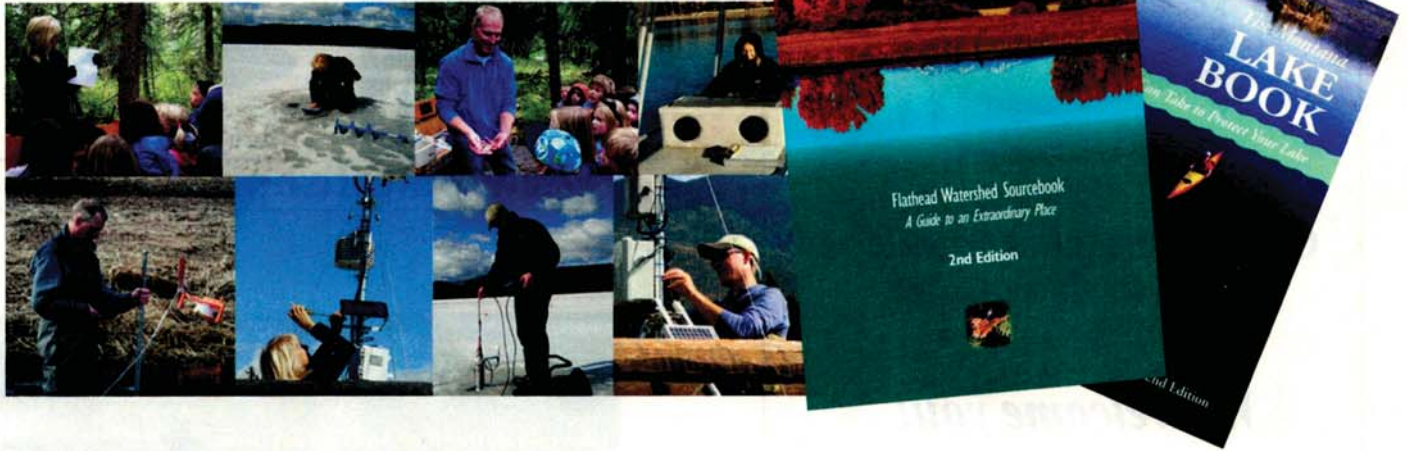


WHITEFISH

Whitefish Lake Institute Stands Watch



Dubbed the “Sentinel of the Lake,” Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) has been keeping a scientific eye on Whitefish Lake and its tributary streams since the Institute was founded in 2005.

WLI’s mission includes three main pillars. The first, Scientific Research, is carried out through data collection and other research on local waterbodies, which WLI shares with the public. In 2015, WLI’s commitment to scientific research was realized through its completion of the Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area. This report is the first-ever complete baseline of scientific knowledge for the Whitefish Lake Watershed.

The other two pillars of the organization are Education & Outreach and Community Stewardship. WLI is a local leader in delivering stimulating educational programs and materials to the community. It annually hosts hundreds of students at the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail in the Averill’s Viking Creek Wetland Preserve, which WLI owns and manages. Students from kindergarten through college accompany their teachers and WLI staff on field trips to the beautiful interpretive trail, which teaches visitors about the cultural and natural history of the wetlands and introduces them to the plants and animals that make the wetland their home. Materials available to visitors include a self-guided tour Trail Guide, a Bird Guide developed in coordination with Flathead Audubon, an Activity Guide of adventures for kindergarten through second grade students, a Discovery Guide full of activities for middle school students, and resources for research projects for high school students.

WLI also connects with numerous students studying environmental education. The Institute has hosted eight summer interns from Cornell University, Middlebury College, Montana State University, St. Lawrence University, University of Wisconsin, Westminster College, and Whitefish High School. WLI’s Executive Director, Mike Koopal, is also working with an undergraduate student of geosciences on a research paper

on Tally Lake, where Koopal has conducted several years of research. Koopal has been teaching educators about water quality for years through WLI’s Teacher In-Service opportunities, and hosts high school students through the Job Shadow program. Science & Education Director Lori Curtis is an adjunct instructor and thesis advisor for Green Mountain College’s graduate master’s programs.

This year, Koopal and Curtis embarked on a new edition of the extremely popular Montana Lake Book and have assembled a volunteer committee to contribute time and funding to the project. The committee includes expertise from nearly a dozen local state, federal, and non-profit resource management organizations working in the Flathead.

WLI also just completed the second edition printing of the Flathead Watershed Sourcebook: A Guide to an Extraordinary Place, which Curtis initially authored in 2010. This project for the Flathead Community of Resource Educators serves as a primer to the Flathead, introducing readers to its cultural and natural history, describing the watershed and its waterbodies, and discussing the many human influences and contributions to the area. The book contains content from over 50 contributors including Koopal.

As the sentinel of Whitefish waterbodies, WLI quietly works to protect water quality and human health in the Whitefish Lake Watershed. Be sure to wave next time you see WLI’s research vessel on Whitefish Lake, or staff scientists taking data on local streams. Working on a shoestring budget, WLI is funded by a combination of memberships, grants, contracts, and through creative partnerships with other organizations. Learn more about our programs and how you can support WLI at www.whitefishlake.org or 406.862.4327

— By Lori Curtis, Science and Education Director
for Whitefish Lake Institute