

Institute honors contributions to protecting water quality

By HEIDI DESCH
Whitefish Pilot

The Whitefish Lake Institute is honoring four individuals for their commitment to protecting water quality through volunteering, education and conservation easements.

The awards were presented during the inaugural Montana Lakes Conference held last week at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake. The conference gathered resource professionals to exchange information, scientific advancements, and management strategies that promote clean and healthy lake and reservoir ecosystems.

The annual Whitefish Lake Institute Stewardship Award was presented to Kris Tempel, Habitat Conservation Biologist, and Alan Wood, Science Program Supervisor, both with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The award recognizes individuals or groups that take extraordinary measures to protect water quality.

Tempel and Wood worked together with the Trust for Public Land and Montana Department of



Whitefish Lake Institute's Mike Koopal, left, and Lori Curtis, far right, present awards last week to Alan Wood, Kris Tempel, Lauren Shotnik and Germaine White during the Montana Lakes Conference at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake. (Heidi Desch/Whitefish Pilot)

Natural Resources and Conservation to complete the final phase of the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project completed last year. The collaborative conservation effort added 13,400 acres to the Stillwater State Forest and protecting that land through multi-phase conservation easements. It protects important fish and wildlife habitat, community water resources, public access and recreational opportunities

while promoting sustainable forest management.

In presenting the award, Jim Williams, FWP's Region 1 supervisor, said the conservation project protects local aquatic resources including important native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout habitat, and large areas of Swift and Lazy Creek watersheds.

Williams said he was proud to present the award to Tempel and Wood "for their passionate and tireless work con-

serving fish and wildlife habitat and connectivity corridors at a landscape level in northwestern Montana — work that has been instrumental in the protection of the Whitefish Lake watershed."

The Volunteer Service Award went to Lauren Shotnik who has spent seven seasons volunteering for the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network.

The network is a citizen science program funded by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and managed by WLI, and uses "citizen scientists" to monitor 40 lakes in Flathead, Lincoln, Lake, and Missoula counties.

Cynthia Ingelfinger, Science and Education Coordinator for WLI, presented the award noting that Shotnik is also involved with the Little Bitterroot Lake Association's water quality program.

"She and her husband live full time on the lake where they loyally head out in their boat two or three times a month from April through October," Ingelfinger said. "She has submitted over 70 water quality reports in the last seven years."

The Chris Ruffatto Excellence in Education Award was awarded to Germaine White, who recently retired from her position as Information and Education Specialist and Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager for the Confederated

Salish and Kootenai Tribes working in the Division of Fish, Wildlife, Recreation and Conservation, Natural Resources Department.

The award recognizes traditional and non-traditional educators who dedicate their lives to engaging the next generation of environmental stewards.

Lori Curtis, Science and Education Director for WLI, said White has been an educator focused on environmental education and implementing outreach programs for diverse audiences.

"She has coordinated public involvement activities associated with the management of fish, wildlife and recreation; developed, produced and disseminated extraordinary educational materials, and has represented her organization in numerous forms of media with brilliance and grace," Curtis said.

White developed and supervised the aquatic invasive species program including inspection stations and education and outreach.