

20



22

ANNUAL
COMMUNITY REPORT



Dear Friends and Supporters,

The Flathead is a special place. Amidst all the recent growth and change, Whitefish Legacy Partners' commitment to conservation, recreation, and education has not wavered. Our work to collaborate and seek community-based solutions is more important than ever – and thankfully, continues to be highly valued and supported – through both community involvement and financial investment.

Since our founding in 2003, we have partnered with the community and protected 6,100 acres of local lands, created the Whitefish Trail, and launched vibrant outdoor education programs. For the past six years, Smith Lake has been at the heart of our conservation work and serves as a critical connection for the Whitefish Trail.

Being outdoors on the Whitefish Trail brings tremendous joy and prosperity, and that is only possible through our strong partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies and involved local nonprofits. Together, through a shared vision, we have built miles of quality public trails and conserved thousands of acres surrounding Whitefish Lake.

Our work to enhance our local economy while protecting the community's core assets deserves permanent protection. Clean water, resilient landscapes, scenic viewsheds, and guaranteed recreational access continues to be our foundation and top priority. The Whitefish Trail and our local conservation lands are our legacy for the Whitefish community.

Mike Jopek

Mike Jopek, Board Chair

MISSION

Whitefish Legacy Partners is a non-profit organization whose community-minded vision ensures conservation, recreation, and education on the lands around Whitefish for future generations. Our community-minded vision includes conserving important viewsheds, watersheds, forests, and wildlife habitat on public and private lands through conservation agreements and acquisitions while simultaneously creating high quality recreation opportunities, including our anchor project, the Whitefish Trail.



CONSERVATION

We protect our important local lands and unparalleled recreation opportunities to ensure open lands, scenic viewsheds, connected wildlife corridors, and quality drinking water for generations to come.

Our community-driven work creates recreation opportunities and permanent public access, supports sustainable timber management, and ensures MT School Trust Lands are not lost to development through innovative conservation strategies.



RECREATION

The Whitefish Trail is a regional, multi-partner project established in 2010 to develop a 55+-mile recreational trail system encircling the community of Whitefish and Whitefish Lake.

The natural-surface, non-motorized trail winds through vibrant forests, visits scenic lakes, and explores our protected open lands. Hiking, biking, fishing, or simply enjoying being outside with family, the Whitefish Trail provides permanent, public recreation just steps from town.



EDUCATION

Education on the Whitefish Trail offers a unique opportunity to cultivate connections between our community, our natural lands, and our outdoor heritage. The WT Learning Pavilion at Lion Mountain offers a base for our year-round, free environmental education programs. We strive to educate locals, visitors, and youth about the interwoven elements of a thriving ecosystem while fostering an appreciation for the special places surrounding our community.





CONSERVATION

The vibrant forests, clean water, open lands, and endless recreation opportunities that define Montana are a few of the many reasons Whitefish and the Whitefish Trail are so special. The state and private land surrounding Whitefish, especially at the head of Whitefish Lake, are host to sensitive wetlands, free flowing rivers, and wildlife migration corridors essential to the water quality of Whitefish Lake and the health of the surrounding open lands.

Many of these lands are at high risk of being converted to non-forest uses. This is especially true in the Swift Creek-Smith Lake area and at Spencer Mountain, where the land offers easy access and stunning views of the surrounding mountains and is highly developable due to its gently sloping terrain. The risk to these areas continues to increase as the local economy thrives and land prices continue to rise. As development expands, the pockets of connected, undeveloped lands are more critical than ever. Conservation of these landscapes today guarantees ecosystem integrity and permanent public access for future generations.

Resilient Landscapes

Whitefish is surrounded by millions of acres of public land stretching hundreds of miles north into Canada, including Waterton-Glacier National Parks, Flathead and Kootenai National Forests, and Stillwater State Forest. Whitefish Legacy Partners, with the support of the community, works to conserve key habitat and open space, protect the Whitefish watershed and the City's drinking water supply, and guarantee permanent public access and managed recreation, all while sustaining local timber jobs. Increasing development pressure threatens the health of our local natural resources, as the area is incredibly desirable. Protection of these resources requires an active and engaged community that seeks to balance growth with natural resource protection through responsible land management decisions and conservation action.



