

RIVER WATCH PROGRAM

Whether it's an obstruction to recreational access, a safety hazard, or an environmental threat, if you encounter something along the river and wonder, "How could anything like that be allowed to happen?" – contact BRPA. We will investigate, we will document, and we will get an answer. We will seek the proper remedies from the appropriate agencies and, when necessary, in the courts.



BRPA participates in many semi-judicial processes, usually involving the issuance of Permits, conducted by agencies such as the Department of Environmental Quality, Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Army Corps of Engineers, Bitterroot Conservation District and others.

In 2014, responding to a 310 Permit complaint lodged by BRPA, the Bitterroot Conservation District made the precedent setting determination that "revetments", such as the one pictured below, are within its jurisdiction. The District gave this landowner until next high water to remove the concrete rubble from the river bank.



PORTAGE ROUTES



BRPA members, pictured above, show the county commissioners an obstacle on the river. In response to petitions from the BRPA the Ravalli County Commissioners have established eleven Portage Routes on the Bitterroot River to facilitate public access. The "experimental" gate, pictured below, was designed by FWP to allow recreational passage while keeping the cows in. If successful it could be a win/win for recreationists and landowners around the state.



LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

BRPA is a legal advocate for the Bitterroot River and its tributaries. We are willing and ready to go to court to see that our environmental laws and public access laws are enforced

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

BRPA v. Bitterroot Conservation District - The Mitchell Slough case was a landmark case in defense of the Natural

Streambed and Land Preservation Act of 1985 and Montana's Stream Access Law. It squashed a well-funded attempt to privatize Montana's waters. In this case a District Court ruled that both these laws only apply to "natural" waterways and that no stream or river was "natural" if it had been altered in any fashion by man. This would have removed almost every stream and river in Montana from protection under either law. BRPA won a reversal of that ruling in the Montana Supreme Court. Then-Governor Brian Schweitzer, was quoted on the front page of the New York Times, saying this about the case: "If you want to buy a big ranch and you want to have a river and you want privacy, don't buy in Montana. The rivers belong to the people of Montana."

BRPA v. Ken and Judith Siebel - This case prevented the privatization of Montana's fisheries by preventing a private landowner from diverting 80% of the water from miles of a Bitterroot River channel to develop a private fishery through the ranch using both the public's water and their fish.

AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM

BRPA has maintained an Aerial Reconnaissance Program since 2000. Utilizing local private pilots willing to donate



flights, local commercial pilots offering reduced rates for non-profits, and LightHawk, a national program providing aerial surveillance and documentation services, we have been able to get a "birds eye view" of specific areas to evaluate what is taking place in or near the river, especially when access through private property has been denied.