

Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



BILLINGS – BOZEMAN – GREAT FALLS –
LEWISTOWN

April 2015

Red Rock Lakes

April 1st, marks a Montana FWCO milestone. This was the date our fish trap was installed in Red Rock Creek, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. April 1, 2015 is now an office record for the earliest date crews have ever been able to access the refuge to install the weir and trap, really, no fooling.

The 2015 fish trap install in Red Rock Creek commenced the third year of our collaborative non-native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout suppression efforts.

This is a five-year project intended to test the hypothesis of potentially negative interactions (competition/predation)

between Arctic Grayling and introduced Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, as well as to evaluate the efficacy of using a weir and trap as a management method to reduce abundances of non-native salmonids in a small stream system.

Despite the unusually early installation of the trap,

The first of the season



Spring runoff has begun in the Centennial Valley. Correspondingly, instream temperature and flows are on the rise triggering Arctic Grayling to initiate their annual spawning migration.

The first grayling was encountered in the trap on April 20th with a total of 92 collected for the month.



Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office staff (left to right: Jim Mogen, Mat Erickson, Jason Marsh, Andrew Gilham, Josh Melton) installing a weir and trap to collect migrating Arctic Grayling from Red Rock Creek, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, MT. *Photo Credit: USFWS*

there were angling reports that suggested a large number of cutthroat trout may have ascended the stream prior to our arrival. These fish likely migrated to spawning sites upstream from our trap site.

In addition to this removal project, the fish weir and trap are also used to monitor the population of spawning Arctic Grayling. These data are used in conjunction with electrofishing surveys conducted by Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks to assess population health.

During April, approximately 450 Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout have been removed: 38 were relocated to Widgeon Pond for recreational fishing opportunities, and the remaining were donated to local food banks in Bozeman and West Yellowstone.



Non-native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (top) and Jason Marsh with a Brook Trout (left), all collected in the fish trap located in Red Rock Creek, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana.

Photo: USFWS

Air Force and USFWS collaborate on Greater Sage Grouse

Malmstrom Air Force Base is home to the 341st Missile Wing which operates and maintains 150 Minuteman III missiles across approximately 25,000 square miles in north-central Montana. Coincidentally, Greater Sage Grouse currently or historically occupy some of this same area. Partnering with the Air Force, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office conducted surveys at missile launch and alert facilities to develop better management recommendations regarding potential impacts of future projects and activities.

Armed with binoculars, spotting scopes, and good boots, Montana FWCO biologists Elin Pierce and Josh Melton and volunteers Jon Barnhill and Jo Proctor began surveys of approximately 60 missile sites that occur within areas currently or formerly occupied by Greater Sage Grouse (GrSG).

Project goals include:

- a) Determining presence or definitive absence of GrSG near launch and alert facilities;
- b) Assess the habitat in the area surrounding each of the launch and alert facilities;
- c) Utilize these data to make sound management recommendations within the Malmstrom AFB Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan.



Male Greater Sage Grouse observed on a lek (breeding area) during 2015 surveys.

Photo: Elin Pierce/USFWS

Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans



The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), with the assistance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and State fish and wildlife agencies, is responsible under the Sikes Act (16 U.S.C. 670a-670f, as amended) for carrying out programs and implementing management strategies to conserve and protect biological resources on its lands.

The Sikes Act was amended in 1997 to develop and implement mutually agreed upon Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs) through voluntary cooperative agreements between the DoD installation, FWS, and the respective state fish and wildlife agencies.

INRMPs are planning documents that allow DoD installations to implement landscape-level management of their natural resources while coordinating with various stakeholders. They are extremely important management tools that ensure military operations and natural resources conservation are integrated and consistent with stewardship and legal requirements.

Fish Passage at Lost Horse Creek to benefit Bull Trout

Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are a federally threatened species. Habitat fragmentation is an identified threat. Addressing threats promotes recovery.

Working with the Clark Fork Coalition, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, as well as other partners, we have removed a migratory barrier and restored access to Lost Horse Creek.

This project restored access to approximately 2 miles of stream habitats and eliminated chronic dewatering of approximately ¼ mile of river.



Annual “push up dam” on Lost Horse Creek used to divert the stream into an irrigation ditch (upper).

Following project completion, Lost Horse creek now flows unimpeded into the Bitterroot River (lower).

Photo: Clark Fork Coalition

National Fish Passage Program



The [National Fish Passage Program](#) (NFPP) is a voluntary, non-regulatory initiative in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that provides financial and technical assistance to remove or bypass artificial migratory barriers to help improve population levels.

If you want more information or are interested in partnering on a Montana NFPP eligible project, please contact George Jordan, Montana FWCO project leader.



*For more information, click on the following logos
Or feel free to contact any of the Montana FWCO
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