

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Montana Dragon Boat Festival has been canceled.

The Bigfork Area Chamber of Commerce has canceled the Montana Dragon Boat Festival. The 9th annual event was scheduled to take place in Bigfork Bay, September 12-13th, 2020. The festival draws teams of 20 from across Montana, the Northwest, and Canada.

The planning of the event requires a substantial amount of time and financial support. Registration, which generally opens in early spring, was delayed due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions. The event committee considered if teams would be willing and able to travel to the event. The event's sponsors have also been financially impacted due to coronavirus closures.

Rebekah King, the director of the Bigfork Area Chamber explained, "We know that many of them would still have been happy to sponsor the Dragon Boat Festival, but we did not feel this was the year to be asking our business community for money."

It also requires the services of Elemental Dragon Boats, a professional dragon boat race directing team from Canada. The border between the US and Canada is currently closed and Canadian residents who do cross for work are required to quarantine away from their families for 14 days upon return.

"It became a question of when the border will reopen and if the members of the Elemental crew would be comfortable coming down. The decision to cancel made itself when the uncertainty of Elemental's involvement came up. The event relies heavily on their presence and professionalism," said King.

While the 2020 festival may be canceled in the traditional sense, the organizers and local teams are looking for a way to commemorate it. There have been discussions of the Flathead Dragonflies hosting a clinic that weekend, possible virtual races, or a one-day practice event to bring paddlers together. There is also still a chance Elemental Dragon Boat, LTD will be able to come and the event can be modified at the last minute. Regardless of this year, everyone is planning for an even bigger and better event in 2021.

"It is important to keep interest in the festival and the sport of dragon boat racing growing in the Flathead Valley," said Alida Tinch with the Flathead Dragonflies.

The Flathead Dragonflies will begin practicing soon and invites anyone interested to join them. The team can be contacted via email flatheaddragonflies@gmail.com or look for announcements on their Facebook page. Their practices, along with any other dragon boat related activities, will also be posted on the event calendar on Bigfork.org.

