

Montana Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger Speech to the Flathead Basin Commission  
Kalispell, MT  
12/7/2005

I thank you for the opportunity to address the commission. The Governor sends his welcome. Before I begin I would like to thank Dennis Schornack for joining the commission today. It is an honor to have the co-chair of the International Joint Commission in Montana for this meeting.

I believe his attendance underscores the importance of the continued work by this commission, the State of Montana, the Province of British Columbia, and the IJC to develop a workable solution to the water quality of our shared resource: the pristine waters of the northern flathead watershed.

I would also like to welcome Mrs. Kathy Eichenberger from the provincial government of British Columbia, Mr. Daniel Millar from Environment Canada, as well as any other Canadians who have traveled from the north to be with us today. Thank you for taking the time to journey to Montana so that we may work together to shape our shared future. We are brothers and sisters and no two nations share more common bonds than the United States and Canada.

While you here, you may also want to shop. Montana has no sales tax, and the loony is strong. And I know many of the merchants in the Flathead would appreciate the business.

In September I was asked to address at the 74th Annual Convention of International Rotarians in Waterton, Alberta. One could not have asked for a more pristine setting. I believe God must have spent a little more time when creating the majesty of Waterton-Glacier.

As some of you are probably aware, it was Rotarians from British Columbia, Alberta, and Montana who first proposed uniting Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park to create the world's first International Peace Park.

Within a year both the Canada and the United States governments affirmed the vision of these Rotarians and passed legislation creating the Glacier/Waterton International Peace Park.

As part of the Park dedication ceremony, a bronze tablet was unveiled and dedicated at the Glacier Park Hotel. This tablet reads: "Permanently commemorating the relationship of peace and goodwill between the peoples and governments of Canada and the United States."

Governments throughout the world have built upon this spirit of international cooperation, first cultivated in the majestic mountains just 30 miles—or 50 kilometers—to our Northwest. Today peace parks have been created and proposed across the planet. In fact, these parks have been proposed as possible resolutions to some world's most disputed borders, such as the Kashmir border dispute between India and Pakistan.

The vision of internationalism based upon mutual respect and bilateral cooperation is the vision of the Schweitzer-Bohlinger Administration. We believe these principles, will provide for the continued protection of not only the Transboundary Flathead, but also the entire ecosystem that

we collectively share as the Crown of the Continent.

Situated atop the continental divide, the Flathead and surrounding watersheds, which comprise the landmass of the parks, are located at the meeting point of four great North American ecosystems: the wetter Pacific Northwest, the dryer Great Plains, and the Northern Rockies and the Southern Rockies.

This unique location provides the watershed with exceptionally rich biodiversity. Plant and animal species from prairie, forest, alpine and glacier ecosystems all reside within the watershed.

The Crown of the Continent continues to receive international honor. Both parks are Biosphere Reserves, and were named as a World Heritage Site in 1995. This global recognition highlights the importance of this area, not just to Canada and the United States, but also to the entire world. Today, these wild lands attract millions of visitors each year.

The importance of the Transboundary Flathead to Western Montana cannot be overstated. These waters flow into Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi. Our trade and travel economies depend upon the protection of our Montana quality of life. From the First Nations to our times, generations of humanity have relied on these waters for their sustenance.

The importance of the Transboundary Flathead can also be found in another way: This drainage, which we share as both neighbors and countries, is the sole remaining river basin in the continental United States with all of its native plant and animal species intact. To lose this designation would be an irreplaceable loss for all North Americans.

The watersheds contain superb habitats for wildlife, but animals are blind to borders. Scientists who study the parks now know that elk, moose, and deer reproduce and spend summers in the British Columbia portion of the Flathead River Basin and migrate south across the international border in the fall to winter in Montana.

The North Fork of the Flathead River riparian corridor is critically important habitat for these large species. In fact, scientists have documented twenty-six different species of carnivores within the Northern Flathead Ecosystem. Biodiversity of this magnitude cannot be found anywhere else in North America.

One truth is certain: the Flathead River and its tributaries are unique among all the rivers of North America. The corollary of this truth is that it is irreplaceable.

As Mr. Harper said earlier, I know Governor Schweitzer is looking forward to meeting with Premier Campbell on this issue for a second time in the near future. Governor Schweitzer believes Premier Campbell is a leader he can communicate and work with to develop creative, win-win solutions.

Our discussions with the Premier's Liberal Government have also established an important fact: the leaders of British Columbia and Montana share the same forward looking, progressive

values. We have strong visions for the future of our polities in the coming decade; we understand the importance of environmental protection and economic development.

Our economies are also similar in structure, and both are in a state of economic transition as new commerce is developing in parallel to existing industries. It is important to remember this; as the values, environment, and opportunity Montanans recognize as their own do not instantly end at the 49th parallel.

Although Montana and British Columbia belong to different countries, we share the same Western culture of neighbor helping neighbor.

I would like to commend the IJC for the continued work on this issue. All parties are working towards a win-win solution, and we reaffirm our support for the recommendation that baseline water-quality and wildlife data be collected for the Transboundary Flathead. Scientists from both sides of the border agree that this data has not yet been collected. We need to listen to these experts to insure that our shared environment is protected for not only ourselves, but for our children, and our children's children.

I also believe it is imperative to bear in mind the protection of the Canadian Fork of the Flathead is not a new proposal. In December of 1988, the IJC recommended against the proposed Cabin Creek Coal Mine at the headwaters of the North Fork. And the final report went even further, recommending that the governments consider creating an International Conservation Reserve.

The IJC is not the first to make such a recommendation. Waterton's first superintendent, a man named John "Kootenai" Brown, who is a Canadian legend cut from the mold of Teddy Roosevelt, once said, "it seems advisable to greatly enlarge [Waterton to the West]. It might be well to have a preserve and breeding grounds in conjunction with the United States Glacier Park."

Montana and British Columbia are international neighbors bound by the principles of friendship, fellowship and concern for one another. Let us nurture the peace and harmony between our two peoples, as we collaborate to find a sustainable solution for the trans-boundary Flathead.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I wish each of you a merry Christmas and a wonderful new year.