**Guest Column: Great Falls should not become a slaughterhouse town**

Guy Alsentzer, executive director, Upper Missouri Waterkeepe, Guest Column Published 10:20 a.m. MT Jan. 23, 2020 | Updated 10:30 a.m. MT Jan. 23, 2020

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Guy Alsentzer, executive director, Upper Missouri Waterkeeper (Photo: GUY ALSENTZER)

Contrary to the recent guest opinion piece in this newspaper from Kurt Rockeman, the Madison Food Park Slaughterhouse proposal is a ticking time bomb for Great Falls, not an amazing economic windfall.

Let Upper Missouri Waterkeeper share a few compelling reasons, based on our expertise in water resources management, about why Great Falls should not become a slaughterhouse town.

From an ecological perspective, industrial-scale slaughterhouses create some of the worst water pollution problems in our nation.

EPA records show that three-quarters of industrial scale meat processing plants discharging waste into local waterways violated their pollution control permits over the last two years, with some dumping as much nitrogen pollution as small cities – and facing little or no enforcement.

For 98 of the largest meat-processing plants in the U.S. discharging more than 250,000 gallons of wastewater daily, records from January 2016 through June 2018 show that 74 of the plants violated permit limits for nitrogen, fecal bacteria, or other harmful pollutants at least once.  Fifty of 98 had five violations, and 32 of 98 had at least 10 violations.

Of those 98 industrial slaughterhouses, 60 are releasing their wastes to rivers, streams, and other waterways that are polluted because of the main pollutants found in slaughterhouse wastes: bacteria, pathogens, nutrients, and other oxygen-depleting substances that destroy local water quality and harm aquatic life.

Industrial-scale slaughterhouses, and the concentrated animal factory farms that nearly always supply them, are among the nation’s leading contributors of nutrient pollution, which fuels excessive algae growth and creates fish-killing low-oxygen ‘dead zones’ in local streams, lakes and creeks.

Permit data from across the nation shows the vast majority of industrial scale slaughterhouses operating in the U.S. use remedial and inadequate treatment techniques that contribute significant pollution to local landscapes and waterways.

Whether polluted runoff from often-leaking waste storage lagoons, over-fertilized fields sprayed with antibiotic laced wastes as “beneficial reuse” to grow animal feed, the incentive an industrial scale slaughterhouse would create for the growth of nearby corporate style mega-meat farms, or the threat to local fisheries and the downstream Missouri River itself, factual examples across the nation indicate that the Madison Food Park’s mega slaughterhouse is likely to directly affect local water quality, threaten drinking water supplies and harm Montana’s outdoors.

Do we want to risk seeing our world-class fisheries or the drinking water source for the city of Great Falls – the Missouri River – degraded or contaminated, or risk the emerging outdoors-based economy and local businesses that are dependent on Montana’s clean and healthy outdoors for foreign corporate profits? Talk about closing the door to the growth of any future outdoors-based tourism economy for Great Falls.

The Madison Food Park slaughterhouse is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, and these water pollution facts are just a few of the compelling reasons Great Falls should respectfully say “no” to an industrial scale slaughterhouse.  If built, dozens of polluting, industrial scale facilities across the nation show clearly that we, the people of Montana, will pay.

The cost we’ll bear will be more water pollution, more air pollution, and far-reaching negative social, human health, and economic consequences.

Let’s all dig deep to develop meaningful opportunities to cultivate sustainable economic opportunities that won’t destroy the Montana quality of life we all hold dear.

*Guy Alsentzer is executive director of the clean water advocacy nonprofit Upper Missouri Waterkeeper and has over a decade of experience in federal and state water pollution control law.*