

## **Audubon Society honors Whitefish scientist**

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Flathead Audubon's Conservation Achievement Recognition was presented in January to the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network and Josh Gubits.

Gubits, an environmental scientist for the Whitefish Lake Institute, heads the Volunteer Monitoring Network that recruits and trains volunteer citizen scientists to monitor water quality, identify and report aquatic invasive species and promote watershed stewardship in Northwest Montana.

The network grew out of monitoring programs at the Flathead Basin Commission and the Whitefish Lake Institute.

Volunteer monitoring is a critical component for the early detection of invasive species in the Flathead Basin. Volunteers are generally the first responders to a water quality issue or an invasive species sighting. Through the work of volunteers in the network, lake data is collected and an annual report prepared detailing the health and status of these lakes.

In 2007, the Whitefish Lake Institute and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks established another program to provide local residents an opportunity to collect baseline data that would help determine lake trends and implement early aquatic invasive species detection and prevention.

In 2010, these programs combined under the direction of the Whitefish Lake Institute. This program currently has more than 60 volunteers who contribute nearly 1,000 hours annually to monitor 50 locations on 41 lakes in Flathead, Lake, Lincoln and Missoula counties. Previously, no scientific data had been collected on many of these lakes.

Gubits received his environmental studies degree from the University of Montana. Before joining Whitefish Lake Institute, he worked for the Watershed Education Network as the field programs coordinator.

He spent the last four years teaching more than 10,000 teachers, students and volunteers about water quality, through the collection of chemical, biological and physical data on stream sites across western Montana. He has been involved in training, coordinating and working with volunteers in several capacities, including water quality monitoring, data base management, education and curriculum development.

Gubits is a certified Montana master naturalist.

In 2009 he received the Montana Water Teacher of the Year Award presented by the Montana Environmental Education Association.

He and the team at the Whitefish Institute continue to partner with project Freeflow at Whitefish High School in an effort to collect water quality data on local water bodies. They also teach outdoor science programs to elementary school students at the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve Interpretive Trail.