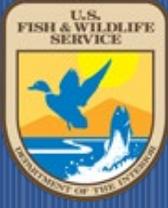


Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BILLINGS–BOZEMAN–LEWISTOWN, MT

January 2020



*“If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.”
~Anne Bradstreet*

Tribal Fisheries:

Biologists Andrew Gilham, Josh Melton and Technician Jason Marsh spent much of the month analyzing and summarizing tribal sport fishery data.

Much of these data will be rolled into updated sport fishery management plans and tie directly to hatchery stocking requests.

We continued to advise the Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Department director, Buzz Cobell, on various fishery issues on the Blackfeet Reservation. As a result of our analysis of length and age data collected on Four-Horns Lake, we advised the tribe to implement a regulation on non-member Walleye harvest. Our analysis revealed that 23+ inch Walleye were relatively old (6-17 years). We suggested the tribe place a harvest limit of 5 Walleye with only one over 20



MTFWCO Fisheries Biologist Andrew Gilham holding a 31 inch, 15lb Walleye captured in experimental gill-nets at Four Horns Lake (Blackfeet Reservation, Montana. Photo USFWS/Josh Melton).

inches. The regulation was recently implemented in the Blackfeet fishing regulations.

Additionally, the Blackfeet Tribe has expressed interest in learning more about the trout populations in several rivers. As such, we are considering options to electrofish sections of Badger Creek, Cut Bank Creek, and the Two-Medicine River

to acquire baseline data on the trout populations. This may lead to increased requests for Westslope Cutthroat Trout from Creston NFH.

St. Mary Bull Trout:

As part of our reimbursable agreement obligations with Reclamation, Jim Mogen has been assisting Reclamation’s Montana Area Office with preparation of their Biological Assessment for project operations in the St. Mary River basin of northwestern Montana. In 1997 our office initiated an extensive, on-going, Reclamation-funded, scientific investigation on the status of the contemporary Bull Trout population inhabiting the St. Mary River drainage. Jim spent much of January summarizing all biological information obtained over the past 23 years from those investigations, including records on the 14,883 Bull trout and 27,200 other fishes handled during that time. These studies determined key characteristics of Bull Trout populations in the St. Mary River drainage in Montana, including locations of spawning areas, relative sizes, trends and genomes of spawning stocks, and the extent that Bull Trout move among tributaries. This information has been crucial in helping us identify and understand the factors that may unduly limit native fish populations and recommended

