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Spring 2014

aáy (pronounced "ahh-ee") is the Salish word for bull trout.

Our mission: To conserve, protect and restore valuable wild fish and their habitat in Northwest Montana



Conservation Groups Sue USFWS for Completed Bull Trout Recovery Plan

In 1998, bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentis*) throughout the northwest, were listed as a Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. In 2002, the Service published a Draft Recovery Plan for the Columbia River and Klamath populations, but that plan has yet to be finalized. Populations of native bull trout throughout the Flathead watershed continue to be imperiled due to habitat degradation and predation by nonnative lake trout. We continue to lose individual sub-populations across the basin and a current controversy involving Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes is in part due to sparse guidance from the federal government and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in particular.

On Tuesday, April 1, 2014 the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and the Friends of the Wild Swan [filed suit in U.S. District Court](#) in Portland, OR against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for again failing to follow Endangered Species Act requirements as they relate to bull trout. Under the ESA, the USFWS is required to produce a recovery plan within 2.5 years of listing. USFWS had promised to produce a plan by Jan. 30th. When that failed to happen the groups filed their promised suit. The suit alleges that the USFWS has dragged its feet for more than a decade in developing a recovery plan for bull trout in the northwestern U.S.

AWR also sued the USFWS over a lack of designation of critical habitat for bull trout in 2001. Almost two years later, the USFWS proposed including a vast area for bull trout habitat: more than 18,000 miles of stream and almost 533,000 acres of lakes in Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. But when the final habitat rule was

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www.warriorsandquietwaters.org

aáy is a quarterly publication of the Flathead Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Contact: 406-250-7473, flatheadtu@gmail.com, www.flatheadtu.org

"Calling Fly Fishing a hobby is like calling Brain Surgery a job."

~Paul Schullery~

From Our President



Larry Timchak—FVTU President



Donate to Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited today! Please visit our website at www.flatheadtu.org and click on the "Donate" button to support our efforts. Thanks.

Newsletter content does not necessarily reflect the views of Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited, it's membership or Montana Trout Unlimited.

FVTU welcomes submission of photos or content from our valued members. The newsletter is published quarterly throughout the year. Publication dates will be approximately Oct. 1, Jan. 1, Apr. 1, and July 1. Please send contributions at least ten days prior to publication to the newsletter editor at:

lucky@flatheadtu.org

any is available online at the FVTU website.
www.flatheadtu.org

Newsletter editor: Lucky Sultz

Springtime in the Northern Rockies

From my perspective, the older you get, the more you appreciate the arrival of spring and another season. After all, you never know how many seasons you have left so make the most of it! Watching the rivers and the land spring to life once more draws me back to my favorite haunts to search for rising fish. The hatches do seem late this year due to the cool spring weather.

The Flathead Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited is particularly busy in the spring as we prepare for our annual banquet on Saturday, May 17 at Grouse Mountain Lodge in Whitefish. The banquet is the Chapters primary means of raising funds to support the important conservation work we do here in northwest Montana. Please support the Chapter by attending the banquet or purchasing raffle tickets for the 14' NRS raft some lucky person will take home on May 17 when the winning ticket is drawn.

This is the social event of the year for fishermen and those interested in wild fisheries conservation in Northwest Montana. In addition to an opportunity to win this beautiful 14-foot, full wrap, self-bailing NRS raft package, there will be door prizes and numerous raffles and auctions. You will have the opportunity to win some really great prizes and at the same time, support valuable conservation work throughout our area. We hope to see you there!



Banquet information will be mailed to all FVTU members. If you need more banquet tickets or raffle tickets, please call Dan Short at 250-5064, or Chris Schustrom at 260-1198.

Banquet tickets are \$40 each. Tickets for the raft raffle are 1 for \$3, 2 for \$5, 5 for \$10, or 12 for \$20.

Larry Timchak
President, FVTU

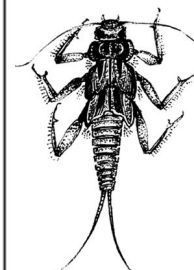
See you on the river!

100 YEARS AGO

ANGLERS GET SMALL CATCHES

Although the recent cold wave gave the fishing a setback, there are several small catches being made. W.H. Young went to Bigfork Thursday and managed to safely land 11 fine fry. There were 10 of the catch that ran from one to three and a half pounds, and one bull trout stretched the scales to nine and a half pounds. Mr. Young stated the good fishing is now at the mouth of the river. Casting from the bridge at Bigfork into the riffles and allowing the hook to drift into the eddies brings results; however, anyone able to cast fairly well can reach places where the fish are to be found by casting from the shore along the mouth of the river.

