



The 2014-2015 “winter” season has been busy; primarily with meeting attendance, planning for spring field work, and other miscellaneous items. While much of this work does not lend itself to interesting reporting, i.e., meeting attendance, budgeting, training, and general administrative matters, a few notable events occurred.

Following are our winter activity highlights for the Montana FWCO:

Sikes Act Work at Malmstrom Air Force Base

Dr. Elin Pierce has been busy with completing the Chapters 8 and 10 revisions to the Malmstrom Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) as well as revising the base’s wildlife hazard assessment (WHA). The INRMP is an important document which will shape natural resource activities for the next several years.

The initial draft multi-base invasive plant control planning efforts for Malmstrom, Minot, Grand Forks, F. E. Warren, Ellsworth, and Offutt Air Force Bases were finalized and distributed to appropriate FWCOs for review and comment. These control plans will help allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop base-specific strategies to control invasive plants, restore habitats, and improve natural conditions.

Lastly, Robbin Wagner has been diligently working on drafting the final summary report for our FY 14 Powwow Pond work. This work is a continuation of efforts to provide and maintain a quality recreational fishery for base personnel and their families.

Planned work for FY 15 include:

1) Initiating year-one of a two-year monitoring effort for greater sage grouse within the missile field operated by Malmstrom in North-central Montana.

2) Continued management of the recreational fishery and aquatic habitats associated with Powwow Pond.

3) Finalizing the INRMP and WHA.

4) Implementing components of the invasive plant control strategy, and

5) Continue to provide day-to-day support to base operations as they relate to natural resource management.



Dr. Elin Pierce being “coined” by Malmstrom AFB 341st Missile Wing Commander Colonel John T. Wilcox II in recognition of her contribution to environmental management on Malmstrom AFB. *Photo Credit: USAF*



St. Mary Bull Trout monitoring and conservation

Jim Mogen continues to serve as the lead biologist for the St. Mary Bull Trout recovery efforts. Much of his winter work has been split among data entry and analysis, annual report writing, and attending coordination meetings.

As a senior biologist for the Montana FWCO, Jim has worked tirelessly with Bureau of Reclamation Natural Resource Personnel, serving as Team Leader on the St. Mary Diversion Biological Review Team, and preparing fishery related reports and documents to facilitate eventual construction of the Reclamation's St. Mary Diversion and Fish Screening and Passage Facility.

Tribal Work

Technical assistance to Montana tribes has been limited this winter. However a few notable areas where the MTFWCO has provided assistance to our tribal partners are:

- 1) Researching status of reclaimed uranium mines adjacent to Crow Reservation,
- 2) Providing review and comments on the 2015 Crow, Chippewa-Cree, Gros Ventre, and Assiniboine Tribes' Water Rights Implementation Team Annual Reports,
- 3) Updated GIS distribution mapping for Sauger, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, Sage Grouse and Black-footed Ferret on Crow and Northern Cheyenne
- 4) Updated GIS distribution mapping for Grizzly Bear, Canadian Lynx, Grey Wolf, Piping Plover, Sprague's Pipit, Wolverine, Swift Fox, Fisher, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Pearl Dace, Trout Perch, and Spoonhead Sculpin on Blackfoot Reservation.

Arctic Grayling

The Montana FWCO continues to support Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) with Arctic grayling conservation within the refuge boundaries.

This winter season Jim, Andrew Gilham, and George Jordan, participated in the 2015 annual Centennial Valley Summit meeting. This is an annual coordination meeting among parties with grayling management authority within the Centennial Valley. This year, Andrew presented a summary of length-at-age data for grayling collected as part of our work on Red Rock Creek and spring work activities were coordinate with our partners. Planned activities for the 2015 field season include:

- 1) Completing year-3 of the 5-year effort to evaluate physical removal as a strategy to suppress non-native salmonids,
- 2) Repeat the larval grayling drift studies initiated in 2014,
- 3) Work with Red Rock Lakes NWR staff to establish a sound monitoring strategy to assess a planned habitat manipulation. Specifically, this will be related to Elk Springs Creek to improve survival and recruitment of Arctic Grayling in this system.

Cutthroat Trout

Montana FWCO staff attended several meetings related to cutthroat trout conservation and restoration where Robbin provided partners with updated information as part of the annual database update as well as an overview of our work to restore native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout to Crow tribal waters as well as providing Planned activities on the Crow Reservation for the 2015 field season include:

- 1) Stocking native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout into Shively Creek, Lost Creek, East Basin Creek and Rotten Grass Creek.



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Cutthroat Trout continued...

- 2) Finalizing a Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Management Plan for the Crow Reservation.
- 3) Complete the Sage Creek YCT restoration project.
- 4) Reconnaissance surveys on Little Bull Elk Creek near Bighorn Lake and Black Canyon Creek upstream of the youth camp to determine if natural migratory barriers are present in these streams.

Other Notable Events

Pathways Intern Michael (Josh) Melton completed the requirements of the Pathways Program by earning an under-graduate degree in Fish and Wildlife Management at Montana State University. Congratulations Josh!

Pathways Intern Andrew Gilham completed his class work at Montana State University and is finalizing his Master's thesis.

Administrative assistant extraordinaire, Judy Kobus-Fisk, kept the office functioning smoothly while also being able to detail into the Regional Office for two weeks.

A selection was made for a new seasonal biotech. Matthew Erickson will be joining the MTFWCO team March 23.

Taking advantage of a brief winter reprieve, Aspen Mogen and her companion Bailey seize the opportunity to [Go Outside](#).
Photo Credit: Jim Mogen, USFWS

