

LAKEFRONT

Winter 2025



Whitefish Lake
INSTITUTE

A 501 (c) (3) Nonprofit Corporation



Celebrating 20 Years!



This year Whitefish Lake Institute is celebrating 20 years of achievements in lake science, education, and community outreach. Founded in 2005, the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) is a community organization that collects scientific data to drive responsible lake management decisions. Here's a look at a few of our success stories through the years.

Initially, WLI acquired the scientific instrumentation to establish a baseline and track the health of the lake. This trend data, now an 18-year record, is available on WLI's website on the "State of the Lake" page under the Reports and Publications Tab. The data shows Whitefish Lake as a healthy, clear, and clean lake but not without threats and challenges. WLI has spent its history investigating these threats while confronting the many unique challenges we as a community face to safeguard the lake.

Protecting the lake translates to ecosystem health and public health. As early as 2005, WLI conducted a study that investigated the presence of boat gas products in the lake water. The findings

showed a human health risk at City Beach where gasoline was found next to the public swimming area. WLI conveyed this information to the City of Whitefish and now an interceptor trench in the boat ramp collects oily bilge water, preventing it from draining into the lake. Follow up testing indicates that the interceptor trench has been effective at keeping the water clean and safe.

In 1989, a train derailed and four tanker cars with 20,000-25,000 gallons of diesel fell down an embankment and partially ended up in Mackinaw Bay on Whitefish Lake. An initial clean-up effort occurred but lingering contamination was found by WLI in 2012. The data prompted regulators to require a second clean-up effort that concentrated on the shoreline area.

Whitefish Lake has long been suspected of having contamination from underperforming or failing septic systems, however, WLI lacked sufficient data to confirm these suspicions. To address this, in 2012 WLI completed a study of (*continued on Page 3...*)

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

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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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LAKEFRONT is published quarterly by the
Whitefish Lake Institute

Cover Photo: *Whitefish Lake as seen from Big Ravine
ski run at Whitefish Mountain Resort.*



@whitefishlakeinstitute



Whitefish Lake Institute

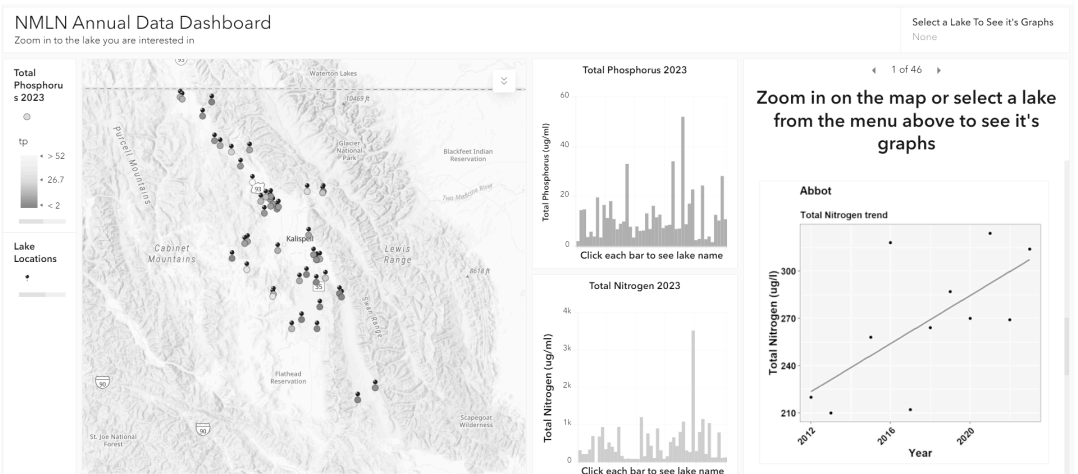
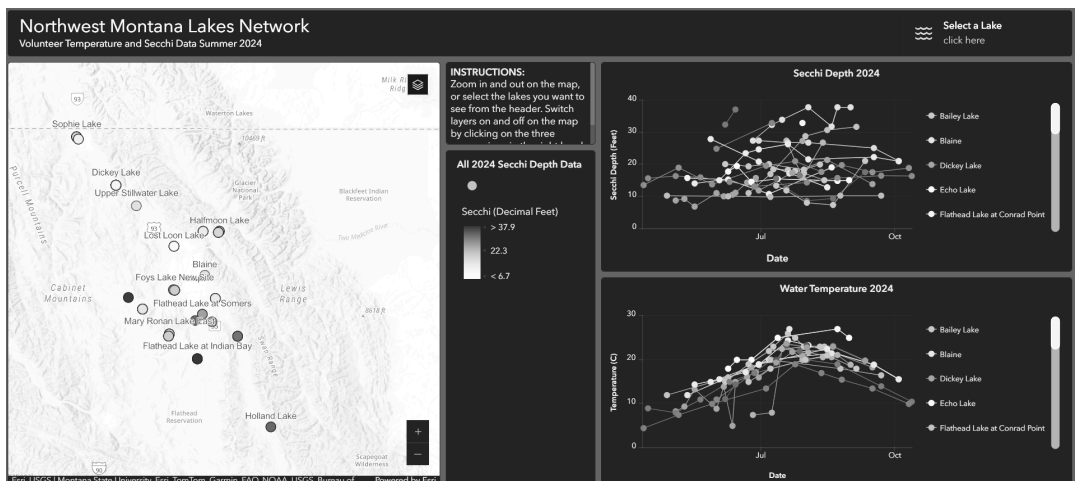
Northwest Montana Lakes Network Dashboard

