



AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY

MONTANA CHAPTER



Mr. Francesco Banderin, Director
World Heritage Centre
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
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France

January 27, 2009

Cc: Mr. Kishore Rao, Deputy Director, World Heritage Centre
Mr. Guy Debonnet, Programme Specialist, World Heritage Centre
Dr. Christina Cameron, Chairperson, World Heritage Committee

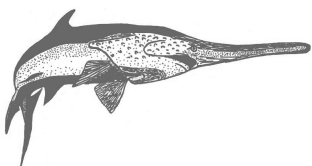
RE: Scientific testimony regarding the petition to add Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park to the List of World Heritage in Danger

Dear Mr. Banderin:

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (MCAFS) appreciates the opportunity to provide scientific information regarding the petition to add Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park to the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. The potential threats of open-pit coal mining, coalbed methane development and phosphate, gold and copper mining in the Elk and Flathead Valleys of southeast British Columbia pose a serious and immediate threat to this World Heritage site and the surrounding ecosystem.

The American Fisheries Society was organized in 1870 and is the oldest society of natural resources professionals in North America. The MCAFS was chartered in 1967, and consists of over 300 members state-wide. Among the objectives of the Society are conservation, development and wise use of fisheries, promotion of educational, scientific and technological development and advancement of all branches of fisheries science and practice, and exchange and dissemination of knowledge about fish, fisheries and related subjects. As such, we are keenly interested in the conservation and protection of native aquatic resources.

The transboundary Flathead River basin in Montana (USA) and British Columbia (Canada), which flows across the US-Canadian border along Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, hosts one of the most diverse and unique aquatic ecosystems throughout North America. Migratory native bull trout, a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and westslope cutthroat trout, a sensitive species, migrate from Flathead Lake (USA) upstream to the Canadian headwaters to spawn and rear, representing some of the last remaining strongholds in the basin and throughout the range of these native species. However, proposed open-pit coal mining and coalbed methane drilling in the Canadian



headwaters threaten water quality, invertebrate communities, and fish and wildlife populations downstream to Glacier National Park (GNP) and Flathead Lake.

In response to these threats, two scientific summits were held jointly with government officials and scientists from the Provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, and the state of Montana. Researchers and managers concluded that critical information was needed to assess the baseline conditions and relative importance of this aquatic ecosystem. Therefore, a multi-agency, long-term research and monitoring program was initiated in 2005 to examine water and sediment chemistry, contaminant levels, aquatic habitat, and the distribution and genetic diversity of native fishes. Comparative data collected in the neighboring Elk River drainage, a system heavily impacted by coal mining and coalbed methane development, showed increased nutrients and heavy metal concentrations in the water and lower invertebrate species richness than the Flathead, a relatively pristine system. In 2008, a basin-wide aquatics inventory of the basin was initiated and data were collected in Canada and GNP. Native fishes were found throughout much of the system, including proposed mining locations. Furthermore, basin-wide bull trout spawning surveys in 2008 show that the river section immediately downstream of the proposed mine and well sites contained the highest numbers of spawning nests of this threatened species in the transboundary system.

These initial research results as well as the conclusions from the International Joint Commission suggest that sediment and water pollution from the proposed mines will degrade waters downstream to Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake. The best available scientific information suggests that the energy development slated for these areas pose a serious threat to the long-term persistence and integrity of fish and wildlife populations and critical habitats upon which they depend for persistence. Designation of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park as a World Heritage Site in Danger will help protect this unique ecosystem from these serious and immediate threats in both the United States and Canada.

In summary, due to the inevitable impacts of mining and gas and oil development on wildlife and water resources and the imminent threats of these activities to Waterton-International Peace Park and the transboundary Flathead drainage, we support the petition to add Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park to the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. This designation is needed prior to any development activity, which is imminent given the rapid advancement of planning, the size of known reserves, and because this energy development is already occurring in nearby Elk Valley. Furthermore, this designation will help protect existing water, wildlife, and wilderness values in the transboundary Flathead River system for the benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you for considering this information and our recommendations, which we hope will assist you with your deliberations at the upcoming UNESCO meeting in June 2009.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carter Kruse".

Dr. Carter Kruse, President MCAFS

xc:

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