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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Whitefish Lake Institute Reports Community Forum and Survey Results

WHITEFISH, MT, June 25, 1015 – The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) today reported the results from its recent Community Forum to introduce the *Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area*, and Public Survey regarding water quality concerns.

WLI—in cooperation with the City of Whitefish and Anderson-Montgomery Consulting Engineers—held a Community Forum on May 20th to introduce the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation funded *Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area* and to obtain comments from citizens. “We were pleased to have so many attendees at the Forum, but hoped more of the community would get involved,” said founder and executive director Mike Koopal. “It was important to hear first hand which issues were most on citizen’s minds.”

Approximately 50 attendees received a Project Description, Project Outline, and a Community Survey. Mayor John Muhlfeld provided introductory comments, WLI executive director, Mike Koopal provided context for the report, and WLI Science and Education Director, Lori Curtis, discussed the survey and public comment process. Eleven community members provided comments or asked questions. Long-time resident Dick Solberg spoke enthusiastically about the importance of people being a voice for the lake saying that if the economy of the area is based on the lake, “every decision, every comment, every statute, every restriction...should be based on the lake.” Dan Weinberg, one of WLI’s initial board members and an ex-Montana State Senator, spoke very passionately about the need to act on the issue of septic pollution on Whitefish Lake. He expressed his heartfelt frustration with the septic pollution issue, saying “...the most obvious thing that we’ve known about for ten years is that we have failing septic systems. Let’s do something about it. Nobody has the right to pollute our lake.”

Charlie Abell—another long-time resident with a deep history with Whitefish Lake—addressed his concerns about Aquatic Invasive Species, bladder/wake boats, and the havoc resulting from the introduction of non-native species. Calling the lake a tremendous asset that is important to the economy, Abell said “we cannot let it be deteriorated to everybody’s short-term wishes.”

The public survey garnered 47 respondents. Of those who responded, 21% were under 18, 11% were 18-29, 13% 30-44, 17% 45-59, and 38% were 60 or over. Household incomes ranged from 25% under \$49,999, 13% between \$50,000 and \$64,999, 17% \$75,000 and \$99,999, 22% \$100,000 to \$124,999, 7% earned \$150,000 to \$174,999, and 18% over \$200,000. Respondents were 61% democrats, 32% independents, and 2% republicans. Ninety-four percent are homeowners while 6% are renters. About 60% do not live on the lake or have a view of the lake, while 40% live on or have a view of the lake. Of that 40%, 6% live outside the City of Whitefish.

Respondents were evenly split between anglers and non-anglers, while 87% use human-powered watercraft or sailboats, 26% use motor boats or personal motorized watercraft, and 2% do not recreate by watercraft. Swimmers in Whitefish Lake make up 90% of respondents. Seventy-eight percent of respondents feel there is too much boat traffic on the lake and 87% feel the boat ramp at City Beach is often overcrowded. Almost 48% of respondents feel that drinking water is the most important reason to protect water quality while 30% identified Fish & Wildlife. When asked to rank “physical” concerns, aging septic systems is the greatest public concern at 49%, followed by the removal of native vegetation and planting of nonnative vegetation at 21%. Aging sewer infrastructure ranked third and sediment from landscape disturbance fourth. The greatest “chemical” concerns are railroad related pollution at 46%, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus at just over 24%, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) at just over 22% followed by pharmaceuticals and personal care products and mercury. Over 79% of respondents feel that water quality is important to the economy of Whitefish and 95% of respondents feel it is important for the City to have local management of Aquatic Invasive Species issues.

Almost 87% of respondents expressed interest in learning more about stormwater and wastewater systems in the watershed, and 100% of respondents expressed some or much interest in seeing the results of the report. Similarly, over 95% of respondents expressed a willingness to contribute to the cost of protecting and improving water quality in the Whitefish area.

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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