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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Whitefish Lake Institute honors long time educator and City of Whitefish director for education and conservation excellence

WHITEFISH, MT, May 27, 2020 – The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) presented the *Chris Ruffatto Excellence in Education Award* to **Eric Sawtelle** who has been involved in scientific discovery and science education since 1999. He is currently a Science Teacher at Whitefish High School where he took over the Flathead River Educational Effort for Focused Learning in Our Watershed program (Project FREEFLOW). He came to Whitefish after 8 years of teaching for the Kalispell School District where he taught Earth Science, Biology, and IB Environmental Systems and Societies. Eric worked with colleagues to develop inquiry-based science curriculums, and as a Freshman Academy faculty member to ensure a positive and successful experience for incoming freshman. He has continuously raised funds to obtain research equipment and conduct field trips for the enrichment of his students; and challenged his students to investigate current global issues through the empirical scientific model.

“Eric’s creative collaborations with fellow high school science teachers, elementary school teachers, and local organizations is beyond impressive,” noted WLI Science & Education Director, Lori Curtis. In addition to having his classes participate in important local conservation projects such as the long-time running Haskill Basin Monitoring and Restoration Project and the recent Cow Creek Monitoring and Restoration Project, Eric has found opportunities for his students to participate in projects as diverse as a long-term study of the North Fork of the Flathead River collecting water quality monitoring data, snorkeling to assess fish populations, conducting spatial and temporal snowpack studies, and studying microbial population assemblages. Eric has a MS in Secondary Science Education from MSU, Bozeman, and a BS in Ecology and Systematic Biology from Cal Poly. Eric is a truly dedicated and professional leader in education.

The *Annual Stewardship Award* was presented to **Craig Workman**, Director of Public Works for the City of Whitefish for his leadership in planning for water resilience for the City of Whitefish. The Public Works Dept. is charged with maintaining and improving the quality of life in Whitefish by building and maintaining municipal infrastructure, planning for future needs, and promoting environmental quality, all while providing superior customer service and excellent public relations.” This includes road construction & maintenance; street sweeping & snow plowing; traffic signs & pavement markings; operation & maintenance of water and sewage treatment facilities; installation, operation & maintenance of water distribution, sewage collection & storm drainage systems; and fleet maintenance.

“Directing this department is a complex challenge that has been met professionally and thoughtfully since 2015 by the City of Whitefish Public Works Director, Craig Workman,” said Mike Koopal, WLI Executive Director. Some examples of Craig’s influence include:

The City’s **municipal water supply** provides a safe supply of drinking water to residents and visitors alike. In the hot summer months, water consumption can swell to four times more than other times of the year pushing the water treatment plant to the brink of capacity. Craig has worked closely with the

Montana Department of Environmental Quality to ensure that reasonable and prudent growth can continue in the City while expansion work on the water treatment plant moves forward. Craig has also been instrumental in the pursuit of finding an alternative source of water for the City, working closely with consulting engineers in their mutual search for a viable groundwater source. These efforts along with leading the charge to reduce water loss throughout the City's distribution system will help ensure a safe and reliable supply of potable water to the City for years to come.

Under Craig's leadership the City Council adopted a **Water Conservation Ordinance** in May 2019. The ordinance was put in place to address infrastructure challenges with peak summer month water demand. The Public Works Department has led an effort to educate the public about the importance of water conservation which also helps Whitefish meet its climate action goal of reducing its carbon footprint by lowering energy requirements to treat and pump water.

The City has over 58 miles of sewage main and 17 lift stations that serve the homes and businesses in the varied topography throughout the community. The current **wastewater treatment system** utilizes a lagoon-based technology that has been modified and upgraded several times over the last 40 years, including the inclusion of a mechanical process to remove the nutrient phosphorous. Both the wastewater collection facilities and the treatment plant require improvements to make the system effective and capable of complying with new anticipated treatment standards. Craig is leading the charge to upgrade the City's water treatment facilities to meet these new requirements while controlling the burden on individual rate payers.

Under Craig's leadership the Public Works Department has partnered in the design, construction and funding of the **Cow Creek Restoration Project**. Craig and his team implemented the construction of hardened crossings on Cow Creek at two private properties. His department committed equipment, materials and personnel to this project, helping to bring to fruition a long time goal of ecological improvements along two highly impacted reaches of this important local stream and tributary to the Whitefish River.

About Whitefish Lake Institute

Founded in 2005, the Whitefish Lake Institute is a 501 (3)(c) non-profit organization 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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