THE DAILY INTER LAKE, MARCH 28, 1914



From: Friday, April 04, 2014 (PST) Columbia Basin Bulletin

Re: CBB, March 14, 2014, "Sport Fishing Interests Oppose Proposal To Gill-Net Flathead Lake Trout, Oppose State Involvement" <http://www.cbbulletin.com/430010.aspx>

Pend Oreille Lake Trout Suppression and the Impacts to Bull Trout—the Whole Picture

By Jim Fredericks, Regional Fishery Manager, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

A recent article in the Columbia Basin Bulletin on March 14, 2014 titled "Sport Fishing Interests Oppose Proposal to Gill-Net Flathead Lake Trout, Oppose State Involvement" described the controversy associated with proposed lake trout suppression actions in Flathead Lake. The article discussed the concerns of the sportsman's group Flathead Wildlife Inc., (FWI) and one of their members, Jim Vashro, a former Fishery Manager for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP).

FWI's two primary concerns were 1) the direct impact lake trout removal would have on the recreational lake trout fishery and 2) the potential indirect impact the netting program might have on the bull trout population as a result of net bycatch. As referenced in the article, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has been conducting (with funding from BPA and Avista) a large-scale lake trout suppression program in Lake Pend Oreille.

The Idaho effort began after significant stakeholder involvement, including discussions about the social value and biological impacts of lake trout and objectives for the Lake Pend Oreille fishery. The program was implemented in 2006 with significant public support for restoring the historical fishery. Eight years of

lake trout suppression efforts, combined with rigorous monitoring and evaluation, allow IDFG to make conclusive statements about the efficacy of the program and the response of the fish community in Lake Pend Oreille.

IDFG recognizes and respects the sovereignty of the State of Montana and the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) with regard to Flathead Lake management.

Appropriately, IDFG has never expressed an opinion or suggested a course of action regarding Flathead Lake, as that is ultimately a decision for the MFWP, CSKT and the citizens of Montana to resolve. It seems evident that FWI's primary concern (the impacts to the recreational fishery) is a management issue based primarily on social values.

The second issue raised by FWI, however, that of by-catch and the impacts to the bull trout population, is one of biology. Mr. Vashro cited the Lake Pend Oreille program as support for his contention that lake trout suppression would have adverse impacts to the bull trout population in Flathead Lake. Unfortunately, in his effort to support his case, he misrepresented the Lake Pend Oreille results and inaccurately portrayed the overall objectives of the program.

IDFG has no intention of wading into the Flathead Lake management debate, and this response should not be taken as such. However, considering the substantial commitment made by IDFG, BPA and Avista to the Pend Oreille lake trout suppression effort and the fact that it is being viewed as an experimental model by entities outside of Idaho, we feel it is important to offer a more accurate account of the impacts to bull trout.

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Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited holds monthly meetings on the third Tuesday of each month October through April. Meetings are held at the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks conference room at 490 N. Meridian in Kalispell beginning at 7pm. Please join us for our regular meetings and program offerings.

FVTU Calendar

- General Meeting: April 15, 2013 Guides from Lakestream Anglers in Whitefish will give a presentation on spring fishing strategies in the Flathead. This will be our final general meeting of the 2014 season. We hope to see you all there.
- Saturday, May 17, 2014—Don't forget our Annual Fundraising banquet and auction at Grouse Mountain Lodge in Whitefish. Stay tuned to www.flatheadtu.org for more details
- For information on our banquet, or to purchase tickets, call Chris at 406-260-1198, or Dan at 406-250-5064.

published in October 2004, it included less than 2,000 miles of stream and 61,000 acres of lakes, none of which were in Montana.

AWR sued again, suggesting that the change in habitat was politically motivated by USFWS Under-Secretary

Julie McDonald, a senior Bush administration appointee. McDonald resigned under pressure in 2007 before a 2008 U.S. Inspector General report established that McDonald had tampered with scientific evidence, removed species and habitat from protected status and gave internal documents to oil-industry lobbyists and property-rights groups.

Seven ESA rulings were subsequently revised, including the bull trout habitat ruling. The final habitat rule published in 2010 included almost 20,000 stream miles and 488,000 acres of lake in the four northwestern states plus Nevada.

