

Dear Ravalli County Commissioners,

December 21, 2014

This is my second letter regarding the proposed changes to the Ravalli County Floodplain Regulations. As a Ravalli County citizen, taxpayer, and property owner, and voter, I am asking you to not change the current floodplain regulations that keep new construction and fill out of the Bitterroot River flood fringe. Current regulations are well researched and are in place for several critical reasons. These reasons were stated clearly by the natural resource professionals who spoke at the December 15 (2014) meeting, as well as the decision makers who initially put these floodplain regulations into place.

The Bitterroot River floodplain is a dynamic, meandering river system. Each year, during naturally occurring flood cycles, the river moves and changes, creating new flood ways that were previously in the river flood fringe. Although naturally occurring, it is an unpredictable system. Within the river flood fringe zone, we don't know where those floodway paths will occur in the future. We are fortunate to have good protection in place, and it would be irresponsible to loosen the current regulations and allow property owners to put fill or build new structures that could someday be in the river floodway path.

Loosening the current regulations is also irresponsible because you will be potentially subjecting Ravalli County to high-cost lawsuits. Wouldn't it be most prudent, as an elected official, to keep your citizens safe from flooding disasters, within a scientifically determined flood fringe zone, and to avoid high cost lawsuits? Do you really want to see citizens lose more property value by building in an unsafe zone? Do you really want to risk high-cost lawsuits that will cause taxpayers further expense?

Allowing new construction or fill in the river fringe will undeniably degrade the Bitterroot River and its natural systems. Water is a precious resource that cannot be replaced once it is degraded, without significant expense. Why would you allow septic systems, new construction, and fill in our precious riparian zone? The Bitterroot River is a Montana treasure; it is the lifeblood of our valley. It is enjoyed by many generations of Montanans who live here, have been here in the past, and those who will live here in the future. Additionally, it draws many tourists who visit for its natural beauty, fisheries, and recreational opportunities. Tourism is the second largest economic driver in the state after agriculture. It would be irresponsible to allow for degradation of such an important state treasure and economic resource for Ravalli County.

I empathize with property owners who have property on the river. However, the regulations are in place to protect their private property. Knowing the laws and regulations, and making wise decisions to protect property values is part of being a property owner. It's irresponsible for property owners to invest in expensive new construction that could be destroyed by future flooding. If regulations are loosened, and property owners build in these unpredictable zones, these same owners could come back and sue the county—with a high cost to the taxpayers. Are those property owners making responsible decisions?

I also own property in the Bitterroot Valley and am restricted from doing various things on my property by laws and regulations. I respect those laws and regulations that maintain the integrity of land, air and water resources, and the integrity of my neighborhood. After all, my private property rights are also affected when my neighbor makes a poor choice.

Last but not least is the inherent ecological value of the Bitterroot River ecosystem, which is home to important wildlife resources. It has been estimated that 80% of bird species rely on the important resources of riparian landscape. It is home to an important fisheries. Countless species live within and depend on this riparian zone, as well as many citizens of our county, not to mention the tourists that support our economy. Are you willing to put this at risk for a few property owners? To degrade such an important ecosystem?

I hope you will consider my comments and make the responsible decision for our resources. Please do not change the regulations that protect the Bitterroot River floodplain and flood fringe.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely, Amy Monteith (406) 961-1944