



Opinion | *Uncommon Ground*

Calm it Down

There are few peacemakers left in politics who are willing to steer us toward calmer waters

BY MIKE JOPEK // AUG 30, 2017

It's all happening quickly. The chokecherries have turned magenta red, the hops are swollen, and the apples wear a rose-colored hue. Fall is in the air.

What a summer it's been. Hot as heck. Not many drops of rain. That constant heat coupled together with never-ending political rhetoric has made for some bad national mojo.

Some people, like yellow jackets, seem on edge and ever ready to sting. It seems the only real heroes left are our firefighters battling the super fires that are burning a half-million acres of public and private land.

Maybe

cooler nights and some real rain will clear the air, allowing us to breathe and treat others with respect. More likely, only the snow saves us.

There are few peacemakers left in politics who are willing to steer us toward calmer waters. Montanans appreciate those workhorses who make stuff happen and enhance our quality of life.

Sen. Jon Tester has quietly and effectively passed much legislation that helps veterans, even in this very Republican-controlled Congress. During congressional recess, he's publicly meeting with many Montanans.

MASTHEAD

NEWSROOM

EMAIL news@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.257.9220

TWITTER @flatheadbeacon



KELLYN BROWN EDITOR IN CHIEF

EMAIL editor@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9539

TWITTER @kellynjbrown



MYERS REECE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

EMAIL mreece@flatheadbeacon.com

GREG LINDSTROM MEDIA DIRECTOR

EMAIL greg@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9541

TWITTER @gl_photo



TRISTAN SCOTT SENIOR WRITER

EMAIL tscott@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9540

TWITTER @tristanscott



MOLLY PRIDDY STAFF WRITER

EMAIL mpriddy@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9542

TWITTER @FB_mollypriddy



DILLON TABISH STAFF WRITER

EMAIL dtabish@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9543

TWITTER @djtabish



JUSTIN FRANZ STAFF WRITER

EMAIL jfranz@flatheadbeacon.com

PHONE 406.407.9544



Tester has been advocating for a federal wildfire fund to offset other Forest Service costs as firefighters risk their lives to protect private property and public land from ever-hotter fires.

TWITTER @jfranz88

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Tester met with Flathead locals and continues his advocacy for local jobs. Recently he helped Kalispell secure a federal TIGER grant to break ground on the Glacier Rail and Industrial Park.

At a Columbia Falls event, Tester touted the outdoor recreation economy that contributes over \$7 billion to the state and supports over 70,000 Montana jobs including 10,000 here in the Flathead. That's big stuff.

There's no denying that tourism is one huge component to the state economy. People just want to visit places like Glacier National Park and see the vanishing glaciers before it's too late.

In Whitefish, there are visitors everywhere pumping money into the local economy and getting outside to enjoy the public lakes and public lands.

Decades ago, Whitefish locals started the process of conserving public lands, educating people about the value of these places, and building trails to help people get outside to enjoy the public air, water and land.

On both sides of Whitefish Lake, from Beaver Lake to Haskill Basin, thousands of acres of public and private watershed have been permanently protected to preserve public access and timber management.

It's been a huge win, not only for the public schools in Montana, but as an economic driver to the local communities. People spend lots of money in the Flathead Valley on outdoor recreation.

As trails and trailheads get built in Haskill Basin, the next phase of the conservation plan connects the loop around the Whitefish Lake public lands to permanently protect hundreds of public acres surrounding Smith Lake.



None of this conservation has been free; it's always been a community effort.

For Haskill Basin, overwhelming margins of Whitefish voters opted to increase a local option sales tax by 1 percentage point to help conserve the watershed for their town.

In Beaver Lake, hundreds of people donated their own private funds to permanently protect the area and invest in schools and outdoor recreation.

Decades ago, Whitefish said it would expand public trails on public lands and secure many of acres for conservation.

Today there's some 40 new miles of public trails connected with a dozen trailheads and thousands of acres of land preserved surrounding Whitefish Lake.

Always some naysayer won't want to let people cross public lands or aren't interested in conserving public lakes and water for the future. That's expected.

Both locally and nationally, there are leaders who warrant support. Help them, as getting stuff done requires us to work together.

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Flathead Beacon • 17 Main Street • Kalispell • Montana • 59901 • USA • (406) 257-9220

