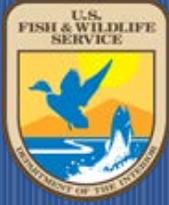


Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



BILLINGS – BOZEMAN – GREAT FALLS –
LEWISTOWN

July-August 2015

Bull Trout

Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are native to Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, and western Canada. This species has experienced dramatic declines across the contiguous United States and in 1999 were listed as “threatened” under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. This decline is broadly attributed to habitat alteration, hybridization or competition with introduced, nonnative fish species, and excessive harvest by anglers.

One population of Bull Trout really stands out as unique. This population is found in the St. Mary and Belly river drainages in Montana and Canada—the only native population east of the Continental Divide.

Since 1997, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office began working cooperatively with the Blackfoot Tribe, Glacier National Park, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to focus on gathering important information on the status and biology of the St. Mary River population in north-west Montana.

Beginning in late-July, Jim Mogen, Robbin Wagner, Josh Melton, Andrew Gilham and Mat Erickson conducted the annual Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout monitoring activities in tributaries of the St. Mary River Drainage. The 15

days of work included stream electrofishing surveys in 11 different streams and/or reaches, securement of temperature recording devices (thermographs) near the mouths of 10 different tributaries, and habitat assessment at various locations.

Additionally, we continue our collaborative efforts with Reclamation to explore, develop, and hopefully implement option to facilitate upstream passage and provide protection from entrainment (i.e., fish ladder and canal screen/bypass) at Reclamations’ St. Mary diversion dam and canal. If completed, this will be a significant step towards recovery and conservation of an important and unique native Bull Trout population.

When a “trout” is not a trout:

The common names used for fishes sometimes have little to do with how they are classified biologically.

Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are members of the “trout” family Salmonidae as are salmon, grayling and whitefish.

However, technically speaking, Bull Trout are actually classified as char (Genus: *Salvelinus*).

One general difference between trout and char is that trout have light colored bodies with dark spots and char have dark-colored bodies with light spots.



Jim "Bull Trout Whisperer" Mogen consoling a fine specimen prior to release after being collected as part of annual population survey efforts.

Photo: USFWS/ Mat Erickson

Red Rock Lakes NWR Arctic Grayling:

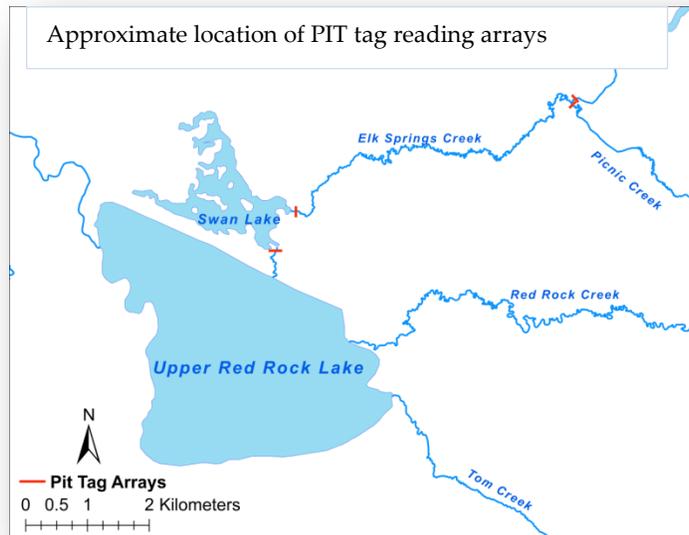
Elk Springs Creek was once a historically important spawning tributary for Arctic grayling. Currently, observations of adult grayling are rare to non-existent in this stream.

The prevailing hypothesis relates to an early 1900s re-routing of the stream's course to flow into Swan Lake and then out to Upper Red Rock Lake.

This diversion may have resulted in Swan Lake serving as a barrier of sorts due to potentially inhospitable habitat for immigrating adults and/or emigrating fry.

Montana FWCO staff have partnered with Red Rock Lakes NWR to re-route Elk Springs Creek into one of its historic channels in an effort to restore Arctic grayling. Currently this restoration effort is planned for fall of 2015 or early spring of 2016.

In advance of this habitat restoration effort, Montana FWCO seasonal biotech, Jason Marsh, has been developing both permanent and mobile tracking technology based on Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags. Jason has adapted the technology to overcome many logistical challenges associated with working in this remote refuge.



Top: 12 mm PIT tag.

Middle: Remote stationary PIT tag reading array.

Bottom: Kayak modified to serve as mobile PIT tag reading array.

Photos: USFWS/ Jason Marsh

Air Force and USFWS collaborate on Natural Resource Management under the Sikes Act:

According to the Montana County Weed Control Act, noxious weeds are defined as “plants of foreign origin that can directly or indirectly injure agriculture, navigation, fish or wildlife, or public health”. In Montana, there are 32 weeds identified as noxious that infest about 7.6 million acres. Enacted in 1948, The Montana County Noxious Weed Control Law was established to protect Montana from destructive noxious weeds and established a set of criteria for the control and management of noxious weeds in Montana.

