

Glenda Wiles

From: Scott Nicolarsen <snicolarsen@msn.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 4, 2015 10:48 AM
To: Glenda Wiles
Subject: Floodplain Plan

Ravalli County Commissioners,

The Bitterroot River is a gem of the Bitterroot valley, as well as a gem of the Treasure state. This is a river that continues to thrive despite an exploding population in its plain and in its valley. Do we dare threaten its floodplain even further? Where do we draw the line?

I have been a guide and outfitter on the Bitterroot for 18 years. In this time I have seen a lot more harm than benefit when it comes to river protection. Here is a short list of problems I have seen under the current "tougher" standards:

1. Several years ago a house was moved onto a bank of the Bitterroot river below Charlo's Heights that was clearly in the path of the river. Whether or not the house was moved into the floodplain or not, the resulting rip-rap project directed the river to the east and caused an irrigation ditch to wash out. This wash out resulted in more restoration work, green pipes dangling into the river, a nasty looking moonscape hillside and an accelerated river heading north.
2. About 1/2 mile above Woodside cutoff a house was constructed on the west river bank. Several rip-rap projects have been installed to keep this house from being consumed by the 'root. None have worked. The river wants to eat the land this house rests on and it will over time, regardless of concrete's attempt to same it.
3. On river right, about 1/2 mile above Bell crossing is a house that several years ago was built right onto the bank of the river. If I'm not mistaken, I think the river was illegally diverted to allow rip-rap to be installed to keep the new construction from washing away. This house is certainly in the fringe and if not for the rip-rap wall, would certainly be fish habitat by now.
4. A house was constructed several years ago about a 1/4 mile below the Poker Joe fishing access sight, just down steam of the Preacher cabin, river left. Most folks I know would say that house is obviously in the floodplain or at least on the fringe. Rip-rap is ongoing to keep this precious piece of real estate from washing downstream.
5. Round the bend about 1/2 mile down and you find the next example of poorly planned floodplain development. A subdivision off the east side highway is protected by nothing more than a poorly rip-rapped, back filled bank and a dangling fence. What was once the best hole in the river, is now lucky to produce a fish.

Each of these listed project probably looked safe and viable for development at one time. However, due to the meandering nature of the Bitterroot, what looks good one year can turn into a disaster the next when the river shifts its channel drastically.

Given these examples, it makes me sad that Ravalli County is considering loosing their floodplain protections. If we don't start to restrict development and limit growth in the floodplain we are going to destroy the very thing that makes this valley special.

Current proposals seek to further erode the safeguards that protect this last great river. Please work to restrict the growth along the river, not make it easier.

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