



DATE: 12 May, 2003
SUBJECT: Charter

The problem

Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the coterminous United States were listed as threatened, under the Endangered Species Act, on November 1, 1999 (64 FR 58910). Bull trout distribution, abundance, and habitat quality have declined over their entire range. Bull trout continue to occur in local populations in the Columbia River, Klamath River, Jarbidge River, St. Mary-Belly River basins. In November, 2002 the US Fish And Wildlife Service (FWS) released a draft recovery plan for bull trout. Throughout the recovery plan, monitoring and evaluation are identified as essential to recovery planning and implementation. Proper monitoring and evaluation are necessary to characterize the status of bull trout populations, before and after implementation of recovery actions, and to allow for an assessment of recovery action effectiveness. In many cases, however, specific details concerning how, where and when to monitor bull trout population attributes and their habitats as well as which analytical techniques would be statistically sound and rigorous are not well defined.

Recover Monitoring and Evaluation Group

To help develop specific details concerning how, where and when to monitor bull trout and their habitats as well as which analytical techniques would be statistically sound and rigorous, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is establishing a Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Group (RMEG).

Mission or purpose

The RMEG will serve to maximize the amount of information from existing studies that is useful to bull trout recovery planning as well as to direct and prioritize future monitoring efforts associated with bull trout recovery implementation.

Benefit

The RMEG will provide technical guidance to bull trout monitoring and evaluation efforts throughout the region. Benefits will include 1) increasing the utility of current data collection; 2) guidance and prioritization of future studies; 3) summarization of monitoring and evaluation needs of cooperators; 4) fostered coordination among monitoring programs; 5) the development and standardization of design elements; and 6) a review of analytical methods for characterizing population and habitat status.

Process

The RMEG is an extension of the Science Team (ST) in Region 1 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Specific assignments for the RMEG will come from the ST who receives their direction from Region 1's, Management Oversight Team. Technical questions that are associated with monitoring and evaluation (specifically when, where and how) will be directed from the ST to the RMEG. The RMEG will then proceed to conduct a rigorous assessment, analysis, review or development of approaches to monitoring and evaluation questions.





Products

The RMEG may be involved in both short- and long-term assignments and generate products accordingly. Short-term assignments may involve (for example) reviews of specific monitoring proposals or summaries of the monitoring and evaluation needs of cooperators. Products from short-term assignments will include a written response to the MOT. Long-term assignments may involve (for example) recommendations of appropriate scale and protocols for various management questions, and critiques of analytical methods for estimating population status and monitoring effectiveness. Products from long-term assignments will include a written report (or perhaps a white paper or peer-review article) and, potentially, a presentation to the ST and MOT. The RMEG will make a legitimate effort to respond to a given question in a timely manner. However, the timeframe in which the RMEG can respond will depend on the scope of the question and competing priorities.

External Peer Review

Draft products from the ST must be provided to federal agencies, states, and tribes as well as university and industry personnel for their review and comment. Given that the RMEG is an extension of the ST, all RMEG products will also be provided for external peer review. After consideration of the external peer review, products from the RMEG will be finalized.

Group Composition

The RMEG will be a multi-agency body chaired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fisheries technical staff and independently facilitated. The RMEG will consist of approximately 10-12 members and represent a balance of skills in population dynamics, char biology, field studies, biometrics, and experimental design. Since this group has a specific function associated with bull trout recovery and the group should be relatively short-lived, the goal will be to have permanent appointments. However, new members may be added to the RMEG when existing members must resign from their appointment or when additional expertise is required.

Time Commitment

It is anticipated that the RMEG will have one or two days meetings, three or four times each year, for a total meeting commitment of four to eight days each year. From these meetings, specific assignments may be made to certain groups or individuals. A variety of approaches, which may include individual work, teleconferencing, and email communication, may be taken to complete assignments. Overall, the expectation is that RMEG members will spend a maximum of 10% of their normal working time (or 25-30 work days per year) on RMEG issues.

Funding

The RMEG will contract the services of a facilitator. If requested, non-FWS members can be reimbursed for travel expenses associated with the activities of this group.

