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Ref: DO011-25
March 20, 2025

Whitefish City Council
418 E 2nd Street
Whitefish, MT 59937

Dear Council Members,

As you know, the City of Whitefish applied for a Montana Stream Protection Act permit (SPA 124 Permit) to construct a section of trail along the Whitefish River connecting the existing trail on BNSF property near Railway Street downstream to the existing trail terminus near the Veterans Bridge on Second Street.

Based on environmental review (EA) of the project, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks must deny the SPA 124 permit application. While this decision was not taken lightly, I applaud your innovative idea to expand the Whitefish River Trail and increase its connectivity throughout your community. That being said, FWP takes seriously its responsibility to balance outdoor recreation and our state's natural resources.

This decision rests on our responsibility to protect and conserve our fisheries and habitat. Our hard-working biologists concluded this project would have long-term adverse impacts to the Whitefish River's bed, banks, and fishery. Impacts include major modifications to in-stream and bank habitat, and decreased bank stability resulting in erosion. The proposed project footprint alone, including piers, asphalt, and the associated retaining walls, would result in direct loss of significant riparian vegetation and increase erosion. In short, this project would fundamentally change the natural, existing state of fish habitat in the project area.

I encourage you to read the EA, Decision Notice, and alternative proposal including suggestions for achieving the goal sought by the Council. At the very least, we can start thinking about and discussing different solutions to complete the Whitefish River Trail, recognizing its importance to the community.

I appreciate the time and effort your community put forth in submitting proposal. As always, my door is always open. Please reach out to me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Adam Strainer
Fisheries Division Administrator