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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Whitefish Lake Institute announces annual stewardship and education award recipients

WHITEFISH, MT, February 6, 2017 – The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) honored long-time Whitefish educator Colleen Sullivan with its 2016 *Chris Ruffatto Excellence in Education Award*. The 2016 **Stewardship Award** went to the Whitefish County Water & Sewer District.

Colleen Sullivan

Sullivan dedicated nearly 40 years to her career as a biology and physical education teacher and coach for all three Whitefish district schools. Sullivan coached Whitefish High's first volleyball team, was one of the first teachers to keep grades electronically, and was likely the first woman to teach science at Whitefish High. Colleen came to Whitefish in 1978 after two years of teaching in Baker Montana. She was hired to teach PE at the high school that had lost its gym to a fire and it had not yet been rebuilt. A creative educator, Colleen was undeterred. She coached track from 1978 to 1984, volleyball in 1978, 1979, then from 2003 through 2008, and again in 2015. She began teaching biology in 1986 when classwork focused on plant and animal systems. Things changed significantly since then with students now learning on more of a molecular level. Again she employed her creativity in the classroom, which she attributes to a handful of former teachers who helped guide her along the way.

“Colleen is an innovative educator, a true role model in both her classroom and in coaching sports,” said Heather Davis-Schmidt, Ed.D., Whitefish School District Superintendent. “She is one of the key building blocks of our community who has helped create a strong foundation for our children in and out of the classroom.”

Colleen retired in 2016 after an amazingly dedicated career in the Whitefish School District.

Whitefish County Water & Sewer District

The Whitefish County Water & Sewer District (WCWSD) has loyally supported water quality initiatives in Whitefish for over thirty years. While the purpose of this small organization has so far not included traditional involvement in water and sewer infrastructure, it does contribute to numerous water quality protection and improvement efforts.

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The community first benefitted from a grant sponsored by the WCWSD to support the University of Montana Flathead Lake Biological Station's *Limnology of Whitefish Lake* study by Golnar & Stanford in 1984. In 1986, a Department of Natural Resources & Conservation Renewable Resource Grant & Loan (DNRC RRGL) program grant sponsored by WCWSD allowed the *Investigation of Septic Contaminated Groundwater Seepage as a Nutrient Source to Whitefish Lake* which eventually led to the partial sewerage of the East Lakeshore.

The community again benefitted from their sponsorship for funding the 2003 *Whitefish Lake Water Quality* study by Craft, Stanford & Jackson. The WCWSD then sponsored a DNRC RRGL grant for the Whitefish Lake Institute's *Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline of Whitefish Lake* (Curtis & Koopal, 2012), and both DNRC RRGL and Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) grants to conduct a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) for the Lion Mountain neighborhood in 2015/2016.

“The WCWSD’s fiscal sponsorship role has helped forward numerous grants without which the Whitefish community would have far less information about the health of their water, noted WLI’s executive director, Mike Koopal. “We would have made far less progress toward improving water quality without the District’s support.”

Most recently, the WCWSD once again sponsored a DNRC RRGL grant for a PER which will be completed in 2017 for the East Lakeshore neighborhood. The WCWSD also supported the development of the *Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail* and has made annual contributions to the Whitefish Lake Institute to support water quality monitoring on Whitefish Lake.

About Whitefish Lake Institute

Founded in 2005, the Whitefish Lake Institute is a 501 (3)(c) non-profit organization committed to science, education, and community stewardship to protect and improve Whitefish Lake and Whitefish area water resources today, while providing a collective vision for tomorrow.

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