The Northwest Montana Lakes Network (NMLN) website just added an important tool for program volunteers, management agencies, and the public. The website (nmln.info) now has ArcGIS dashboards to display all the important data collected by volunteers and program staff at WLI! From the homepage click on Data Visualizations.

A dashboard is an interactive data visualization tool. Dashboards are composed of elements, such as maps, charts, indicators, and tables and allow users to tailor the data to a specific request. These are digital tools that help us see and understand data. For example, on the NMLN volunteer data dashboard, you can select a lake in the program and see current year volunteer data (Secchi and temperature) as well as more in-depth graphs showing this data over time. It allows you to focus on one lake or view all lakes spatially.

Dashboards can be overwhelming as they house extensive information, but once you know how to navigate the tool, a wealth of information is available to the user. We hope you will go to nmln.info to check out this new addition to our collective knowledge of lakes in northwest Montana.

Found below are two screenshots from the ArcGIS dashboard. The top dashboard displays volunteer Secchi and temperature data. The bottom dashboard displays data collected by program staff as assisted by the volunteers.



20th Anniversary

(continued from Page 1...)

the shoreline area using multiple detection techniques. The study led to the City of Whitefish launching an ad-hoc committee which prepared two Preliminary Engineering Reports that detailed mitigation options and cost estimates. WLI has now taken this issue to a broader level, engaging with the Flathead Basin Commission (now Western Montana Conservation Commission) and other partners to develop a GIS Risk Assessment for Flathead County, and also using the latest technology via synthetic DNA and Pharmaceutical and Personal Care Product testing. Multiple lines of evidence demonstrate that Whitefish Lake has failing septic systems and community solutions are needed to protect water quality and human health.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) prevention is a high priority for the community of Whitefish, but up until 2016 Whitefish had no formal AIS plan. In 2016, with the threat of zebra mussel larvae detection in Tiber Reservoir, WLI crafted a more formalized local AIS plan. Now, in partnership with the City of Whitefish and Montana FWP, there is a mandatory local watercraft inspection prior to launch with a complimentary preventative decontamination for high-risk watercraft. The program is recognized statewide as the gold standard for local efforts. Even with safeguards in place, the program can never be perfect and public awareness and participation is key.

WLI also conducts early detection monitoring and management for multiple AIS species. Beaver Lake has Eurasian watermilfoil and, the early actions by WLI, the City of Whitefish, and the current partnership with Montana FWP, has severely reduced and possibly eradicated this population. Additionally, WLI found curly-leaf pondweed in Haskill Creek. To prevent it from spreading to the Whitefish River WLI has partnered with Montana FWP to conduct weed pulls.

In 2009, WLI became owner of 28.82 acres of wetland habitat, including the lower portion of Viking Creek before it enters Whitefish Lake. WLI is protecting this kidney to the lake in perpetuity and developed a public interpretive nature trail in the wetlands. Each spring, WLI hosts all Whitefish and Kalispell 5th graders in the wetlands for field trips that include various partner education stations with engaging natural resource topics.

