



Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
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April 2, 2002

Also sent to:

Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041, STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC
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CANADA

Dear Prime Minister Chrétien,

The [American Fisheries Society](#), the oldest professional society in North America dealing with the natural resources, was organized in 1870. The [Montana Chapter](#) of the American Fisheries Society (MCAFS) was chartered in 1967. Among its objectives are conservation, development and wise utilization of the fisheries, promotion of the 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 subject.

The MCAFS is pleased to learn that negotiations are in progress in Canada to incorporate 100,000 acres into Waterton Lakes National Park and to determine the long-term dispensation of approximately 700,000 acres of public lands in the upper Flathead River and the Wigwam, Elk and Bull River Valleys in the Kootenai Watershed. The Flathead and Kootenai Rivers are international ecosystems that cross provincial and state boundaries and the Canada-U.S. border. These drainages support critical habitat for a variety of threatened and sensitive fish species in Canada and the U.S. We encourage actions throughout the region that help conserve, protect, and restore native fish and the habitat on which they depend.

Over the past several years, the B.C. Ministry of Environment and the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks have been using radio telemetry and fish marking techniques to track native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the Flathead and Kootenai Watersheds. Similarly, these agencies have also tracked the movements of burbot in the Kootenai Watershed. Results have shown that many native trout and burbot migrate to spawn in the Canadian portions of these river drainages, attesting to the importance of Canadian tributaries to the maintenance of these transboundary species.

In the Flathead and Kootenai Watersheds, migratory trout populations have declined because of human impacts on the environment such as habitat degradation and fragmentation and negative interactions with nonnative fish species. In response to declines, the bull trout was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and the westslope cutthroat trout was classified as a sensitive species. Genetically pure strains of migratory westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout are now sustained by populations inhabiting headwater tributaries in the U.S. and Canada. These stocks are critical to the restoration of native fish species throughout their historic range.

We believe that expanding Waterton National Park and designating a Wildlife Management Area in the Flathead River will protect and conserve contiguous tracts of critical fisheries and aquatic habitat in Canada and the U.S. The North Fork Flathead River, which flows across the US-Canadian border just over the divide from Waterton Lakes National Park, is recognized as a regional stronghold for migratory bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout throughout their native range. Studies have shown that a majority of spawning and rearing occurs in the upper reaches of the Flathead River in Montana and British Columbia. Montana's Glacier National Park and National Forest lands on the U.S. side of the border provide a habitat stronghold for fish populations. A sparse human population, limited development and high biodiversity make the North Fork Flathead River one of the most intact watersheds within the U.S. portion of the Rocky Mountains. Protection of critical habitat throughout the entire Flathead system, including the headwaters in Canada, is imperative to the persistence of native trout in the Flathead drainage.

We believe that legislation of a Wildlife Management Area in the Wigwam, Elk and Bull River valleys will protect and improve key ecosystem processes and critical habitat for native fish recovery. Investigations in the Kootenai Watershed have revealed that the Wigwam River, which originates in Montana and flows into British Columbia, provides important spawning and rearing habitat for one of the strongest populations of bull trout in North America. The Wigwam, Elk, and Bull Rivers contain adfluvial-spawning migrations of bull trout and are part of the contiguous population that supports bull trout in Libby Reservoir (Lake Koocanusa). Canadian tributaries also contain some of the most important remaining populations of pure westslope cutthroat in the Kootenai Watershed. Similarly, radio tagged burbot in Koocanusa have been tracked into the Canadian headwaters. Land management decisions on both sides of the US-Canadian border should consider potential impacts to these species of special concern.

Transboundary fisheries populations support a valued cultural and economic heritage in Canada and the U.S. We applaud and support Tembec's endorsement to add 100,000 acres of relatively pristine lands to Waterton Lakes National Park. Further, we encourage legislation to designate 700,000 acres of public lands as Wildlife Management Areas to protect and conserve critical fisheries habitat. Human development and resource extraction continue to expand to remote areas and, unless strategically planned, will impact fisheries resources. Decisions made today represent a unique and irreversible opportunity to sustain our natural heritage for future generations. We urge you to consider the value of these international fisheries during your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Pat Clancey, President
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