



WINTER 2011

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This evening as I write this, the high for tomorrow is forecast to be 6 degrees and the low -6. It is not really fishing weather, so I am hitting the vise and hitting the slopes as well. I am about finished tying my parachute Adams in various sizes to start the season. I still have a lot of skwalas and salmon flies from last year, but most of my golden stones and yellow sallies are chewed up from last year and will need replacing. I am also planning out my coming trips. Hopefully, I can make it to some new waters for me, like the Big Hole and the Beaverhead. It has also been a while since I've been down to the Yellowstone and Madison.

After my mind drifts all over the state, I soon come back to the Flathead Valley, thinking about the "after work" floats and wade trips I plan to do as well. These are just quick trips that keep me going through the work week and get me to my next weekend off. (I work every other weekend, so there is a bit of time between each big trip.) I enjoy catching beautiful westslopes on a size 12 parachute Adams and being surprised every once in a while when an extra-nice cutty comes to the fly. They make the frustration of trying to get a big, Missouri River trout eat a size 20 PMD seem less important.

I also begin to think about a particular fly box that is not a full as it should be. It is my big, huge, ugly streamer box. I have not been keeping up with that box, at least with the intention for bull trout. My trips above Hungry Horse Reservoir on the South Fork to fish for bullies are just a pipe dream that hopefully will come together soon.

It's a shame that we are limited to so few waters to fish for certain trout native to Montana. Especially since our state has so many places that are a trout fisherman's dream come true. I urge you, as a Trout Unlimited member, to speak up on behalf of native bull trout to our state Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. We cannot talk about bull trout recovery without talking about lake trout removal. This past year was the first out of a ten year plan when the numeric goal for lake trout removal by fishing was actually met. The angler success this year should not be celebrated only in light of past shortcomings. Under the recently completed co-management plan the lake trout population was allowed to double from an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 lake trout. If the primary goal is to reduce the lake trout population, we have to say that the goal has not been met.

Please let your voices be heard. We must make it clear that we favor restoring the Flathead bull trout population to the point where you can intentionally catch a bull trout in our home waters. The question we must ask is; When will it be time to get serious about restoring the bull trout population? Will it be when we can no longer fish for native bull trout in the South Fork, Swan Lake, and Lake Koocanusa? Will it be when accidentally catching a bull trout in the Flathead River is an absolute rarity? From my perspective, that point was reached when we were no longer allowed to intentionally fish for bull trout in most of their home range. Our native fish need a strong, clear voice and as TU members, we are committed to being that voice.

FLY TYING CLASS 2011



Legislature Now in Session

Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited wants to remind you that the 2011 Montana Legislature is now rolling at full throttle and that may not be good news for Montana fishing or our natural environment. Montana TU provides an informative web page with legislation to watch and important Action Alerts on bills that need our support or bills that we may need to derail.

http://www.montanatu.org/take_action/mt_legislature.htm

Please pay particular attention to House Bill 309 that will severely cripple Montana's 26-year old stream access law and restrict your legal access to many of our waters. Contact your representative and let him or her know that this bill is a bad deal for Montana sportsmen. You can find your legislator's contact information on the Montana TU web page or at the Montana Legislature website. Thanks again for your help and for supporting our wild fish.

<http://leg.mt.gov/css/default.asp>

See more at FlatheadTU.org

FVTU February General Meeting

We hope you will join us at our next general meeting Tuesday night February 15 . *Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited* will host Jason Lanier from Bigfork Anglers. Jason will present a fun and informative program on *Fly Fishing the Swan River*. If your regular fishing itinerary includes the Swan River, you will want to be there to pick up some professional tips and secret spots. Our monthly meetings are held at the Fish Wildlife and Parks Building, Public Meeting Room at 490 N. Meridian Road in Kalispell. The meeting will begin at 7pm. Coffee and cookies are always on hand.



