

Brokering a Solution

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When it comes to the high value of real estate in the Flathead Valley, finding creative solutions that balance a developer's bottom line while protecting natural resources can be a challenge. There's no better example of a success story than the expansion of The Lodge at Whitefish Lake, which included a 30 acre wetland gift to the Whitefish Lake Institute.

The Averill family proposed to expand The Lodge across Wisconsin Avenue on the 40 acres they had purchased. The area, comprised largely of wetland habitat, acts as a kidney filtering out pollutants and excessive nutrients adjacent to the clear waters of Whitefish Lake.

All previous development proposals at this site were considered too big, too dense and too intrusive. Public opposition to these development proposals led to the formation of a citizens group called the "Friends of Wisconsin Avenue Wetlands." It took over two years of negotiations between the Averill family, the Friends of Wisconsin Avenue Wetlands

and the Whitefish Lake Institute to broker a deal that benefited all—most importantly protecting the wetlands.

In addition to the wetland donation, the deal included the development of additional guest space for The Lodge subject to wetland mitigation requirements outlined by the group and endorsed by the

Lake Institute installed motion sensitive cameras in the wetlands and have captured on film a surprising diversity of wildlife in the urban interface, including; black bear, mountain lions, moose, elk, deer, coyote, fox, turkey, and various raptors. These photos indicate that this unique wetland habitat is crucial for wildlife in the urban interface and worthy of protection.



Fawn



Mountain Lion

Source: Whitefish Lake Institute, 2009

US Army Corps of Engineers. The deal also included \$110,000 to fund wetland restoration, monitoring, interpretive trail development, and fencing.

The wetlands are seasonally open to the public via an interpretive nature trail and the area offers a great outdoor classroom for school groups and other community organizations. Citing the collaborative approach that served all parties, the local planning board and city council unanimously approved the plan.

The Whitefish Lake Institute now manages this 30 acre public resource for wildlife and water quality. In 2009, the Whitefish



Satellite view of the wetlands owned by the Whitefish Lake Institute



Aerial view of the wetlands owned by the Whitefish Lake Institute, looking east from Whitefish Lake

Source: OTBDesignworks, 2008

Source: Gravityshots.com, 2008