



August 11, 2025

Kalispell City Council
P.O. Box 1997
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Ref: Files #KA-25-05 / KCU-25-04 – North Meadows Development, LLC

To Whom It May Concern:

Flathead Audubon Society, representing its 400 plus members, appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed North Meadows development along Ashley Creek as it runs through South Kalispell. Our mission is to conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity through education and conservation programs in Northwest Montana.

Ashley Creek is an overlooked **valuable and important wildlife corridor**, running all the way from Ashley Lake to its confluence with the Flathead River. Wildlife graduate work in the 1980's showed that river otters commonly moved from Flathead Lake to Smith Lake through the Ashley Creek corridor, preying primarily on the crayfish population. Residents tell us White-tailed deer regularly move along the Ashley Creek corridor from the Foys/Lone Pine area to the City and back, with many getting hit on U.S. Route 93 Alternate near the Ashley Creek bridge. Additionally, many bird species, such as Great Blue Herons and Bald Eagles, forage along this section of the creek from Smith Lake to the Flathead River.

Despite human development along much of the Ashley Creek corridor, this area still supports intact native vegetation and provides excellent wildlife habitat for a wide variety of nesting and migratory birds; aquatic species such as fish and crayfish; semi-aquatic animals such as beaver, mink, muskrat, and river otter; as well as deer, fox, and coyote. Based on habitat and E-bird sightings along Ashley Creek, important birds that one may see along Ashley Creek in the vicinity of Kalispell include:

1. Nesting and migratory waterfowl or waterbirds, such as Mallard, Wood Duck, Common Goldeneye, and Great Blue Heron (a Montana Species of Special Concern).

2. Foraging raptors, such as Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Coopers and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, and Rough-legged Hawk.
3. Streamside songbirds, such as Belted Kingfisher, Song Sparrow, Gray Catbird, Bohemian and Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Kingbird, Red-winged Blackbird, and Yellow Warbler.
4. A variety of game birds, such as Ring-necked Pheasants and Gray Partridge; various swallows, including Barn, Tree, and Northern Rough-winged; and cavity nesting birds, such as Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, and Black-capped Chickadee.

The Ashley Creek floodplain and associated undeveloped upland areas serve as a buffer for Kalispell, reducing the amount of urban/suburban runoff that flows directly into the creek and decreasing the impact from flooding events, which now appear to be more unpredictable in size and frequency due to climate change. Further encroachment will not only reduce the creek and its floodplain's natural ability to mitigate pollution and flood events, but also reduce/remove Ashley Creek's inherent natural values, wildlife habitats, and role as a wildlife corridor connecting areas west of town with areas south of town.

As the City of Kalispell continues to undergo incredible growth, so should its efforts to **protect functional, productive, and unique natural areas within and adjacent to its boundaries**. Protection of riparian and associated buffer areas is good for water management, provides open space for residents, and helps protect dwindling habitat for birds and other wildlife. As some may recall, the protection and development of Lawrence Park was inspired by citizens (Friends of Lawrence Park) who worked closely with the local community and City of Kalispell to clean up the land, restore and protect the wetlands, and meet other community needs.

The City Council and planners are asking for a new Vision for Kalispell, but the current draft plan focuses primarily on the built environment. The new Vision 2030 should also include significant additions of new and large open natural spaces to protect the last relatively intact pieces of our local natural environment (streams, rivers, spring creeks, forest, etc.).

If the proposed New Meadows high density development gets approved and constructed, it will greatly impinge on the values of Ashley Creek and this wildlife corridor. The number of people and pets who will likely be able to roam the approximately 10 acres and hundreds of feet of creekfront would displace wildlife and birds from the area. House cats, not native to North America, prey on a billion North American birds each year and are a large cause for decreasing songbird populations on our continent. The noise, runoff, parking areas, roofs, and other building infrastructure will reduce the buffer area along the major habitat

corridor and negatively impact the current habitat and open space values of the uplands and riparian areas.

Currently, there is a unique opportunity to build upon the Bibler family's efforts with the City of Kalispell, as they help create the new park along Ashley Creek close to U.S. Route 93 Alternate and the Parkline Trail system. This park could anchor the west end of an open space landscape along Ashley Creek east to the city-owned Begg Park off Airport Road. Much of the corridor is not developable. Why not connect these two public spaces along Ashley Creek through both funding and public/private land conservation efforts vs. adding dense development in a sensitive area and further fragmenting the corridor? Given the public comment to date on this proposal, it seems that adjacent homeowners, HOAs, and the greater Kalispell Community, along with organizations like Flathead Audubon, would support and help complete such a visionary and beneficial endeavor.

We encourage Kalispell Planners and City Council Members to consider working with the applicant and landowner, and with the entire local community, to protect this still undeveloped unique area, while also compensating the private landowner(s) for the value of their land.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darcy Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Darcy Thomas, President
Flathead Audubon Society Board of Directors