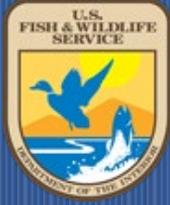


Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BILLINGS–BOZEMAN–LEWISTOWN, MT

March 2020



“Must the show go on? ... The show must go on.” ~ Pink Floyd

In January, the first COVID-19 case was reported in the US. By mid-to-late March all but one Montana FWCO staff were in telework status to minimize potential exposure. One employee continued to report to work to keep an eye on the facility. That changed March 26 when Montana Governor Steve Bullock issued a directive implementing Executive Orders 2-2020 and 3-2020 which provided measures to stay at home and designating certain essential functions. Since those orders, all Montana FWCO employees are in telework status. While this changed our work environments—the show goes on.

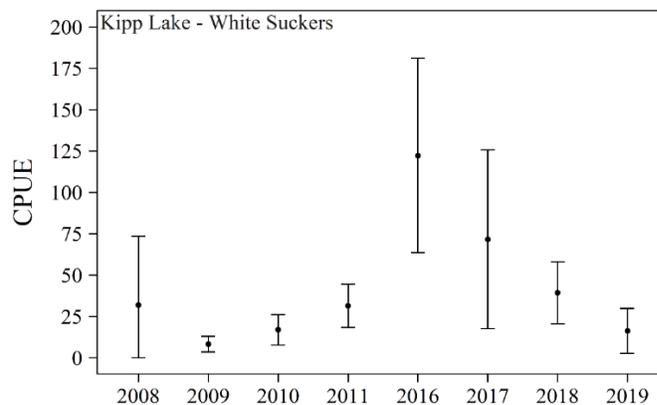
Tribal Fisheries:

Biologists Andrew Gilham, Josh Melton and Technician Jason Marsh spent much of the month analyzing and summarizing tribal sport fishery data and getting those data into reports for the respective tribes.

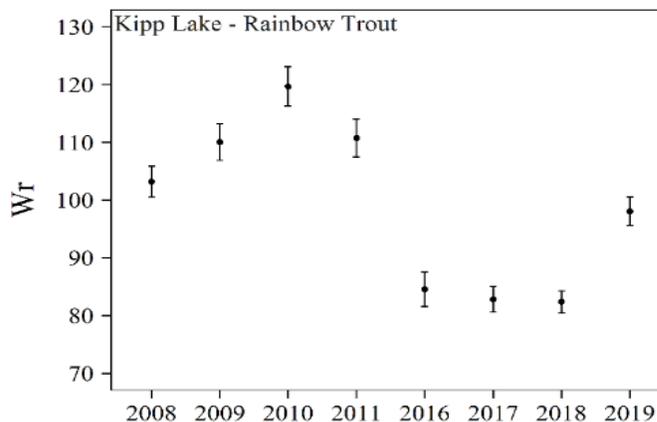
Preliminary data from our 2018 White Sucker removal efforts suggest improving Rainbow Trout conditions (relative weights) in 2019 likely are correlated with the 2018 White Sucker suppression effort.



Weir on Kipp Lake Feeder canal for removing spawning White Suckers attempting to migrate up the canal for spawning.



CPUE (Catch per net) of White Suckers in Kipp Lake (2008-2011; 2016-2019). White Sucker suppression was initiated in May 2018 just prior to surveys. Following the 1-season suppression, we have identified what appears to be a decline in CPUE in 2019.



Relative weight (Wr) of Rainbow Trout (RBT) captured in experimental gill-nets in Kipp Lake (2008-2011; 2016-2019). RBT condition appears to be strongly negatively correlated with White Sucker abundance. Following the 2018 removal, the condition (Wr) of RBT increased.

St. Mary Bull Trout:

Biologist Jim Mogen and Jason continued to purchase supplies and equipment and building and testing various PIT Antenna designs for spring deployment at various locations in the St Mary watershed.

Jim also met with Reclamation contractor Lynn Kaeding regarding analysis and interpretation of our cumulative 1997-2019 St. Mary Bull Trout data set.

Additionally, Jim spent a large portion of March working closely with Reclamation’s Montana Area Office personnel on development of their St. Mary Biological Assessment (BA). The first draft was completed in mid-March. Since then he has been busy addressing edits, comments and suggestions resulting from Reclamation internal reviews of the document. Concurrently, Jim is corresponding with the Helena Ecological Services office— providing important information and helping to address some of their early concerns related to the BA.

On March 25, 2020 the Alliance for the Wild Rockies filed a complaint for injunctive and declaratory relief in US District

Court, Great Falls. Defendants listed are Reclamation’s Commissioner and the DOI Secretary (Case 4:20-cv-00022-BMM-JTJ). The filing requests “the Court declare that Reclamation’s unpermitted incidental take of bull trout violates Section 9 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).”

