

LakeFront

Quarterly newsletter to Whitefish Lake Institute members

Winter 2006

Tackling Growth in the Flathead

Growth in the Flathead is inevitable. How we decide to manage it is currently at stake. In 2003, the Montana Legislature ordered local governments (municipalities and counties) to develop growth policies. The deadline is Oct. 1, 2006.

The timing could not be better. Population estimates from 2000 show that Flathead County grew 25 percent from 1990 to 2000 and Whitefish estimates show a 30 percent jump between 2000 and 2004. But is Whitefish growing consistent to how it always did? Not likely. Since 1999, it is estimated that the market value of Whitefish property has grown by a whopping \$300 million. A total of 179 new housing units worth 45.35 million dollars were built in Whitefish in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005, signaling the influx of a high-end

housing market and exclusive development.

Can the Flathead absorb this growth while maintaining the natural beauty and home spun qualities that drew people here in the first place? Can natural resources like water quality be protected and passed on to future generations? One thing is for sure, the answers to these questions are not easy.

Growth Policies can be viewed as guiding documents that provide a clear picture of a community's vision and goals. Ultimately, growth policies are the foundation for more specific rules, guidelines or ordinances like subdivision regulations, neighborhood plans, lakeshore regulations and zoning. Examples include the Whitefish Downtown Master Plan and the Stormwater System Utility Plan. *(Continued on page 6)*

Brrrrrr.....



Courtesy of the Whitefish Pilot, Chandler Melton Photo.

The Whitefish Winter Carnival drew over 150 Penguin Plunge participants with proceeds going to the Special Olympics of Montana.

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Whitefish Lake
INSTITUTE

*Protecting and improving the
Whitefish, Montana area
lake resources*

Whitefish Lake Institute
 635 Denver Street
 Whitefish, MT 59937

Voice: (406) 862-4327
Fax: (406) 862-4341
info@whitefishlake.org
www.whitefishlake.org

Founded in 2005, the Whitefish Lake Institute is committed to acquiring scientific research and engaging the local citizenry to protect and improve the Whitefish area lake resources of today, while providing a collective vision for tomorrow.

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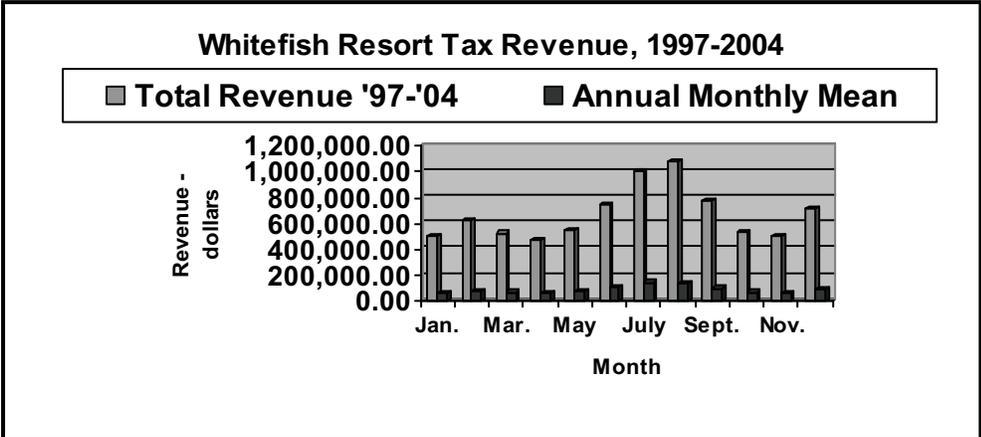
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Mike Koopal, Editor

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From the Boardroom
-Charlie Abell, Secretary / Treasurer

All of us need to understand how important the Whitefish drainage is to the economic viability of Whitefish and our part of the North Valley. From my nine years on the Resort Tax Oversight Committee, and an analysis of the income cycle to it's fund (to fix our streets), it becomes immediately apparent as to when business is good in Whitefish– It's the summer!



