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MONT. P.S. COMMISSION

Flathead Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited
P.O. Box 638
Kalispell, MT 59901

Montana Public Service Commission
1701 Prospect Ave.
P.O. Box 202601
Helena, MT 59620-2601

Dear Sirs,

Northwest Montana contains the majority of streams in the state and many of those clean rivers and creeks are also major rail arteries. In the Flathead we are seeing several trains a day hauling hundreds of carloads of Bakken oil along our river corridors. The Middle Fork of the Flathead has been designated as a Wild and Scenic waterway because of its pristine condition and importance to our economic livelihood. A derailment and spill of crude oil along our waterways would cause irreparable harm to our wildlife, our wild fish populations and to our local economy for many years to come.

The spill near Culbertson last year of 35,000 gallons of Bakken crude oil proved just how ill prepared the State of Montana and BNSF are for a major spill anywhere in our state. We must clearly place an emphasis on reducing the risk of and preventing any oil spill along our waterways. Once the oil enters one of our wild rivers, there really is no way respond in a meaningful way. Any spill into the Middle Fork of the Flathead River will ultimately contaminate the aquifers in the Flathead Valley that we all depend on for clean water and good health. Furthermore, that oil will make its way throughout the Flathead River system and to Flathead Lake where it will destroy, not only one of the cleanest and most pristine water bodies in the country, but it will heavily impact the economy of Northwest Montana.

The Flathead Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited is dedicated to the protection of our wild fish populations and the clear, clean and cold aquatic habitat that supports those fish. Oil in the Flathead River system would severely impact our wild fish and could have historic impacts on habitat for decades. We fully support efforts of the PSC to create a rail safety plan that will take into account the needs for proper funding, staffing and agency cooperation to first and foremost prevent the possibility of any spill into our waterways as well as preparing an overwhelming response that will be needed if such a disaster should occur. Our Chapter wishes to engage in and comment on the rail safety plan.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Larry Timchak
President, Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited