



# Lawrence Park

## A 78 Year History

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For:  
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Department**  
Director, Mike Baker  
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## 1. Introduction

*" We shall endeavor, so far as possible, to protect the natural conditions, and most earnestly solicit the good will and co-cooperation of all in protecting trees and shrubbery"*

*re: Lawrence Park, W.H. Lawrence, December 31, 1921*

Lawrence Park is an island or laboratory of natural processes around which the City of Kalispell has grown since 1892. Although some of the study area has undergone substantial environmental modification during the settlement of Kalispell, much of the area maintains its natural integrity. Human use has been sporadic; determined by the areas relative remoteness, anonymity and terrain. Aerial photos as recent as 1953 depict a riparian environment molded by the Stillwater River as it delivers its cargo of runoff south to its confluence with the Whitefish River. From there the drainage flows on to the Flathead River, Flathead Lake, the Clark Fork, Columbia River and finally empties into the Pacific Ocean.

Prior to 1915 the water system used by the City of Kalispell was operated by private concerns. In 1892, the Kalispell City Council granted right of ways to Chester Davis of Chicago for the purpose of constructing water lines and power lines for "public purposes". The Kalispell Water Commission purchased water from the franchise. The Davis business became the Kalispell Water and Electric Company and then became the Northern Idaho and Montana (Mountain States) Power Company. The source of water during these years was a pump station on the east side of the confluence between the Stillwater and Whitefish River. The brick pump building was featured in a photograph included in the 1912 Water Commission Report. Water was pumped to a standpipe on McGinnis Hill. The location of the water system required transporting water across the Rivers via a bridged pipeline to the Townsite of Kalispell. High water episodes played havoc with the pipeline.

The construction of Kalispell's own water system followed the fabrication of a reservoir on Buffalo Hill in 1914. The pumping station that included an office, pump room, fuel room and boiler room was constructed below the reservoir on a 2 1/2 acre site. The site was purchased from Wilbur N. Noffsinger in 1915. A 20 by 24 foot well was constructed over what had been known as Noffsinger Spring. An electric pump with a back-up steam boiler delivered water via a 18 inch pipe

to a 1.7 million gallon open concrete reservoir that is still situated 1850 feet away and 142 feet above on Buffalo Hill (see base map near the golf course clubhouse). In 1915, W.H. Lawrence was hired as the water works superintendent. The water system has operated as a city owned utility since then. (*See Appendix A*)

The location of the pump station required the construction of an access road via North Main Street. The City enlarged the water works area by 20 acres and then 57 acres. The City completed acquisitions from Noffsinger totalling 80 acres in 1939. The land included the water works, the park, wetlands and original Buffalo Hill Golf Course.

The Kalispell Water Department published annual reports from year end 1914 until year end 1940. The first reference to Lawrence Park, named after the department superintendent, appears in the 1921 water report written by W.H. Lawrence. The water works crew maintained the access road and park with flower gardens, ornate fencing (along the access road), groomed lawns, pheasants, peacocks, pet deer and buffalo (winter). Lawrence Park was described in colorful detail by W.H. Lawrence in the annual reports submitted from 1921 until Lawrence's death in 1931. Although the water department crews maintained the park under the direction of successor Superintendent Ward Buckingham, little mention was made of the park in the annual reports 1932 - 1940. The park fell into a state of disrepair in the following years due to the automation of the pump, World War II and the absence of W.H. Lawrence. The City annexed the golf course portion of the property in 1950.

**W.H. Lawrence was born in Castine, Maine in 1856. He arrived in Kalispell in 1911 as an employee of the Mountain States Power Company. He worked as superintendent of the power company's water department until 1914 when he assumed the position of superintendent of the Kalispell Water Department. Lawrence headed the water department until his death in 1931 in Rochester Minnesota. A legacy that Lawrence left with us during his seventeen year tenure with the water department was his colorful annual water department reports. The reports extolled the virtues of the park that he developed around his beloved water works. He summed it up in one report by saying that "Public Parks, large or small, are not thought of as a luxury, but as a necessity to the well being of the entire community." He also stated in several reports that "we want all to visit the park." As stated in his eulogy contained in the 1931 annual report (see Appendix B):**

**"His life was dedicated to the public good and to public service and he never veered for one moment from the course laid out by him and the performance of his duties as he saw them. His jealous loyalty to the community may sometimes have warped his judgement and subjected him to criticism, but criticism of a particular act of policy or expediency was always accompanied by friendly and candid expressions of confidence in him as a public servant."**

## 2. Recent History

From 1940 and 1975 activity in the Park consisted of gravel extraction from the slope next to the south boundary of the golf course and fill (road excavation material, etc.) dumping in the flood plain/ oxbow areas of the flats. The 1964 flood of the Flathead drainage system clogged what had been both active and passive channels in the south and west portion of the park with debris. The area came under the jurisdiction of the Corp of Engineers due to the adoption of the Clean Water Act. Work on the old park during these years consisted of minimal maintenance. The City halted dumping and fill operations on the flats in 1975.

