

OPINION

5.78 miles long — impressive stats of Whitefish Lake

Whitefish Lake (48.4536°N, 114.3796°W) is located at an elevation of 2,998.5 feet above sea level at the southern end of the Whitefish Mountain Range. It is 5.78 miles long and 1.37 miles wide with 15.85 miles of shoreline. The lake has a mean depth of 82.1 feet, and is 232.6 feet at its deepest point off Hellroaring Point. The lake has an annual mean lake elevation fluctuation of 3.81 feet.

The lake residence time, calculated by dividing the lake volume by the flow in or out of the lake is around 2.5 to 3 years depending on stream flow conditions. In comparison, Lake Tahoe, which drains an area about the same size as Whitefish Lake has a retention

time of 650 years! 67.6 percent of Whitefish Lake is in the photic (sunlight penetration) zone where conditions allow growth of algae or aquatic vegetation.

Whitefish Lake is fed by six perennial tributaries including Swift Creek, Lazy Creek, Hellroaring Creek, Beaver Creek, Smith Creek, and Viking Creek. Swift Creek is the largest tributary to the lake, draining 64 percent of the total watershed along the Whitefish Range. Lazy Creek is a meandering lowland second order stream that runs parallel to Swift Creek and drains 13.6 percent of the total watershed into the north end of the lake. The remaining 22.4 percent of the Whitefish Lake

Watershed is drained by several smaller tributaries — the largest of which is Hellroaring Creek which originates on Big Mountain draining about 2.6 percent of the Watershed. Viking Creek drains 3 percent of the Watershed through a wetland preserve owned and managed by WLI. Smith Creek drains 3.2 percent and Beaver Creek drains 1.1 percent, with the remaining 12.5 percent drainage including overland and ephemeral streams contributions.

Like all watersheds the Whitefish Lake Watershed is an area of land that captures, stores, and sheds its surface waters through a single outlet. The water that flows from

the land drains to streams, rivers, or other bodies of water — in this instance — Whitefish Lake. The Whitefish Lake watershed is defined in the north by the Swift Creek Headwaters between Herrig Mountain (7,274 feet) and Link Mountain (7,230 feet) and in the south by the outfall of Whitefish Lake to the Whitefish River. The western border includes Stryker Peak (7,338 feet) and Stryker Ridge (6,906 feet) in the north and Lion Mountain (4,000 feet) in the south and encompasses the Beaver Creek watershed. The eastern border below Link Mountain encompasses Diamond Peak (7,305 feet) in the north, and a portion of the

Whitefish Range south past Big Mountain (6,817 feet) in the south.

There are two motorized public access sites on the lake. One is on the south end of the lake at City Beach and the other is on the east side of the lake at State Park. There is also a small, little-known, unimproved county access site near Lazy Bay. City Beach and Les Mason Park serve as the two most popular swimming locations on the lake.

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