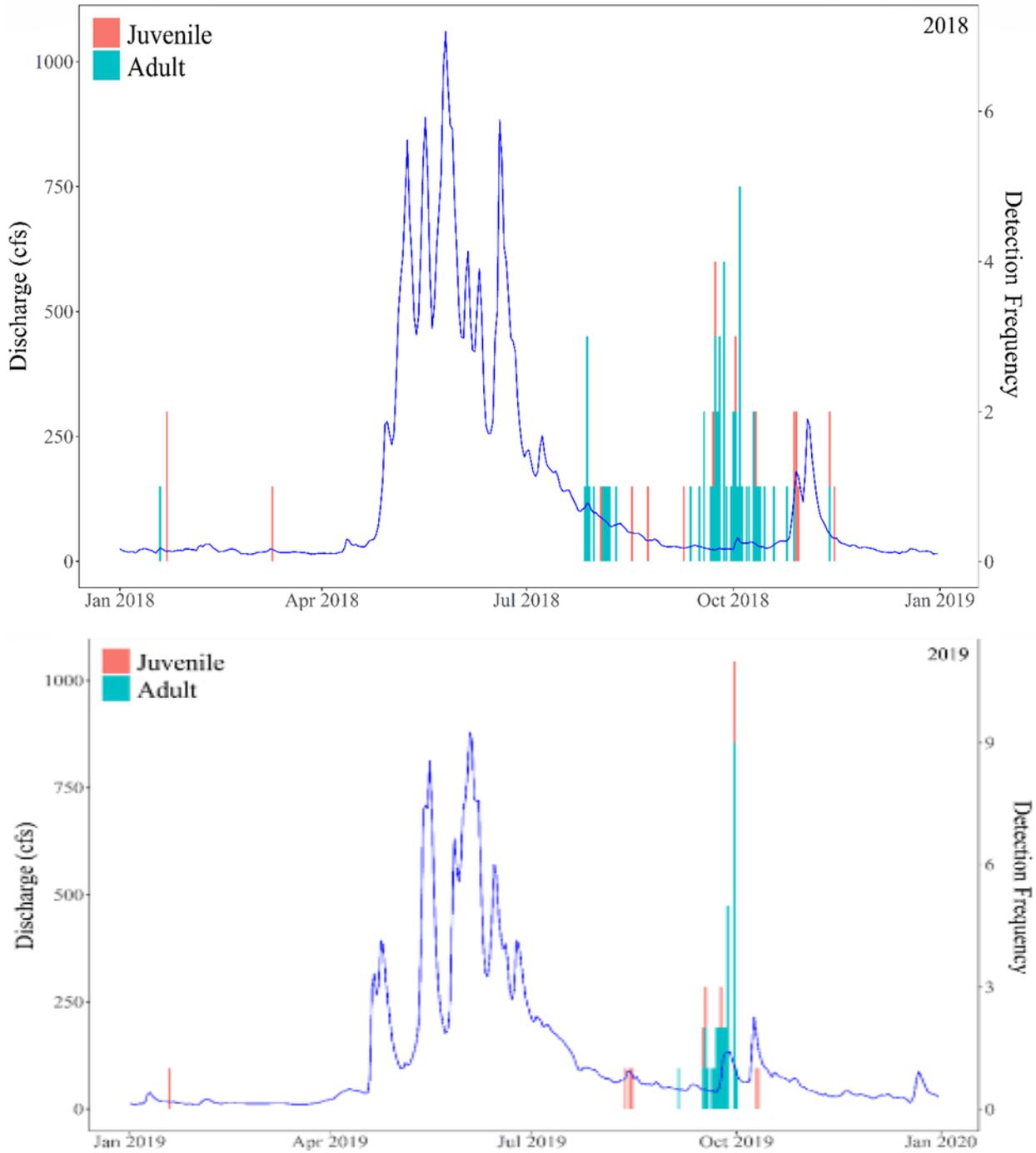
management actions to reduce the effects of those factors.

Along with data analysis, we have been acquiring additional equipment for new PIT array stations to be installed in the spring. In preparation for the installation, Jason Marsh started testing antenna designs for installing in streams where widths are greater than 80 ft.

The new PIT readers. Along with testing the new equipment, Jason has been working with new hyperterminal software (CoolTerm) to communicate with PIT-tag readers and to develop models for future PIT-tag data summaries.



MTFWCO Technician Jason Marsh testing new PIT array equipment *Photo USFWS/Jim Mogen).*



Preliminary data of juvenile and adult Bull Trout detected at Boulder PIT-tag stations in 2018 and 2019. Dark blue line is stream discharge on Swiftcurrent Creek at Many Glacier, MT. Turquoise and red vertical lines indicate adult and juvenile Bull Trout detections, respectively. Note: PIT-tag arrays were not operational during mid-May to mid-July.

Sikes Act work, Malmstrom Air Force Base, MT.

Game Camera Project—

This month, 3,937 video files equating to 32.8 cumulative hours of footage were reviewed as part of our game camera. We observed a single Grizzly Bear (images to left) on one of our cameras in the data analyzed in January. The image was collected 6/25/2019.

Powwow Pond Sampling—

Biologist Josh Melton and Technician Jason Marsh completed some additional analysis and finalized addressing comments on the draft completed analysis of Powwow Pond annual summary report.



Other happenings:

Jim and George met with Lacey Hopper (Acting Director Bozeman FTC/FHC complex) to update and revise the Bozeman FAC safety committee charter. First meeting is planned for February.

Andrew continued preparing the Arctic Grayling Standard Weight and Lengths management brief for submission. The manuscript is nearly ready for re-submission, as it was declined as a journal article several months ago.

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