFAC, Mayre Flowers, Shirley Folkwein, Phil Matson, Del Phipps, Laura Damon, and Peter Metcalf*

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