From 1973 to September of 1987 the Kalispell Parks Department operated under the direction of Pieter Drent. The following is a brief chronological account of Lawrence Park history from 1974 to present:

### 1974

- City grants permission for KGA to use north portion of Lawrence Park for putting green.
- The Kalispell City Council passed a motion to add to the KGA leasehold all city owned property between North Main Street and the Stillwater River exclusive of Lawrence Park "and that this land become part of the golf course.

### 1975

- A renovation project was implemented in the old park area under the C.E.T.A. program. Work included removal of dead trees and brush, leveling and repair of playground equipment.
- The City's dump / fill operation was halted by Mt. Fish and Game and the Army Corp of Engineers.

### 1978

- Rest rooms were installed in the old park area.
- The north 6 acres of the old park were included in the expansion of the golf course.

### 1979

- A request for Renewable Resource Grant-Loan funding for recreational development and up-grading of Lawrence Park was submitted by the City of Kalispell. The amount of the grant request was \$1,310,700.

### 1981

- The City and Flathead Conservation District opened an old river channel into wetland area to alleviate river erosion on the John Mueller property.

### 1983

- The City was notified by the Corp of Engineers of its violation of the Clean Water Act through its dumping of excavated road base and asphalt material in a wetland at the base of the west edge of the park.

### 1984

- The City Parks Department drafted the "Lawrence Park Development Proposal" with a \$270,000 budget. The proposal included provisions for one American Legion and two Babe Ruth baseball fields with bleachers, a picnic pavilion, landscaping, irrigation, road improvements and water and sewer lines. Part of the rationale for the proposal was the impending relocation of the Griffin Park Ballfield.

- The Friends of Lawrence Park was organized to promote the renovation and enhancement of the park along with the protection and enhancement of natural processes and habitat in the environmentally sensitive parts of the park.

#### 1985

- A proposal from the Parks, Airport and Golf Committee was submitted or "a cooperative plan between the Kalispell Golf Association and the Parks Department of the City of Kalispell for the rehabilitation, restoration consider the inclusion of that area into the water sprinkling, mowing and general maintenance program of the golf course.

- A proposal called the "Lawrence Park Proposal" was presented by Gail Downey for the Flathead Group of the Sierra Club, Audubon Society and Flathead Wildlife Incorporated. The goal of the proposal was a multiple-use, family oriented park, utilizing the largest open space.

- A memo was sent from City Police Chief Stefanic alerting Mayor presents" especially relating to patrol or supervision. The police department cited the Park's remoteness and singular access as a problem for proper supervision.

- A letter was sent to Mayor McDowell by Pieter Drent responding to pressures on the City Council to expand golfing into the park.

- The City was warned again by the Corp of Engineers to remove fill from the west area of wetland (see 1983).

#### 1986

- An application for a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) assistance (matching grant) for Old Lawrence Park was submitted to Mt. Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks by the Parks Department.

#### 1987

- The LWCF fund request consideration deferred to 1988.

- Pieter Drent retired and Mike Baker took over as Director of the Kalispell Parks and Recreation Department.

#### 1988

- The LWCF grant request did not get a ranking sufficient for funding by the State.

- Negotiations were conducted by the Chamber of Commerce between the Friends of Lawrence Park, KGA and Kalispell Tennis Association for determining compatible land uses by each organization for Lawrence Park.

- An application was submitted by the Kalispell Parks Department to the Montana Department of Natural Resources for obtaining a Reclamation and Development Grant to stabilize the gravel pit at Lawrence Park.

- Extraction of gravel by the City ceased at Lawrence Park.

- Lease negotiations between the City and Buffalo Hill Golf Association set out clear boundaries for future Lawrence Park planning area.

1989

- Kalispell Chamber, FLP, KGA, FTA and City Parks Department sign document agreeing to future use of Park as illustrated in Exhibit "A" (Concept Plan). The agreement was dated October 24, 1989. The City Council did not ratify this document.

1990

- The LWCF Grant application was re-submitted by the Parks Department or 1992 funding.

1991

- The gravel pit slope stabilization project was implemented. \$180,000 was invested to stabilize the former gravel pit. The funding was provided by the Montana Department of Natural Resources.

- A request for proposals for the Lawrence Park Master Plan was solicited by the Kalispell City Parks and Recreation Department.

1992

- The Lawrence Park Master Planning effort was initiated by the Kalispell City Council under the direction of the City Parks Department.

1993

- The completed Lawrence Park Plan was submitted to the Parks Department in February.

### 3. Land Area

The total land area of Lawrence Park consists of approximately 60 acres. The land area has three smaller semi-natural subdivisions: 1) the historic park consisting of approximately 8 acres, 2) the open and filled area consisting of approximately 20 acres and 3) wetland / riparian areas consisting of approximately 28 acres. In-holdings in the wetland/ riparian areas consist of an additional 26 acres (including tracts 24A, 23A and part of 5). Approximately 2 acres of the 8 acres in the historic park area have been developed and managed for park use. The other 6 acres were leased to the Buffalo Hill Golf Course. Potential park area including in-holdings is 82 acres