

Off-season watercraft rules begin Oct. 1

Whitefish Pilot

Officials are reminding folks that off-season rules for watercraft using Whitefish Lake begin Oct. 1.

The City Beach watercraft inspection station, Whitefish Lake State Park watercraft inspection station, and the Whitefish decontamination station all close for the season on Sunday, Sept. 30.

The Whitefish Lake Institute, city of Whitefish and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are asking watercraft users to comply with off-season rules, which are in effect from Oct. 1 through April 30.

The City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park boat ramps will be locked in the off-season. All motorized and non-motorized watercraft users may launch in the off-season by demonstrating via the Off-Season Online AIS Self-Certification Program they have acquired suf-

ficient knowledge of AIS risks and self-inspection techniques.

Users who successfully pass the program test will be issued a certificate and lock code to enter and exit the boat ramp at City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park.

Find the Off-Season Online AIS Certification Program at www.cityofwhitefish.org or www.whitefishlake.org. Users who passed the Off-Season Online AIS Self-Certification Program or the Early Morning Anglers AIS Self-Certification Program and received a code after Jan. 1, 2018 will not need to take the test again until fall of 2019 as the code has not changed.

Because decontamination is not available during the off-season, officials ask that high-risk watercraft abstain from launching in Whitefish Lake during this time. High risk boats include, those with ballast tanks

or bags that have not been out of the water for 30 days, those with standing water that have not been out of the water for 30 days, those that have been in mussel infested waterways in the last 30 days and those that have dirt, mud, vegetation or animal life on any internal or external surface.

"We are once again asking high risk watercraft users to show care and abide by these rules during the off-season," noted Carla Belski, Community Services Coordinator for city of Whitefish Parks and Recreation. "We appreciate all watercraft users continuing to respectfully access the lake during these months while our facilities are closed for the season."

Montana's fight to protect state waters against AIS increased throughout the state in 2018, with collaborative efforts focused on Montana's borders the Continental Divide,

and the Upper Columbia Basin.

In a continued effort to increase protection of Whitefish Lake, the city of Whitefish, Montana State Parks, and the Whitefish Lake Institute continued to fund and manage inspection stations at City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park as well as a decontamination station.

"We appreciate the participation and patience of watercraft users throughout the 2018 season," said Mike Koopal of the Whitefish Lake Institute. "Boaters and anglers at City Beach, Whitefish Lake State Park, and the Prevention & Decontamination Station demonstrated they recognize the importance of preventing AIS from entering our waterways," noted Koopal.

Full program details are available at: http://whitefishlake.org/AIS_Mgmt_Pgm.php.