Vital Habitat

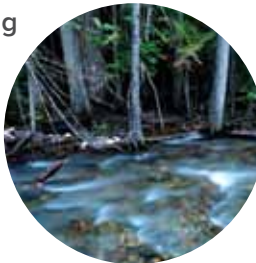
The high-quality forests, meadows, wetlands, and creeks surrounding Whitefish are home to a wide range of signature wildlife species, including elk, mule deer, moose, gray wolf, black bear, and bobcat.

Much of the habitat also serves as core recovery areas for the threatened Canada lynx and an endangered population of grizzly bear, in addition to many wetland and forest dependent birds, bats, butterflies, and dragonflies that are listed as priority species in the MT Partners In Flight Bird Conservation

Plan. Much of this habitat has been identified as having critical wildlife connectivity values, providing key linkage zones for various wide-ranging carnivores and ungulates.

Our Water

Our community is blessed with many streams, wetlands, and lakes dotting the surrounding landscape, with Whitefish Lake being the largest and most ecologically and economically influential waterbody. Whitefish Lake is fed by six tributaries encircling the lake, including Swift, Smith, and Lazy Creeks at the north end of the lake which supply nearly 90% of the lake's water. The City of Whitefish currently gets 25% of its municipal water supply from Whitefish Lake and 75% from Haskill Creek. Preserving our resilient landscapes and vital habitat protects our local watershed.



RECREATION

Since 2010, the Whitefish Trail has become an important community asset with 47 miles of natural surface, non-motorized trails accessed from 15 trailheads surrounding Whitefish Lake. This community-driven and donor-supported project is a collaboration between Whitefish Legacy Partners, the City of Whitefish, and the MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

In 2022 and in partnership with Flathead National Forest, Whitefish Legacy Partners completed construction of the Whitefish Trail at Holbrook Overlook. Situated on 156 acres of USFS land halfway up Big Mountain Road, Holbrook features four miles of new trail and a welcoming scenic overlook with stunning views of the Flathead Valley. In upcoming years, Holbrook will connect into Hellroaring Basin and eventually to Smith Lake at the head of Whitefish Lake.

In 2023, we will improve access at Smith Lake with new trail and lakeshore amenities, including a dock, viewing platform, and bench. This new day-use area will ensure sustainable public access to a beloved local place that will provide a family-friendly and quiet recreation opportunity at Smith Lake.

As we continue to create community outdoor recreation destinations and the Whitefish Trail system matures and expands, our work to maintain, manage, and operate the Whitefish Trail must also shift and adapt. This is an ongoing challenge that WLP, the City of Whitefish, and the dedicated community of people who donate, support, and volunteer in countless ways are ready to meet.

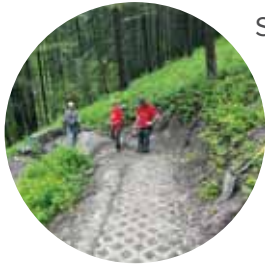


Repair the WT Wear and Tear!

Well-designed trails and trailheads require regular maintenance and attention. This maintenance keeps the Whitefish Trail in good working condition so that it can withstand regular use and varied weather conditions. Routine maintenance projects include ongoing work such as clearing trail drainage features and re-staining benches and picnic tables. Work can also be more complicated as with two important projects completed in 2022:

TRAILHEAD GRADING

The 15 Whitefish Trail trailheads are the well-loved access points that we all use to get to the trail. To ensure continued easy and safe access, parking lot and road grading work was completed at Lion Mountain, Big Mountain, and Swift Creek Trailheads. In an effort to maintain all trailheads, we initiated a rotating repair schedule that ensures all trails regularly receive corrective maintenance.



SWITCHBACK ARMORING

On the steep sections of Lower Haskill, switchbacks are getting eroded from steady use. In partnership with the Flathead Area Mountain Bikers (FAMB) Trail Crew and members of the WLP Volunteer Trail Crew, the WT Trail Coordinator reinforced steep turns and returned the trail to good working order. This armoring work involved excavating two switchbacks, laying rock pavers within the switchbacks, then covering the pavers with a mixture of gravel and dirt.