Given Montana FWCO’s 20+ years of monitoring data, we anticipate continued coordination with our Ecological Services division in the coming months.

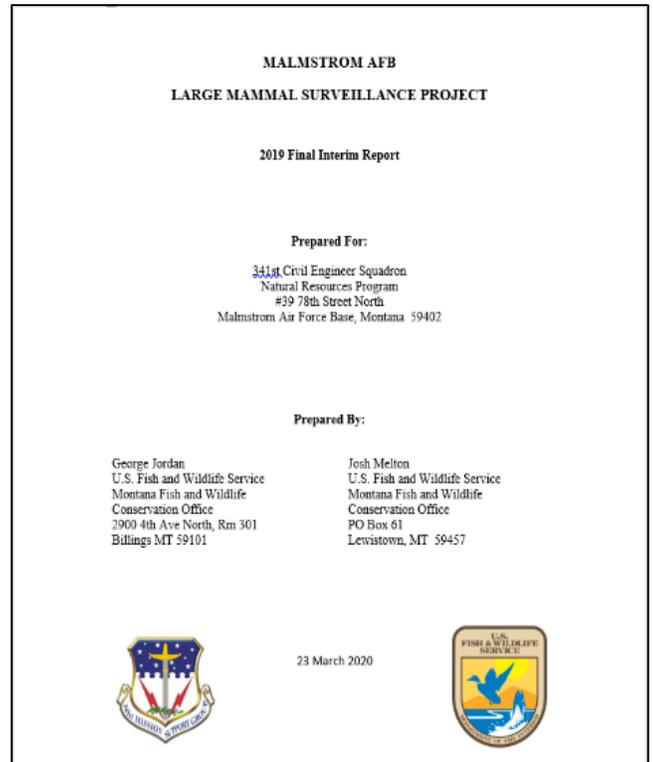
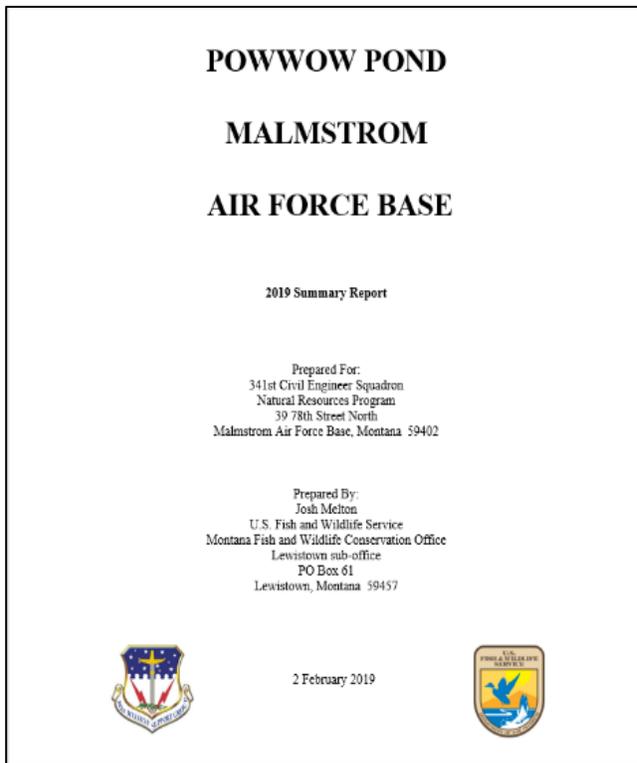


Biologist Jim Mogen releasing a St Mary Bull Trout. It is not often one sees a fish smile, but this Bull Trout indeed looks happy. USFWS photo.

Sikes Act work, Malmstrom Air Force Base, MT.

Final reports for 2019

Powwow Pond recreational fish management work and game camera surveys were transmitted to and accepted by Malmstrom AFB Natural Resource Manager as final and complete.



Other happenings:

Safety findings from February's informal walkthrough were addressed by mid-March.

Staff have been addressing other administrative work such as, completing assigned training including Hatch Act, Scientific Integrity, and Grant Solutions, participating on numerous all employee COVID-19 calls, and continued coordination with partners.

Andrew received comments on our Arctic Grayling Standard Weight and Lengths management brief and has been working to address reviewer comments prior to re-submission.

Thanks to Jon Gilleen, Bozeman Fish Technology Center's Maintenance Mechanic, for keeping an eye on the office while we are in telework status.

Andrew had an opportunity to assist Great Plains FWCO with pallid sturgeon work on the Missouri River prior to the general shift to telework. It is great to be able to assist a sister office while also allowing staff to get some new experiences.



Biologist Andrew Gilham with a lake sturgeon collected while sampling pallid sturgeon.

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