



Arctic Grayling

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service among-division cooperation for species conservation:

As part of a collaborative Arctic Grayling conservation effort, the FAC Division is working closely with the Refuge Division to evaluate non-native trout removal. To accomplish this, a fish trap was re-installed in Red Rock Creek by Montana FWCO (MTFWCO) fishery biologists, Jim Mogen, pathways intern Andrew Gilham, and seasonal biotech, Jason Marsh. This is the second year of a five year project.



Fish trap on Red Rock Creek, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. (Photo courtesy, Jim Mogen, USFWS, Montana FWCO)

The intent of this effort is to evaluate the response of Arctic Grayling associated with removing non-native trout from refuge waters. The fish trap is checked 2 -3 times daily by MTFWCO staff and pertinent data are collected. As these non-native trout are captured and processed, Refuge staff are distributing them to local Food Banks across three counties in south-west Montana. As of

May 2, a total of 605 non-native trout had been caught in the trap, as compared to 1,162 on May 1 of 2013.

Additional cooperation with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks:

The non-native rainbow/cutthroat trout hybrid fishery is not normally accessible to anglers because the spawning run takes place in April, however, the state stream fishing regulations do not open until the 3rd Saturday in May. To enlist angler assistance with removing these non-native fishes, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks agreed to modify their regulations in 2013; Red Rock Creek is now open to fishing year-round except for complete closure from May 15 through June 14 to protect spawning Arctic Grayling. Limits were also increased to 20 fish per day and in possession with no length limits.



Anglers taking advantage of the modified fishing season and liberal harvest limits established as part of this project. (Photo USFWS)



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION OFFICE



Increased angler opportunity:

In order to increase angler access to the non-native trout, MTFWCO biologists also translocate a portion of the trapped non-native trout to Widgeon Pond. Our goal is to translocate 150-200 fish annually for added recreational fishing opportunities. A fish screen was installed on the outlet of Widgeon Pond to prevent these non-native

rainbow/cutthroat trout hybrid from escaping the pond and causing negative impacts to the downstream fishery. Finally, to prevent reproduction of the non-native trout within the pond, only adult-male fish will be moved to the pond. To date, 201 males have been tagged and relocated to the pond.



Arctic Grayling collected in our fish trap provide pertinent data prior to being released above the trap so they can continue their spawning migration. The trap, located in Red Rock Creek, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana, is one of the sampling and monitoring methods utilized by Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office personnel to assess fish population trends. (Photo courtesy, Andrew Gilham, USFWS)



Bull Trout

Jim Mogen continued to work with the 2013 Bull Trout survey data, analyze and interpret information, and worked on updating the St. Mary project annual report. Jim also continues to lead the St. Mary Biological Review Team to provide biological input to engineers working on designing the St. Mary Diversion Passage and Screening facility. Currently, Reclamation is at approximately the 60% design phase for planned fish passage and entrainment prevention modifications for this project.

Jim continued to coordinate efforts with Pat DeHann and Lynn Kaeding, retired USFWS, on drafting their St. Mary Bull Trout genetics and migration paper.

Jim and George Jordan met with Reclamation personnel to discuss St. Mary project work priorities and budgets for 2014 and beyond. Jim then completed the 2014 St. Mary Scope of Work and Budget Proposal for submittal to Reclamation for reimbursable funding to complete proposed work activities in 2014.

Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout and the Crow Tribe

The Crow Tribe has management authority for Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (YCT) within the Crow Reservation and their Tribal Legislature passed a law in 2002 designating YCT as a species of special concern to the Tribe. The Montana FWCO, as part of our trust responsibility described under Secretarial Order 3206 and the USFWS Native American Policy, continues to support the Tribe with their YCT conservation efforts.

The Crow Reservation has suitable YCT habitat including six stream systems with shared management among other agencies (4 of those streams are interstate and all have remnant populations of pure strain YCT in their headwaters). Additionally, there are unoccupied stream reaches that may serve as suitable introduction areas for refugia populations. Robbin Wagner has begun an effort to develop a YCT management and restoration plan for the Crow Reservation that will be finalized in conjunction with the Tribe and other partners.

Other Tribal Work:

George met with Representatives from the Wildlife Conservation Society to discuss efforts of mutual interest on the Blackfeet Reservation in north-west Montana.

Yellowstone River:

George participated in several meetings related to providing fish passage at Reclamation's Intake Dam on the Yellowstone River.



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION OFFICE



George has been working closely with the Buffalo Rapids Irrigation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Reclamation to resolve issues related to the screens installed at the Shirley pumping plant during summer of 2013.

Sikes Act:

Historically, our office was annually contracted to assist Malmstrom Air Force Base (AFB) natural resources staff with management of a small pond in order to provide on-site recreational fishing opportunities. However, in late FY 2013, the Department of Defense (DoD)–Air Force, provided funding to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to assume greater responsibilities for natural resource management. Malmstrom AFB was one such installation where our role was substantially expanded. As part of the new agreements between DoD and the Service, we have hired a new term biologist to be collocated on Malmstrom AFB. Our new biologist, Dr. Elin Pierce, will report for duty May 19. We eagerly await her arrival as she brings a variety of skills that will allow us to fulfill our obligations to the Air Force, balance natural resource issues with the Malmstrom AFB mission, provide onsite expertise for the Base, as well as, the Montana FWCO, and coordinate responsibilities under the Sikes Act.

Additionally, Robbin has been working with Malmstrom AFB staff to begin coordinating efforts to remove invasive fish from Powwow pond with our first efforts tentatively scheduled for early May.

In addition to the technical work, our office continues to support Base personnel with hosting an annual Kids Fishing Day event to help connect youth with the outdoors. This year's event is planned for early June and preparations are underway, including working with Ennis National Fish Hatchery to arrange stocking of up to 300 retired rainbow trout broodstock.

Safety:

The joint CDSO for Montana and Northern Rockies FWCOs, Robbin Wagner, continues updating existing Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) to ensure compliance with DOI and FWS safety requirements, developing SAF01s for staff, and assisting with coordinating our Station Safety Audit scheduling with Jim Behrmann, July 14, 2014.