

Red, white and cute

Alex, 2, anxiously awaits the start of the parade at Georgetown Lake on Tuesday. For more photos of the parade see pages 12 and 13.

Planning for the rodeo begins almost immediately after the previous one ends, Friede commented.
see **Drummond** page nine

Ranchers still question impact of CSKT Water Compact

by Emily Petrovski

Questions remain unanswered for ranchers and irrigators on the impact of the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Water Compact, which impacted the Milltown Water Right.

Representatives from Fish, Wildlife and Parks spoke to a group of ranchers at a meeting of the Granite Headwaters Watershed group on June 21.

Fisheries Manager Pat Saffel said the agency is in its first phase of figuring out how the compact will

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affect irrigators. They have initial GES data and the next phase will be getting out and talking to people,

Saffel said at the meeting.

Saffel and Water Conservation Specialist Mike McLane presented draft information of their initial findings at the meeting.

“We want feedback,” Saffel said.

They have done their initial assessment, but want to work with people, he added.

McLane gave an overview of the Milltown Water Right. Since the Milltown dam was removed, the water right for the dam was transferred from hydroelectric use to an environmental

purpose and the State or Native American Tribes could hold the right, McLane said. Fish, Wildlife and Parks would administer the right, he added.

Part of the transfer of the right was that it could not be converted to a consumptive use, McLane said.

The State decided to negotiate for the right rather than to litigate, McLane noted. The Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes were the first to begin negotiating for the right in the 1980s and the last to finish up, he commented.

see **Water** page ten

Water users still have questions about Milltown water right

continued from page one

It was decided the tribes and FWP would co-own the right.

At the time the dam had a 2,000 cfs water right.

They negotiated a base flow for each the Clark Fork and the blackfoot rivers. Mike said they wanted to ensure irrigators were not taken out of the equation. There would be constraints on how and when irrigators could pull water.

In the watershed there are almost 1,600 more senior water rights than

the Milltown water right.

According to GIS data, the sum of the junior water right on the Clark Fork is 468 cfs.

In the future, summers will get longer, there will be less snow and less snowpack, McLane said. Many of the ranchers at the meeting asked if the water right would eventually run into a question of fish versus agriculture as water gets more scarce.

“God I hope not,” McLane replied.

He said he does not want the issue to become fish versus ag. The department is not required to come up with a plan

to enforce their water right, he noted.

Partnerships will get you further, McLane said.

He noted that in the local area there are not many water rights that are junior to the Milltown water right. Ensuring the fish get what they need is important.

“It’s a fish’s world— how much water do I have,” Saffel noted.

“It’s a rancher’s world too,” Neal Clark responded.

The ranchers in the valley expressed a desire to know if and how their water rights would be

impacted by the change.

Chuck Johnson, who is on the Granite Headwaters Watershed Group, asked the FWP representatives if they could see a list of the water rights by priority date for the Flint Creek Valley. With the list, the irrigators could see which of their rights are junior or senior.

Information will be published online, Saffel said. It is good for them to get feedback on what information people want to see, he added.

The second phase of the project will involve setting up coordination with other users in the basin, Saffel noted.