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**Interviewee: Arthur Deschamps Speech**  
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Arthur Deschamps: To the people of the city of Missoula: on 10 September the people of our city will have the opportunity to vote on a most important issue, to decide whether the city should take over the ownership and control of its water system or to continue as is present under private ownership and management. At the outset, one could stir the dead old embers of the past only to find that since its beginning, Missoula water has been privately owned and managed.

Starting in 1864 with the partnership of Higgins, Worden, and Pattee and their flour mill on through the kinetic manipulations of such high-powered individuals as Andrew Hammond and others. Beginning with the final years of the 19th century, we got underway with the Missoula Water Company. Then the Union Water Company which incidentally never furnished one drop of water to the city of Missoula. Finally, who should come into the picture but a fellow with red whiskers, W. A. Clark.

It was about this time that a struggle for control of Missoula water occurred. This caused some mild excitement in certain lay circles. However, it was taken well in stride as Missoula folks of that day were accustomed to the spectacle of financial titans doing purposeful battle for the rich resources of the region which included land, timber, minerals, and yes indeed water. At any rate, Clark prevailed. The Clark interest established the Missoula Public Service Company which can be considered the first company to own and manage Missoula water on a viable business basis for an extended period of time, until 1929. That was the year Montana Power acquired the water system from the Clark people. At this point it is fitting to acknowledge that for 50 years Montana Power provided the people of Missoula with excellent service at reasonable rates and for all those however some long years Missoulians accepted this as their due with hardly a thought that one day things could change.

In November 1979, a corporation whose general offices are in California purchased from Montana Power the Missoula water system. This company, Mountain Water Company, whose manager Lee Magone a former Montana employee—Montana Power employee—and a 30-year Missoula resident, has its local office at 1345 west Broadway. I must say in all candor that the people of Mountain Water have demonstrated competent managerial abilities coupled with sustained dedication in providing water service to the city. In short, they know their business and they are on the job.

Regarding the specifics of the system, Mountain Water now has 31 wells within the urban area, two in East Missoula, and a single well at the airport. The well casings vary in circumference from 12 to 18 inches with an average depth of 150 feet. They are taking from the aquifer, or water table, some 20 million gallons per day. However, it must be noted that the deteriorated

condition due to the age of much of the system's underground pipes results in approximately a 30% decrease in the efficiency of the pumping mechanism. The company is currently and will continue replacing old pipes. The work is expensive. However, it is also expensive to lose water through leaking pipes with the intended decrease in the efficiency of the pumps.

Now what's with Rattlesnake Creek? Well, due to the giardia invasion of 1983, it is not in use as part of the city's water supply. So, what is the situation? Frankly, there are now problems on the Rattlesnake which to me are disturbing as well as questions that beg for enlightened answers. Will it ever be possible again to restore the Rattlesnake watershed as well as the creek to the virtually pristine state that existed under private ownership? What affect has the federally created wilderness status of the upper area have on the quality of Rattlesnake water? Will it be possible to use the creek without the need to construct a costly filtration system? Should the people of Missoula be at all concerned regarding the law of abandonment as it may apply to the Rattlesnake? Do we risk the possible loss of this precious resource? The answer may lie in the Annotated Code of Montana law and applicable sections therein, namely; 852403, 852404, and 852405. One wonders if there are practical responses to these queries and how much time do we have? Sure, it is this time frame that is so important. I must say in contemplating all these questions, I think of lines written by Theodore Dreiser, "I acknowledge the futures, I believe in them, I have heard the disastrous beatings of their wings."

In discussing the water needs of St. Patrick Hospital, I was told by the assistant administrator, Loren Jacobson, that the well water, because of its physical properties now furnished by Mountain Water, has a deleterious effect on their dialysis equipment. Such was not the case when the hospital was applied from the Rattlesnake. The question arises, to what extend has well water increased cost. The figures speak for themselves. In 1983, St. Patrick's water bill was \$19,301. In 1984, it was \$22,400 an increase of 11.6% which comes approximately to \$.50 per day per patient. However, it is not for me to question the cost accounting of either St. Pat's or Mountain Water.

