

PROTECTING THE WATER, WILDLIFE AND OUTDOOR HERITAGE OF THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT.



Erin in Her Habitat

Erin Sexton was awarded the 2012 Conservation Achievement Award by the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. The citation notes Erin's dedication and tireless efforts for applying research to sound policy solutions.



New MT AFS logo, designed by Al Zale, 2008.

The Montana Chapter

of the American Fisheries Society was chartered in 1967. The national [American Fisheries Society](#) is the oldest professional society in North America dealing with the natural resources and was organized in 1870. The Society works to conserve and wisely use the fisheries of Montana, and to promote the educational, scientific and technological development of all branches of fisheries science and practice, and to exchange and disseminate knowledge about fish, fisheries and related subjects.



Clean Water & Vital Fish

Erin's research in association with the Flathead Lake Biological Station helped establish a baseline scientific understanding of the important conservation value of the water quality and aquatic habitats in the North Fork Flathead River. (Photo: Michael Ready/iLCP)

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Local Scientist Honored for Work on Transboundary Flathead River
Erin Sexton Received Fishery Society Award

March 15, 2013

Dear Friend:

Erin Sexton is the Transboundary Coordinator for the State of Montana and is a Research Scientist at University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station. Over the past 10 years, Erin has shown tremendous leadership in working to protect the international Flathead River from inappropriate industrial development.

Scientists and conservationists consider the North Fork Flathead River one of America's wildest rivers due to its pristine water quality and abundant and diverse aquatic and terrestrial life. Since the mid-1970s the river have been threatened by a series of industrial proposals in British Columbia to strip mine coal and drill for coal-bed methane.

Erin's research in association with the [Flathead Lake Biological Station](#) contributed significantly to local, state, provincial, and federal authorities in both the U.S. and Canada understanding of the importance of the Transboundary Flathead watershed for conservation. The [Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society](#) noted Erin's relentless efforts to coordinate and develop a solid foundation of science to inform management and decision makers.

For example, Erin was an integral and contributing member of the Flathead Ecosystem Science Team - a collaborative university and multi-agency science partnership established to research the potential impacts of mining and other industrial-type development in the Flathead. Erin coordinated the collection of baseline aquatic data and developed a comprehensive environmental assessment of water quality, aquatic food webs, habitat, native fish, and wildlife in the Flathead system.

Erin's data compared the Flathead with the neighboring Elk River in B.C. where more than 50 years of open-pit coal mining has degraded water quality and biodiversity. By contrast, the pristine aquatic habitats in the Flathead supported healthy aquatic life, including migratory populations of threatened bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.

Erin helped establish diplomacy between the United States and Canada at the state/provincial/federal and NGO levels through her personal relationships, communication, and awareness. She identified critical information gaps and always kept the science team and political leaders informed of ongoing threats and developments. She faithfully attended innumerable official meetings, public information gatherings,



Coal Mines & Pollution

Erin's application of accurate scientific data helped inform citizens and then decision makers about the likely adverse effects of allowing mountaintop removal coal mining and coal bed methane development in the B.C. headwaters of the Flathead. (Photo: Garth Lenz/iLCP)



The Epicenter of Flathead Ecosystem Research

The "Bio Station" at Yellow Bay is one of the oldest research field stations in the United States, established in 1899.

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and forums. She also has served on the Flathead Basin Commission's Water Quality Task Force since 2005.

She was appointed by Governor Schweitzer to represent Montana during 2009 UNESCO's fact-finding mission to investigate whether the proposed mining was a threat to Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, which concluded that mining in the Flathead would be "incompatible" with Peace Park as a World Heritage Site.

Most recently, she helped initiate collaborative research to identify critical data gaps and vulnerabilities in the face of climate change and logging practices in the B.C. Flathead.

We can faithfully say that Erin's tireless work helped directly lead to the 2010 MOU signed by B.C. Premier Campbell and Governor Schweitzer, and to the subsequent legislation banning mining in the B.C. Flathead. In light of her dedication and accomplishments, we want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Erin for her scientific integrity and effective advocacy, at times and places where her information was not always popular.

Congratulations Erin!

~ We Thought You'd Like to Know! ~

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