SUBDIVISION IN THE FLATHEAD

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Land Use Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF FLATHEAD AREA DEVELOPMENT

Indians have lived in the Flathead for thousands of years and still own and utilize much of the lower Flathead on the Kootenai and Salish Reservation. Europeans came first in the early 1800's in their search for furs, but settlers did not arrive until the 1850's. With the Homestead Act of 1862, settlers began filing ownership claims on the most desirable land, mostly in the lower valleys where warmer climate and level, productive land was available. Between 1855 and 1871 treaties were arranged with the Indians to establish their reservation on its present day location. The decade of the 1880's brought a large influx of people to the Flathead, promoted by a dramatic increase in transportation. In 1883 the Northern Pacific Railroad, aided by the largest land grant in American history (over forty million acres in alternate sections for twenty miles on both sides of the right-of-way) began bringing settlers in from the south to the Jocko valley.[1] At the same time the large mining companies began acquiring large tracts of timberland to support their large timber requirements. These actions created the

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[1]State Engineers Office, Water Resources Survey of Flathead and Lincoln Counties, Helena, June 1965, p. 11.

first large non-federal ownership patterns that are still evident today. Pioneers taking advantage of the Homestead Act and General Allotment Act of 1880 came rapidly to the area and in 1884 boats began regular navigation of the Flathead Lake and River. From 1885 on rapid settlement of the lower valleys further established the ownership pattern. By 1889 Montana was admitted to the Union, and by 1890 the Great Northern Railroad had pushed its tracks through Marias Pass to the upper Flathead valley and the new townsite of Kalispell. This transportation corridor was completed in 1893 to Seattle. Roads became more numerous as more people came to the valley. Flathead County was created out of Missoula County in 1893.[2] The federal government moved to complete the ownership pattern in 1897 by establishing the Flathead Forest Reserve. This became the Blackfeet and Flathead National Forest in 1907. Part of this reserve became Glacier National Park in 1910.[3] The Flathead Indian Reservation was thrown open to white settlement under the General Allotment Act after Indian families were given the chance to choose homestead sites. These allotments enabled the white settlers to dominate the ownership of much of the most productive lowlands in the lower Flathead valley. The

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[2]Edgar Trippet, Historical Information Concerning the Upper Flathead Valley (Trippet Publishing, 1971), p. 18.

[3]Charles Shaw, The Flathead Story (U.S.F.S.:1967), p. 42.

federal government created the first subdivisions at this time by dividing some areas of the Flathead Lake Reservation shoreline into "villas" to sell to white people to generate money for the Indians.[4]

By the 1920's the ownership and use patterns had become established. Agriculture was the foundation of the economy, and the wood products industry developed as the demand grew. Much land in the valley had been cleared in the early 1900's and federal timber began to be used. Also in these early years, man-generated fires incised patterns in the timbered hills, increasing the natural fire impact considerably. In 1931 the Kerr Dam hydroelectric project began generating electricity in the lower Flathead, following the trend of the Pacific Northwest region in obtaining virtually all of its electrical power in this way.[5] The huge Hungry Horse dam was completed in 1953, bringing President Harry S. Truman to the Flathead to dedicate it. Within two years the Anaconda Aluminum Company had built a large smelting plant just five miles downriver at Columbia Falls. The aluminum reducing process is the most consumptive of all industries of electricity and depends on a large cheap supply for its success.

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[4]J.E. McAlear, The Fabulous Flathead (Reservation Pioneers, 1962), p. 23.

[5]Edgar Trippet, op. cit., p. 26.

This importance is indicated by comparing the power source to the ore source, which is in Caribbean Jamaica.[6]

As the prosperity of the post-war United States increased and transportation improved, recreation and tourism began to play an increasing role in people's lives and the Flathead's economy. Service facilities were needed to satisfy the larger demands of more people coming to the area to experience the natural wonders of the northern Rockies. Forest Service, National Park, and Fish and Game agencies began adapting their management policies to the increased demand, and new business opportunities were created to accommodate the large tourist population flow.[7] As transportation and surplus income availability further improved, many people became interested in owning land in this scenic country for retirement, second home or speculative purposes and a new "settler" influx has commenced. Since 1968 the new land rush has instigated new land-use and ownership pattern changes that are the focus of this study.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The bedrock of the Flathead drainage and forming the northern Rockies is of Pre-Cambrian sedimentary origin,

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[6]Norman Larson, An Economic Analysis of Anaconda Aluminum Plant, Dept. I.G.R. (Research and Information System Division), Helena, 1974, p. 31.

