

Dear Editor,

Tucked into the south-east corner of the province, the Flathead River Valley is a remarkable wilderness area that is valued by many. Its forests and wetlands are home to an abundance of wildlife. The mountains offer phenomenal vistas to recreational users. And the forested lands support an economy on which many depend. People in the local area, as well as across the country, have deep attachments to the land and to the rich natural, social and economic values that the Flathead embodies.

A year ago the Province of British Columbia made the decision to prohibit mining and oil and gas exploration and development in the Flathead. The prohibition helps ensure the long-term protection of the clean water, healthy forests, diverse animal populations and natural beauty of an area that has enriched the human experience for generations.

Recently, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and our partner, The Nature Conservancy (US), agreed to bring \$9.4 million to the Province to help implement their decision, which the Province will also move to legislate in the coming year. Why would we do this? Because by bringing this money to the table, we were also able to negotiate some basic standards of conservation for the Flathead River Valley, such as maintaining and enhancing old-growth forest stands, wildlife populations (especially species-at-risk), water quality and other key ecological indicators.

As an organization with a mission to protect the natural heritage of this country through collaboration and science-based management, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is proud to play a part in strengthening the ecological values of the Flathead in partnership with the Province. The Nature Conservancy of Canada does not –and will not – take a stand on the calls for the creation of a national park in the Flathead. Our place at the table exclusively concerns the conservation of the area's plants, animals and natural communities.

Today the Flathead remains an active, working landscape, shared by recreation, forestry, hunting, conservation, research and many other interests. A key point about this funding commitment is that it allows all of these uses to continue.

The debate over different directions for the Flathead will always be there. Right now, the priority is implementing the Province's land use decision, and NCC looks forward to working with all interested parties in these actions to conserve the nature of the Flathead.

Sincerely,

Linda Hannah, Regional Vice President
British Columbia Region, Nature Conservancy of Canada