



FALL 2009

Presidents Corner

Some good news, some news of concern for native bull trout in the Flathead, and some general FVTU goings on

This Fall Fish Wildlife and Parks proposed increasing protection for spawning bull trout by extending closures at the mouth of Big, Bear, and Woodward Creeks in the Flathead basin to keep folks from targeting bull trout when the current closures end at the end of August. Thanks to Jim Vashro at FWP for getting comments from chapter members at our October meeting.

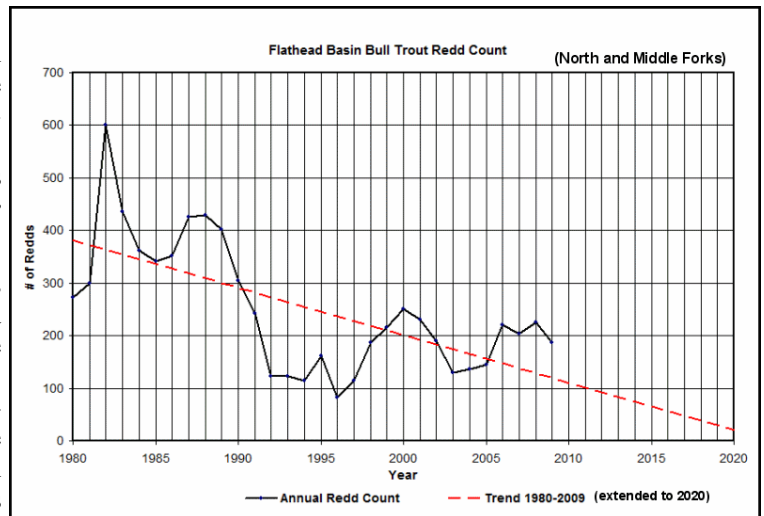
On November 3rd MT Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in Kalispell released their 2009 bull trout redd count reports for the Middle and North Forks of the Flathead as well as for the Swan and the South Fork Flathead tributaries of Hungry Horse Reservoir (minus the wilderness). These reports and the press release are available on the FVTU website at www.flatheadtu.org.

The population of bull trout is characterized by FWP as “stable” in the North and Middle Forks of the Flathead, yet the trend since the redd counts began in 1980 has been downward, as you can see in the included graph. If one looks at the trend line it would seem, as one member puts it, that “the “stable” population has a little over 10 years left.” This trend should be of great concern.

Over the years our chapter has expressed concern over declining populations of native trout. Bull trout are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Our native westslope cutthroat trout are listed as a species of special concern as well. As you’ve heard us say before and we say again here, “*Now is the time to save our native trout.*”

Fisheries managers, currently implementing strategies to reduce non-native lake trout populations in Lake Pend O’reille and Upper Priest Lakes in Idaho, Yellowstone Lake in Yellowstone Park, Quartz Lake in Glacier Park, and Swan Lake share a common hypothesis, based on statistical models. The premise is that if one can reduce the lake trout population by 50% or more annually, through various measures ranging from fishing contests to bounties to large-scale netting, the lake trout population will reach

a “tipping” point where the population will start to significantly decline, or even collapse. At that point native trout populations can begin to recover in a significant way. Wouldn’t it stand to reason that the same models should be considered with regard to the decreasing bull trout population in the Flathead? If the bull trout population experiences a decrease of 50% or more due to predation by non-native lake trout, which the Flathead population has, the bull trout population could “tip” and collapse. It should also be pointed out that bull trout are being impacted by other factors such as the Kerr and Hungry Horse dams, water



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Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009 by Lucky Sultz

There's an old saying that "*It takes an act of Congress to cut timber in Montana*". The timber industry has been hard hit in recent years due to falling lumber prices, climate change, competition from imported lumber, and the economic downturn. One prime concern to timber companies has been court challenges to federal timber sales by environmental organizations. Environmental organizations, for their part, see potential conservation and recreation areas slipping away due to development and logging is a convenient target.

About 3% of Montana is designated as wilderness, much less than some other western states, and we haven't seen any new wilderness created since 1983. Conservation organizations would like to see more federal land protected as wilderness. Timber interests fear removing more lands from potential harvest. Snowmobilers, ATV owners and mountain bikers don't want to lose recreation areas. Mining and grazing interests fear losing more areas to wilderness. State and county governments don't want to see more erosion of their tax base as lands are locked up.