Now to the trouble years, bringing to mind to water crisis that occurred on the Deschamps ranches. First one must point out that the mean annual precipitation for the Missoula basin is approximately 13.81 inches which identifies western Montana as a semi-arid region. It all began in 1928 when the total precipitation for that year being 11.05 inches. In 1929, the total was 10.78 inches and in 1930, 12.35. Because of this run of dry years, the water table became depleted to the extent that the level of the ranch springs also lowered to unprecedented and alarming level. So, we had a water crisis that was real, inconvenient, and caused considerable worry. There was no way to determine whether the springs would ever come back to their former level. In fact, they never did totally. It was during these years that all of these creeks that replenished the water table, starting with Grant Creek then to Butler, LaValle, O'Keefe, Mill Creek at Frenchtown, then on to the Roman Creek, and Hula Creek in the Huson area barely got down to the valley floor. In August of 1935, the Clark Fork was low to the point where it was not possible to pull any appreciable amount into the Grass Valley ditch. As a ditch rider, starting at the dam located some three miles northwest of Target Range, I crossed five

channels. Three of these were dry and the water in the other two barely reached a horse's knees. We remained dry the rest of the summer. There is evidence however that irrigation ditches; the Orchard Homes, Flint, Grass Valley, and Frenchtown Reclamation also known as the Donlan ditch are important replenishers to the water table. It also must be taken into account that the change from flood irrigation to the overhead sprinkler system now in common use on farms and ranches does not return to the water table the amount of water that occurred with the flood method. It is because of past experience that I have this deep concern for this city's water.

Now I shall submit the worst possible set of conditions that at some future time could occur in the Missoula basin. This is not a reassuring scenario. First there are now 76,000 people living in Missoula county with 33,388 of this number living within the urban area. Most of us are getting our domestic water from Missoula basin aquifer. In a 24-hour period the Frenchtown Mill in Frenchtown—so I was told—draws approximately the same amount of water from the water table as is supplied to the city of Spokane. Because of the nearness to the Clark Fork, a number of the Champion wells are drawing water from the river. We must not forget that for the past two years the Rattlesnake has not been in use. Now picture three dry years: the snow pack below normal, the local creeks do not get to the valley floor, the Clark Fork drops, the water table recedes, certain city wells cease to function. You turn on your faucet, and all you get is a gurgle.

But enough of the theories, it really boils down to having a Rattlesnake back in use. We need it. It is precious. We could use it. We could lose it because of a casual indifference for its value. How very gratifying it will be if on Election Day, 10 September, the people of Missoula turn out in mass and vote overwhelmingly for either ownership of their city waterworks or to continue the present management for private ownership and management. Whatever the choice, may the vote be substantial and thereby decisive, putting away the inure of the present. Let us also hope that the upcoming discussions among ourselves, presentations to the city council, letters to the Missoulian, as well as television interviews, will lack the strikes that possibly contributed to the fail vote of city county consolidation. This negative vote in my view also is due to the presumptuous arrogance embodied in certain sections of the Missoula city-county consolidation charter.

On the whole I believe Missoulians love this place and regard it with peculiar affection. Let us not forget those who have so enriched the social fabric of this place. Coming from various parts of the world, the nation, and other cities in Montana including Butte, Anaconda, and even as far away as Brockton—just to name a few—they found the natives friendly so they stayed. Needless to say, the natives do take a measure of pardonable pride when calling to mind that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Moreover, may we all be reassured that things cannot be all bad in Missoula as we are warmed vicariously by the golden glow of affluence when observing the young upward mobility crowd, the yuppies, driving to work in their BMWs. In recalling Missoula's past, I find it colorful, feisty, and at times comical.

In conclusion, I quote from one of my favorite American authors, Stephen Vinson Benet, "Out of the flesh, out of the minds and hearts of thousands upon thousands of common men, cranks, martyrs, starry-eyed enthusiasts, slow spoken neighbors, hard to push around, women whose hands are gentle with their kids, and men with a cold passion for mere justice. We made this thing, this dream, our city." I thank the people of Missoula who gave generously for their time and furnishing both professional and statistical data in the preparation for this paper.

Sincerely, Arthur Deschamps Jr., 509 Westview Drive, Missoula, Montana.