To preserve, protect and restore coldwater fish and fisheries in NW Montana.

FLATHEAD VALLEY TROUT UNLIMITED

FACTS ABOUT FLATHEAD LAKE AND THE NEPA PROCESS

What is the EIS/NEPA Process?

The Flathead Lake and River NEPA process began in 2010 following the lapse of the co-management plan for the Flathead. The process has been open, public and inclusive and included public input, outfitter representatives and all public agencies in the Flathead (CSKT, MFWP, USGS, NPS, USFWS, Flathead Lake Biological Station, Flathead National Forest, University of Montana) as well as some of the most prominent fisheries scientists in the field. A draft EIS will be available for public comment this year.

Region 1, MFWP made a purely political decision to withdraw from participation in this collaborative process to find common-sense solutions to rebalancing this important fishery in Flathead Lake and to abandon their long-standing commitment to native fish restoration in the Flathead.

What has happened to our native fish?

Predatory lake trout have spread throughout the Flathead Basin. Ten of 13 lakes in Glacier National Park have been invaded by mackinaw denying visitors to our area the unique opportunity to catch native fish in their historic habitat. Angling pressure on Swan Lake has dropped dramatically due to recent lake trout encroachment. The loss of native bull trout and cutthroats and associated fishing opportunity is costing our outdoor economy far more than the value that the small nonnative fishery Flathead Lake provides.

Native fish need your help

Family bull trout outing on the North Fork Flathead, 1960s

Native Fish Spotlight

Today, Flathead Lake contains a lake trout population of nearly two million fish, more than double the number of two decades ago.

The population of adult native bull trout in the lake and the North and Middle Forks now numbers less than 3,000 fish.

Why must something be done now?

A fine Flathead bull trout

Fishing opportunities and the economic benefits of fishing in Flathead Lake and the North and Middle Forks of the Flathead River have been severely compromised due to predation by nonnative lake trout and illegally introduced northern pike. The ill-advised introduction of mysis shrimp in the Flathead by MFWP resulted in an explosion of the nonnative lake trout population in Flathead Lake and the collapse of a popular bull trout fishery as well as the decimation of the popular kokanee salmon fishery, all due to predation by lake trout. Fishing pressure on Flathead Lake fell by more than 50%. Flathead Lake dropped from being the #1 most popular lake fishery in the state to #13, costing the local economy millions of dollars.

Native cutthroat and bull trout populations, comprising the unique and popular stream fishery upstream from Flathead Lake, have also declined by more than 60% due to predation by lake trout in Flathead Lake. Popular river fishing opportunities for residents and visitors alike have been highly impacted.

What Can I Do?

Contact Bruce Rich, MFWP Fisheries Bureau Chief and Governor Steve Bullock today and express your disappointment in the political decision to withdraw MFWP from the Flathead Lake NEPA process.

Please contact MFWP Fisheries Bureau Chief Bruce Rich at: (406)444-2449 or, http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/contactUs/fisheriesContactForm.html
Governor Steve Bullock can be reached at: (406)444-3111 or, http://governor.mt.gov/contact/commentsform.asp

Bull trout are the largest aquatic predator and only trophy fish in the Flathead River system. Their numbers have been steadily declining for the last forty years due to predation by lake trout and other changes to our aquatic ecosystem.

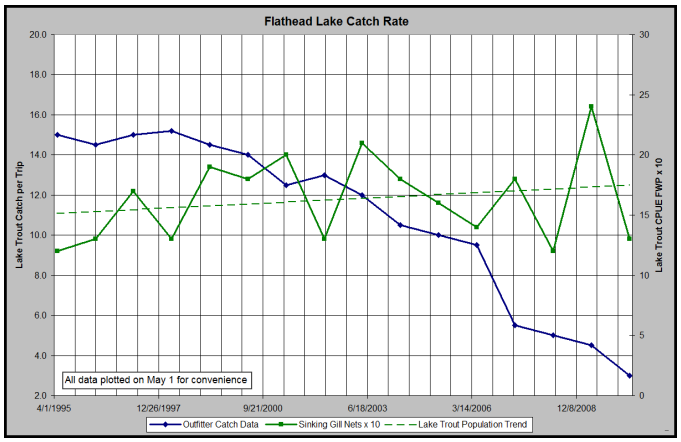
"The Flathead River is the ecological engine of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem." - ***Transboundary Flathead Research Needs Workshop, West Glacier, MT, Executive Summary, 2005***

What can we do to rebalance our fishery and protect native fish?

The best available science indicates that suppression of nonnative lake trout populations can benefit native fish. Independent review of the recent experimental netting program on Swan Lake indicates a high level of success. Five years of netting and other suppression measures on Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho resulted in a dramatic and rapid rebound in native bull trout as well as the popular kokanee salmon. These techniques, along with new technologies being tested on Swan Lake and elsewhere will prove useful in rebalancing the Flathead Lake fishery.

Commercial fishing interests claim that lake trout are undergoing a dramatic decline in Flathead Lake. They claim that they can now only catch three fish per trip. That claim is not borne out by population sampling done each spring by MFWP. The results of the FWP netting show that there has been NO decline in lake trout numbers over the last 15 years, and there may even be a population increase. Anglers participating in the Mack Days fishing contests twice each year seem to have no problem boating 50-80 lake trout per day. The winner of the 2011 fall Mack Days had two 100-fish days.

147 pounds (gutted) of bull trout from the North Fork Flathead, from the 1960s



20# bull trout from Presentine Bar

Will suppressing the lake trout population ruin the fishing in Flathead Lake?

There is no evidence that reducing the lake trout population will harm fishing opportunities. There will still be nearly a million lake trout in Flathead Lake and there was a vibrant lake trout fishery when we last had those numbers of fish. The goal of the NEPA process is not to eliminate lake trout, but to restore a balance to a fishery that is out of equilibrium and endangering our heritage of fishing for native fish.

Legal and Moral Obligation

The bottom line in all this is simple: the bull trout is a native Montana fish, and Montanans have not only a legal but a moral obligation to maintain viable populations of native species. We owe it to future generations of Montanans to be good stewards of resources that are as much theirs as ours.

Former Montana Governor
Marc Racicot

For more information on these vital issues, please visit the Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited website at ***http://www.flatheadtu.org/*** *and follow FVTU on Facebook.*