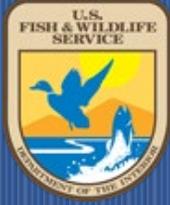


Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BILLINGS–BOZEMAN–LEWISTOWN, MT

June 2020



During late-May the USFWS started to evaluate options to increase allowable work activities beyond teleworking and fulfilling mission critical activities. This allowed for limited but expanded opportunities to conduct high-priority fieldwork, but with caveats to help ensure employee and public safety.

St. Mary Bull Trout:

In mid-May, Reclamation's St. Mary Canal, experienced a catastrophic failure in one of its drop structures. This resulted in a complete shutdown of project operations and the draining of the canal.

During the week of June 8-12, Montana FWCO biologists Jim Mogen, Andrew Gilham, and Michael (Josh) Melton, along with technicians Jason Marsh and Geoff Popken, armed with nets and electro-fishing equipment, collected hundreds of native fish including northern pike, burbot, mountain white fish, and one bull trout. Many were returned to the St. Mary River including the bull trout. While there, they also installed one Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag detection system in the St. Mary canal for future monitoring.

In addition, the crew downloaded data from three of the PIT-tag readers on Boulder Creek though they were unable to collect the data from our

Swiftcurrent Creek PIT-tag detection site as three grizzly bears were in close proximity.



Jason Marsh releasing a bull trout salvaged from the St. Mary Canal. Photo: USFWS-Jim Mogen

Jim and George Jordan continued coordination as part of an interagency team established to identify mitigation measures that could be implemented at St. Mary Canal to help reduce entrainment of bull trout.



Staff from the Montana FWCO recording data on fish collected from the St. Mary Canal salvage effort. Photo: USFWS-Jason Marsh

Tribal Trust:

Andrew and Josh continued to work on updating older tribal fish management plans and coordinating stocking to support tribal recreational fishing.

We had tentatively planned on resuming Westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) stocking in Lower St. Mary Lake, Blackfeet Reservation, while awaiting WCT genetic analyses previously collected in several tributaries in the St. Mary watershed.

Unfortunately, we have not received a complete analysis on the origin of these WCT populations. Therefore, surplus MO12 WCT from Creston National Fish Hatchery will be stocked in Lower Two Medicine Reservoir and the Two Medicine River.

However, preliminary analysis showed a WCT population that MT FWCO sampled last year to be free of Yellowstone Cutthroat and Rainbow Trout hybridization (Roberts Creek). If the population is also shown to be aboriginal (not of hatchery origin) it may be used in the future as a donor population for introduction into Gunsight Lake, Glacier National Park.

Finally, Judy KobusFisk, completed scanning of all responsive documents related to a recent FOIA and made those files available to our FOIA coordinator.



MT FWCO Biologist Josh Melton and technician Geoff Popken collecting genetic samples of Westslope Cutthroat in Roberts Creek (Blackfeet Reservation). Pictures are pre-COVID (August 2019). Photo: USFWS-Andrew Gilham



MT FWCO technician Geoff Popken collecting genetic clip from WCT in Roberts Creek, Blackfeet Reservation, MT (August 2019). Photo: USFWS-Andrew Gilham

Other Happenings:

Jim's co-authored manuscript has been published and is available online at:

<https://doi.org/10.1002/rra.3656>



Thoreau once wrote something along the lines about folks going fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after. While there may be truth in that, it sure is fun to catch some now and again. Photo: George Jordan

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