



FLATHEAD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

Northwest Power Planning Council
851 SW 6th Ave.
Portland, OR 97204

January 8, 2003

Re: Draft Mainstem Amendments

Gentlemen:

On behalf of Flathead Electric Cooperative and the 43,000 members it serves, the Flathead Electric Board of Trustees supports the Montana Council members, John Hines and Ed Bartlett, on the proposed changes to the plan for dealing with the upper reaches of the Columbia River system. Montana's proposals reflect the state's interest in finding ways to achieve a balance of benefits to fish enhancement and to Montana's economy at a lower cost.

The economy of the Flathead Valley area has changed from being based on timber and agriculture, to tourism and year-around recreation. This has resulted in reduced household incomes because lower-paying service jobs are now more prevalent. Paying living expenses of housing, utilities, schools, roads and government has become increasingly difficult for many people. Providing more recreational opportunities for the Flathead Valley will provide more jobs and a higher standard of living for our residents.

Hungry Horse dam was constructed for the purpose of water storage for flood control, power generation and irrigation needs. Through the years, the level of recreation activities has significantly increased and needs to be included as a purpose for the dam. The natural beauty, the fishing and boating opportunities of western Montana have been "discovered."

The proposed amendments will help facilitate the needs and activities of northwest Montana, by providing:

1. a higher water level behind the dam, for a longer period of time
2. more assurance of reservoir filling
3. flows that are more natural
4. less fluctuation of river levels, which will enhance insect habitat for resident fish
5. increased flexibility of the hydro system, resulting in additional generation

With the Federal Columbia River Power System reaching its load capacity and the continued growth that we are experiencing here in the northwest, it is imperative that full value is received from our water resource. This is not a hoarding or restricted use for Montana. The lower Columbia system will receive all of the water that flows from the headwaters of northwestern Montana.

We urge the Power Planning Council to approve the proposed amendments to the plan.

Very truly yours,

Karl Schrade, President
Flathead Electric Cooperative, Inc.