

Welcome to our neighborhood newsletter - a place to catch up on news and updates from your Lion Mountain Owners Association (LMOA). If you have information you'd like included in our next issue, please contact Kim Solem at kim_solem@msn.com.

Lion Mountain

OWNERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER | Spring 2026

YOUR LMOA BOARD

- Lauren King, President
- Ragnar Stoelzle, Vice President
- John Novak, Treasurer
- John Costa, Secretary
- Keith Quisberg
- Jon Solem
- Sandy Stash

WORKING COMMITTEES

The LMOA Board oversees several working committees that address specific neighborhood issues by gathering information, assessing problems and recommending solutions to the Board. Committees and Chairs include:

- Finance: John Novak
- Roads: Ragnar Stoelzle
- Communications: Lauren King
- Security: Ragnar Stoelzle
- Architectural: Keith Quisberg
- Water: Lauren King/Sandy Stash
- Beach: Ragnar Stoelzle
- Septic: Keith Quisberg
- 2050 Planning: Jon Solem
- Social: Rochell Montana
- Welcome: Jennifer Robinson
- Weeds: Jane Decker & Dugan Reber
- Firewise: Ed Lieser

Interested in getting involved? We'd love your help. Please contact the chairperson for each committee. You'll find more information about the Board including contact details, committee reports and meeting minutes on the LMOA website.



Protecting Lion Mountain from Wildfires

Weather and climate experts are predicting another hot, dry summer in the Flathead Valley. One of the most effective ways we can protect our neighborhood from wildfire—and reduce the risk of home loss—is by clearing dense trees and dead shrubs throughout the community. While these efforts won't prevent a fire from starting, they can help slow or limit its spread. They can also help keep fire insurance costs more manageable.

Lion Mountain's dense forests and steep slopes can allow fires to spread quickly. Along with removing dead and downed vegetation, consider making tree thinning part of your annual property maintenance. This means removing smaller trees and undergrowth that can act as fuel during late summer. Thinning also helps healthier trees thrive by reducing competition for water, sunlight, and nutrients, while supporting a more diverse and resilient forest.

The easiest time to thin is when trees are still small enough to cut with pruning shears. A simple approach is to choose the healthiest tree within a 10-foot area and remove the others. Repeating this every few years helps prevent the need for more difficult and costly removal of larger trees later on.

Pruning is another important step. Trimming both live and dead branches on larger trees as far as you can reach can help prevent fires from climbing into the canopy and becoming more dangerous crown fires.

For more guidance, visit mtfireinfo.org, which offers helpful information on creating a property plan and reducing wildfire risk. Simple steps like maintaining defensible space and clearing fuels near your home can significantly improve its chances of withstanding a wildfire.

NEIGHBORHOOD BRUSH COLLECTION

It's time to start clearing downed branches to help reduce wildfire fuel across Lion Mountain. Homeowners are encouraged to add small diameter green trees and shrubs from dense thickets. These clusters of vegetation become ignition sources and carriers of fire, particularly on steep slopes. This HOA-sponsored service is intended for small branches that are easy for one person to lift but is not designed for large trees. Please keep piles free of rocks and roots. Neighbors are encouraged to gather piles in the spring, but we ask that you keep the roadsides clear of piles at all other times of the year for fire safety and to aid in snow removal. HOA chipping dates will be announced soon.

The Lion Mountain HOA will also be hiring a contractor to cut dead trees and clumps of dead brush along the road corridor this summer. These roads create a fuel break in the event of a wind-driven fire. These activities will ensure Lion Mountain remains a certified Firewise Community by the National Fire Prevention Association.

COUNTY BURNING REGULATIONS

Burn permits in Flathead County are required from May 1 through June 30. Call (406) 751-8144 for daily air quality updates before burning. No burning is allowed during peak fire season (July–September).

Whenever possible, consider chipping brush or letting it decompose naturally—it improves soil health, supports wildlife, and avoids air pollution.

In addition, please keep in mind the following wildfire prevention tips:

Never park your vehicle in tall, dry grass. The heat from your undercarriage and exhaust pipe can cause accidental ignition.

Dragging chains can easily spark a wildfire. When traveling with any type of trailer, ensure your chains are properly connected..

The mtfireinfo.org website contains important information to help you prepare for an evacuation. It also has recommendations for managing vegetation to improve your home's chances of surviving a wildfire.

