

2018 CRT Op-Ed

**By Rep. Mike Cuffe**

**Montana House district 2**

Our lands and homes were taken from us and destroyed. Our way of life was stolen and drowned. It was a disaster for life along the old Kootenai River and neighboring mountainsides. More doom could come from Columbia River Treaty.

Libby Dam, the fourth Dam built under CRT, could lose more than 25 percent of the annual flow from the Kootenai River. It would flow into the Columbia River at Canal Flats, B.C. Thus, concentration of Selenium contamination entering Lake Kocanusa from B.C. coal mines would be significantly increased.

Meanwhile, British Columbia has been compensated up to \$300 million per year for three dams that flood three valleys. Montana has received nothing for flooding the beautiful and bounteous Kootenai Valley. For the same reasons as B.C., Montana should be compensated in the same way. If the Kootenai carries 20 percent of the Columbia River volume, 20 percent of \$300 million equals \$60 million per year for Montana.

Instead we are ignored and disrespected. We are told we don't count. We are told that I am the only one telling this story; that nobody else cares. Yet, we must trust our federal negotiators to do what is right, fair, just-- to treat us just as well as a foreign nation, a tribal government, or a fish. I believe they will, but we must speak up.

We are the people and government of Lincoln County, Montana.

Nobody knows! Nobody cares! Nobody gives a hoot about the submerged villages of Rexford and Warland, or the homes and ranches and dreams and families and individuals and lives that once existed in the beautiful and productive Kootenai River Valley.

*AND MORE. MUCH MORE! I can go on at length with colorful and mournful and sad and humorous stories, true stories of life in the Kootenai Valley. In 1969, I*

*created a radio program called "Nobody Gives a Hoot about Rexford, Montana" for KUFM. I still listen to those old voices from the past: Tearful teacher Alice Beers who invented the name Kooconusa, Rough lumberjack Mayor Jack Parish seeking the best for his town, popular storekeeper Bill Fewkes, County Commissioner Leo Collar, and others including Mrs. W.F. Logsdon the grandmother of current 71-year-old Rexford Mayor Bill Marvel, and my brother Robert McKenzie the highway foreman who doubled as Rexford fire chief.*

But that is past. The future always starts today. My mission is to have Montana concerns included in the modernization of the 1964 Columbia River Treaty. I have been involved with the "modernization" since the earliest meetings in 2011 or 2012.

What we seek is two-fold, yet simple: First and foremost, remove Section 2 of Article 13 from CRT language. Current CRT language would allow up to 1.5 million acre feet diverted from the Kootenai River. The average annual flow of the Kootenai is 5.8 million acre feet.

If the Article 13 diversion ever happened, production of electricity at Libby Dam would immediately reduce by that amount. All the electricity from Libby Dam is an asset only to the American side. That is a ton of megawatts.

At some point Lake Kooconusa would never refill. Currently it is dropped 100 vertical feet from full pool each year to make a big mud flat/dust bowl. The diversion would create dramatic impacts to life in and around Kooconusa Recreation activity and property values would take a negative hit, and coping/cleanup costs would grow. Selenium contamination should be a part of negotiations because Libby Dam creates a settling pond, and the potential diversion multiplies the danger.

Secondly, Compensation for Montana means that for flooding our valley permanently to protect those downstream, Montana would receive half the value of electricity from Libby Dam plus half the value of the electricity generated in Washington and Oregon from flood waters held back by Libby Dam. That's the way it works for British Columbia.

Only thing is, Canada gets even a better deal. White Sturgeon grow in Kootenay Lake in B.C., but swim upstream to Kootenai Falls to spawn. Extra water is released from Libby Dam to help reproduction. That extra water must be spilled around Kootenai Canal Generating Station near Nelson, B.C., so we pay them for

electricity that didn't get generated because we are trying to save a fish that lives most of its life in B.C. Don't laugh, it is true.

In addition, CRT states that benefits from Libby Dam remain in the country where the benefit occurs. That means that the electricity generated in Washington and Oregon, from flood water held back by Libby Dam, should be an asset only of the U.S. side. However, I have been told by Bonneville Power Administration that half of that power becomes part of the Canadian entitlement. Read the Treaty, and you decide.

Negotiator Jill Smail at U.S. Dept of State will lead a town hall meeting at the Davenport Hotel in Spokane April 25 from 5 to 7 pm. To submit questions in advance, or to access the meeting by phone, email Susan May at [ColumbiaRiverTreaty@state.gov](mailto:ColumbiaRiverTreaty@state.gov).