Be Kind Outside!

As the total number of trail users increases, we are working on more than just keeping the trails in good condition. We are also focusing on user etiquette outreach campaigns to ensure everyone knows how best to enjoy recreational trails responsibly and courteously. One example that is making a difference on the Whitefish Trail through digital outreach, in-person events, and informational signs, is the Outside Kind Flathead campaign.



Though there are many recreation rules that are the same for all user groups—Respect Wildlife, Leave No Trace—there are also considerations for different user groups. Communicating the various lessons to each user group is complicated, and Outside Kind Flathead is a valley-wide campaign, led by WLP, that hopes to simplify rules among user groups and focuses on being kind and thoughtful. This summer, look for our Outside Kind materials throughout the Flathead and on the Whitefish Trail, and do your best to be kind to one another as we all enjoy these shared recreational spaces together.

Visit outsidekind.org/flathead for more information on hike kind, wag kind, ride kind, ski kind, and trot kind.



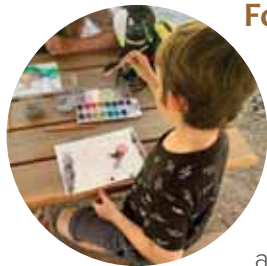
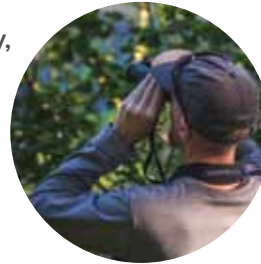


EDUCATION

The Whitefish Trail serves as a portal to bring people outdoors and provides the community a connection to the natural lands surrounding Whitefish. Whitefish Legacy Partners facilitates outings on the Whitefish Trail for all ages and strives to provide relevant school curriculum programs, encourage outdoor education, and increase awareness of our local natural resources. Our Whitefish Trail programs offer opportunities for our community to learn about the value of conservation and open lands surrounding Whitefish.

Free Community Programs

WLP offers free outdoor education opportunities to the community, including school field trips, guided community hikes and bikes, youth-specific activities, adult speaker series, and trail fitness programs. Guided hikes include spring wildflowers, bird watching, mushroom identification, snow science, and more. Youth-specific hikes include field sketching, nature art, insect identification, and forest exploration. The goal of our free education programs is to empower youth and engage the community.



Forest Explorers

Forest Explorers Camp offers a unique opportunity for kids ages 7-11 to explore the Whitefish Trail during a four-day camp at the Whitefish Trail Learning Pavilion at Lion Mountain. Campers enjoy fun-filled days with hikes, art activities, and games while connecting with the natural world and meeting new friends. Whether learning about forest critters, building fairy houses, or capturing the views in a painting, campers learn about the animals and ecosystems that surround them through creativity, play, and exploration.

Girls on the Trail

Girls on the Trail is a collaboration between Whitefish Legacy Partners and community partners for girls ages 12 to 15 to experience mountain biking, hiking, photography, writing, and community service. The four-day program provides teenage girls throughout the Flathead Valley an opportunity to find a love for mountain biking, an appreciation of trails and open lands, and to develop their own creativity and strength through hard work and mentorship.





EVENTS

Whitefish Legacy Partners hosts three fundraising events each year to engage the community and celebrate together. These events provide us an opportunity to celebrate all that the Whitefish Trail contributes to the quality of our lives and the vitality of our community.

Hit the Trail! Challenge

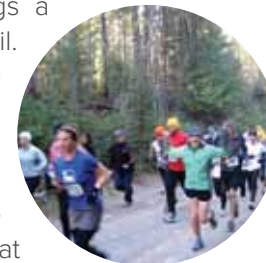
The Hit the Trail! Challenge occurs during the month of May and inspires the community to live active and healthy lifestyles. We challenge the community to log their miles on the Whitefish Trail during the month while running, biking, hiking, or horseback riding. For every mile logged on the Whitefish Trail, \$1 is donated back to the trail and our local conservation lands. The 2022 Trail Challenge engaged over 600 individuals, including 12 Workplace Teams and the Whitefish Middle School, for a total of 29,083 miles on the Whitefish Trail: 6,100 miles logged were hiked, 12,806 miles biked, 4,055 miles run, and 34 miles were logged on horseback, generating \$29,083! Thank you, Whitefish.



open lands with live music, local craft beer, food trucks, a raffle, and kids' activities, including a bike obstacle course. All proceeds support conservation, recreation, and education on our local conservation lands.

