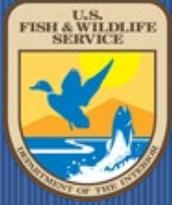


# Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BILLINGS–BOZEMAN–LEWISTOWN, MT

October 2020



Under “normal” circumstances, October would have been a busy month for the MTFWCO field crew, with Bull Trout redd surveys, fish salvage, and downloading, maintenance and winterization of our network of PIT-Detection Stations, analyzing filed data, and generally wrapping up the field season. Well, if we learned anything in 2020, a year when nothing has been normal, typical, ordinary, or average, we should have expected October to be different as well...as it was.

## St. Mary Bull Trout:

If you recall, back in May, the Bureau of Reclamation’s St. Mary Canal failed, leaving the canal inoperable and farmers along much of northern Montana without their trusted water supply for the remainder of the irrigation season.

Canal in early October. Although the growing season was essentially over at that time, the canal was immediately recharged to convey much needed water downstream to overdrawn storage reservoirs before winter locked them and their diverse fisheries in ice.



A catastrophic failure in one of the St Mary Canal drop structures (left) resulted in the canal being inoperable during the normal diversion period. The image on the right is during the final phases of rebuilding the drop structure. Photo: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Working under the difficulties associated with weather, remoteness, and Covid-19 restrictions, Reclamation’s contractors finally completed the rehabilitation of the St. Mary

The canal headgates were finally closed for the season on October 31, bringing Reclamation’s 2020 diversion year to an end.

## St. Mary Bull Trout (continued)

In a typical year, the outlet of Sherburne Reservoir and the headgates of the St. Mary Canal (approximately 7 miles downstream) would have been closed at the end of September, leaving both the canal and Swiftcurrent Creek (Sherburne Dam outlet) mostly dry until spring (October-March).

In an ordinary year, soon after shut-down, our crew would have used nets and electrofishing equipment to rescue Bull Trout from isolated pools along those dewatered habitats in Swiftcurrent Creek and return them to safer habitats downstream. Due to the revised operations, our October efforts have been pushed to the first week of November.

Reclamation's extremely rare extension to the normal diversion period (April-September) pushed our annual fish salvage operations right out of October, past Halloween, and into the first week of November when even the grizzly bears think it's foolish to be outside (stayed tuned for those findings). Also, a heavy dumping of snow hit the St. Mary region in mid-October followed by a week of freezing temperatures when day-time highs barely reached double digits. The wet cold weather delayed our plans to work with our various PIT-Detection Stations and eliminated any chance of accessing Bull Trout spawning areas high in the headwater regions of St. Mary drainage.

Consequently, redd surveys were not conducted in 2020.

Jim Mogen and George Jordan continued serving as members of the St. Mary mitigation team, an interagency team established to identify mitigation measures that will be implemented at St. Mary Canal to help reduce entrainment of Bull Trout.



**One of the recommendations from the St. Mary mitigation team was to install some course screens in front of the canal intakes to help reduce adult Bull Trout entrainment during the late fall. The above screens were installed by Reclamation on the functioning canal intakes. Photo: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.**

Hatchery support:

During October, Judy Kobus-Fisk had an opportunity to assist Saratoga NFH with spawning efforts. On her way across Wyoming, our GOV started acting up and she barely made it. Upon her arrival, both Pat and Lee were quick to assist her with trying to troubleshoot the issue and went so far as to pull a few strings with a local mechanic who was able to get our vehicle in on very short notice. Thus, I wanted to give a “shout out” to Lee and Pat who were quick to assist and demonstrated a great level of team work and support to try to assist Judy. THANK YOU!

The diagnosis for our GOV was not good (one cylinder is not firing) so it likely needs a new motor or to be replaced. Currently this vehicle is serving as “lawn art” at the Saratoga NFH.



Judy washing eggs at Saratoga NFH. Photo: USFWS Ana M. Bode



Wyoming Toads at Saratoga NFH. Photo: USFWS

## Other Happenings

Andrew Gilham resubmitted our Arctic Grayling standard weight manuscript to North American Journal of Fisheries Management. We are currently awaiting a decision on whether the manuscript is accepted or if further edits are needed.

George completed his 60-day detail as the acting North Geographic supervisor.

Jason Marsh has scheduled his Master's thesis defense. The thesis was centered around evaluating habitat restoration to benefit Arctic Grayling in Red Rock Lakes NWR.

**FISH ASSEMBLAGE RESPONSE TO HABITAT RESTORATION IN ELK SPRINGS CREEK, MONTANA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING RESTORATION**



**Jason Marsh**  
Master's Thesis Defense  
Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at 10 A.M.

WebEx link: <https://montana-student.webex.com/montana-student/j.php?MTID=m33b68cb7debcf8e4d170de61799e4403> (Password: grayling)

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