



Whitefish Lake Institute Brief History

Addressing resource conservation issues takes time and patience. Time is not, however, on the side of the resource, and patience does not come easily to those with resource management responsibilities. Long-term conservation also requires a baseline of scientific, cultural, and historical knowledge of an area; an understanding of its physical, biological, and chemical dynamics; and a program to monitor any changes over time from the baseline. With these elements in place, adaptive management plans can be developed and actions implemented. Successful conservation efforts are therefore the product of significant dedication and considerable funding. Since its 2005 inception, WLI has collaborated with numerous individuals, organizations, groups, and agencies to protect water quality in the Whitefish area. Here you will find some of the milestone events that have marked our progress and success.

2005

- The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) was founded by Mike Koopal on January 6th, 2005
- WLI governance is established with a board of directors and two advisory committees
- WLI receives 501(c) (3) designation from IRS
- WLI begins the process of acquiring equipment to conduct research
- WLI begins a study looking at the potential health effects of gasoline constituent loading to Whitefish Lake
- Chris Ruffatto, now retired Power and Energy Technology teacher at Whitefish High and program FREEFLOW director graciously volunteers to assist in data collection from 2005-2010

2006

- WLI finishes field component of study evaluating gasoline constituent loading to Whitefish Lake
- WLI conducts a social survey at three grade levels in the Whitefish School District to determine recreational use levels on Whitefish Lake
- WLI begins annual Pond Unit presentation to all Whitefish 2nd graders and fish dissection for all Whitefish 4th graders
- WLI begins making presentations to middle school and high school classes. Through the years WLI presents to schools in Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Kalispell and Somers. WLI also presents information to various civic groups, homeowners associations, and lake groups
- WLI acquires key scientific equipment through a Supplemental Environmental Program Agreement between the City of Whitefish and Montana Department of Environmental Quality

2007

- WLI begins a long-term trend study of Whitefish Lake, documenting physical and chemical parameters at two sites on Whitefish Lake, five tributaries, and atmospheric deposition data
- WLI completes report; *Gasoline Constituent Loading and Motorized Watercraft Use Levels, Whitefish Lake, Montana, 2005-2006*
- Through a donation from Plum Creek (now Weyerhaeuser), WLI purchases and installs a weather station and bulk precipitation collector at the north end of Whitefish Lake
- WLI contracted by Flathead County to provide technical assistance to the Bigfork Stormwater Project

2008

- The Whitefish City Council approves initial funding to provide mitigation at the City Beach Boat Ramp based on recommendations from the WLI report: *Gasoline Constituent Loading and Motorized Watercraft Use Levels, Whitefish Lake, Montana, 2005-2006*
- WLI begins investigation to characterize the physical and chemical properties of Tally Lake
- WLI adds the Whitefish River to its baseline monitoring program
- Mike Koopal receives an *Outstanding Individual Achievement Award for his Contribution to the Protection and Enhancement of Fisheries Resources in Montana* by the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

2009

- WLI begins a summer internship program for college students majoring in the natural resource sciences. Participants to date include: 2009 - Kristi Whisler (Northwestern University) and Mary Kohnstamm (St. Lawrence College); 2010 - Michael Harrison (Whitman College), 2011 - Leif Castren (Middlebury College), 2012 - Meagan Powell (Westminster College) and Carl Talsma (Cornell University), 2013 - Logan Seipel (University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point), 2014 - Dietrich Perchy (Montana State University), 2017 - Barrett Gray (Princeton University)
- WLI brings to attention of the Whitefish City Council the problem with petroleum based leaks from seeps along the Whitefish River
- WLI becomes recognized by the Whitefish School District as an In-Service Provider for teachers
- WLI partners with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to establish the Whitefish to Eureka Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program
- WLI begins an investigation to characterize the physical and chemical properties of Swan Lake for the Swan Lakers and Kootenai Lodge Estates

2010

- WLI brings to attention of the Whitefish City Council continued petroleum based seepage along the shoreline of Mackinaw Bay (site of 1989 train derailment) and urges the US Environmental Protection Agency to take action on the issue
- Mike Koopal from WLI and John Wachsmuth from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks co-coordinate the 2nd Edition of the Montana Lake Book
- After two years of negotiations WLI acquires 28.82 acres of wetland habitat near the shores of Whitefish Lake through a private donation linked to an overall development package. WLI names the area the *Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve* to honor the donor family
- WLI begins the Whitefish Wine Auction, the organization's major annual fundraiser (2010-2015)
- Based on proceeds from the Whitefish Wine Auction, work commences on building a public interpretive trail in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve
- WLI presented the inaugural Doris Schumm Community Spirit Award by the Whitefish Community Foundation

2011

- WLI hires Lori Curtis as Science and Education Director
- WLI hires Josh Gubits (2011-2016) as Environmental Scientist and Coordinator of the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network
- WLI partners with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Flathead Basin Commission to develop the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network which combined the WLI Whitefish to Eureka program and the FBC Volunteer Monitoring program
- The Whitefish Wine Auction is labeled "*Montana's premier wine event*" by distributors and patrons

- Lori Curtis receives *Outstanding Outdoor Writer Award* by the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society
- WLI partners with the Education Travel Institute of America to offer Road Scholar programs bringing 700 educational travelers to Whitefish each year to learn more about the natural amenities of the bioregion (2011-2014)
- WLI partners with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; City of Whitefish; and the Whitefish County Water District to create and install educational signs at City Beach