[7]Wild and Scenic River Study Draft Proposal (Flathead National Forest).

containing argillites, quartzites and limestones and referred to as the Laramide Belt Series. Paleozoic formations in some upper drainages form cliffs and ridges due to their erosional resistance. The large fault system of the Rocky Mountain trench falls along the axis of the valley and forms the Mission and Swan Range faces. The valleys have been glaciated during the Ice ages, most recently during the Wisconsin age which ended 12,000 years ago. The valleys have been filled by glacial deposits of different ages and may be as deep as 4,000 feet in the main Flathead Valley. The last valley glacier deposited the moraines containing the present Flathead Lake and the till and alluvium that forms much of the present day valley soil. The pothole lakes region of kettle and kame topography around Echo Lake in the eastern upper Flathead Valley was formed as the glacier receded and left isolated ice blocks that melted to form the potholes.[8]

The landforms of the valley bottoms include the nearly level alluvial river bottom and floodplain, the lacustrine formed bottoms and the rolling glacial low terraces and benches. The east valley terrace is elevated some eighty to one hundred fifty feet above the Flathead River, and the central valley terrace is a lower formation north of Kalispell.

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[8]R.L. Konizeski, Alex Brietkrietz, and R.G. McMurtrey, Geology and Groundwater Resources of the Kalispell Valley, Northwestern Montana (Bulletin 68, U.S.G.S., July 1968), pp. 14-20.

In addition there are low, ice-scoured hills southwest of Whitefish Lake, and glaciated terrain to the south of those hills. This encompasses the fifteen by twenty-five mile main Flathead Valley, the Stillwater Valley and the North-fork Valley. Ninety percent of the area's farmland is here within six hundred vertical feet of the lake. The glaciated valleys, foothills and uplands are found at higher elevations. These lands are forested or cutover and include much of the large private ownership holdings. The low rolling Salish mountains to the west, the Whitefish range to the north, and the high, steep mountains of the continental divide to the east form the boundaries of the drainage basin and receive most of the precipitation in the watershed.[9]

The soils of the Flathead area are altitudinally stratified. The Brown Podzolics can be found in the higher forest zones, the gray wooded soils in the low forests and the chernozem, chestnut and azonal alluvial soil groups in the lower valleys. The soils of the Flathead Valley have been mapped and the survey indicates that 135,868 acres of upper valley land fall in the category of Class I-IV agriculturally productive soils.[10]

The climate of the Flathead is influenced primarily by

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[9]Ibid., p. 23.

[10]Soil Survey, Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana (U.S.D.A., S.C.S., and Montana Agr. Exp. Station, September 1960), p. 12.

Pacific maritime systems modified by drying effects of the mountain ranges to the west. Generally there is most precipitation in winter and spring with warm dry summers and cold, cloudy winters. In winter some polar continental air masses from the northeast spill over the Rockies and bring cold temperatures and wind through Bad Rock Canyon. Precipitation is year-round and is heaviest in December, January, and June. Yearly average precipitation ranges from one hundred twenty inches in the high North Fork mountains to fifteen inches in the low valley. The driest months are July and August.[11] The growing season varies from 150 days in Kalispell, 130 days in Polson, 100 days in Columbia Falls and 90 to 30 days in the mountains. Flathead lake moderates temperatures in all seasons and enables fruit orchards to thrive on its shores.[12]

A major contributor to the intrinsic wealth of the Flathead is its water resources. The heavy mountain snow-pack and spring rains nourish the forests and bring water to the streams and upper rivers and recharge the groundwater storage of the mountains. The large valley rivers provide wildlife and fisheries habitat, valley groundwater recharge, hydropower for the region, navigable water for recreation (and

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[11] Water Resources Survey, op. cit., p. 13.

[12] Soil Survey, op. cit., p. 18.