WLI's work does not only benefit the Whitefish area. We expand our reach by coordinating and administering the Northwest Montana Lakes Network, a partnership with Montana FWP that engages citizen scientists on 41 lakes in northwest Montana. We also organize and host the Montana Lakes Conference which brings together lake scientists, managers, and the public to focus on collectively protecting our lakes. For seven years, our Science Quencher has brought the community together to hear lightning round talks on Montana wildlife, water, and ecology topics.

Student Opportunities

Are you, or do you know a high school senior entering a 2 or 4 year college with plans to major in environmental science/studies, environmental engineering, biology, ecology, hydrology or other related field?

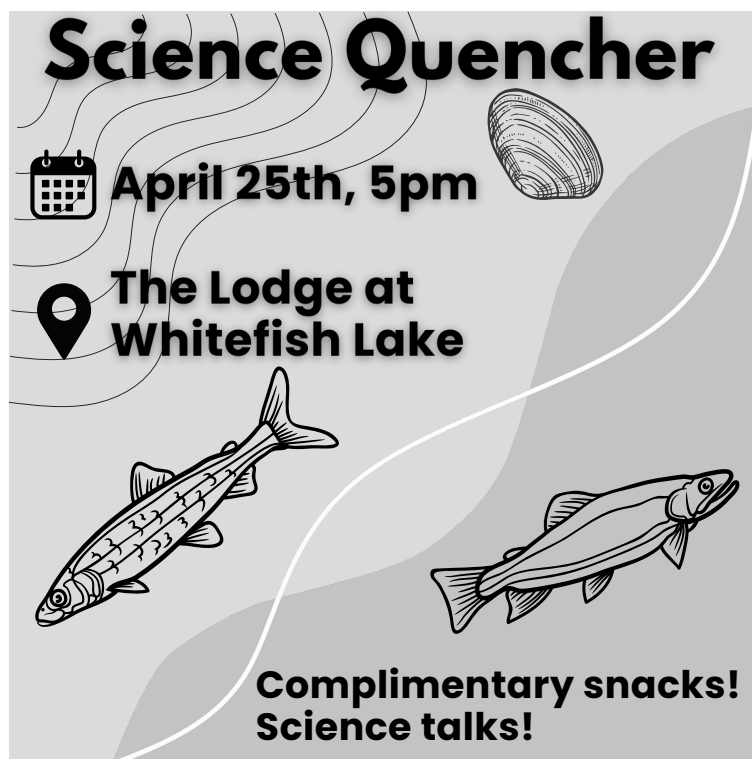
WLI offers a \$500 scholarship available to Columbia Falls or Whitefish High School seniors.

WLI also offers a summer internship opportunity for a college student majoring in environmental science or related field. This is an amazing opportunity for a student to learn about watershed processes, lake ecosystems, and be part of data collection, data analysis, and educational events. The internship supplies a \$3000 scholarship for tuition.

Please spread the word to interested students! Visit our website: whitefishlake.org/internship-and-scholarship-opportunities/ to learn more about these exciting opportunities for the next generation of water stewards.


Save the Date-- April Science Quencher


Please join us for a complimentary beverage and snacks, and listen to lightning round presentations from local experts April 25th at 5pm.



The poster for the Science Quencher event features a light gray background with stylized white wavy lines representing water. At the top, the title "Science Quencher" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below the title, on the left, is a small black calendar icon with a white date, followed by the text "April 25th, 5pm" in a bold black font. To the right of this is a detailed black and white illustration of a clam. Below the date and time, on the left, is a black location pin icon, followed by the text "The Lodge at Whitefish Lake" in a bold black font. At the bottom of the poster, there are two detailed black and white illustrations of fish, likely trout or salmon, swimming towards the right. In the bottom right corner, the text "Complimentary snacks! Science talks!" is written in a bold black font.

Science Quencher

 **April 25th, 5pm**

 **The Lodge at Whitefish Lake**

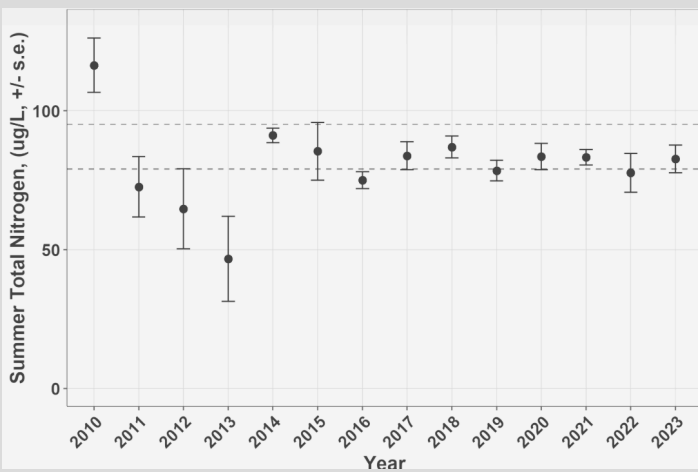
**Complimentary snacks!
Science talks!**



