



LakeFront

Quarterly Newsletter of the Whitefish Lake Institute

Winter 2021

Economic Benefits of Whitefish and Flathead Lakes

Researchers at the Whitefish Lake Institute and the Flathead Lake Biological Station teamed up to estimate the benefits that Whitefish and Flathead Lakes impart to home values in the form of price premiums for lakefront and nearby real estate. This premium can be roughly interpreted as the aesthetic benefit landowners derive from living on or near lakes with exceptional water quality. Numerous other studies have provided convincing evidence that property values are positively affected by clean water or conversely, degradation in water quality can lower property values. The study used a “hedonic” pricing model to estimate how much more people are willing to pay for homes with lake associated amenities. The data set consisted of over 7,000 sales transactions from 2004 to 2018. Estimates are in 2018 dollars.
(continued on Page 2...)



The study suggests that highly desirable lakes such as Flathead Lake and Whitefish Lake enhance surrounding property values thereby contributing significantly to the local economy and tax base.

Largest Ever Conservation Easement Completed on Whitefish Lake

WLI board of directors Secretary/Treasurer John Collins and his wife Anne, long-time WLI supporters, recently finalized a conservation easement on 672 acres of private land adjoining Whitefish Lake. In partnership with The Montana Land Reliance (MLR), the voluntary conservation easement protects both natural and scenic values and important fish and wildlife habitat associated with the property.

Highly visible from Whitefish Lake and the surrounding area, the Collins family land provides a critical wildlife corridor between a large adjoining tract of Montana State School Trust Land and 1.2 miles of Whitefish Lake shoreline on the property. (continued on Page 4...)

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Back issues of *LakeFront* available at www.whitefishlake.org



A 501 (c)(3) Nonprofit Corporation



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Founded in 2005

Mission Statement

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 community vision for tomorrow.

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Whitefish Lake Institute

Cover Photo:
Whitefish City Beach
Courtesy: Heidi Desch (Whitefish Pilot)

Career Opportunity: WLI Finance & Grants Manager

The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) seeks an experienced and highly organized professional to join our small non-profit team. Part Time to Full Time, depending on skills and qualifications. Position manages finances, including AP, AR, payroll, programmatic budgeting and financial reporting. Must be fluent in QuickBooks Pro software, as well as Excel for budgeting and grant management. The ideal candidate writes, administers, and reports on grants to support programming, and engages in organizational planning, staff meetings, board meetings, WLI sponsored events, and miscellaneous administrative tasks. **Must have bachelor's degree and at least five years of experience** bookkeeping. See the full job description at www.whitefishlake.org.

(Economic Benefits of Whitefish and Flathead Lakes can't from Page 1...)

Study Results

The study provides estimates of the aesthetic benefit residential land owners derive from living on or nearby Whitefish Lake and Flathead Lake, which both exhibit exceptional water clarity.

Lakefront Price Premium

Lakefront on Whitefish Lake commanded a price premium of 254% or \$1.3 million on average compared to the same home located over 2 km from the lake. The effect of Whitefish Lake on home value diminished the further the property was from the lake. The price premium ranged from 5% to 29% for properties within 0.5 km, 1 km, 1.5 km and 2 km buffers from the lake. In comparison, lakefront homes on Flathead Lake exhibited a 114% or \$0.5 million on average price premium compared to the same home over 2 km from the lake. Contrary to our expectations, proximity to Flathead Lake did not positively influence housing values for homes that were not on the lake.

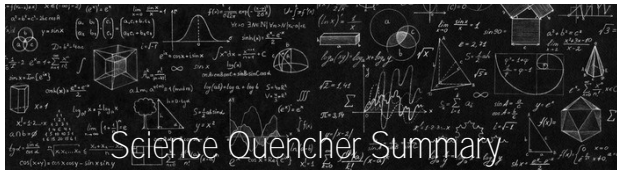
Contribution to the Economy

In Montana, local government and school district tax collections arise almost entirely from property taxes (96.4%). Aggregating price premiums estimated for lakefront property, we calculated Flathead Lake contributed \$1.6 to \$2.2 billion to real estate values. The capitalization of Flathead Lake into surrounding lakefront parcels resulted in an additional \$12 to \$17 million in property tax revenue. Whitefish Lake enhanced surrounding property values by \$0.6 to \$1.1 billion contributing \$5 to \$8 million in property tax revenue.

