



Matt Baldwin / Whitefish Pilot file photo  
Lifeguard Justin Riechers keeps an eye on the action at City Beach.

## Boat ramp filter planned at City Beach

By HEIDI DESCH Whitefish Pilot | Posted:  
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In a step to help protect the water quality of Whitefish Lake, water draining from boats using the City Beach access will be filtered beginning this fall.

City Council last week approved a lakeshore construction permit for the city to install a trench

grate and oil/water separator at the boat ramp. The separator will be used to capture and treat surface runoff and boat bilge water.

“Anything we can do to reduce the bilge water going into the lake is a step in the right direction,” councilor Richard Hildner said. “Anything we can do to improve the water quality, especially at that spot of high use, is a good thing.”

The trench grate and separator will capture and treat surface water from the parking lot area and boat bilge water before it enters into the lake. When watercraft exit the lake, it’s common for the boats to drain on the boat ramp. Boat bilge water often contains gasoline, motor oil or grease.

The water currently drains onto the boat ramp and flows directly into the lake.

The existing concrete boat ramp will be cut to allow for the trench grate drain to be installed above the high water mark. Once collected, the water will be directed to the oil/water separator. The separator will remove oil and other liquid pollutants from the water flowing into the grate.

“The grate will go across the boat ramp and treat the water that comes out of the boats,” city engineer Karin Hilding said. “There has been concern for years over some of that material getting into the swimming area and being unhealthy for kids swimming there.”

Mike Koopal, Whitefish Lake Institute director, said the institute conducted a study about seven years ago that showed the area to be a problem.

“It’s nice to see this project come to fruition to protect water quality and health at City Beach,” he said.

The trench grate and separator are expected to be installed this fall. The city will be able to by-pass the separator during the off-season and allow for flow to be discharged to the lake.

Ryan Mitchell, with Robert Peccia & Associates engineering, is working with the city on the project and said the system is new to being installed in Montana.

“There is not a lot of these being put in,” he said. “We’ve checked with Fish, Wildlife and Parks and other entities. They are surprised at what we’re doing, but they think this is a great idea.”