

LAKE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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RE: Letter of Support
Greater Woods Bay Wastewater District

To Whom It May Concern:

This department has been requested to comment on the value of a community wastewater treatment system for the greater Woods Bay area. This office is responsible for Lake County's on-site wastewater treatment system permitting and compliance program under the Lake County Board of Health. The department has general responsibilities for public health impacts from environmental and human activities.

It would be difficult to imagine a setting where need for a community wastewater treatment system is more critical than the greater Woods Bay area. The soils are very gravelly with limited fine material. This results in rapid infiltration of wastewater into the ground with limited treatment but excellent disposal. The potential for aquifer contamination by wastewater is high as is the likelihood that such contamination directly affects the water quality of Flathead Lake. This department is aware of elevated nitrates in the area; however, there has been no formal study that documents this concern.


The potential for wastewater contamination of water resources is exacerbated by the fact that the area has been historically subdivided into very small parcels. Most of these parcels have individual on-site wastewater systems, with many of the systems installed prior to local septic permitting regulations and standards. When systems fail, the replacement options are limited and generally expensive due to design criteria, advanced treatment or both; in some cases the property must utilize a holding tank as the only viable option.

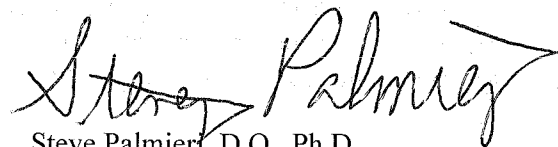
An emerging concern in this area is its potential for commercial development. Its access to Flathead Lake and proximity to other highly popular areas such as Bigfork and the Flathead Valley make it an attractive location for growth. Development is primarily limited by the lack of a community wastewater treatment system. The few businesses established recently were required to install advanced wastewater treatment systems at considerable expense. And, this office is aware of existing businesses operating on very limited systems that cannot support additional activity. A community wastewater system would be a valuable economic asset to the area as businesses seek to provide additional or improved service to the public.

Flathead Lake has been listed by the State of Montana as an impaired surface water. The recent Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study of the lake conducted by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality estimated three percent of the nutrient load was attributable to on-site wastewater systems at or near the lakeshore. While this is a relatively small number, it is a larger percentage of the total nutrient load that can be addressed by local intervention.

From the perspective of both public and environmental health, Lake County could not be more supportive of the effort by the Woods Bay community to develop a district wastewater treatment system.

Sincerely,


Susan K. Brueggeman, R.S.
Director


Steve Palmieri, D.O., Ph.D.
Lake County Health Officer