

# *Swan View Coalition* Nature and Human Nature on the Same Path



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## **Statement of Keith Hammer to the US Forest Service Planning Rule Advisory Committee**

**May 29, 2014**

My name is Keith Hammer and I am chair of the non-profit Swan View Coalition. We've been working since 1984 to conserve and restore fish and wildlife on the Flathead National Forest and in the greater Flathead River Basin.

On the Flathead and elsewhere collaboration is being gamed by those seeking political advantage. Rather than resolving conflicts through use of the best available science, collaboration is being used to politically marginalize those who work to enforce use of the best available science.

The Whitefish Range Partnership rushed to conclude its collaboration in order to be "first out of the chute" as the Flathead was just inviting the public to its collaboration. The Forest Supervisor, prior to any substantial agency or public review of it, said the Whitefish Range proposal "may be very close, if not exactly what we end up doing." The Revision Team Leader said those not a part of the Whitefish Range Partnership could "take pot shots at it." This hardly builds confidence in the broader public that their concerns or the best available science will be fairly considered by the Forest Service.(1)

The Whitefish Range Partnership proposes to substantially increase the suitable timber base by increasing logging in grizzly bear security core habitats and by challenging "existing lynx management strategies."(2) This was then put before the full Forest collaborative. There was never any detailed discussion at any of the revision meetings I attended about whether or not the best available science supports such an increase in logging on the Flathead.

The Assessment of the Flathead National Forest, required by the Planning Rule and promised in the Fall of 2013, was not actually completed until mid-April and hard copies were not available until last week - after the collaborative process was essentially over.(3) The Assessment includes maps of grizzly bear security core and key wolverine habitat overlain with snowmobile use areas. These new maps could have been key during earlier revision meetings.

Instead, the meetings were a feeding frenzy as participants asked for logging and the use of motor vehicles on National Forest lands with no clear criteria firstly described to insure those pursuits would be in line with the best available science and the law. There were no elk, bears, wolverine, lynx, bull trout, or other wildlife at these meetings - so application of the best available science and legal requirements is the only way these species can be given a voice in the process.

Former Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas and others seized on using collaboration to marginalize those who resort to litigation to insure the needs of fish and wildlife are being met. Retired Forest Service biologists Al Espinosa and Harry Jageman tell Congress "The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act . . . is largely being used to circumvent existing environmental laws and give control of the management of our National Forests to local special interests."(4)

We in March submitted our Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan, alongside a substantial bibliography of the science it is based upon.(5) Will the Flathead write a new Forest Plan that represents the will of the American public, whose laws require the use of the best available science, or will it write a Plan that hedges on those laws in order to placate local residents?

There is renewed vigor in the movement to turn control of federal lands over to State or local governments. To what degree is collaboration feeding this movement toward local control over America's public lands?

Under the new Planning Rule, the use of collaboration is optional, while the use of the best available science is mandatory. What recommendations could this Committee make to insure that collaboration, when used, reinforces use of the best available science rather than marginalizing those who use it to give voice to fish and wildlife?

**(Notes, Sources and Additional Concerns on the Following Page)**

## Notes and Sources

1. Links to the news articles quoting the Flathead Forest Supervisor and Revision Team Leader can be found in our letter to the editors at:  
[http://www.swanview.org/home/articles/blog/flathead\\_skews\\_forest\\_plan\\_revision\\_process/180](http://www.swanview.org/home/articles/blog/flathead_skews_forest_plan_revision_process/180)
2. The timber management section of the Whitefish Range Partnership Agreement can be found on pdf pages 23-28 at:  
[http://www.headwatersmontana.com/sites/default/files/WRP\\_Final\\_11\\_18\\_2013.pdf](http://www.headwatersmontana.com/sites/default/files/WRP_Final_11_18_2013.pdf)
3. The Assessment of the Flathead National Forest can be found at:  
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5422786&width=full>
4. Sources for the statements of Jack Ward Thomas, Rebecca Watson, Al Espinosa, and Harry Jageman on page 2 of our newsletter at:  
[http://www.swanview.org/newsletters/Fall\\_2013e.pdf](http://www.swanview.org/newsletters/Fall_2013e.pdf)
5. Our Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan can be found at:  
[http://www.swanview.org/reports/Citizen\\_reVision\\_Flathead\\_Forest\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.swanview.org/reports/Citizen_reVision_Flathead_Forest_Plan.pdf)

## Additional Concerns

- A. We outline other concerns with the Flathead's collaborative process, and the contracting of Meridian Institute to conduct it, in an April 24, 2014, letter to the Flathead Forest Supervisor. It can be found at:  
[http://www.swanview.org/reports/Weber\\_Letter\\_140424.pdf](http://www.swanview.org/reports/Weber_Letter_140424.pdf)
- B. We report further on how misdeeds at the Udall Foundation, between the time it was audited by USDI's Office of the Inspector General and a follow-up report was issued by the General Accounting Office, appear to have tainted the contracting of Meridian Institute to conduct the Flathead's collaborative process. See page 2 of our newsletter at:  
[http://www.swanview.org/newsletters/Winter-Spring\\_2014e.pdf](http://www.swanview.org/newsletters/Winter-Spring_2014e.pdf)