



New Conservation Easement is Largest Ever on Whitefish Lake

Collins family donates 672 acres of private land for conservation in partnership with Montana Land Reliance

BY [TRISTAN SCOTT](#) // FEB 7, 2021

Having lived in Whitefish since the early 20th century, the Collins family has tracked the mountain town's development in real time, watching as new homes crowd natural resources and the population booms.

Around the turn of this century, the family acquired property on the western shore of Whitefish Lake near its northern terminus, and the sixth generation of Collinses to call Whitefish home have opted to conserve the property in an easement to keep the swatch of Whitefish Lake free of development.

Working with the Montana Land Reliance, the Collins family entered into the voluntary conservation easement as a means to protect both the property's natural values — it provides key fish and wildlife habitat and serves as a popular migratory corridor to a variety of critters — and its scenic values, preserving a view shed that is highly visible from Whitefish Lake and the surrounding mountains, including Big Mountain.

According to prepared statements from John and Anne Collins, the family members have witnessed substantial changes in Whitefish during the course of their lives, which prompted them to explore options to furnish the lakeshore property with permanent protections.

“We placed this easement on our property to keep a large part of Whitefish Lake forever free of development,” John Collins stated.

Covered with a diverse stand of timber containing nearly every species of Montana evergreen — from ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and western larch, to red cedar and western hemlock — the property provides habitat for numerous species of wildlife, including deer, elk, moose, wolf, lynx, and black and grizzly bear.

Montana Land Reliance (MLR) Western Manager Mark Schiltz said the new easement is the largest ever completed on Whitefish Lake, and its finalization marks a rare occasion on a waterfront that is more desirable than ever.

“This project represents one of the most important conservation easements in the Flathead Valley and MLR is honored to partner with the Collins family to help make this happen,” Schiltz said.

“This will be the largest easement in the history of Whitefish Lake,” he added. “It doesn't happen very often, and it couldn't happen at a more important time, given the explosive growth the valley is currently experiencing.”

While the conservation easement permanently protects the water quality of Whitefish Lake by prohibiting the construction of all future lakeshore homes on the property, it also helps maintain forest health by permitting responsible commercial timber harvests.

“The easement allows us to manage our timberland to promote forest health and maintain species diversity while providing important habitat for all types of wildlife,” according to John Collins.

The Montana Land Reliance is a nonprofit organization that partners with private landowners to permanently protect agricultural lands, fish and wildlife habitat, and open space. Its western office has worked to protect more than 10,000 acres in the Flathead Valley and Northwest Montana, while it is the largest statewide land trust in terms of acreage.

“The Collins family has given a gift that will benefit Whitefish and the Flathead Valley for generations to come,” Schiltz said.