Whitefish Trail Legacy Run

Every fall, the Whitefish Trail Legacy Run brings a weekend of running events to the Whitefish Trail. The WT Legacy Run weekend engages over 800 community members, including racers and volunteers. Saturday's 50k Mountain Ultra starts and ends in Depot Park in downtown Whitefish, climbs to the summit of Big Mountain via the Whitefish Trail in Haskill, and finishes at the Great Northwest Oktoberfest. Sunday's races include a half marathon, 10k+, 5k+, or family fun run starting and ending at the Whitefish Bike Retreat in Beaver Lakes. These events connect the community and visitors to our local lands, while celebrating how far we've come to "Close the Loop" of the Whitefish Trail.



Whitefish Trail Hootenanny

The Whitefish Trail Hootenanny, held annually in late August, is a music festival, fundraiser, and one of our favorite family community events! The WT Hootenanny brings over 1,200 community members together in downtown Depot Park to celebrate the Whitefish Trail and our



For more information on upcoming events, visit whitefishlegacy.org/events.



WHITEFISH TRAIL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Audra Tasa has been giving back to the Whitefish Trail as a volunteer for years. In 2022, Audra volunteered 500+ hours as a WT Trail Patroller, WT Legacy Run and WT Hootenanny volunteer, and education volunteer.

One of her favorite volunteer days was helping with Girls on the Trail mountain biking. She says “The girls took to mountain biking the trail in no time and were having so much fun. They were cheering each other on and wanting to get more and more adventurous. Their joy and energy were so infectious that my face literally hurt from smiling all day. It was just an overall incredible day.”

Volunteers like Audra find a variety of ways to give back and make the Whitefish Trail an important part of the community. We are so grateful to Audra for making volunteering on the Whitefish Trail a big part of her life and for bringing her own infectious joy and energy to the trail.

To learn more about WLP’s volunteer opportunities and how you can give back to the community in a fun way, visit: www.whitefishlegacy.org/give-back.

“

I am so grateful for our trail system and all it offers. Volunteering with WLP is simply a win-win, and I am thankful for the opportunity to give back to a resource that provides so much for so many.” – Audra Tasa



FINANCIALS



WHITEFISH LEGACY PARTNERS ANNUAL OPERATIONS & PROGRAMS

Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2022

Whitefish Legacy Partners' programs supporting conservation, recreation, education, fundraising, and community outreach are the backbone of the organization. Six dedicated, paid staff lead the efforts working to accomplish the community's vision with guidance and leadership from an 11-person volunteer Board of Directors.

Revenue	2022
Grants	\$84,240
Great Fish Community Challenge	\$176,587
Corporate Sponsors	\$40,336
Donations	
Friends & Families	\$37,655
Major Donors	\$138,534
Events & Merchandise	\$113,660
Programs	\$3,677
Total	<u>\$594,689</u>
Expenses	
Operations	
Conservation Programs	\$77,546
Education Programs	\$63,465
Recreation Programs	\$147,508
Fundraising	\$57,297
Community Outreach	\$61,391
Administration	\$18,467
Investments	
2023 Programs	\$100,000
Future Whitefish Trail	\$55,953
Total	<u>\$581,626</u>
Non-Cash Contributions	
Volunteer Labor	\$47,635
In-Kind Goods & Services	\$32,267

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY!

Whitefish Legacy Partners established a Montana accredited endowment in 2011 with the Whitefish Community Foundation. The Fund safeguards the long-term health of our community trail system by funding maintenance in perpetuity—for current and future generations.