Many environmental organizations have pinned their wilderness hopes on the mammoth *Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act*. NREPA would designate 24 million acres of new wilderness in five western states, including about seven million acres in Montana. Some version of this legislation has been introduced in every session of Congress since 1991. It has only received a public hearing twice and has not yet made it to a vote. No member of Congress from the five affected western states would agree to co-sponsor the current version of NREPA. The bill instead was sponsored by a congresswoman from New York. Wilderness legislation has become the third rail of western politics.

Owing to courage or inexperience, freshman senator Jon Tester stepped into the fray. Senator Tester looked around Montana and felt that the current top-down approach to western land management just wasn't working in our state. Senator Tester saw several "place-based" forest initiatives being worked out in local areas by community stakeholders and federal land managers. Tester looked at three initiatives in particular, the Three Rivers Challenge in the Kootenai National Forest, the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Project in the Seeley-Swan and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership. In consultation with local partners from all interest groups, Senator Tester and his staff fashioned the *Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009* introduced in the House in July.

The bill designates 670,000 acres of new wilderness in Montana. It directs the U.S. Forest Service to "mechanically treat" 10,000 acres per year for the next ten years. Timber harvest will come primarily from the more than two million acres of currently roaded land already designated for timber harvest. Logging priorities will include beetle-killed trees, urban-wildland interface areas and previously logged areas. Mandated harvest will create jobs and give local mills a more predictable source of material. Harvest will come with strict environmental restrictions such as, removal of temporary roads and some existing roads. Receipts from timber harvesting will be spent in Montana by creating at least 50,000 acres of "stewardship projects". The projects will include things like improving fish and wildlife habitat, removing or repairing fish barriers, fixing or removing some roads, repairing campgrounds and cleaning up streams. All stewardship work and timber harvest must be done in compliance with the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.



The bill has received its share of justified and unjustified criticism. There is skepticism over whether the timber projects will generate enough revenue to pay for the stewardship projects. There is fear that passage of this legislation will harm chances for other wilderness designations such as NREPA in the near future. Some don't like establishing a precedent of Congressional mandates removing management decisions from local control. Objections have been raised about passing a bill which mandates harvest quotas when the lumber market is in a slump and agency budgets are being cut. And of course, some groups are just opposed to any more wilderness at all and fear government intrusion in Montana.

The good news is that the bill has gathered together an unprecedented coalition of conservationists, timber companies, federal agencies and ATV and snowmobile advocates. Long-time adversaries like former governor Marc Racicot, former U.S. representative Pat Williams, author Rick Bass and many others have spoken and written in support.

Montana Trout Unlimited, was an early backer of the place-based initiatives and of this legislation. Along with other groups like the Montana Wilderness Association and the National Wildlife Federation, TU has supported the legislation because much of the protected wilderness and special management areas will serve to protect headwater areas of important Montana streams like the

(See Forest on page 5)

Once the most abundant and widely distributed of the cutthroat trout subspecies, westslope cutthroat trout have declined dramatically across their range. Although habitat degradation and angler exploitation have played a role in the decline of this native fish, the principle threat has been competition and hybridization with introduced trout species. Today, the South Fork Flathead drainage comprises over half of the remaining interconnected habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and persistence of this native Montanan depends in large part on conservation actions aimed at reducing threats posed by nonnative trout species.

The South Fork Flathead River provides a world-class westslope cutthroat trout fishery in a pristine wilderness setting. However, historic stocking of nonnative Yellowstone cutthroat and rainbow trout in headwater lakes poses a threat to the persistence of native trout in this drainage. In 2007, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) began implementation of the South Fork Flathead drainage westslope cutthroat trout conservation program. The objective of this multi-year project is to remove nonnative trout from twenty-one headwater lakes and reestablish populations of westslope cutthroat trout. Removal of these introduced trout populations will prevent the downstream spread of hybridization and protect the remaining genetically pure populations of native trout.



Westslope cutthroat trout exhibit strong spawning site fidelity; that is, they return to their natal stream to reproduce. Over time, reproductively isolated populations accumulate adaptive genetic differences that allow them to persist in their particular environment. As a result, the conservative approach to westslope cutthroat trout restoration would be to preserve as much of this genetic variation as possible. Considering the scope and geographic extent of the South Fork restoration project, biologists and conservation-minded anglers emphasize the importance of preserving as much genetic variation as possible among populations within the South Fork drainage.

