U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and Proposed Critical Habitat

Jarbidge River Population Recovery Unit

What areas are included in the Jarbidge River population?
The Jarbidge River bull trout population is one of the smaller population management units, including the Jarbidge and Bruneau River watersheds in southwest Idaho and northeast Nevada. This population is isolated by dams and is at least 150 river miles from the nearest other bull trout populations downstream in Idaho and Oregon.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?
Proposed critical habitat includes 131 miles of streams (about 3.2 percent of the total stream miles in the drainage).

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?
The draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Jarbidge River population was developed through a Recovery Team of Federal, State, and Tribal biologists with knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival.

The critical habitat proposal was developed by the Service based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?
The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery team, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposal. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of the species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and delisting of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?
A recovery plan is a blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and delisting of a threatened or endangered species. It is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. The plan is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities and individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic

environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

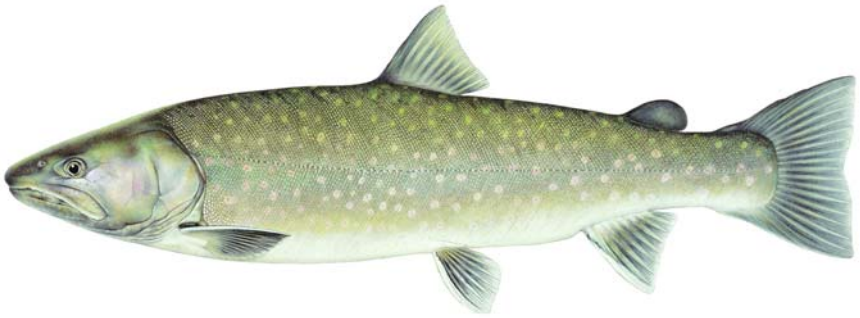
How was the draft recovery plan developed?
The Recovery Team met and reviewed all known available information about bull trout and streams in the local area. This review incorporated data from State and Federal agency population surveys, habitat assessments, and prior species conservation activities.

Historical references were also consulted for background information on activities and conditions in the watershed.

The Team's local knowledge and professional judgement were used to guide development of the draft recovery plan. Focusing recovery on a more local level allows recovery tasks to be tailored to specific areas and local interests.

What is the status of bull trout in the Jarbidge River population?
Bull trout in the Jarbidge River population are currently considered to be low in abundance and at risk of extirpation. There is one existing core area for bull trout with six identified local populations.

Although historical population records are lacking, bull trout were likely more abundant and widely distributed in the Jarbidge and Bruneau River watersheds than they are today because of barriers to fish passage in mainstem river corridors dating back to the late 1800's and serious subsequent habitat degradation in Jarbidge River headwaters area.



This is likely especially true for migratory (fluvial) bull trout, which represent only a fraction of the current population.

No overall trends in population abundance have been documented because we lack a sufficient history or intensity of standardized bull trout monitoring to accurately determine population trends.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Jarbidge River population?
Threats to this bull trout population include a combination of historical and current human-induced and natural factors. Large dams and diversions on the mainstem Snake and Bruneau Rivers constructed over 100 years ago were likely primarily responsible for the historical disruption of the population's natural migration corridor.

The legacy of late 1800's and early 1900's mining, timber harvest, and livestock grazing in the Jarbidge River watershed produced widespread habitat impacts. Localized problems from livestock grazing remain along a few streams. Seasonal water temperatures are problematic in many drainages, especially those that are migration corridors. Impacts from road construction and maintenance practices continue to affect bull trout.

Bull trout over-harvest concerns have been addressed at least partially by State fishing regulation changes (no bull trout harvest), but species misidentification and illegal harvest may still occur. Fishery management conflicts with nonnative sport fish species have been eliminated through no stocking. However, potential hybridization from existing brook trout in the watershed is a potential threat to bull trout recovery.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?
The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex, interacting groups of bull trout distributed throughout their native range so that the species can be delisted. Specifically, the Jarbidge River Recovery Team adopted the goal of maintaining and increasing bull trout abundance and expanding distribution, where possible.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?
Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trend, and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

* **Distribution criterion** will be met when the total number of identified local populations (currently numbering six) has been maintained or increased; when local populations have each been genetically evaluated; and when bull trout local populations remain broadly distributed in the existing core area.
* **Abundance criterion** will be met when, adult bull trout are sufficiently abundant to provide for the persistence and viability of the core area and to support both resident and migratory adult bull trout. This level of abundance is estimated to be within a range of 270 to 1,000 spawning fish per year.
* **Trend criterion** will be met when measures of bull trout abundance within the core area show stable or increasing trends based on 10 to 15 years (representing at least two bull trout generations) of consistent monitoring data.
* **Connectivity criterion** will be met when habitat within the core area is connected so as to provide for the potential full expression of migratory behavior, allow for the refounding of extirpated populations, and provide for the potential of genetic exchange between populations.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Jarbidge River population?
Generally, the strategy for recovery consists of protecting, restoring, and maintaining suitable habitat conditions for bull trout; preventing negative effects from nonnative brook trout; aligning fisheries management with bull trout recovery; and further researching population structure and habitat use.

How long will recovery take?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout. In the Jarbidge River population, the current status of bull trout is less secure than in many other portions of the species' range where population abundance and distribution are greater and threats are few. It may be three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possibly longer, before significant reductions can be made in the identified threats to the species and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?
Total cost of bull trout recovery in the Jarbidge River population is estimated at $6 million spread over a 25-year recovery period. Total cost includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and by private businesses and individuals. These costs are attributed to bull trout conservation, but other aquatic species will also benefit. Cost

estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

How can I obtain a copy of the recovery plan?
The document, photographs, and other materials may be found on the Service's Pacific Region website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?
Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to: Bob Williams, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234, Reno, NV 89502-7147; or faxed to 775-861-6301. Comments are due on or before October 29, 2004, which is the end of the 120-day comment period.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Jarbidge River population of bull trout until August 25, 2004. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be mailed to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland OR 97232; faxed to 503-231-6243; or e-mailed to r1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan for complete details.

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

A public information meeting on the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal will be held at a future date during the public comment period. Written comments may also be submitted at the meeting. The meeting schedule will be posted on the Service's bull trout website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout and publicized in local newspapers.