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UPOM participates in Water Rights Networking Conference

(Butte) – Unwarranted government intrusion into water use, a drastic decrease in recreational opportunities, and the further erosion of private property rights were the primary concerns aired at a grassroots networking conference held this week in Butte. The conference, hosted by the Montana Stockgrowers Association and Citizens for Balanced Use, was focused at organizing opposition to S 1870 and HR 2421, titled “The Clean Water Restoration Act of 2007.”

Despite the benign title of the legislation, it has far-reaching negative effects on Montana’s resource industries and outdoor recreation. Of primary concern was the elimination of the term “navigable” from the 1972 Clean Water Act. According to water policy experts at the meeting, eliminating “navigable” from federal code could take away Montana’s ability to control water decisions.

Three UPOM board members, Deanna Robbins, Mark Robbins, and Toby Dahl, attended the conference. “It’s pretty clear that this is bad legislation intended to further the environmental movement’s agenda,” said Deanna Robbins. “Putting all water decisions in the hands of the federal government, and away from the states, sets the stage for them to begin chipping away at our other property rights.”

“We’re getting assaulted from all fronts,” added Dahl. “UPOM got started to address hunting and fishing access issues, but we see a tremendous value in working with groups like MSGA and CBU and all the others on property rights issues. We either stand together and work together, or we’re all going to get steamrolled by those who would take our rights away.”

The tenor of the meeting in Butte was optimistic that the federal water legislation could be stopped, and all groups in attendance were encouraged to organize grassroots opposition that would be recognized by Senators Baucus and Tester and Governor Schweitzer. “Unfortunately, sometimes it’s not about right or wrong, it’s about which side makes the most noise,” said Mark Robbins. “This isn’t just a fight for what’s right, this is a fight for our livelihood, for our way of life. I want my kids to have all the advantage I had in rural Montana, but they’re trying to take that away. This legislation is just one example.”

“Property rights is the next battleground in the environmental movement,” Dahl added. “We either pick up the fight now, or there’s going to be nothing left for us to fight for.”

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