Presently, the M012 broodstock is the only certifiably disease free and genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout population available for restoration efforts. Developed in the mid 1980's, this brood was founded from twelve South Fork and two Clark Fork tributary populations. Fish from this brood have been extensively stocked in western Montana lakes, including those in the South Fork. Although the M012 is derived predominantly from South Fork tributary populations, it still contains only a fraction of the westslope cutthroat trout genetic variation that exists throughout the South Fork drainage. Consequently, MFWP initiated efforts to create alternative "drainage-specific" brood sources for conservation. Prior to establishing a broodstock, extensive disease and genetic testing is required to identify potential donor populations. Additionally, suitable donor populations must have high densities of fish in order to be able to rebound from having several hundred or more individuals removed from the population and transported to the hatchery. Once streams are identified that fit these criteria, the real work of wild fish collection, transportation, and captive rearing and spawning begins.



Located at the southern end of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Danaher Creek meanders through a high elevation meadow complex before joining Youngs Creek to form the headwaters of the South Fork Flathead River. The cold, clear tributary streams that feed Danaher Creek are filled with clean gravels that provide for ideal spawning and rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout. In July 2009 fisheries crews collected 270 juvenile westslope cutthroat trout from Danaher Creek as part of the initial effort to establish a brood stock from this genetically pure, disease-free population. To help ensure that the fish survived the 24-mile trip from Danaher Guard Station to the North Fork Blackfoot Trailhead, fish were loaded in plastic bags filled with oxygenated water and placed in cooler panniers with ice. After eight hours on the trail, the pack string of mules arrived at the trailhead where a hatchery truck awaited their arrival. Hatchery workers transferred fish from the mules to the aerated trunk tank where they began the

next leg of their journey to Sekokini Springs Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Facility in Blankenship. Survival was excellent during the long transport; all but one of the fish survived. Presently, these fish are in the process of transitioning from wild to hatchery feed and those that mature this spring will be spawned to initiate a "Danaher-specific" broodstock. Subsequent wild fish collections will take place over the next two years to ensure that the genetic variation in the broodstock is an adequate representation of that found in the wild Danaher population.

Next summer fisheries crews will continue genetic and disease testing in South Fork streams to identify additional popula-

(See Brood Stock on page 4)

(Bull Trout from page 1)

quality, water temperatures, spawning habitat losses, and sedimentation. Bull Trout are being pressured from numerous directions.

The current Flathead Lake Co-Management plan is in its final two years. This plan has been a good mechanism to monitor and provide input into the status of our native species in Flathead Lake, which heavily influences the rest of the Flathead basin. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the FWP deserve recognition for working collaboratively on this plan. We hope that there can be continuing cooperation by these agencies with the public in order to find a long-term solution to the non-native lake trout problem.



Fencing Project 2009

In addition, from the FWP report, redd counts for both the Swan and the South Fork Flathead are well below the ten-year average. As you know, fishing for bull trout is allowed in both of these drainages under special regulations, with the harvest of two bull trout per year from Hungry Horse and one bull trout daily allowed in the Swan. It is a treat to be able to fish for formidable fish such as the bull trout in these drainages, but given the decreasing redd counts I believe action should be taken here as well to safeguard these populations. Perhaps it is time to consider catch and release only regulations for bull trout and westslope cutthroat in the Swan and South Fork and single barbless hook regulations in the entire South Fork Flathead drainage, not only to save native bull trout there but also to safeguard the last stronghold of westslope cutthroat in Montana.

We are fortunate to have very good biologists working on this issue locally. Wade Fredenberg with the US Fish and Wildlife Service; Barry Hansen with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; Mark Deleray, Leo Rosenthal, Brian Marotz, Matt Boyer, and other FWP biologists; Chris Downs with Glacier National Park; and Clint Muhlfeld with the USGS Science Center in Glacier, to name a few, all are doing good work. Each agency/individual works diligently on their respective part of this puzzle. Perhaps FVTU and these biologists can all sit down for lunch and connect the dots between each agency's part of the puzzle to create a better "big picture" view of this issue.



Kids Camp 2009

My hope is that significant actions can be taken now to stop this disturbing trend in our native bull trout populations. It was encouraging to have Jim Vashro (FWP) tell the chapter at our October meeting that there is a possibility of beginning an Environmental Assessment for netting lake trout on Flathead Lake in order to achieve catch levels necessary to "tip" the lake trout population downward. Current fishing contests and general angling on Flathead Lake may be getting us part way there, but further action is needed to reach the tipping point.