The full report can be found at www.whitefishlake.org under ***What's Happening.***



*A frozen Monk's Bay as viewed from
Whitefish City Beach.*



Since late 2019, WLI has hosted speakers addressing a variety of topics at our well-attended Science Quenchers. The events—aimed at engaging community members in science and conservation issues—have gathered smart, interesting audiences with a desire to learn something new. We responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by temporarily moving our events online through Zoom, and will continue to do so until it is once again safe to gather.

At our most recent Science Quencher, on January 15th, our four scientists included: Franz Ingelfinger, a wildlife biologist and restoration ecologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Franz shared his work on a riparian habitat restoration project that directly seeds black cottonwood at an ecologically significant scale in areas impacted by dam-altered flow regimes by mimicking the work of the river in preparing ground for seeding and supporting long term survival. This approach has broad applicability across landscapes impacted by dam operations.

Ryan Richardson, a fluvial geomorphologist with River Design Group, discussed his work developing a spatial model of septic risk for the Flathead Lake basin for the Flathead Basin Commission by mapping known risk factors for septic system failure including soil type, slope, groundwater depth, and proximity to surface water.

Lori Roberts, Research Assistant (Bear Biologist) for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, highlighted her work in the Greater Continental Divide Ecosystem to understand grizzly bear population status and trends and how it relates to grizzly bear management throughout the western United States.

Samantha Tappenbeck, Conservation Program Manager for Flathead Conservation District, presented on the locally led conservation work being done by the Flathead Conservation District (FCD) including restoration work on Cow and Ashley Creeks as well as what programs are available through FCD to help landowners protect water resources on their lands.

We thank all of our past Science Quencher speakers and participants, and look forward to bringing our next Science Quencher to life on April 16th where we will feature young professionals.

Ripple Effect Scholarship Application Reminder

WLI offers three types of scholarship opportunities to qualified students. The scholarship program can award students in three categories including 1) a \$500 scholarship for tuition to a high school student as they enter college, 2) an unpaid Internship (see below) at WLI which when completed offers **a \$1,000 stipend toward the student's tuition, and 3) WLI's** support of a graduate thesis or dissertation. Appropriate courses of study for consideration in the scholarship program include: biology, ecology, environmental science/studies, hydrology, or other fields related to water quality as approved by WLI staff. For more information, see our website www.whitefishlake.org under Education Programs. The deadline for applications is April 15th.

Summer Internship Opportunity

One of the most important aspects of WLI's educational programming is to encourage and mentor students. WLI has hosted college interns dating back to 2007. Thanks to our Ripple Effect Scholarship Fund, a \$1,000 stipend towards tuition is awarded to an upper level university student who completes a successful summer internship with WLI.

WLI interns learn about streams, rivers and lakes, watershed processes, limnological data collection, and data processing and analysis. The intern also learns about—and participates in—the daily functioning of a small non-profit corporation. WLI attempts to match the intern with special projects that are in their interest area. One intern can be accepted each summer. Internship applications are due April 15. To learn more about the internship and application process, please visit our website: www.whitefishlake.org.

Wetland Trail Annual Closure

We hope you are enjoying your treks at the Living Wetlands **Interpretive Nature Trail in the Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve**! Please remember we are nearing the annual March 15th to May 1st trail closure to maintain the structural integrity of the trail, protect native vegetation, and avoid potential spring wildlife/human conflicts. Until then, enjoy your winter walks along the trail.

If you know of a small group (8 minimum) that would like a guided interpretive nature walk, including the story of how WLI became the owner of the property and our management approach, please contact the WLI office.

