



LakeFront

Quarterly Newsletter of the Whitefish Lake Institute

Winter 2020

Whitefish Lake Institute Celebrates 15 Years!

WLI has had the honor of serving the Whitefish Community for 15 years. During that time, WLI has become a strong community partner and continues to thrive and be relevant. Still run by its founder and executive director, WLI has engaged citizens and resource managers in protecting our water resources, while planning for the future. We strive to conduct water quality research, develop education programs and events, and engage in water quality initiatives that strengthen our community and make it more resilient in the face of increasing demands such as development and a warming climate.

Since its 2005 inception, WLI has collaborated with numerous individuals, organizations, groups, and agencies to protect water quality in the Whitefish Lake Watershed. On Page 2 you will find some of the milestone events that have marked our progress and success.



WLI staff (L-R) Cynthia Ingelfinger, Mike Koopal, and Lori Curtis

Bull Trout eDNA Results

WLI participated in the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Rangewide Bull Trout Environmental DNA (eDNA) project by collecting samples in local streams in 2017 and 2018. The USFS states on the Rangewide Bull Trout eDNA Project website that though once abundant, bull trout have declined in many locations and are at risk from a changing climate, *(continued on Page 3...)*



Spawning bull trout. Courtesy U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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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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Cover Photo:

Fresh snow on the Big Mountain lit up by the sun serves as a beautiful backdrop to Whitefish Lake.

(WLI Celebrates 15 Years! *continued from Page 1...*) With your support, we've been able to accomplish many community benefit projects. Here is a sample—

Science

WLI established and continues a long-term water quality sampling program for Whitefish Lake and area streams, and completes annual summary statistics.

WLI completed the Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: *A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area*, a comprehensive report for the public and resource managers detailing data from WLI and partners.

WLI report: *Gasoline Constituent Loading and Motorized Watercraft Use Levels, Whitefish Lake, Montana, 2005-2006* led to the City of Whitefish installing an interceptor trench at the city beach boat ramp to protect lake and public health.

WLI report: *Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake, Montana* led the Whitefish City Council to establish the ad hoc Whitefish Community Wastewater Committee. WLI continues to work on this issue.

In 2017, WLI prepared a memo with summary statistics analyzing 58 years of Whitefish Lake elevation data.

Education

WLI mentors the next generation through a summer internship program, including students from; Northwestern University, St. Lawrence College, Whitman College, Middlebury College, Westminster College, Cornell University, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, Montana State University, Princeton University, Brown University, and Harvard University.

WLI hosts educational outings for school groups in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve, including all Whitefish 5th graders and various adult groups.

WLI initiated the Ripple Effect Scholarship Program for high school students entering college and majoring in a natural resource related field.

WLI hosts the Montana Lakes Conference to highlight lake management and to bring together scientists and community members to improve lake understanding.

WLI produced *Voices of Our Lake* and coordinated the 2nd & 3rd edition of the *Montana Lake Book*.

Aquatic Resource Initiatives

WLI acquired 28.82 acres of wetland habitat near the shores of Whitefish Lake through a private donation linked to an overall development package that WLI helped to negotiate. WLI then opened a public interpretive nature trail in the wetlands.

At WLI's prompting, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supervised the secondary clean-up of 450 cubic meters of lingering contaminated sediment from the 1989 train derailment along the shoreline of Mackinaw Bay.

WLI developed a comprehensive Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program to include two watercraft inspection stations and an early detection monitoring program. WLI has also led the effort to control Eurasian watermilfoil in Beaver Lake.

WLI and partners restored two reaches of Cow Creek via riparian area protection and restoration.

WLI partners with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to coordinate a lake volunteer monitoring program for 41 lakes in northwest Montana.

Awards

WLI received the inaugural Doris Schumm Community Spirit Award (2010) from the Whitefish Community Foundation.

WLI received the inaugural Russ and Mary Jane Street Community Service Award (2014) from the Whitefish Community Foundation, and was a recipient again in 2017.

Science Quencher— *Quenching your thirst for science*

WLI hosted its second in a series of fun community events called ***Science Quencher: Quenching Your Thirst for Science***. These quarterly events are aimed at engaging community members in natural resource issues. The January 17th event enjoyed a packed house in the Regatta Room overlooking Whitefish Lake at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake.