The current lawsuit alleges that *"Although the Defendants have acknowledged the importance of complying with this mandatory duty with respect to the bull trout, at present a final recovery plan has not been developed, much less implemented .. Indeed, although the Defendants initiated the recovery plan process more than a decade ago, this process has been subject to repeated delays and now appears hopelessly stalled."*

In 2008, the USFWS again determined that bull trout should remain an ESA-listed species. On April 1, 2013, the plaintiffs published a Notice of Intent to use USFWS, noting that *"Indeed, more than a decade has transpired since the Service released its first draft recovery plans in 2002 and 2004 .. As set forth in the NOI, the Defendants' lengthy delay in formulating a bull trout recovery plan is without legal justification and in violation of the ESA Accordingly, the Plaintiffs requested that the Defendants undertake prompt action to develop and implement a final recovery plan for bull trout."* *"The agency's failure to timely develop and implement a recovery plan for the bull trout therefore violates the ESA."*

The lawsuit asks the court *"To issue a mandatory injunction ordering the Defendants to promptly develop and implement a recovery plan for listed populations of the bull trout, and in no case to delay publishing a Notice of Availability for the draft recovery plan for more than 90 days from the date judgment, and to establish a deadline for the final recovery plan within 6 months of the close of public comment on the draft plan."*

Fly Tying

Here's a quick and effective nymph pattern that's easy to tie. From Mike Bradley in Pennsylvania. Courtesy of the Fly Tying group on TU.org.



Hare's Ear/Copper John Hybrid

Hook: Umpqua U101 #10-16

Thread: 8/0 Olive

Tail: Light Olive Mallard

Rib: Chartreuse XSm Ultra Wire

Body: Olive Hare's Ear

Thorax: Olive Hare's Ear

Wing Case: Orvis Black/Olive Thin Skin and Gold Tinsel

Legs: Light Olive Mallard

Bead: Copper to match hook size

Head finished with a UV resin and torch.

I put this together today just kind of making it up as I went along and came out with what I think is kind of like a hybrid Hare's Ear/ Copper John. I tied a few in tan and dark hare's ear as well.





A century ago, tens of thousands of bull trout roamed the waters of Flathead Lake and the Flathead River system. By the mid-1980s a spawning run of 10,000-15,000 fish still provided exciting fishing opportunities. Today there are less than 3,000 adult fish left in Flathead Lake and the North and Middle forks. Due to our misguided actions and inattention, these magnificent fish are on the brink of extinction in our home waters.

FVTU is proud to announce the release of our exciting video, *Jewel in The Crown*. This DVD examines the plight of native fish in the Flathead with a focus on current problems facing bull trout.

Through conversations with the last generation of anglers who were able to legally fish for bull trout in our home waters and many historical photos as well as interviews with local fisheries biologists and managers, we examine the current situation and where we need to go now to preserve our native fish heritage in the Flathead Basin.

Get your copy today: *Jewel in The Crown* is available for only \$12 (+ \$2 shipping and handling) and can be obtained on the FVTU website www.flatheadtu.org, at several participating local fly shops, or at our monthly general meetings.

The Whole Picture—from page 3

Mr. Vashro stated that bull trout redd counts in tributaries upstream from Lake Pend Oreille have dropped sharply in the years since netting was initiated and concludes netting has clearly played some role in the decline. Mr. Vashro's conclusions were evidently drawn by limiting his analysis to using redd count data from 2006-2013. The 2006 estimate of redds was the highest on record and represented a 30 percent increase from 2005. No one with IDFG was surprised to see that number drop the following year.

A more comprehensive assessment of available bull trout information including; all the historical redd count data, population estimates, catch rates, and exploitation rates shows why concluding lake trout suppression is adversely impacting the bull trout population in Lake Pend Oreille is off the mark.

First, bull trout redds have been counted annually in tributaries to Lake Pend Oreille since 1983. Although counts are widely regarded as an accurate index of the adult bull trout population, the relationship between the actual number of bull trout redds created and those counted may vary because of counting conditions, observer bias, and stream flow events. For that reason, most biologists recognize that redd counts should be used to reflect long term trends, and generally agree drawing conclusions from a single counting event can be misleading.

Since 1983, the total number of redds in Pend Oreille tributaries has ranged from 320 to 1,256, with an average of 689. The mean number of redds prior to the net-

ting program (1983-2005) was 584. The mean from 2006 through 2013 was 782. Using only counts from the six "index" streams, the mean prior to netting was 508, compared with 493 after netting began. Statistically speaking, there has been no downward trend.

