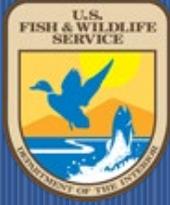


# Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BILLINGS–BOZEMAN–LEWISTOWN, MT

August 2020



August has been a busy month for MTFWCO fishery crews. While complying with the various Covid-19 restrictions required by our own agency, as well as additional restrictions authorized by the state of Montana, Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Tribe, we were able to return to St. Mary to conduct important bull trout-related activities.

## St. Mary Bull Trout:

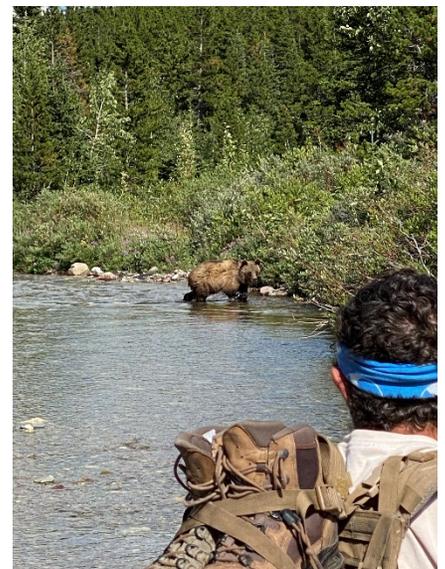
During the first two weeks of August, our crew of six, including MTFWCO staff Jim Mogen, Andrew Gilham, Josh Melton, Jason Marsh, and Geoff Popken, along with USBR Biologist Matt Bullard, conducted electrofishing surveys in numerous remote reaches in four different tributaries to the St. Mary River – Divide, Boulder, Kennedy and Otatso creeks.

These surveys, conducted annually since 1998, are the primary means of monitoring this uniquely isolated population. This year the team PIT-tagged more than 400 Bull Trout (130-759 mm total length) and recaptured 56 fish that were tagged in previous years which will provide important movement, age, growth and survival information helpful for conserving this important ESA-protected species.

All in all, the stream surveys went smoothly with few surprises, other than a young grizzly that gave them all a bit of a scare as it defended its favorite stretch of water with some splashing, growling, and jaw-popping before running off, which was probably a good idea. Even John Wayne would have been in awe of the speed at which the crew drew their bear sprays.



Montana FWCO staff inserting a PIT tag into a bull trout. USFWS Photo-Michael (Josh) Melton



Grizzly bear keeping an eye on the Montana FWCO crew. USFWS Photo-Jim Mogen

### Bull Trout continued...

Young-of-the-year (age-0) bull trout were encountered at most locations, indicating the presence of adequate spawning habitat and successful prior-year reproduction. The largest fish captured was a 759-mm male estimated to be at least 14 years old that was first captured back in 2012 (501 mm at the time).

As part of a separate cooperative conservation project with Glacier Park and the Blackfoot Tribe that is aimed at restoring native fishes to pristine headwater habitats, our crew also collected genetic samples (fin clips) from a potential Westslope Cutthroat Trout donor population in the Lee Creek drainage just upstream from the international border. Those samples will be sent to the Montana Conservation Genetics Lab in Missoula for analysis.

A week after completing the annual surveys, the crew returned to St. Mary for another week of downloading, maintaining and installation of PIT (tag) – Detection Stations. These stations, an array of buried antennae that log PIT-tagged fish as they swim past a stationary site, provide additional insight regarding seasonal movements associated with adult

spawning migrations and juvenile emigration. We now have 10 functioning antennae in the St. Mary drainage, four in Swiftcurrent Creek, three in Boulder Creek, two in Divide Creek and one in the St. Mary Canal. The crew also deployed automatic depth and temperature loggers at the various stations.



Seasonal Bio-tech Geoff Popken holding a bull trout.  
USFWS Photo-Jim Mogen

## Other Happenings:

Jason Marsh was selected for a permanent biotech position with the Montana FWCO. Congratulations Jason!



**"The mayfly lives only one day. And sometimes it rains." ~ George Carlin**

USFWS Photo-Michael (Josh) Melton

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



**George Jordan**

Project Leader  
2900 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. North, Room 301  
Billings, MT 59101  
Phone: 406-247-7365  
Email: [george\\_jordan@fws.gov](mailto:george_jordan@fws.gov)

**Andrew Gilham**

Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
4052 Bridger Canyon Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-585-9010  
Email: [andrew\\_gilham@fws.gov](mailto:andrew_gilham@fws.gov)

**Michael (Josh) Melton**

Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
335 Airport Road 61  
Lewistown, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-535-2800 ext 23  
Email: [michael\\_melton@fws.gov](mailto:michael_melton@fws.gov)

**Jim Mogen**

Fish Biologist  
4052 Bridger Canyon Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-585-9010  
Email: [jim\\_mogen@fws.gov](mailto:jim_mogen@fws.gov)

**Jason Marsh**

Biotech  
4052 Bridger Canyon Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-585-9010  
Email: [jason\\_marsh@fws.gov](mailto:jason_marsh@fws.gov)

**Judy Kobus-Fisk**

Administrative Support Officer  
4052 Bridger Canyon Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-585-9010  
Email: [judy\\_kobus-fisk@fws.gov](mailto:judy_kobus-fisk@fws.gov)

**Geoff Popken**

Seasonal Biotech  
4052 Bridger Canyon Road  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
Phone: 406-585-9010  
Email: [geoffrey\\_popken@fws.gov](mailto:geoffrey_popken@fws.gov)