Montana FWCO staff continued their assault on noxious weeds with the application of Telar and Tordon to patches of Whitetop and Knapweed, respectively.

While herbicide application is one tool for weed control, it is recognized that an integrated weed control strategy is the most effective. With that in mind, Elin Pierce initiated efforts to pursue a goat-grazing program for 1,300 acres of thistle and spotted knapweed, and other species planned for 2016.

POWWOW POND:
Montana FWCO biologists received approvals from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to stock Fathead Minnows (*Pimephales promelas*) as an additional prey base for Largemouth Bass.



Members of the 561st NOS (Network Operations Squadron) lending a hand with straightening and staking up some spruce trees that were pushed over by high winds. These trees were planted 18-19 June as part of the 2015 Arbor Day tree planting event .
Photo: USFWS/ Elin Pierce

Other ongoing activities for the reporting period include:

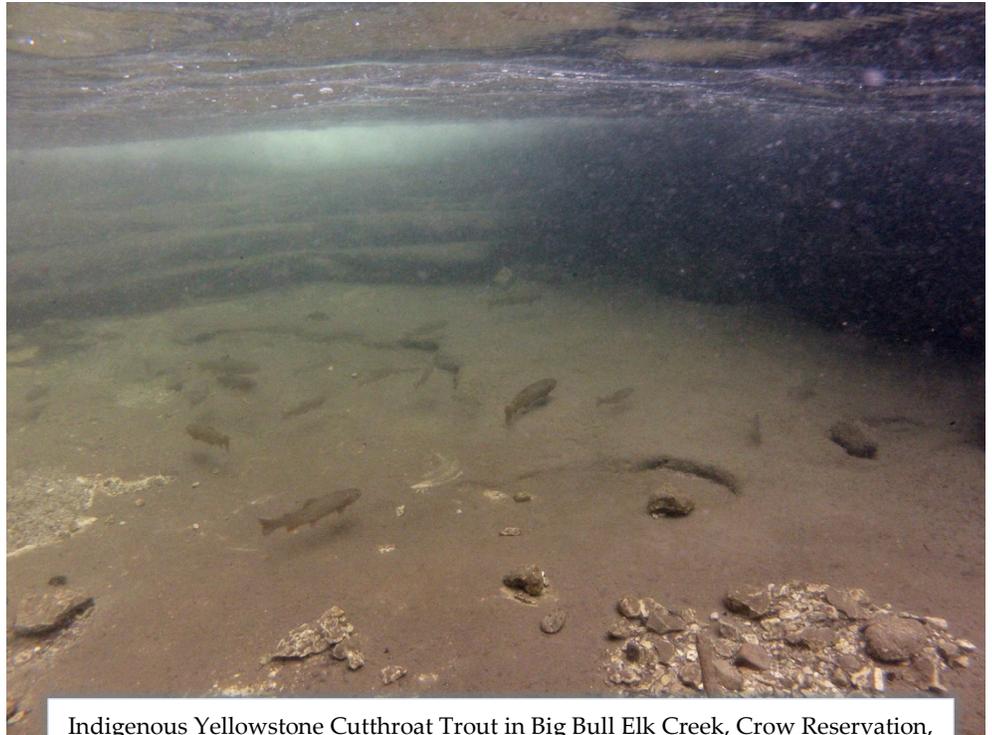
- Securing a \$6,500 grant for pollinator gardens on base.
- Develop and complete purchase agreement for aeration system for Powwow Pond.
- Provided draft Integrated Natural Resource Plan materials to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks for review and comment.
- Purchased special flicker nest boxes (starling-proof) for FY16 installation.
- Obtained data and monitored habitats related to Bird/Animal Aircraft Strike Hazard plans.
- Initiated plans for reduction in rodenticide usage and monitoring toxic substance levels in non-target species.

The Crow Tribe and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout:

Since 2002, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout conservation and restoration has been a priority partnership activity between the Crow Tribe and the Montana FWCO. During July, approximately 1,500 Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout were released in the upper section of Rotten Grass Creek in the Bighorn Mountains; and approximately 1,200 Yellowstone Cutthroat were released into a fishless section of upper East Basin Creek. These fish were supplied by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

Additionally, 50 fin clips were collected from Big Bull Elk Creek, which supports an aboriginal population of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout.

These fin clips will be part of a genetic assessment to establish the genetic fingerprint of these populations so that it can be monitored and possibly compared to other populations in the drainage.



Indigenous Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Big Bull Elk Creek, Crow Reservation, Montana. Photo: USFWS/Michael "Josh" Melton



Seasonal Biotech Mat Erickson standing in front of natural fish barrier in Big Bull Elk Creek, Crow Reservation, Montana. Photo: USFWS/Michael "Josh" Melton

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