2012

- WLI completes the report; *Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake, Montana* and presents study findings to the Whitefish City Council
- Based on the results of the WLI septic leachate study, the Whitefish City Council adopted Resolution 12-15 establishing the ad hoc Whitefish Community Wastewater Committee. WLI is appointed to facilitate the committee
- WLI completes first annual report for the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network describing the current status of over 40 lakes in Northwest Montana
- WLI completes the Bigfork Stormwater Project Pre-Project Implementation Water Quality Testing Technical Memo
- WLI awarded a \$25K capital grant by the Whitefish Community Foundation in honor of Mary Jane and Russ Street who left the Community Foundation an unrestricted gift of just over \$1.1 million and to whom preservation of Whitefish Lake was very important
- At WLI's urging, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supervised the secondary clean-up of 450 cubic meters of lingering contaminated sediment along the shoreline of Mackinaw Bay from the 1989 train derailment

2013

- WLI hires Jen Croskrey as Finance and Administration Manager (2013-2015)
- After years of fundraising and construction, WLI opened the *Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail* in the *Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve*
- WLI drafts the first Whitefish Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Management Plan that was adopted by the Whitefish City Council
- As facilitated by WLI, the Whitefish Community Wastewater Committee submits a management plan to Whitefish City Council
- WLI adds Beaver Creek to the baseline monitoring program
- WLI completes a 400 point aquatic plant survey of the Whitefish Lake shoreline
- The City of Whitefish selects an engineering firm to mitigate gasoline constituents at the City Beach boat ramp by installing and WLI recommended interceptor trench

2014

- Josh Gubits receives *Conservationist of the Year Award* by The Flathead Audubon for his work on the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network
- WLI produces first WLI Progress Report including a historical timeline since its inception
- WLI completes the *Bigfork Storm Water Project Final Report*
- WLI completes the *Swan Lake Water Quality Investigation Final Report*
- WLI adds Cow Creek, Haskill Creek, and Walker Creek to the baseline monitoring program
- WLI collected data to support the City of Whitefish Nutrient Reduction Plan
- WLI moves to a new location: 550 East 1st Street #103 in downtown Whitefish

- WLI presented the inaugural Russ and Mary Jane Street Community Service Award by the Whitefish Community Foundation

2015

- WLI celebrates its 10 year anniversary!
- WLI completes the Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: *A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area*, a comprehensive report for the public and resource managers
- WLI completes the 5th year of coordinating and administrating the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network
- As the project facilitator, WLI successfully developed partners and received planning grants to complete a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) for the Lion Mountain Neighborhood, and the City of Whitefish adopted a resolution to approve the Whitefish Community Wastewater Committee Management Plan
- Connie Chung highlights the Whitefish Wine Auction as Master of Ceremonies
- Jen Croskrey steps down as Finance and Administration Manager to help manage her husband's business and to spend more time with family
- WLI successfully participates in the Whitefish Community Foundation's first Great Fish Challenge (2015-present)

2016

- Josh Gubits transitions to contract status, establishing his own business, AquaTerra Solutions, and continues to coordinate the NWMTLVMN and AIS tasks for WLI
- WLI begins membership appreciate program
- Mike Koopal and Lori Curtis present papers at the North American Lake Management Society International Symposium in Banff, Canada
- WLI successfully developed partners and received planning grants to complete a second PER for the East Lakeshore neighborhood
- WLI ramps up biological monitoring on Whitefish Lake by conducting macroinvertebrate, periphyton, and mysis shrimp studies, thanks to grants from the Cadeau Foundation and Whitefish Community Foundation
- WLI makes infrastructure improvements to the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail via a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Recreational Trails Program grant
- WLI participates in the Rangewide Bull Trout eDNA project by collecting samples on local streams
- In November, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks announces that zebra mussels were found in Montana east of the Continental Divide. WLI begins work with a private donor to build a watercraft inspection station at City Beach
- WLI manages a 2nd Edition update of the Flathead Watershed Sourcebook
- Lori Curtis appointed as Supervisor on the Flathead Conservation District Board

2017

- In response to the findings of zebra mussels in Montana in late 2016, WLI significantly enhances the Whitefish AIS Management Plan recommendations to Whitefish City Council to include inspection stations at City Beach and State Park along with a watercraft decontamination station and other tools to prevent an infestation to Whitefish Lake. The Whitefish City Council unanimously approved the plan, passed an ordinance for the mandatory inspection of watercraft prior to launch and signed an Memorandum of Understanding with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks for program implementation

- Mike Koopal and Lori Curtis are appointed by Governor Bullock to serve on the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission (UC³). Lori Curtis is appointed Presiding Officer
- Mike Koopal appointed by Whitefish City Council to the Whitefish Climate Action Plan Committee
- Mike Koopal and Lori Curtis co-coordinate the 3rd Edition of the Montana Lake Book
- WLI presented its second Doris Schumm Community Spirit Award by the Whitefish Community Foundation of its efforts on the AIS issue
- WLI partners with The Lodge at Whitefish Lake for a lodging and food & beverage conservation fee to benefit WLI programs
- Mike Koopal, Lori Curtis and John Muhlfeld co-author paper for the Montana Chapter of the American Water Resource Association