

# LAKE FRONT

*The official quarterly newsletter to members of the Whitefish Lake Institute*

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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## The President's Corner - Gene Hedman

It was in March 1956 that I saw Whitefish and the Flathead Valley for the first time. That statement is a little strange for a person who was born in Whitefish (1934), went to school at Central School (now in process of demolition), 1st grade through high school; who fished, hunted, hiked everywhere, but who had no real appreciation for what is here.

I left in 1953 to visit the desert of California at Camp Roberts, California, then on to Korea, Japan, and other points in the Far East; discharged from Uncle Sam's Army in 1956 and finally returned here with experiences that equipped me to see things I hadn't seen before, and a resolve that this would be home, and that I would do whatever was necessary to stay here!

It was then that I became able to appreciate the good fortune we had in those growing-up years. Every season had its special appeal, and the Whitefish watershed was essential to most of the activities. I especially remember the picnics at the City Beach; the swimming, canoeing and fishing in those early years. The kokanee salmon were there in abundance, as well as the cutthroat trout and Mackinaw. We had an active Whitefish Lake Boat Club, and held boat races that involved the entire community. Those days extended into the seventies, and then some things changed. Development around the lake increased; the kokanee salmon were lost, pike were introduced into the lake, the cutthroat population declined dramatically and the boat traffic increased significantly.

It was in the spring of 1974 that Whitefish Lake truly lost its innocence. That was the year when the residents on the West lakeshore noticed a wide streak of muddy water that extended from the mouth of Lazy Creek down the entire West shore to the outlet of the river. Someone had taken a "drag line" and decided to dredge out the inlet of Lazy Creek, increase the depth of the inlet and create a peninsula for use as a building site. Interestingly, the crane became mired in the silt and was "stuck" there for the entire season. Even the most liberal of us realized that this was simply too much, and a group of us decided that it was time to attempt some regulation of what was done on the shoreline of the lake.

We got together, found some model regulations that had been used in other states, and drafted what was the precursor to what we now know as the Lakeshore Protection Act. We took it to Helena the next time the legislature was in session and it passed into state law.

We are now in another critical era due to the phenomenal amount of development that is occurring. The Whitefish Watershed still needs protection and care. It's appropriate that we have a body of concerned citizens who appreciate the value of what we have and are willing to contribute time, energy, resources and expertise to the protection of our most valuable asset. Although I no longer live on the lake, I still care greatly about it, and am happy to contribute what I can to see that it sustains its attributes for the coming generations.

On behalf of my good friends who serve on the Board of Directors, the Citizen's Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee, I invite and encourage you to join our efforts.

### **New Study: Is Our Lake Safe?**

The Whitefish Lake Institute has designed a study to determine if there are any human health risks associated with people swimming and recreating in the lake, as it relates to petroleum products that enter the lake through boat and personal watercraft use. Petroleum products, or various volatile organic compounds (VOC's), will be analyzed at four locations on the lake beginning in August of 2005 and extending through the July 4th weekend of 2006.

VOC concentrations can also have a direct effect on fish and zooplankton communities. All samples will be analyzed by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Laboratory in Helena. -MK

## From the Executive Director - Mike Koopal

The record setting rains of June delivered some much needed precipitation, but the gloomy weather also ushered in some disheartening news about Whitefish Lake. The *Whitefish Pilot* ran three ominous headlines in June that detailed some impacts to our lake.

“Perfect storm creates City beach sewage spill” described the estimated 5,000 gallon leak of untreated sewage into Whitefish Lake. “Landowner cited for multiple lakeshore violations” discussed how one lakeshore owner cut trees and dumped gravel in the lakeshore protection zone while simultaneously violating storm drain rules. “Neighbors protest Hellroaring home site” covered the excessive erosion from an east lakeshore property that directly entered Hellroaring Creek and ultimately Whitefish Lake.

The paper also ran the story, “City presented with grand vision for downtown”. This article explained the conceptual design for a landing area to connect the downtown area to the Whitefish River and Whitefish Lake.