Cooperative Solutions Needed Now to Save our Native Fish

by Paul Pochak, President Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited

Montanans have long cherished native bull trout and westslope cutthroat as important sport fish, cultural symbols, indicators of good water quality, and drivers of our recreation economy. Many Montanans grew up learning how to fish by catching these two species. Future Montana kids deserve the same opportunities, but without determined actions now, these opportunities will be lost.

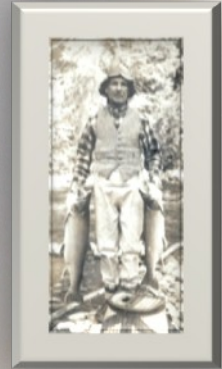
Predation by non-native lake trout is consistently recognized as the number one threat to native bull trout and westslope cutthroat in the Flathead. Unfortunately, current proposals to help these important fish are not being well-served when scientific information is incompletely presented or misleading. It is important for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and its Flathead office to present complete scientific data and to accept the results, and to honor the commitments the agency has made in state plans to recover bull trout and cutthroat trout in Montana.

An inclusive process initiated by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes is currently underway to find more effective ways to reduce the non-native lake trout population in Flathead Lake in order to recover native bull trout and westslope cutthroat populations in the Flathead drainage. During this open process the public strongly supported native bull trout and westslope cutthroat recovery, commenting in favor of aggressive actions such as netting of non-native lake trout to reduce the population of lake trout in Flathead Lake. Comments supporting recovery of native fish far outnumbered those submitted in support of non-native lake trout.

Disappointingly, FWP is ignoring this strong public support for native bull trout and westslope cutthroat, and continues to drag its feet in agreeing to practical solutions that will recover native bull trout. The agency's opposition is based on its position that bull trout populations are "stable" or "secure" in the Flathead. Nothing could be further from the truth. Since 1980 there has been a continuous downward trend in native bull trout populations in the Flathead based on FWP's own population survey data. For example, in 1982 FWP biologists counted over 400 bull trout redds (bull trout spawning beds) in the North Fork Flathead. In 2010, FWP biologists counted just 54 redds in the same waters. FWP biologists in Kalispell choose to analyze and present only recent data to support their claims of a "secure" and "stable" native fish population in the Flathead. This conveniently chosen timeframe shows a slower rate of decline in Flathead bull trout populations. Regrettably, this population "stabilization" is occurring near the low end of historical population numbers, and native bull trout and westslope cutthroat populations are barely holding on by their fins.

Bull trout in the Flathead are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Montana FWP tabs westslope cutthroat a "species of concern." Because of their threatened status, fishing for bull trout is illegal in Flathead Lake and the Middle and North Forks of the Flathead River. Following drastic declines in bull trout redd counts in the Swan drainage, it appears angling opportunities might also eventually be curtailed there. The status of bull trout in pristine habitats of Glacier National Park is also in decline. Biologists report that bull trout in 9 of 12 lakes in the northwest corner of the Park have effectively become extinct because of non-native lake trout that moved in from Flathead Lake.

Montana FWP must honor the commitments it made when it helped develop, then signed the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan and a similar statewide plan for cutthroat trout. Both plans call for pro-active efforts to recover key native trout habitats such as in the Flathead. The agency should heed its own scientific data as well as what it is hearing from the public. It is the right thing to do to restore and sustain populations of our iconic native fish for future generations. Contact Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks in Helena at brich@mt.gov, and in Kalispell at jvashro@mt.gov to let them know that you support effective actions for recovering native fish.





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*Conserving, protecting and restoring North
America's Coldwater fisheries and their
watersheds*

SEE THE FULL COLOR NEWSLETTER AT
www.flatheadtu.org
FVTU Website is LIVE



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Calendar of Events

- February 15, 2011 'Fly Fishing the Swan River' with Jason Lanier of the Bigfork Anglers. 7:00 pm at the FWP Headquarters on Meridian Road in Kalispell.
- March 11-13, 2011 'Great Rockies Sport Show' volunteer fly tiers, casters and helpers needed. Call Paul at 406-393-2113.
- May 21, 2011 FVTU Annual Banquet – Grouse Mountain Lodge in Whitefish.