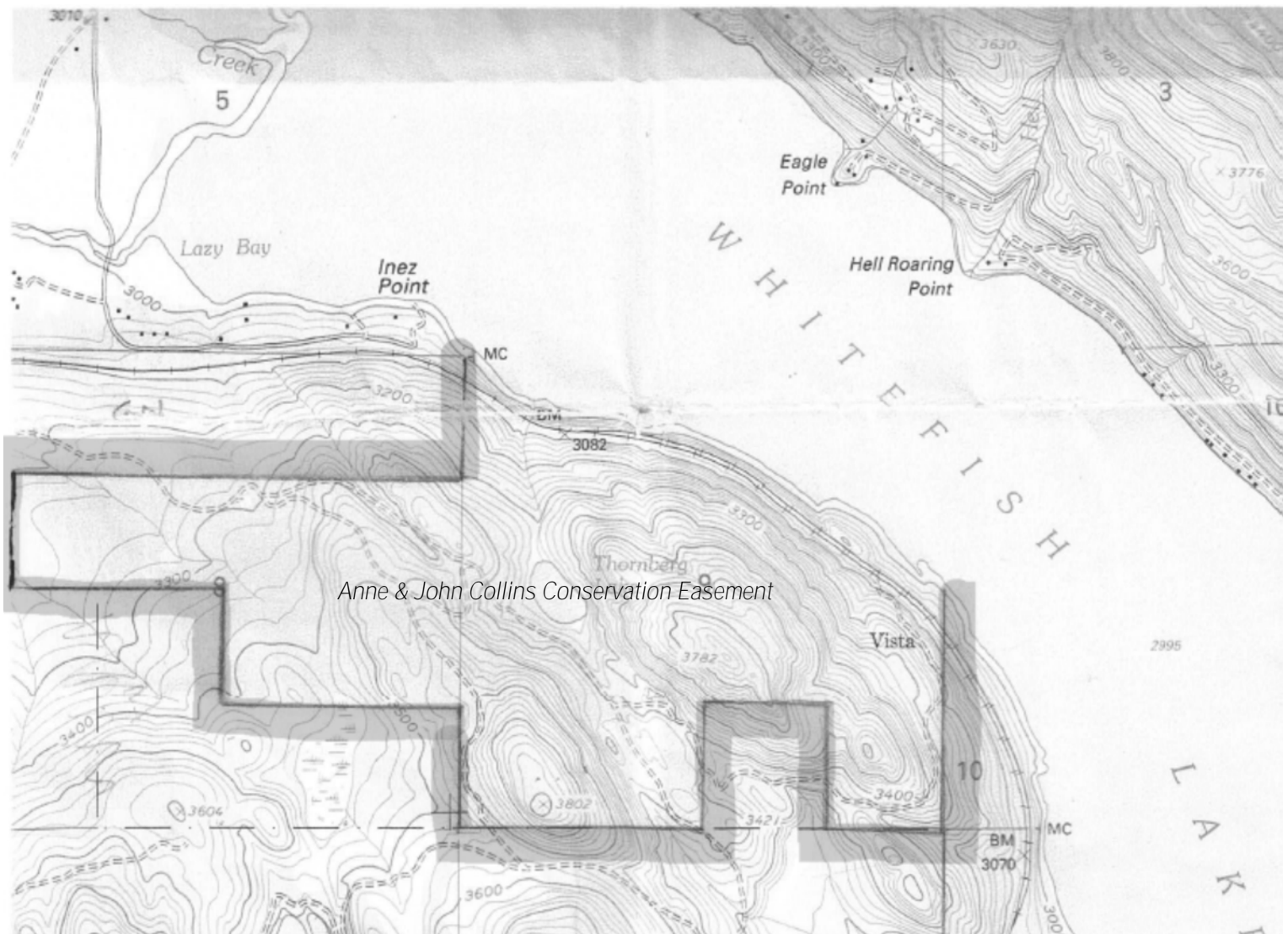
(Largest Ever Conservation Easement Completed on Whitefish Lake con't from Page 1...)

The Collins' family settled in the Whitefish area in the early nineteen hundreds and has owned the conserved property for 20 years. Their grandchildren now represent the sixth generation of the family to call the beautiful town of Whitefish home. Having witnessed substantial changes in Whitefish throughout his life, John advised, "We placed this easement on our property to keep a large part of Whitefish Lake forever free of development."

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. MLR Western Manager, Mark Schiltz remarked, "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."

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," John explained.

"This couldn't happen at a more important time, given the explosive growth the valley is currently experiencing," Mark advised. "The Collins family has given a gift that will benefit Whitefish and the Flathead Valley for generations to come."



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