

## Glenda Wiles

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**From:** Alex Hibala <ajaxx87@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 5, 2015 7:33 PM  
**To:** Glenda Wiles  
**Subject:** Against New Construction in Bitterroot Floodplain

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing you to express my strong opposition to proposed modification of existing Ravalli ordinances which would allow new home construction within the Bitterroot River floodplain. Opening the door to new development within this sensitive area of the Bitterroot valley I fear will be detrimental on numerous fronts and will negatively effect the lives of many full-time Bitterroot residents. My complaints regarding said zoning adaptation include: permanent, artificial, detrimental, destructive alteration of the streambed and the Bitterroots' natural pattern of re-channellization; decreased tourism revenue due to compromised visitor experience on the Bitterroot River; increased streamborn pollution due to housing proximity (fertilizers, pesticides, fuel, animal waste, etc.); increase in landowner-recreationist conflicts; and marginalization of the ascetic experience of the Bitterroot River. Oh these concerns i will further consider the following two.

My first and foremost concern is for the health and wild vitality of the Bitterroot River. The Bitterroot is a unique resource within Montana: It enjoys the stability and consistency of a tailwater resource without losing its freestone character, and also posses a high degree of variability due to geological streambed features mid-valley (Hamilton to Stevensville or thereabouts). This trait differentiates the Bitterroot from other rivers such at the Big Hole and Blackfoot which have historical, near-permanent channels. Allowing construction of homes within the floodplain will invariably result in rampant stream-side stabilization measures, such as rip-rapping, in an effort to protect these new homes from the rivers natural course. Widespread application of this "build and defend, common resource be dammed" mentality will turn the Bitterroot we know and love into little more than a ditch. Artificial. Dead. A Utility, not a Beauty. The unique qualities of the Bitterroot as a river should not be compromised in an effort to conform with other zoning regulations throughout Montana which in no way reflect the characteristics of our river, nor should we sacrifice this resource wholesale in the name of faint minority of landowners. I recognize that there is a time for protecting property but allowing the construction of homes which will without a doubt detrimentally alter the free-flowing re-channelization of the Bitterroot cannot be supported.

My second concern is the effect building new homes in the floodplain will have on local tourism economies. This is where my personally and professionally vested interest lies. Fly-fishing brings a substantial flow of tourism revenue to the Bitterroot valley. This source of tourism attracts people from all over the USA and all over the world and it would be hard to envision a bustling Bitterroot summer without them. Many people enjoy the experience so much that they eventually buy property in the Bitterroot which then promotes continued growth in real-estate markets. They provide my livelihood. They provide the livelihood of many service workers related to them such as restaurants, lodging, rentals, real-estate, and other entertainment. All of these economic benefits are directly contingent on the Bitterroot being the wild, pristine, natural river that it is. They come here over other rivers in the state because the Bitterroot is a special place which is not easily forgotten or overlooked. While we are unique there is enough similarity to other Montana valleys that a natural competition and comparison arises, and the valley that is "built up", "isn't as scenic", "look at all the damm houses", or "crowded" will certainly lose out. I begrudge no one for their multimillion dollar property or wanting to "own a piece of the Big Sky", however doing so in a way the directly undermines my livelihood and the livelihoods of numerous Bitterroot residents I take vehement exception with. Actively degrading our river, our collective

resource, our collective blessing as residents of this beautiful and pristine river valley, is to undermine both our livelihoods and our identity.

The Bitterroot is slowly being recognized as a special resource and steps are being made to protect it accordingly, such as the recent ruling to close the Bitterroot basin to drilling new "exempt" low-flow wells and the ongoing efforts of FWP to create a plan to limit commercial use of the West Fork. Allowing new homes to be constructed within the floodplain is in blatant contrast with this over-arching goal and should be rejected.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be attending the meeting on Wens Jan 7th to further explicate my point.

Alex Hibala  
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