Graph created from data supplied by the City of Whitefish Resort Tax Oversight Committee.

With the loss of our primary employment from the railroad, lumber, CFAC, etc., we have had to depend on the traveling vacationers and second homeowners to fill that void.

Why do folks come to visit and live in our area? There are lots of reasons. Certainly on the top of the list are the natural amenities; our lake, it's tributaries and the public lands that they drain and reflect.

As our Institute continues to play its roll in the maintenance of a quality environment, it will continue to need funding. To date we have been so very fortunate to have Mike Koopal and his willingness to nearly donate his time and expertise. In order for us to continue we need funding! Please join us in our efforts by becoming a member and making financial contributions.

Mark Your Calendars
The Institute's Annual Membership Meeting is May 13th

The Institute's Annual Membership Meeting will be held Saturday May 13th beginning at 3 pm at Bay Point. Festivities will begin with interpretive pontoon boat rides lead by members of the Institute's Technical Advisory Committee. At 5pm, we'll host a BBQ with beverages. If you would like, please bring a side dish. At 6:30pm we'll move inside to the Bay Point Homeowners Clubhouse for a presentation of the Institute's accomplishments and what the future has in store for us. Bring your questions, we'll do our best to answer them.

If the weather doesn't cooperate, all activities will be held inside at the Bay Point Homeowners Clubhouse beginning at 5pm. Bring your family, friends and anyone interested in lake issues. Bay Point is located off of Dakota Avenue. Please carpool if you can to reduce parking congestion. The Membership Meeting is completely free. It's our way of saying thanks to our supporters! -MK

Executive Director's Essay

Thank you Frank

- Mike Koopal

The backdrop tapestry at Frank Morrison, Jr.'s funeral in early January read "Out of the believers heart shall flow rivers of living waters."

Frank was a believer in every aspect of his life. All five eulogies at his funeral clearly echoed this belief and how Frank was able to harness it. Belief brought to Frank a brilliant legal mind, an unequalled love-story with his wife of 48 years, Sharon, a second love affair with Montana, and the un-ending pursuit to mentor and help the "little guy."

I'm one of the little guys that Frank helped. Frank was the first person I contacted to be on the Board of Directors for the Institute. We had never met before, but I was well aware that he was a man of conviction and passion. His reputation as an accomplished trial lawyer along with his achievements during his tenure on the Montana State Supreme Court spoke of his commitment and vision. If the Institute could learn from him, we were bound to find success.

It took a nervous phone call on my behalf to request the first meeting. Why I had been nervous, I don't know. When we sat down later at his office, Frank's hospitality was welcoming and I was quickly put at ease. I didn't have to be much of a salesman that day. Frank had already read the Institute's business plan, and before I even uttered a sentence, he said he wanted to be on the board of directors.

Since that initial meeting, Frank made himself available to

me whenever I needed advice. This was especially helpful as I waded through the mountain of paperwork during our application for tax exempt status. At the first board meeting, Frank also accepted the nomination to be the Institute's Vice President.

Frank's commitment to natural resources, in particular Whitefish Lake, went back to the early 1970s. He was instrumental in helping draft and lobby for the passage of the Lakehore Protection Act of 1973. The current day benefit of that law is the Whitefish Lakeshore Protection Committee. Frank also hosted a meeting in 1998 with then Governor Racicot, city leaders and management agencies to discuss local lake issues. Ultimately, that meeting inspired me to the possibilities of the Whitefish Lake Institute concept.

Frank understood that our natural resources are not inherited from our parents, but are borrowed from our children. Frank was a believer, and from his heart flowed support and encouragement to the multitudes that can now strive to be the same.

In Frank's honor, the Institute is establishing a Scholarship Fund to provide financial aid to students pursuing a natural resource related major. The Institute would also like to help fund any master's level thesis project specific to Whitefish Lake. If you would like to support the Frank Morrison, Jr. Scholarship Fund, please call the Institute at 862-4327.