EMERGENCY & FIRE EGRESS

As we enter fire season, remember that we have three routes to safely exit our neighborhood in the event of an emergency. In addition to the main Lion Mountain entrance/exit at State Park Road, you can exit via Wolf Tail Pines access gate at the top of Good Medicine Drive, or via the Goguen/Two Bear Ranch property access road in Lion Mountain Ranches.

You can find maps, gate codes and other details on the LMOA website. Please become familiar with these options; print out egress information and store a copy in each of your vehicles.



Important Fire Service Board Election in May

The Whitefish Fire Service Area (WFSA) provides fire protection services to Lion Mountain and approximately 3,200 residents living outside the City of Whitefish through a contract with the City's fire department. The area is governed by a five-member board of trustees responsible for ensuring adequate fire protection for all residents.

This May, two seats on the WFSA Board will be up for election. Ballots are expected to be mailed to residents on April 17. The Lion Mountain HOA Board encourages all residents to stay informed about the issues and candidates so we can help support a strong, effective board focused on improving fire protection and reducing response times across our area.

Lion Mountain homeowners are invited to a community meeting to discuss fire service issues and meet the candidates. The meeting will be held on **April 16 at 7pm at the Marriot Townplace Suites, 300 Akers Lane in Whitefish**. All residents are encouraged to attend.

The WFSA is one of the largest fire service areas in Montana, covering more than 75 square miles. It is currently served by a single active fire station in downtown Whitefish, which means that some residents experience response times of up to 35 minutes. Residential development in the service area has grown exponentially, and fire protection services have not kept pace.

Addressing funding challenges is critical to improving service. Currently, residents in the WFSA pay a flat annual fee of \$180 for fire protection. Over the past year, the WFSA Board circulated a petition in an attempt to convert the service area into a formal fire district. This change would allow funding through a mill levy rather than a flat fee, generating significantly more revenue. It would also give residents greater input into how fire services are managed and funded. The petition has not achieved the required level of support, so the WFSA Board is pursuing an alternative approach.

In February, the Board voted to request a fee increase of 230% from the Flathead County Commissioners to fund additional firefighters for the Whitefish Fire Department. If approved, this approach would increase funding but preclude direct voter

influence over how resources are prioritized and allocated.

Along with the funding request of the Commissioners, the WFSA Board identified four priorities:

1. Funding four additional firefighters for the Whitefish station
2. Allocating approximately \$1.1 million to remodel the Hodgson station to enable response from that location
3. Continuing efforts to convert to a fire district
4. Identifying a future fire station site west of Whitefish

Some residents have expressed concern that the first two priorities will not improve response times. Adding staff at the downtown Whitefish station will not reduce travel distances to outlying homes, and utilizing the Hodgson station will increase response times by ten minutes for residents west of Whitefish. Residents have asked the WFSA Board for a comprehensive strategic plan outlining clear goals, timelines, and expected outcomes for the 230% fee increase. There has been strong community support for prioritizing a new fire station west of Whitefish, though this has not yet been a primary focus of the Board.

In addition to fire protection, many residents face increasing challenges obtaining affordable fire insurance. Much of the WFSA lies within a wildland-urban interface, where homes are surrounded by dense forest at elevated risk of wildfire. Most insurance providers require homes to be within five miles of a fire station to qualify for reasonable rates. Many properties in the WFSA fall outside this range, placing homeowners at risk of significantly higher premiums—or loss of coverage altogether. Expanding the number and location of fire stations throughout the WFSA is a critical solution to this issue.

The April 16 community meeting will provide an opportunity to explore these topics in more detail and hear directly from candidates running for the WFSA Board, including Brian Cole and David Ordway. Both candidates have expressed a focus on representing rural and fire-prone areas that are currently underserved.

Septic Systems & Whitefish Lake: Doing Our Part

For years, scientists have been studying the impact of local resident septic systems on Whitefish Lake. Studies dating back to the 1970s have consistently shown that septic leachate is affecting our water quality. More recent reports suggest the lake may be nearing a tipping point, making this an important issue for our entire community.

Whitefish Lake is central to our quality of life. It provides drinking water, recreation, wildlife habitat, and helps support property values. Protecting it is a shared responsibility.