FUND BALANCE:
\$1,281,805
as of December 31, 2022

ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION:
4% OR ~\$50,000
in perpetuity

Make a legacy donation and enrich the Whitefish Trail FOREVER.
www.whitefishlegacy.org/ways-to-donate



FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2022

Revenue	
USFS Challenge Cost Share	\$18,900
Non-profit Partners	\$5,750
Corporate Sponsors	\$2,200
Total	<u>\$26,850</u>
Expenses	
Professional Services	\$18,550
Events	\$2,826
Administration	\$697
Total	<u>\$22,073</u>

THE WHITEFISH TRAIL

ANNUAL PROJECT

Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2022

WLP fundraises each year to support new construction and operations and maintenance on the Whitefish Trail. The budget is managed collaboratively with the City of Whitefish.

HOLBROOK OVERLOOK

Revenue

Grants	\$150,955
Private Donations	\$156,165
Total	\$307,120

Expenses

Planning & Design	\$35,425
Trail Construction	\$33,485
Trailhead & Amenities	\$238,210
Total	\$307,120

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

Revenue

Grants	\$58,707
Private Donations	\$8,814
Partner Contributions	
Glacier Nordic Club	\$1,995
Flathead Area Mtn Bikers	\$6,160
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$449
Endowment Distribution	\$19,708
Total	\$95,883

Expenses

Operations	\$35,660
Maintenance	\$52,359
Programs	\$8,814
Total	\$95,883

TOTAL PROJECT

2010-2022

The Whitefish Trail first opened in 2010 at Lion Mountain with new sections of the Whitefish Trail added each year. The original WT investment was led by community-minded donors and leveraged by WLP to secure the State's largest Recreational Trails Program grant supporting a project of regional significance. Twelve years later, with annual contributions thanks to the generosity of trail users, conservation-minded supporters, and local businesses, the Whitefish Trail is 47 miles, accessed from 15 trailheads, with education programs based at the WT Learning Pavilion at Lion Mountain.



FUTURE PROJECTS

2023-2030

WLP secures grants and donations every year on behalf of the Whitefish Trail and plans for future construction, maintenance, and management. WLP invests in the future of the Whitefish Trail strategically and with prudent fiscal responsibility. Recreation opportunities will expand at Smith Lake in 2023 and 2025-2027, connect the Whitefish Trail from Holbrook Overlook to Hellroaring Basin in 2025, and connect Hellroaring Basin to Smith Lake in 2026. Future WT connections to Close the Loop of the Whitefish Trail optimistically will be completed by 2030.



2022 Grants, 2023-2025	\$73,750
2022 Restricted Private Donations	\$30,000
2022 Board-designated Investment in future	\$55,953
New Construction Reserves	\$164,132
Total	\$323,835

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Community conservation is the foundation of WLP's work, and we work with public and private partners and donors to create lasting legacies. WLP led our community's first conservation project in 2014 protecting 1,520 acres forever in Beaver Lakes. Haskill Basin was the source of the second community conservation project in 2016 involving numerous partners to protect 3,022 acres and the City's drinking water. WLP acts as the local community catalyst to create beneficial outcomes and protect critical landscapes for the community.



SMITH LAKE LEGACY Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2022

Private Donations—2017-2021	\$656,631
Private Donations—2022	\$230,624
Private Donations—pledged, 2023-2026	\$1,590,000
Foundations	\$210,000
Total	\$2,687,255

Land Board consideration April 2024, MT State Trust Land 600-acre easement acquisition

BEAVER LAKES \$7.3M + **HASKILL BASIN** \$16.7M = **\$24M**

100% funded locally 46% or \$7.7M funded locally 2012-2016



SUPPORT

Thank you for supporting conservation, education, and recreation in our community!



AGL Foundation

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Alix Partners
Amazon Smiles
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Carin Weinrich
Aimee Weller
William & Karen Whitby
Whitefish Pottery
Amy & Tim Williams
Brenda Wilmore

Bold print indicates supporters who have given every year for 5 years. Every effort is made to correctly list and thank each supporter who allows us to make a public acknowledgement of their gifts to Whitefish Legacy Partners. If your name is missing or incorrect, we apologize for our error. Please contact us with corrections at (406) 862-3880 or email us at info@whitefishlegacy.org.

