



LakeFront

Quarterly Newsletter of the Whitefish Lake Institute

Fall 2019

Cow Creek Restoration Project

For over one hundred years, cows and horses have been a part of the Cow Creek landscape and hydrologic system in Whitefish. This may seem bucolic, but livestock with unrestrained access to creeks have the potential to damage and remove native riparian vegetation and erode stream banks, resulting in increased water temperatures and nutrients. The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) has been monitoring water quality in Cow Creek since 2014, and given the high temperatures and extensive nutrients regularly detected, it has been a restoration priority for years. If hydrologic function and riparian areas on Cow Creek are restored, it will help to reduce pollutant loading to downstream waterbodies considered by the Department of Environmental Quality as "impaired", including the Whitefish River, which is listed for temperature and Flathead Lake, which is listed for nitrogen and phosphorus. (continued on Page 2...)



Once again, the community of Whitefish has shown its giving spirit through the Great Fish Community Challenge. The 2019 Great Fish Community Challenge brought in \$2.8 million for 53 nonprofits. In addition to raising more money overall (\$2.27 million prior to the match), nonprofits brought in more donations and had more additional donors than the prior year. Eighty percent of the nonprofits raised more than they had in prior years. These funds enable nonprofits like the Whitefish Lake Institute to benefit the community through conservation of our natural resources, improvement of human services, and enhancing local (continued on Page 3...)



Impacts from livestock on Cow Creek are evident by trampled stream banks, lack of streamside vegetation, and a poor stream width to depth ratio.

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Whitefish Lake Institute
550 East 1st Street #103
Whitefish, MT 59937

Voice: 406.862.4327
Fax: 406.862.0686
info@whitefishlake.org
www.whitefishlake.org

Founded in 2005

The Whitefish Lake Institute is committed to science, education, and aquatic resource initiatives to protect and improve Whitefish Lake and Whitefish area water resources today, while providing a collective vision for tomorrow.

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Whitefish Lake Institute

Cover Photo:
*Whitefish Lake as viewed from above
the City of Whitefish*

(Cow Creek Restoration Project Continued from Page 1...)

Although WLI has conducted research with support of the Whitefish High School Project FREEFLOW and sought funding for restoration on Cow Creek for many years, this opportunity came together in 2017 when two forward-thinking private landowners agreed to work with us on restoration measures. The Erbes and Barnes families have owned their respective properties for decades and are dedicated to protecting the creek that flows through their landscapes. WLI partnered with the Flathead Conservation District (FCD); the City of Whitefish; Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM); Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), River Design Group, and most importantly the Erbes and the Barnes families on a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 319 grant application. The Cow Creek Restoration Project was awarded over \$70,000, and after much permitting and behind the scenes legwork, the on-the-ground restoration work began on both properties this year.



A Montana Conservation Corps member demonstrates planting techniques to Whitefish High School Project FREEFLOW students at the Erbes property on Cow Creek.

The Cow Creek Restoration Project includes fencing to keep livestock out of the stream corridor; installation of a limited crossing and watering gaps on the creek for livestock, planting native riparian vegetation, ongoing water quality monitoring, and weed control. The partners have all taken on important tasks. WLI is conducting baseline water quality and quantity measurements and partnering with Project FREEFLOW on pre and post restoration monitoring. In the fall of 2018, thirty FREEFLOW students conducted initial field measurements for a pre-restoration baseline and will be back to the properties regularly for water quality monitoring and plant survival assessment over the next few years. The City of Whitefish constructed hardened crossings and water gaps for livestock at both properties. FWP managed and coordinated the planting of over 1400 native plants with help from two Montana Conservation Corps crews. Additional planting assistance was provided by WLI and FCD staff, the Flathead Lakers, and Project FREEFLOW. Plant cages, tubes and weed mats were installed to protect the new trees and shrubs against their primary adversaries — deer, voles and weeds.

Projects like this are not possible without the vision of private land owners like the Barnes and Erbes families whose dedication to restoring Cow Creek will make a difference on their properties, on local waterbodies, and far downstream.