2005 Institute Highlights

Here's a look at some of the things the Institute worked on in 2005:

Water Quality Monitoring Program Development

Lake systems are complex. As a result, it takes the collection of data over time to develop trends for analysis. Without it, management decisions can't proceed with the proper background information. The Institute has developed a comprehensive program to monitor the lake to determine cause and effect relationships. The program includes cooperating with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to develop numeric indices, or threshold levels for nutrient and pollutant loading. From alkalinity to zooplankton, this program will look at all aspects of the lake. The program has been peer reviewed by a combination of over 40 local scientists and stakeholders.

Volatile Organic Compound Study

The Institute initiated a volatile organic compound study in 2005 designed to answer a simple question: Is there a public health risk for children swimming at City Beach? With the City's Boat Launch located adjacent to the beach, a potential exists for volatile organic compounds originating from motorized watercraft petroleum products to cause deleterious health effects to swimmers.

The study has found levels of BTEX (benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene and xylene), agents known to cause a myriad of health problems ranging from cancer and birth defects to nervous system, liver and kidneys damage. BTEX's are quite insidious, affecting people through ingestion, inhalation or absorption through the skin. All three avenues of exposure are available to swimmers at City Beach.

The Institute is currently working on recommendations that will provide mitigation measures to reduce the loading of BTEX's into the lake. This study will continue through 2006, and is supported, in part, by a grant from the Whitefish Community Foundation.

Social data from grade levels 4, 8 and 11

How many kids use the lake? What are they doing once they are there? Do they have concerns about the lake? The Institute wanted to know. We surveyed grade levels 4, 8 and 11 to find out. We obtained a 90% respondent rate of total enrollment with the help of the Whitefish Public Schools. The survey found that 89% of the school kids recreated at the lake in 2005. (continued on page 4)

(2005 Highlights continued)

It doesn't seem like kids are too interested in fishing but 87% of those surveyed swam in the lake. Of the 87% that swam in the lake, 29% claim to have swum twenty days or more. It's a good thing the Institute is researching the levels of volatile organic compounds!

Monthly Educational Column in the Whitefish Pilot

Part of the Institute's mission statement is education. In order to create an awareness of environmental issues, the Institute's Executive Director submits a monthly column "Lakeline" to the Whitefish Pilot. Topics have ranged from a historical look at fishing in Whitefish Lake, "Fishing Bear Hide Flies and Red Flannel Underware," to a closer look at

the detrimental effects of the introduction of opossum shrimp into the lake in the 1960s and 1970s, "Shrimping for Answers in Whitefish Lake."

Presentations to government, civic groups and schools

From dissecting fish for all of the Whitefish 4th graders to presenting information to City Government, the Institute was active in educating the community and getting information out to the public about local aquatic resources.

Quarterly publication of our newsletter LakeFront

LakeFront keeps Institute members informed about the current Issues and happenings of our local lakes. Guest columns from board and committee members along with local experts provide unique perspectives on our aquatic resources.

A Look Ahead to 2006

Here's a look at some of the things the Institute would like to accomplish in 2006:

Implement the Water Quality Monitoring Program

The program plan has been peer reviewed by scientists and stakeholders. Now it's time to put the program into action. It'll take the cooperation of local and state government, citizens, and stakeholder groups to make it happen. It is important to recognize that this program is not simply a monitoring plan, but a tool to address questions and concerns. Results from this effort will pinpoint problem areas and identify actionable recommendations. At the end of the year, we will be drafting a Comprehensive Status Report for Whitefish Lake assimilating all previous studies while adding our research to create one document. Thereafter, biennial reports will be completed to continually provide the latest trend data.

Continue the Volatile Organic Compound Study

This study which originated in 2005 has found levels of BTEX's throughout the lake. The Institute needs to further this study in 2006 to provide more statistically viable data. At the end of the year, our results will be made public and will include our mitigation recommendations.