It seems as if a peaceful little lake in northwestern Montana is being jarred by the clamor of development and personal interests. Hopefully, these early summer events are not an indication of things to come. But what’s to stop it? The short answer is you.

By becoming involved with lake issues and by supporting the Institute, a collective voice is forming to guide future management decisions. It’s an innovative approach to blend the needs of a growing City of Whitefish and the precious natural lakes found in our backyard.

Talk to your friends and family about the issues we face as a community and ask them to support the Institute through their membership. Unless we build a concerted effort to study our lakes and provide long-term solutions for our resources, the headlines of June will be indicative of things to come.

### **Guest Column “What Whitefish Lake Means to Me” - by Bayard Dominick**

Bayard works at Slopeside Properties and Dominick & Bowden Development.

I am excited to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee of the newly formed Whitefish Lake Institute. When Hunter and I moved to Whitefish almost 5 years ago, our time spent on and around Whitefish Lake became one of our most cherished activities. Whether sailing, canoeing, waterskiing or merely hanging out and relaxing to the gentle rolling of the lake beneath the warmth of the late evening sun and unwinding from our daily lives, we have joined the myriad past and present Whitefish families who know what I mean.

The Lake, however, is much more than just a great way to spend time with one’s family. It has, for better or for worse, evolved into one of the largest economic drivers of the Flathead Valley. The real estate prices in and around the lake have skyrocketed; the boat traffic multiplies every time the sun shines. City Beach, the State Park and Les Mason Park see more and more use. Our community is facing an ever-increasing challenge as it weighs the economic and environmental impacts of growth on the lake and our community in general. The lake is a jewel that must continue to be cherished and protected. The Whitefish Lake Institute has been formed to help do just that.

The Institute has been formed not to act politically, but to provide thoughtful and measured research and education. The Institute will strive to collect and disseminate the important information and environmental trends that will allow the community to develop appropriate long-term management practices and to make better, wiser decisions about how we should best protect Whitefish Lake and many of the other important lakes throughout our region.

The Citizens Advisory Committee thanks the Executive Director, Mike Koopal, and the Board of Directors for their vision and leadership in committing themselves to the formation of the Whitefish Lake Institute. Please consider this an invitation to all of you who share our love and concerns for the Lake to get involved with the Whitefish Lake Institute and help support its mission in anyway that you

## Action Item - Smith Lake

Located near the head end of Whitefish Lake on State property, Smith Lake is rooted in the history of Whitefish. The Whitefish Rod and Gun Club constructed a dam on the lake in 1937 and 1938 to expand the lake from five acres to 18 acres. In 1958, Fish and Game replaced the wooden dam with a concrete structure. The lake was used to rear westslope cutthroat trout to plant in Whitefish Lake until the late 1960's. Today, the lake has developed a reputation for good brook trout fishing.

Recently, DNRC engineers classified the dam as a high hazard due to structural integrity issues. As a result, the following alternatives have been developed to mitigate the problem;

- Provide immediate repair. This is a short term fix requiring a long-term solution. Cost estimated at \$12,500.
- Rebuild the dam. This would be a long-term solution and cost approximately \$180,000 for engineering and construction costs.
- Remove the dam. Obliterating and rehabilitating the site would cost approximately \$130,000.

The Whitefish Lake Institute provided the DNRC with a letter recommending that the agency rebuild the dam. The Institute feels that Smith Lake provides an important historical family fishery resource. If the dam is removed, water levels would most likely be too shallow to prevent winter kill of trout.

## Action Item - Hellroaring Pollution

The Whitefish Lake Institute was the first to report to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) the excessive erosion that occurred on an East Lakeshore property from June 1 through June 3. During the three day event, over three inches of rain fell, causing rill and gully erosion to contribute inordinate amounts of turbidity and total suspended sediments to Hellroaring Creek and ultimately Whitefish Lake.

The Whitefish Lake Institute worked closely with the Whitefish Lakeshore Protection Committee to ensure that the appropriate documentation occurred and water quality samples were taken. -MK



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