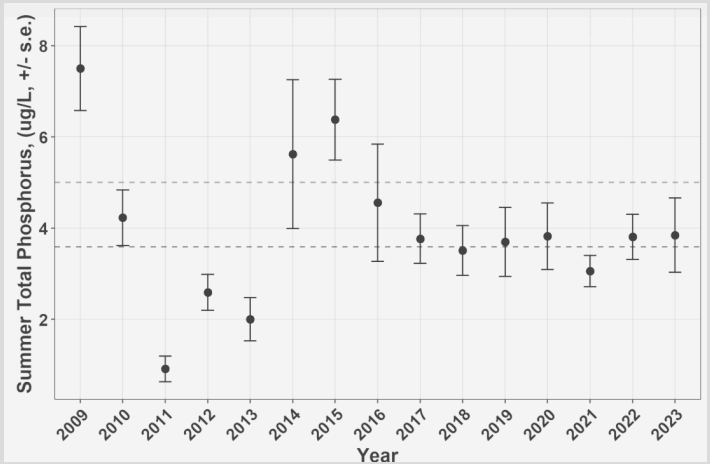
WLI Limnologist, Cassie Roberts, out for a skate on the crystal clear ice on Whitefish Lake.



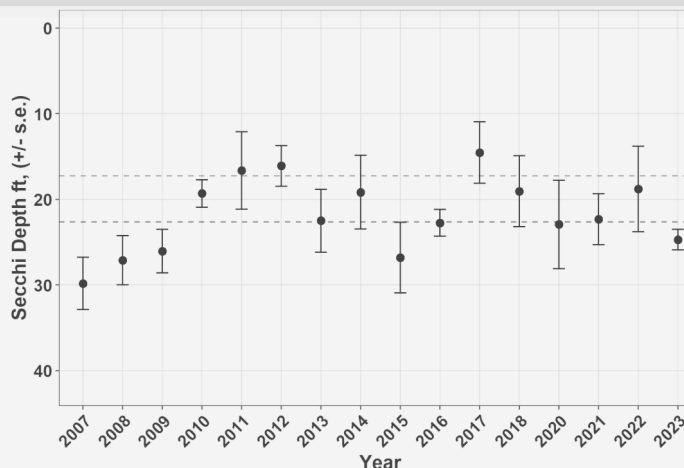
Unique conditions this year, including windless conditions and a slow freeze, led to transparent ice conditions.



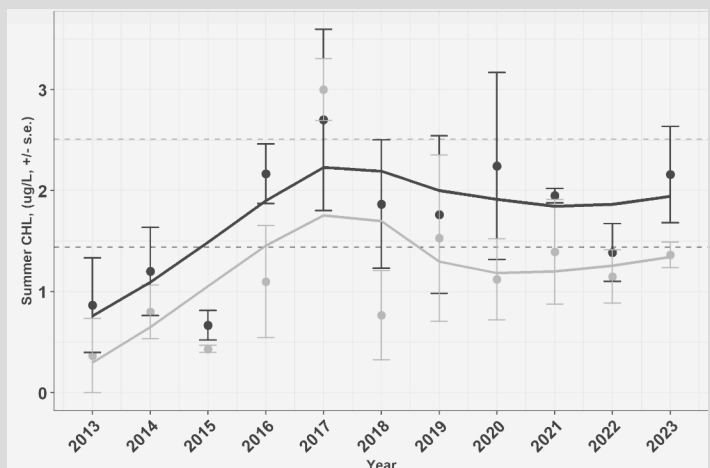
*State of the Lake--Nitrogen.
Color State of Lake charts found at
www.whitefishlake.org.*



*State of the Lake--Phosphorus.
The top dashed line displays the WLI set standard.
The bottom dashed line shows the average.*



*State of the Lake--Secchi (clarity).
Natural resource data can be variable year to year.*



*State of the Lake--Chlorophyll (a).
Three consecutive years above a Standard should
cause concern for the community and a call to action.*

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