On a very positive note, the first of three seasons of lake trout removal on Swan Lake have been completed with approximately 5,750 lake trout removed since late August. Score one for native bull trout in Swan Lake, and thanks to MT FWP Travis Horton and Leo Rosenthal, The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Trout Unlimited, Montana State University, the US Forest Service, and the other partners who moved forward with this important project. Stay tuned and please continue your support for native bull trout and westslope cutthroat restoration in the Flathead basin.

We'll keep you in the loop when opportunities for your comments arise.

The Flathead Valley chapter has a great lineup of monthly programs for this season including the 2nd Annual Christmas Fly Swap, and a program on fishing the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia. The complete schedule is included in this newsletter. Also included, you'll find a contribution by Matt Boyer, FWP Fisheries Biologist for the South Fork Flathead Westslope Cutthroat Restoration Project, an article on tying another beautiful pattern by Jim Johnson, and an article by Lucky Sultz on Senator Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, which Montana TU has been instrumental in moving forward, and which will result in protection of some important Montana headwaters for our native trout. Enjoy the newsletter, and remember, the fishing is always good, and sometimes the catching is too.

Chris Schustrom, Chapter President

(Brood Stock from page 3)

tions for replication. Building upon lessons learned from this past year, it is hoped that in the future multiple brood stocks will be available for westslope cutthroat trout conservation in the South Fork.

Matt Boyer
MFWP Fisheries Biologist
South Fork Flathead Conservation
Project



(Forest from page 2)

Missouri, Madison, Beaverhead, Ruby, Blackfoot, Clark Fork, Kootenai, Jefferson and Big Hole rivers as well as Rock Creek, Monture Creek, Grasshopper and Big Sheep Creeks. These areas include important habitat for native cutthroat, bull and redband trout and areas that have been under consideration for oil and gas leasing.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act may finally be able to overcome the long drought in the creation of new Montana wilderness. According to Tom Reed, backcountry coordinator for Trout Unlimited, *“Sportsmen see this bill as an insurance policy for their hunting and fishing pastimes. Thanks to Senator Tester and this bill, hunting and fishing will always be a part of the Montana cultural landscape.”*

By Lucky Sultz
FVTU Board Member



Win this Drift boat

Don't miss this great opportunity to win a brand new Clackacraft and help Conserve, Protect and Restore Montana's native trout and their watersheds in the process!



This fall, the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited is raffling of a brand new 16' Low Profile Clackacraft. At only \$20 a ticket, how can you not give yourself a chance at driving away with this beautiful boat!

Tickets are on sale now, so don't wait! There is no limit on the number of tickets you may purchase, so buy two, heck buy five!

To purchase tickets:

Call 406-543-0054 or send a check along with your phone number, e-mail and mailing address to Montana Trout Unlimited PO Box 7186 Missoula, MT 59801.

Fly Tying Classes

Five weeks; January 4th, 11th, 25th;

February 1st, 8th.

Contact: Jim Johnson – 837-3210.



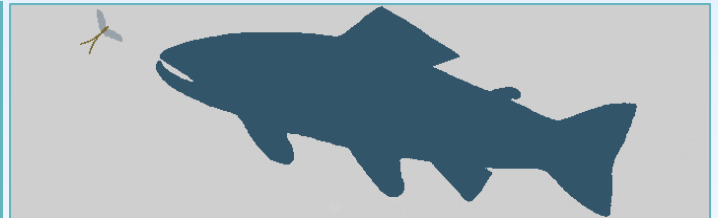


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Calendar of Events

- November 17, "**Senator Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act**" with Tracy Stone Manning and Bruce Farling.
- December 15, **FVTU Christmas Party, Fly Tying Extravaganza, Fly Swap**
- January 19, "**Fishing Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia**" Ryan Peterson
- February 19, "**Fishing the Blackfoot Valley**" Dan Paschke
- March 12-14, "**Great Rockies Sport Show**" Flathead Fairgrounds
- March 16, "**Bamboo Rods**" Jerry Kustich
- April 20, Pending
- May 8, **Annual Banquet** - Grouse Mountain Lodge

We need pictures! Send us your favorite fishing photos and we will add them to the next newsletter. Email the photos to bulltrout@montanasky.net. Send in the photos or you may get tired of seeing my pictures over and over again.
FVTU Web-site at FlatheadTU.org!!