



SELKIRK CONSERVATION ALLIANCE
KEEPING THE WILD IN THE SELKIRK ECOSYSTEM

NOTICE TO SCA MEMBERS & PUBLIC

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THREATENS COOLIN-WARREN WETLANDS, SOUTH PRIEST LAKE

In April of 2021 a 65 acre parcel of wetlands on the south end of Priest Lake was awarded to Tricore Investments (Clifford Mort, CdA) in a property dispute with John Stockton & a business partner who were attempting to preserve the wetland area. When the property was originally purchased by Tricore Investments in 2016 (before the dispute) the company was planning to develop a housing project on the wetland site. Tricore's plan was to purchase wetland credits from a local wetland bank (Valencia Wetlands Bank) which would allow the company to develop the site.

Selkirk Conservation Alliance is working to inform the public about the critical importance of preserving Panhandle wetland ecosystems and the potential permanent loss of a critical Class I Idaho Panhandle wetland site/wetland system on the south end of Priest Lake.

The Coolin-Warren (identified as Chase Lake in 2004 Conservation Strategy for Idaho Panhandle Peatlands) wetland site has been identified by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Idaho Conservation Data Center as one of the most important wetland sites in the Panhandle of Idaho.

Why wetlands are so important: Wetland ecosystems are among the most biologically diverse and productive ecosystems on the planet. Wetlands provide habitat for thousands of species of aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals (including many rare and endangered species). In addition, wetlands provide many (FREE) ecosystem services to the public including flood control and protection, water quality protection including water filtration, aquifer recharge and shoreline erosion control. Sadly, wetland ecosystems are also among the most threatened (and quickly disappearing) ecosystems on the planet. In Idaho, wetlands make up only one to two percent of the land mass and yet they are critical for the survival of 80 to 90 percent of the state's species. Currently only 44% of the original wetlands in the state of Idaho remain.

Why the Coolin-Warren (Chase Lake) wetlands are especially critical to protect: Extensive studies by Bursik and Moseley (1995) identified 45 sites considered critical to conservation of the full array of peatland biota and wetland communities of the Idaho Panhandle region. Each of the 45 sites was ranked on richness, rarity, condition, and other values (interpretive values, wildlife, fisheries, etc.). The Coolin-Warren/Chase Lake wetland area was ranked in the top five of outstanding Idaho Panhandle wetlands-peatlands, standing out as having the greatest ecological diversity of all 45 sites identified as being critical to/for Idaho wetlands conservation. The Coolin-Warren/Chase Lake wetlands contained all 12 of the ecological features used to rank and prioritize Idaho wetlands! Further, according to IDFG, this wetland site contains the most extensive floating mats known in the region and the largest bog microsites in the state.

Why you should care: Land development and housing construction on this 65 acre site would entail the filling in (with vast amounts of sediment), ditching, draining and destruction of this important and finite wetland ecosystem. Development would equate to the permanent loss of numerous wetland species

both flora and fauna and many ecosystem functions (which greatly benefit humans) at the south end of Priest Lake including (but not limited to) flood control, water filtration and aquifer recharge. When wetlands are filled, the water that normally occupied the site annually and during flood/rain events is rapidly diverted to neighboring properties and downstream to Priest River and regional streams causing increased erosion, especially shoreline erosion and property damage. Sewage wastewater treatment is also of concern and has the great potential to further degrade regional surface and ground water quality if not managed properly. The Coolin-Warren wetland is located over the Priest River Aquifer and plays a critical role in water filtration and recharge for the aquifer.

Indeed, the Bonner County Comprehensive Plan recognizes and articulates a growing concern over the compounded effects of human activity on/in the watershed stating, *“The Upper and Lower lakes and tributaries are of very high water quality with a watershed dominated by federal, state, and private forest land offering exceptional natural aesthetics. In recent years, there has been a growing concern about maintaining the high water quality of Priest Lake, given the expanding shoreline development of homes and businesses, the capacity of existing sewer treatment facilities, and increasing recreational use of the lake. There is also major timber harvesting activity in the watershed on state and federal lands.”*

What you can do: The wise management of growth and development around the southern end of Priest Lake must be a top priority for Bonner County Commissioners responsible for and entrusted “to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the state.” Bonner County will be responsible for the review, issuing and oversight of many of the permits that would allow the Coolin-Warren wetlands to be developed.

1. Contact the Bonner County Planning Department (Director; Milton Ollerton & Floodplain Manager; Jason Johnson) at planning@bonnercountyid.gov, phone: (208) 265-1458 and let them know **you are opposed to developing the Coolin-Warren wetlands!**
2. Contact Bonner County Commissioners Steve Bradshaw (District 1), Jeff onnolly (District 2) and Dan McDonald (District 3) at bonnercountyid.gov/contact-us and let them know **you are opposed to developing the Coolin-Warren wetlands!**
3. Join and support SCA. SCA works to cultivate an environmentally conscious and responsible public in the Priest Lake Basin.

For the past 34 years SCA has engaged in the struggle to conserve, protect and restore the crucial and sensitive natural resources of the Selkirk Mountains, their watershed, forests, lakes, streams and rivers, in an area that encompasses the northernmost counties of Idaho. SCA advocates for regional natural resource stewardship and seeks to facilitate cooperative decision making on environmental issues through public education and the promotion of grassroots activism.

In closing, many of the benefits that wetlands provide primarily aid the general public and greater community, not private developers. Developers have few incentives to conserve wetlands which is why it is up to us, as a community, to stand up for and protect, these valuable ecosystems for current and future generations!

We truly cannot afford to develop any more critical, functioning wetland ecosystems regionally or globally for the spectrum of services they provide to humans and wildlife. We must preserve these areas and systems above all costs (and profits).

Thank you,
SCA Staff and Board

Please visit our website at www.scawild.org to find out more about our organization.