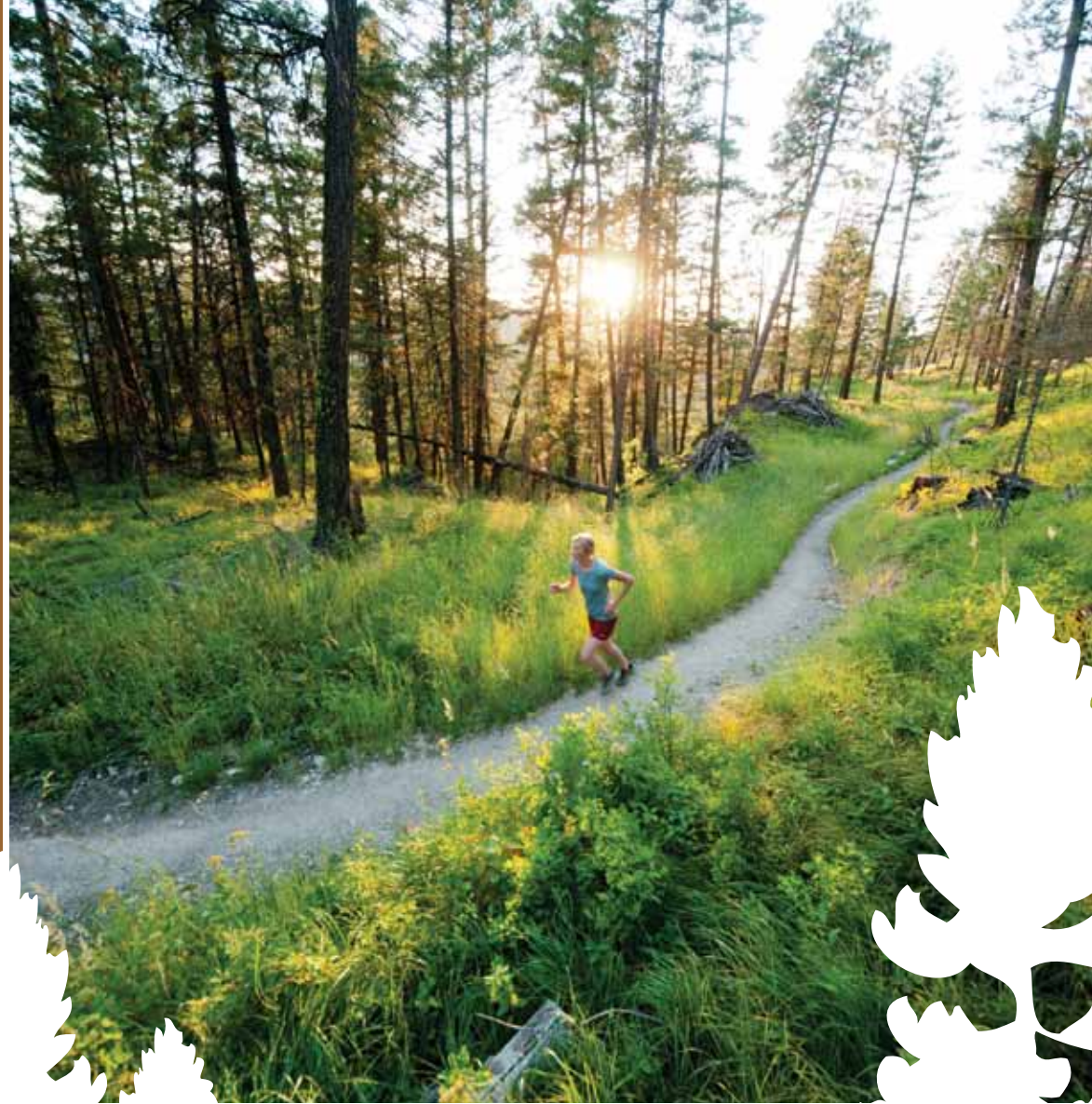


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 Bill & Betsy Bayne
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WLP RAISED
\$132,309

WCF MATCH
\$11,800

INCENTIVE
 GRANTS
\$1,200

DONORS:
360
 INCLUDING
34
 NEW

Supporting Smith Lake Legacy & WLP Programs!

