

## **Citizen and Agency Partnership: Volunteer Monitoring in Montana's Flathead Basin**

**Mark Holston**

Flathead Basin Commission, 109 Cooperative Way, Suite 110, Kalispell, MT 59901

### **Biographical Sketch of Author**

Mark Holston is the Public Information Office of the Flathead Basin Commission and is the organization's sole employee. The FBC is a quasi-state agency that functions as a watershed group in the six million square acre Flathead Watershed of northwest Montana and southeast British Columbia. The primary emphasis of this non-regulatory entity is education. Mr. Holston's background is in print and electronic journalism. He has authored many magazine articles on environmental topics for, among other publications, Americas Magazine, the publication of The Organization of American States, and The World & I, the monthly publication of The Washington Times. He has coordinated the FBC's Volunteer Monitor Program since its inception in 1992.

### **Abstract**

Citizen volunteer monitoring programs designed and coordinated by the Flathead Basin Commission for lakes and streams in Northwest Montana demonstrate an effective use of trained citizen volunteers to augment agency-conducted monitoring programs that are increasingly faced with lack of adequate human and financial resources.

The FBC programs are now in their second decade and to date have produced thousands of individual monitoring reports by program participants from over three dozen sites on area lakes and streams. Monitoring methods have been developed and volunteers have been trained according to jointly agreed upon standards. The University of Montana, U.S. EPA, Montana DEQ and other agencies have contributed to this collaborative effort, insuring a high level of data quality and applicability to such agency-driven projects as watershed restoration work and TMDL programs in area basins. The volunteer program is a model of success and has increased public awareness of water quality issues and has improved landowner stewardship. It has also produced high quality data that is available upon request and has been utilized by citizen groups, state and federal agencies, such local government entities as planning boards, consulting firms, educational institutions, and individuals for a variety of purposes.

The presentation will highlight program successes that illustrate the benefit of citizen/agency partnerships and the scientific credibility of citizen-collected water quality data.