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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A VOICE FOR THE LAKE: Montana Lakes Conference Highlights Efforts to Protect Lakes

WHITEFISH, MT, FEBRUARY 26, 2019 -- The Inaugural Montana Lakes Conference will highlight community-based efforts to promote healthy lake and reservoir ecosystems across the state. To be held on the shores of Whitefish Lake on March 13-15, the conference will bring together diverse resource professionals to discuss the roles of research, resource management, education, local lake associations, and citizen science to address the myriad challenges facing Montana's lakes and the communities they support.

Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) is hosting the conference at the Lodge at Whitefish Lake. WLI works to assemble diverse stakeholders to work on major issues facing Montana's lakes. Septic leachate, aquatic invasive species (AIS), and climate change are at the top of the list.

"The health of the lake in the long term will depend on our citizens," WLI Executive Director, Mike Koopal said. "Whitefish Lake is the heart of this community, and we all need to embrace the small changes we can make to ensure the lake remains clean and healthy."

WLI works to shed light on lake health through science, education, and aquatic resource initiatives. WLI supporters also are sharing why lake health is so important to them, through the Montana Watershed Coordination Council's Watershed Stories campaign. Some, like retired science teacher Chris Ruffatto, know the value of Montana's lakes for hands-on youth education. Ruffatto and WLI converted a boat into a floating laboratory to allow hundreds of high school students the opportunity to collect useful, valid scientific data.

Other supporters, including Whitefish Mayor John Muhlfeld, seek to protect Whitefish Lake from the damage they've seen to lakes elsewhere in the country. "What degraded Caroga Lake," said Muhlfeld, who spent his childhood summers on that lake in upstate New York, "was the failing septic systems and the introduction of zebra mussels - the same things that now threaten Whitefish Lake."

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.

The **Montana Watershed Coordination Council** unites and supports Montana's watershed communities to promote healthy and productive landscapes.

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Photos of Mike Koopal, Chris Ruffatto, and Mayor Muhlfeld available upon request.