A7 Cycles

Kevin & Christine Abel

Koel & Lazette Abell

David & Ruth Ackroyd

AGL Foundation

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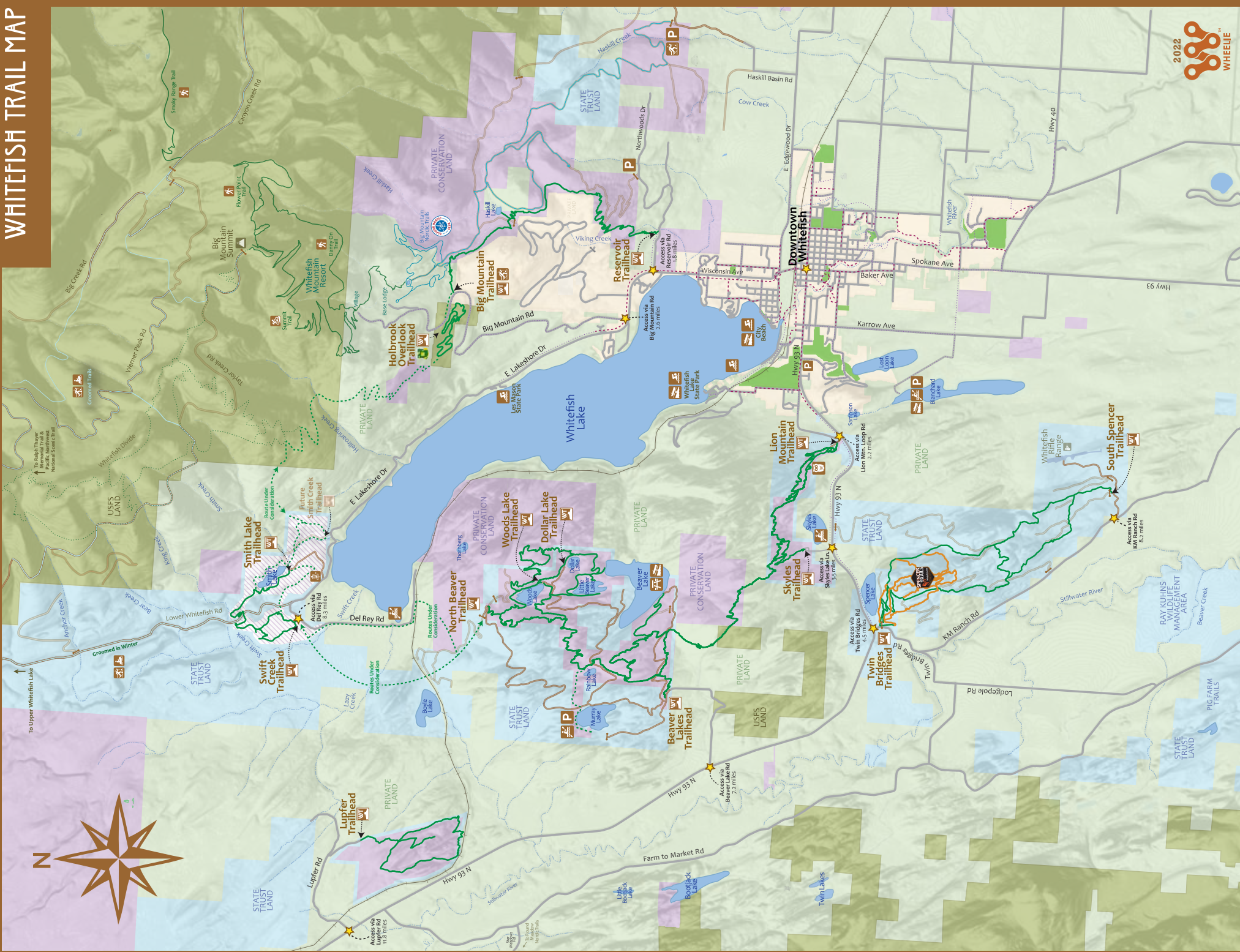
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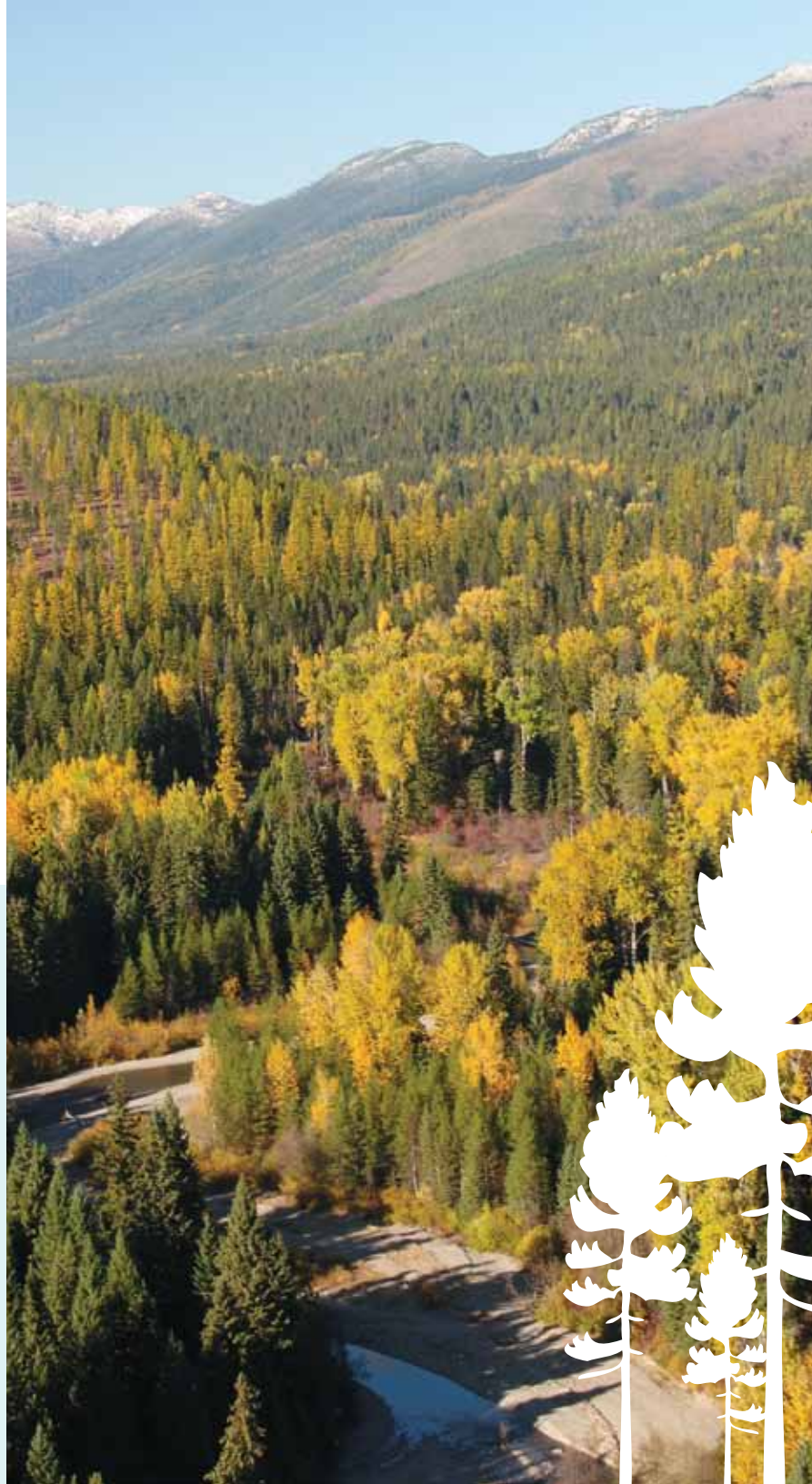
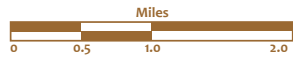
WHITEFISH TRAIL MAP





LEGEND

- The Whitefish Trail & Trailheads
- - - Proposed Whitefish Trail
- Spencer Freeride Trails
- Groomed Nordic Trails
- Community Trails
- - - Future Community Trails
- ★ Distance From Downtown
- - - Existing City Paths
- - - Proposed City Paths
- Groomed Trails
- State Lands
- USFS Land
- City Parks
- City Limits
- Private Land
- Conservation Land
- ▨ Proposed Conservation Land



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