One of the main concerns about lake water quality, and an area where Lion Mountain residents can have a positive impact, is **septic leachate**—wastewater that can move through soil and groundwater into the lake. While some septic issues are obvious (like backups), others are invisible and can quietly cause long-term water quality problems. Nutrients like phosphorus from household wastewater can fuel algae growth and degrade lake health.

Many of the septic systems in our neighborhood are aging. Even well-maintained systems have a limited lifespan, and

failures—especially underground—are more common than many realize. Homeowners can make a real difference by:

- Regularly inspecting, maintaining and pumping septic systems
- Learning how their system works
- Being mindful of what goes down drains and into the system

The Western Montana Conservation Commission seeks to reduce pollution from wastewater to our ground and surface water resources by leveraging science, creating local partnerships, and inspiring community action. You can learn more about their work here: <https://westernmtwaters.com/our-work-and-projects/nonpoint-source-projects/septic-leachate/>

Communities across the country have faced costly consequences after delaying action on wastewater issues. By staying informed and working together, we can help protect Whitefish Lake for future generations.



CONSERVING LION MOUNTAIN WATER RESOURCES

With below-normal snowpack this year, water conservation will again be important for Lion Mountain over the coming summer. On average, households in our neighborhood use about 800 gallons per day in summer—significantly higher than other times of year.

Last summer, our collective water conservation efforts made a real difference. Let's keep that momentum going! Here are a few simple ways to help reduce water use:

- Let lawns go dormant or turn off decorative water features
- Fix leaks in toilets, faucets, and irrigation systems
- Water less often, but more deeply—or not at all
- Water gardens in the early morning
- Aerate lawns to improve moisture retention
- Use native plants and mulch to reduce evaporation
- Collect rainwater with barrels
- Mow high and leave clippings to shade the soil
- Use commercial car washes, which typically use less water

If you have questions about our water resources, contact Water Committee Chair Lauren King at mrs.mtn.king@gmail.com.

NEIGHBORHOOD SEPTIC PUMPING

Many households in Lion Mountain utilize septic systems which need to be pumped every 3-5 years. In an attempt to help neighbors stay on top of septic maintenance and to secure a volume discount, the HOA is organizing a neighborhood septic pumping opportunity this summer. Participants will receive discounted service and a \$50 HOA credit.

Septic pumping involves a professional technician using a vacuum truck to remove accumulated waste from a septic tank. The process includes inspecting baffles and structural integrity, cleaning, and safe, compliant disposal of waste to prevent system backups and drainfield failure.

BEACH & MARINA GATE CODES

New Beach Lane gate codes will be emailed out to all neighbors soon. Each household has a unique code. To keep our neighborhood safe, please don't share it, including with renters.

Anytime you need to access your Beach Gate Code, there are two easy ways to find it:

1. Log-in to the [LMOA website](#) and open your profile.
2. Download the app for our database (Wild Apricot), which will allow you to access your Beach Gate Code from your phone.

Wildfire Updates

If you'd like updates on fire activity in our area, **Watch Duty** is an excellent resource. This free app and web-based notification system alerts you of nearby wildfires and firefighting efforts in real-time. You can access it via the website, watchduty.org, or download it to your phone from Google Play or the App Store.



Roads Update

Crack sealing will be taking place again this summer on Lion Mountain roads—please watch for workers and equipment. The Lion Mountain Roads Committee is currently in planning phases with our roads engineering firm to identify next steps for ongoing road maintenance projects. Homeowners can help protect our roads by ensuring contractors avoid using Four-Wheel Drive and stick to Lion Mountain Drive when traveling to job sites. This helps reduce wear and keeps steep areas safer for everyone.

BE BEAR AWARE

Bears are active again—please help keep both wildlife and neighbors safe:

- Carry bear spray when walking
- Secure trash and recycling (bring bins in at night)
- Avoid leaving pet food outdoors
- Keep grills clean
- Use bird feeders only in winter
- Share sightings with neighbors via Nextdoor or Facebook
- Contact Fish & Wildlife if needed (Justine Vallieres: 406-250-1265)



Upcoming Neighborhood Gatherings

Your Lion Mountain social committee has some fun activities in the works, so come on out and connect with neighbors! Mark your calendars for two upcoming dates: May 16 for a progressive dinner, and June 28 for a Woody Weekend beach gathering. Watch for more details to come via email and flyers on the mailboxes. If you have questions or would like to help, please contact Social Committee chair Rochell Montana at r.montana@therapy4me.org.