Monitor Channel Stability

Once again, the Institute is taking on a project to collect data over time to understand ecosystem dynamics. Since lakes are influenced by watershed functions, the Institute is teaming with the U.S. Forest Service Tally Lake Ranger District to monitor channel stability at over 40 different locations. Study locations include tributaries to Tally Lake, the Stillwater Lakes and Whitefish Lake. We'll be looking at channel cross sectional profiles, bedload transport, stream-bank erosion, and fish habitat. The Institute and the Tally Lake Ranger District are currently working on a Memorandum of Understanding and a Work Plan to guide the effort. Work is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2006.

Finish the Social Survey

The kids have done their part. Now it's time for the adults to tell all. The Institute will be conducting an on-lake survey in the summer of 2006 along with a community survey at the end of the year. These results will be combined with the school data to give us a comprehensive look at just how the community and recreationalists interface with the lake.

Continue Our Education and Outreach Efforts

Whether it is through our monthly educational column in the Whitefish Pilot, our quarterly newsletter LakeFront, or our continued outreach to community groups, you can be sure that the Institute will keep the community informed.

Grow Our Membership

Now that people know what we're up to, we hope to build upon our membership. Membership not only provides the financial support needed to keep the Institute operational, it also builds a collective voice and provides vision for our local lakes. The Institute's science must be backed by local citizens to yield actionable results. -MK

Whitefish Lake Native Fish Species

Bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, pygmy whitefish, northern pikeminnow, peamouth, largescale sucker, longnose sucker, sculpin, redbside shiner

Introduced Species Currently in Whitefish Lake

Lake trout, brook trout, rainbow trout, lake whitefish, northern pike, yellow perch

Introduced Species Known to Have Existed in Whitefish Lake, but Current Status Unlikely

Pumpkinseed, black bullhead, largemouth bass, kokanee (now absent)

Thank-you Sponsors!

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I want to be a member of the Whitefish Lake Institute!

Check here if you would like to remain anonymous.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code: _____

Annual Membership Type

Individual / Family

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Business

Lake Sponsor \$100 Lake Leader \$250 Lake Benefactor \$500+ Research Guarantor \$1,000+

Special Giving

Endowment Fund \$500+

Please mail membership information and your tax-deductible charitable contribution to:
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(Growth continued from page 1)

With the recent annexation of Whitefish Lake and an increased planning jurisdiction for the City of Whitefish (Oct. 1, 2005), the Whitefish growth policy process must address an expanded geographic scope, including Whitefish lake.

Lake systems are complex, and the policies that we develop now must include the appropriate monitoring of the lake. It's time for policy makers, scientists, and managers to work together to establish trend data to support informed management decisions, all while engaging the community about the resource.

Whitefish's community fabric has always been defined by our interface with Whitefish Lake. How we decide to manage it now speaks volumes for our character and the legacy we will pass on.

The Institute encourages you to become involved in the growth policy process. Learn about the issues that affect our quality of life in Flathead County and Whitefish, and what you can do about it. For more information, contact:

Flathead County
Planning Department
1035 1st Ave. West
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-8200
www.co.flathead.mt.us/fcpz

City of Whitefish
Planning and Building Dept.
1005 C Baker Avenue
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406) 863-2410
www.whitefish.govoffice.com

-MK

Welcome New Board and Committee Members

Board of Directors



Karen Reeves has a forestry degree from the University of Montana and has spent time as a fire lookout and timber cruiser. She's currently the retail manager for Montana Coffee Traders. Karen serves on the Flathead Resource Advisory Committee and is active in long range planning issues

especially as they relate to natural resources. Bill Leonard purchased property on Whitefish Lake in 1968 and became a permanent resident after retiring from the military in 1978. Bill founded the Whitefish Water and Sewer District in 1982 and has been a leading force in protecting Whitefish Lake ever since.

Citizen's Advisory



Steve Qunell earned a Bachelor's degree in History from the University of South Carolina and a Master's Degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He taught high school at the Montana Academy for 5 years and is currently an adjunct faculty member at FVCC. His passion lies in understanding how to apply historical lessons to today's world and working within the local community to affect positive change.

Whitefish, MT 59937
635 Denver Street

