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**WHITEFISH AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES 2018 PROGRAM LAUNCHED:
New Hours, New Prevention & Decontamination Station Location**

WHITEFISH, MT, May 1, 2017 – The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), City of Whitefish, and Whitefish Lake State Park opened both Whitefish Lake Watercraft Inspection Stations and the Prevention & Decontamination Station on May 1. The *Our Lake, Our Future Aquatic Invasive Species Management Program* was designed to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) to area waterbodies. This comprehensive program includes inspection stations at the Whitefish City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park boat launches, a Prevention & Decontamination Station, education and outreach, and three online self-certification programs for watercraft users.

Thanks to a partnership between Don “K,” Glacier Nordic Club, and WLI, the AIS Prevention & Decontamination Station has moved to the west side of Highway 93, across from Don “K” just north of J. P. Road. Prevention & Decontamination staff are housed in Glacier Nordic Club’s shack which was loaned to WLI for the boating season while not in use for ski season.

City of Whitefish Watercraft Inspection Station Hours

May & September 6:00 AM – 9:00 PM*

June thru August 6:00 AM – 10:00 PM

** Hours extended over Memorial Day & Labor Day weekends*

Whitefish State Park Watercraft Inspection Station Hours

May thru September 7:00 AM – 10:00 PM

Whitefish Prevention & Decontamination Hours

May & September 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM*

June thru August 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM

** Open until 8:00 PM on Memorial Day & Labor Day weekends*

“The greatest concern is for zebra mussels which were first documented on the east side of the Continental Divide in Montana in late 2016,” noted Lori Curtis, Science & Education Director for WLI and Chair of the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission (UC³). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks leads the AIS program for the state, with support from the Montana Department of

Natural Resources and Conservation, the Montana Invasive Species Council, the UC³, and program partners including the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, the Blackfeet Nation, Glacier National Park, the Provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, and bordering states. “The level of coordination, outreach and accountability going into this boating season is exceptional,” said Curtis.

Online Self-Certification Programs

In an effort to address low-risk watercraft, early morning anglers, and to improve traffic flow at the inspection stations, three online programs are available. All three programs are designed to provide access to watercraft users willing to learn the risks and take appropriate **Clean.Drain.Dry** (cleandraindry.mt.gov) steps to prevent the introduction of AIS to Whitefish Lake. The programs are:

Non-Motorized, Hand-Launched Online Self-Certification Program

This program—in its third year—has been very successful in educating users of non-motorized watercraft such as kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, and float tubes about AIS prevention protocols. Test takers who pass with a 100% score receive a certificate and annual sticker for their watercraft.

Off-Season Online Self-Certification Program

During the Off-Season—October 1 through April 30—motorized and non-motorized watercraft users who pass the test with a 100% score receive a certificate and code to open the locked gate at either City Beach or Whitefish State Park.

Early Angler Online Self-Certification Program

The Early Angler program provides an opportunity for motorized and non-motorized anglers who pass the test with a 100% score to receive a certificate and code to open the locked gate prior to watercraft station open hours throughout the year at either City Beach or Whitefish State Park.

All programs are available by clicking the *Our Lake, Our Future* logo from WLI’s home page www.whitefishlake.org

History of City of Whitefish AIS Program

In 2013, the City of Whitefish began funding and implementing an annual AIS Management Plan as recommended by WLI. The purpose of the plan is to prevent the transfer of AIS to local waterbodies through various task items including; early detection and monitoring, watercraft inspections, and education and outreach on AIS issues. Each year, the plan proposes specific task items to reduce the threat of AIS to the Whitefish area. It is designed to be adaptive to emerging issues while maintaining a base level of protection from known AIS threats. Task items have changed slightly over the years based on new information and the ability to leverage other partnerships. However, certain task items have remained consistent such as watercraft inspections, early detection monitoring for AIS, and control/eradication of Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM) in Beaver Lake.

Why is This Important?

A zebra mussel colonization of Whitefish Lake has many plausible economic and environmental consequences to both individuals and the public at large. These include damage to: the City of Whitefish Public Water Supply or to the Water Treatment Plant, individual water intake systems, boats and boat motors, and docks. It also includes reduced recreational opportunities for visitors and locals which would impact local businesses. A fouled lake would also decrease property values and could potential impact the local tax base. Lastly, it can alter the ecology and water quality of Whitefish Lake due to the myriad negative feedback loops of an infestation such as the decline of native species, an increase in algal blooms, and eventual loss of water clarity. Because Whitefish Lake is at the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin, a local infestation could—via downstream drift—affect all points downstream over time.

About Whitefish Lake Institute

Founded in 2005, the Whitefish Lake Institute is a 501 (3)(c) non-profit organization committed to acquiring scientific research, and to educating and engaging the local citizenry to protect the Whitefish area water resources of today, while providing a collective community vision for tomorrow.

Map of Watercraft Inspection Stations and Prevention & Decontamination Station provided with this release.

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