

# OPINION

## Questioning the Lion Mountain septic study

In my opinion, the article regarding a report on Lion Mountain's wastewater management alternatives (Whitefish Pilot, March 2) has multiple errors and statements that deserve correcting.

I believe Carver Engineering's report that Lion Mountain's drinking water system is being polluted with nitrates is patently false. Lion Mountain has been testing their drinking water since 1978 and it has never had nitrate levels or any other pollutants above the legal amount and the testing done six weeks ago by the Montana State Lab and Department of Environmental Quality found no problematic levels of nitrate. These results go to all Lion Mountain Homeowners and are a matter of public record.

The nitrate level noted in the report, 3.5 mg/l, is considered totally safe in a public water system. Since that 2013 reading, the measured nitrate in the Lion Mountain well has trended down. If there was sewage contamination, wouldn't it be trending up as more septic fail?

It should be mentioned that nitrates can be found in water due to erosion of natural deposits or fertilizer runoff.

Lion Mountain isn't the only potential source of pollution in the lake.

Dog Bay is adjacent to Whitefish Lake State Park, which used outdoor privies right next to the lake for years. They have 23 campsites and a day-use area and are full most times.

Note that the report never

mentions any testing done on any septic system. Just because a septic system is old doesn't mean it is polluting. And, many homeowners on Lion Mountain have upgraded their systems voluntarily.

In my opinion, the article implies that Lion Mountain homeowners have no interest in or caring about the quality of the lake, which is totally false. Several of our homeowners are members of the Whitefish Lake Institute and homeowners voted to fund the Carver study. Lion Mountain has a beach/boat area for homeowners, so we are very concerned about lake quality.

Note that in the fine print, the solution to all of Whitefish Lake's problems is not only to install city sewer on Lion Mountain, but to annex Lion

Mountain to the city. Also note that the tax increase to Lion Mountain homeowners would be about 20 percent, going into the city coffers, in addition to having to pay the \$2.9 million estimated to put in a sewer system. And, historically, in my opinion, the city has been wildly inaccurate at estimating costs.

Also note that installing a sewer system on Lion Mountain would cost \$2.9 million; payable by whom? And, this system would be installed by a city who is planning significant upgrades to their wastewater treatment facility to meet new permit requirements.

The "study" done by Carver Engineering cost \$65,000. Maybe that money could have been used to upgrade the

city's wastewater treatment system or to help folks on Lion Mountain upgrade their systems rather than using the "study" for what I believe is a ploy to force annexation.

— Linda Coolidge is a Lion Mountain homeowner

**Editor's Note:** Carver Engineering's report focused on the designated Lion Mountain study area. Carver's report documented a spike in nitrates of 3.5 mg/l in 2013 from well No. 1 on Lion Mountain, which serves phases 1-5 in the development. According to Carver, concentrations exceeding 3 mg/l indicate potential human/surface sources of contamination. The EPA has a drinking-water limit of 10 mg/l.