Foreword

By 7:05 p.m. on November 10, 1983, over 300 people had crowded into and overflowed the City Council Chambers at Missoula, Montana. The occasion was the hearing before the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences on a request by Champion International Corporation for a modified permit to discharge treated wastewater year round from its kraft paper mill at Frenchtown. This event, I think more than any other in recent times focused public attention on the beleaguered Clark Fork River and served as a catalyst for action.

And the time was ripe for action. Three Superfund sites and a major reclamation project had been created to deal with the spoils and derelict machinery left over from a century of mining in the river's headwaters. The Anaconda Company had ceased operations at Butte and had begun negotiating for the sale of its properties. The U.S. Forest Service was beginning to write long-range plans for resource management on lands covering 60 percent of the watershed. Public agencies were about to prepare applications to keep water flowing in the Clark Fork. The City of Anaconda needed a new wastewater treatment system; Montana Power Company needed a safer dam at Milltown. And two companies were announcing plans to build major gold and silver mines one at each end of the river.

The quality of the Clark Fork River became a regional issue involving parts of three States. Connections real or fancied were drawn between such distant and disparate locales as the Colorado Tailings and Milltown Dam (Montana) between the City of Missoula (Montana) wastewater effluent and Lake Pend Oreille (Idaho) and between the Champion Mill (Montana) and the underground aquifer that waters the City of Spokane (Washington). People began to think of the Clark Fork less as a river of convenience and more as a complex but troubled ecological system teetering on the brink of greatness or disaster depending on one's perspective.

In the 2 years since that hearing in Missoula, the Superfund projects have achieved a full head of steam. Water heaters have been replaced in Milltown to remove the last residues of arsenic and Montana Power Company has made plans to reconstruct Milltown Dam. "Pro-river" conservationists organized the Clark Fork Coalition with satellite groups from Deer Lodge to Sandpoint. The Clark Fork River Basin Project was established in the office of the Montana Governor. And regional conferences dealing with water quality issues in the Clark Fork drainage were held in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene.

But in those same 2 years we have witnessed the death of hundreds of fish below the Warms Springs Ponds following an afternoon thunderstorm in 1984, the river going nearly dry at Dempsey during the normal spring high flow period in 1985, and a vertical drawdown of Noxon Reservoir in excess of 35 feet earlier this year. Perhaps more unsettling to river watchers has been the proposed Baucus Amendment to the Superfund law following the announced sale of Anaconda properties to the Washington Corporations of Missoula.

Over 30 studies addressing some aspect of water quality in the Clark Fork River are in progress or have been completed recently. Many of these were featured at the Clark Fork River Symposium held April 19, 1985 at Montana Tech in Butte. But some people are getting impatient with studies and planning saying we need to put men and machines to work on the ground in order to realize any tangible improvements. Others claim that only nature and time can undo what man has done and that there is no "quick fix" for the Clark Fork.
It's true. Studies alone will not clean up the Clark Fork. But studies--good studies--like the ones reported in these proceedings provide bases for intelligent action. Compared to the wealth of minerals and other resources extracted from the drainage of the Clark Fork River the cost of these studies is a pittance. And they save money in the long run.

LOREN L. BAHLS, Helena, Montana, November 10. 1985