Second, the incidental capture of bull trout in the netting program afforded IDFG the opportunity to conduct mark-recapture population estimates of bull trout in 2008 and 2012, and compare those with an estimate from 1999. Those estimates show no decline in the bull trout population, and the most recent estimate of 11,700 bull trout (over 16 inches), is almost identical to that from 1999.

Third, because deepwater trapnets have been set in identical locations and times each year since 2006, the catch rate information (expressed as fish/net/night) provides another index of the bull trout population. We now have an eight-year data set with which to evaluate catch rates of both lake trout and bull trout. While the catch rates of lake trout have plummeted, as desired, the catch of bull trout has increased. The lowest bull trout catch was in 2007, at 0.1. By 2013, it had increased nearly three-fold and was the highest on record.

Fourth, another means of evaluating whether the netting effort is affecting the population is to put the number of bull trout captured in context with the total population. In 2013, the number of adult bull trout inadvertently killed in the netting program was 261. Using the 2008 population estimate (the lowest and thus most conserva-

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tive estimate) this equates to only 5 percent of the adult population. A fishing mortality rate of 5 percent is low by any standard, and well below a level that biologists would expect to impact a population. We recognize some of the bull trout released may not survive. A mark-recapture study to evaluate survival of bull trout released from gillnets shows 75-85 percent of them survive. However, for the sake of discussion, even if we assume the extreme scenario that every bull trout handled in the netting program was removed from the population, the annual mortality rate would only be 17 percent -- still well below a level that would be expected to drive down the population.

Mr. Vashro correctly points out that the population of bull trout has not been growing despite the efforts to suppress lake trout. All of the available information about bull trout abundance and trends indicate the population has been quite stable for the past thirty years. He suggests that IDFG has had to shift the focus of the work from bull trout to kokanee to justify the work. That claim is incorrect. IDFG Fishery Management Plans from 2001 through present all clearly state the multiple objectives of the lake trout suppression program. IDFG has never wavered from the objectives of maintaining a bull trout population capable of supporting a sport fishery and restoring the tremendously popular kokanee and trophy rainbow trout fisheries.

That the bull trout population has not increased since lake trout suppression began isn't surprising. Spawn-

ing and rearing habitat in the Pend Oreille system is relatively limited, and IDFG has long-maintained that the bull trout population is likely at, or near, carrying capacity. Fortunately, the availability of funding, necessary public support, and proactive management enabled the program to be implemented before the bull trout population suffered a decline from the rapidly expanding lake trout population.

Flathead Lake and Lake Pend Oreille are different systems, socially and ecologically. Because lake trout were a new component of the Lake Pend Oreille fishery when the suppression effort began, lake trout anglers were a relatively minor angling contingency. Clearly, Flathead Lake has many anglers and businesses who value the existing lake trout fishery.

IDFG wishes the best to MFWP, the CSKT, FWI and other stakeholders as they chart a course for the Flathead Lake fishery. We are happy to share what we've learned and welcome the use of the Lake Pend Oreille data during the course of the discussion. Considering the tremendous resources that have been spent on what amounts to a very large-scale experiment we felt an obligation to set the record straight.

Jim Fredericks
Regional Fishery Manager
Idaho Department of Fish and Game



FVTU News Briefs

Three GOP Senators Block North Fork Protection Act

Montana's newest U.S. senator, Democrat John Walsh, tried Thursday to pass the bill protecting the North Fork of the Flathead River from mineral development, but a trio of Republican senators blocked the move.

Ted Cruz of Texas, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma – objected. The offices of Cruz, Toomey and Coburn could not be reached for comment.

While Walsh's attempt to pass the bill failed, the measure remains on the Senate calendar and could be considered later.

"This is exactly what's wrong with Washington, D.C., and I invite my colleagues who objected to the bill to float the North Fork this spring and see why this bill is so important," Walsh said in a statement.

Legislation to protect the North Fork watershed, in the works for at least four years, would bar any future oil and gas or other mineral leases on federally owned land in the watershed west of Glacier National Park.

The effort has been in conjunction with agreements by Canada to stop mineral development in the North Fork drainage in British Columbia.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., said Thursday that the bill "fell victim to a few folks who can't even find the Flathead River on a map."

"Politics trumped good policy, hurting Montana's economy and our outdoor heritage in the process," he said. "The American people deserve better."