Science Quencher— *Quenching your thirst for science*

The Whitefish Lake Institute hosted its first ever **Science Quencher**, a local event aimed at engaging community members in science and conservation issues. The first event was held Friday, September 27th at The Firebrand Hotel. We served complimentary appetizers, beer, and wine, and offered a handful of “lightening round” style talks from local Flathead Valley science experts.

We were overwhelmed by the response with more than 70 people showing up to hear and speak with **Sam Bourret**: Fisheries biologist, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks; **Jim Elser**: Director, Flathead Lake Biological Station; Bierman Professor of Ecology; **Clint Muhlfeld**: Research Aquatic Ecologist, USGS Rocky Mountain Science Center and **Jim Williams**: Patagonia sponsored author (*Path of the Puma*) and Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Region 1 Supervisor. Williams book “Path of the Puma” was also available for sale and signing.

It was a fun gathering of smart, interesting people with a desire to learn something new. The energy and expertise of our speakers absolutely made the event a success! A hearty thanks to all of you. When asked what they thought about the gathering and if they would enjoy ongoing events of this style, attendees responded very positively. WLI therefor plans to host quarterly Science Quenchers in 2020. Keep an eye out for announcements in your local papers and through our opt-in email list (http://www.whitefishlake.org/enews_signup.html).



*Clint Muhlfeld, Ph.D speaks to a packed room at The Firebrand Hotel. His talk— *Understanding Climate Change Effects on Freshwater Biodiversity for Climate Adaptation in the Northern Rockies— detailed the plight of aquatic species ranging from rare glacial meltwater stoneflies to the iconic top end aquatic predator, bull trout.**

Call for Stewardship and Educator Awards

It is that time of year when we reach out to the community for your ideas to honor our fellow water quality stewards and educators. Each year, the Stewardship Award recognizes individuals or groups that took extraordinary measures to protect water quality in the Whitefish area. Similarly, the *Chris Ruffatto Excellence in Education Award* provides an avenue to recognize and honor educators (traditional and non-traditional) who dedicate their lives to engaging the next generation of environmental stewards. Nomination forms can be found on our website on the Education page under Programs and must be received at WLI by January 5th.

Great Fish Community Challenge (*con't from Page 1...*) arts and culture. This year, WLI's booth in the Great Fish Community Fair and Color Fun Run was staffed by WLI Executive Director, Mike Koopal; Science & Education Director, Lori Curtis; and Science & Education Coordinator, Cynthia Ingelfinger. We appreciated visits from many children (and their parents!) who were interested in water quality, aquatic invasive species, and more. Visitors viewed live zooplankton from Whitefish Lake through a microscope, and observed many live aquatic insects from local streams. We also enjoyed spending time with the public and fellow nonprofit organization staff members.



The WLI booth at the the Great Fish Community Fair and Color Fun Run.

Funds from this year's Challenge will support WLI's ongoing educational programming, participation in a number of multi-level water quality efforts, work to address the septic leachate issue, and ongoing biological surveys. Thanks to everyone who made this a successful Great Fish Community Challenge year!

Fall Photos



The Cow Creek Restoration Project involved the collaboration of many groups including; Flathead Conservation District, City of Whitefish; Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Conservation Corps, River Design Group, Flathead Lakers, Whitefish High School FREEFLOW, private land-owners, and WLI. (Photo courtesy Daniel McKay, Whitefish Pilot)



Franz Ingelfinger, Restoration Ecologist at Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Kalispell, designed and facilitated the Cow Creek Restoration Project planting and supervised the great crew from the Montana Conservation Corps. In total, over 1,400 plants represented by over 10 different species were planted. (Photo courtesy Daniel McKay, Whitefish Pilot)



A bull elk in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve.



An early fall snow had this black bear foraging in the wetlands.



A coyote slinks through the wetlands. The wetlands are bordered by a Nature Conservancy Easement, making space for animals to roam.



This past spring a buck with antler buds was caught on camera strutting through the wetlands.

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550 East 1st Street #103
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