Our four scientists included: **Tabitha Graves**, a Research Ecologist for the US Geological Survey discussed her work "In pursuit of the Western bumblebee." Local author **Antonia Malchik** discussed (and signed copies of) her book, *A Walking Life: Reclaiming Our Health and Our Freedom One Step at a Time*, a look at the past and future of walking's role in our shared humanity. **Rachel Malison**, a Research Scientist/Postdoctoral Scholar and stream ecologist at the Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS) discussed a project funded by the National Science Foundation's Dimensions of Biodiversity program that is studying the biodiversity vulnerability of stonefly (Plecoptera) species in river floodplains. And **Erin Sexton**, a Senior Research Scientist, also with the University of Montana's FLBS discussed her collaborative, transboundary Crown of the Continent research assessing mining impacts and ecological conditions, and incorporating adaptation strategies for climate change.

Guests enjoyed complimentary wine, beer and appetizers; "lightening round" talks; and engaging conversations with friends, neighbors and colleagues. The next three Science Quenchers will be held on Friday April 17th, Friday July 17th, and Friday October 16th all at the Regatta Room at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake.



Tabitha Graves of the United States Geological Survey discussed the life history of the western bumble bee at the Science Quencher held January 17th.

(bull trout *continued from Page 1...*) nonnative species, and habitat degradation. Informed conservation planning relies on information about the distribution of bull trout in streams. WLI collected samples for the Lazy, Swift, and Haskill drainages. Bull trout were absent in Lazy and Haskill Creeks. Since we know that bull trout utilize the mainstem of Swift Creek, and the West Fork of Swift Creek, WLI prioritized sampling efforts on tributaries to those streams.

Notable findings from the survey include the presence of bull trout in lower Chicken, Antice and Stryker Creeks. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks have no prior records of bull trout in those streams. It could be that juvenile bull trout move up these streams to rear before out-migrating to Whitefish Lake, however, further surveys are needed to determine the full distribution, while field verifying the eDNA results.

Understanding the life history needs for the Whitefish Lake / Swift Creek bull trout population is vital to protect this threatened species. Since 1998, the number of bull trout redds (spawning nests) in Swift Creek and the West Fork of Swift Creek have ranged from 5-17. The average for the last six years was 12.8, demonstrating perilously low numbers for this adjunct population. Recovery of this population will be difficult given the strong food web control by the expansive lake trout population in Whitefish Lake.

Ripple Effect Scholarship Application Reminder

WLI offers three types of scholarship opportunities to qualified students. The scholarship program can award students in three categories including 1) a \$500 scholarship for tuition to a high school student as they enter college, 2) an unpaid Internship at WLI which when completed offers a \$1,000 stipend toward the student's tuition, and 3) WLI's support of a graduate thesis or dissertation. Appropriate courses of study for consideration in the scholarship program include: biology, ecology, environmental science/studies, hydrology, or other fields related to water quality as approved by WLI staff. For more information, see our website under Education Programs. The deadline for applications is April 15th.

Wetland Trail Annual Closure

We hope you are enjoying your treks at the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve! Please remember we are nearing the annual **March 15th to May 1st** trail closure to maintain the structural integrity of the trail, protect native vegetation, and avoid potential spring wildlife/human conflicts. Until then, enjoy your winter walks along the trail.

Winter Photos



At the Montana AIS Summit, Lori Curtis participated in a panel discussion about aquatic invasive species financing. Also participating on panels were WLI staffers Mike Koopal and Cynthia Ingelfinger.



(L-R) Cynthia Ingelfinger from WLI and Hailey Graf, Resource Conservationist for the Flathead Conservation District, during the Cow Creek Restoration Project.



Attendees at WLI's Science Quencher were treated to presentations by: Tabitha Graves of the U.S. Geological Survey, local author Antonia Malchek, Rachel Malison of the University of Montana Flathead Lake Biological Station, and Erin Sexton also from the Flathead Lake Biological Station.



Rachel Malison, a Research Scientist / Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of Montana Flathead Lake Biological Station presented information on stoneflies, and their unique ability to survive in low dissolved oxygen conditions. Join us at the next Science Quencher April 17th at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake.



Look closely and you will see a small herd of elk making their way through the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve.



Snow blankets the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve.

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