

September 2016 Bull Trout Working Group Minutes

Meeting held September 16, 2016 at the Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board office

Attendees: Pat Monk, Judy Neibauer (USFWS); Mitch Long (KCT); Scott Kline, Eric Anderson, William Meyer (WDFW); Richard Visser (USBR); Dave Fast, Jeff Trammell (Yakama Nation); Gary Torretta, Eric Merten, Tom Matthews (USFS); Ashton Bunce (CWU); Alex Conley (YBFWRB); Anna Hood, Cassandra Weekes (MCFEG); David Child (YBJB).

On the phone: Gabe Temple (WDFW), Jose Vazquez, RD Nelle (USFWS).

1. Review and Approval of Agenda

2. Bull Trout Action Plan (BTAP) update

Cassandra Weekes updated the group on the BTAP update process. A BTAP work session for the Kachess populations was held before the Bull Trout Working Group meeting to review the proposed 2016 Box Canyon and Upper Kachess River action updates and additions. A revised draft will be sent out in early October and final comments will be incorporated by the end of October so we can approve the 2016 Kachess populations update at the December 1st Bull Trout Working Group meeting.

During the morning session, the group also completed final edits to the Gold Creek Population action updates and recommended that the Working Group approve it. The Bull Trout Working Group approved the final version of the Gold Creek action updates, and agreed to begin updating the BTAP actions for the remaining Upper Yakima populations (Teanaway, Cle Elum, Waptus, mainstem Yakima) prior to the next meeting.

3. Microhabitat selection of young-of-year bull trout in a drought year

Ashton Bunce with Central Washington University presented her graduate research. Ashton's study examined the microhabitat selection of YOY bull trout in Gold Creek throughout the summer and fall of 2015. Microhabitat variables included bottom velocity, depth, distance to the nearest shoreline, substrate and fish cover types present. YOY were observed inhabiting shallow stream margins with little or no detectable flow. A mixed effects logistic regression model was developed modeling the presence of YOY bull trout in response to several microhabitat predictors. This model suggests that bottom velocity, distance to the nearest shoreline and the interaction between depth and season were some of the most significant predictors of presence of YOY bull trout. Overall, YOY bull trout were shown to have very specific habitat requirements relative to the stream habitat available to them in Gold Creek. The results from this study demonstrate the importance of critical rearing habitat for highly vulnerable YOY bull trout.

4. Bull Trout eDNA Assessment

Cassandra Weekes and William Meyer discussed the Rangelwide Bull Trout eDNA Project and presented the Climate Shield maps for the Yakima Basin. The Climate Shield maps for the Yakima have 1,300 eDNA sample sites identified. The group discussed funding sources for bull trout eDNA sampling in the Yakima Basin. USFWS in Leavenworth partnered with Wild Fish Conservancy and was successful at obtaining a Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) funding. A sub-set of the Bull Trout Working Group agreed to work on a WNTI proposal that's due October 7. The group will meet to work on the proposal collaboratively.

5. Bureau of Reclamation update

Richard Visser gave an update on Bureau of Reclamation projects. Reclamation has shifted its short term focus from work on Rimrock passage to ensure adequate passage at Clear Creek Dam, which has been identified as a high priority. Pat Monk updated the group on the bull trout trap-and-haul project at Clear Creek Dam. 30 adults have been transported around the dam. All were pit-tagged and a genetic sample was taken before being released. 14 of the bull trout went up the NF Tieton and 3-4 went into Clear Creek. There was only 1 recapture in the pool below the dam. It's estimated that the bull trout population stuck below Clear Creek Dam may be around 100 fish.

Richard discussed the Kachess-area projects that the US Forest Service has submitted to Reclamation for inclusion in the Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant EIS.

Reclamation has not had any reports of fish passage issues across the reservoir beds thus far in 2016. The Fish Passage Work Group looked at options for fish passage through the Kachess Narrows and at Box Canyon Creek. The Fish Passage Work Group chose a roughened-channel on the left bank as the preferred alternative for passage at the Narrows.

6. Juvenile demographics data collection

Scott Kline updated the group on bull trout juvenile demographics data collection at Box Canyon Creek, Mineral Creek and the Upper Kachess River to support the habitat suitability curve development. Nearly all of Box Canyon was snorkeled in August and Mineral and Kachess were snorkeled in September. Macro-invertebrate sampling was also conducted on all three streams.

Box Canyon Creek results using quarters: (if one divided the whole accessible reach into quarters with the first quarter being at the mouth adjacent to the reservoir and the fourth quarter being that quarter below and adjacent to Peekaboo falls.)

1. Fourth quarter of the stream: 2 adult bull trout, 7 juvenile bull trout ranging between 160 and 280 mm, and no YOY were found.
2. Third quarter: 0 adults, 4 juvenile bull trout, and no YOY were found.

3. First quarter (it wasn't fully completed): 0 adults and 43 YOY bull trout (50-60 mm) were found.

The first quarter still needs finished and the second quarter was not surveyed.

Mineral and the upper Kachess surveys will be completed in the coming weeks.

7. Bull Trout Task Force update

Anna Hood, Bull Trout Task Force member, gave an update on the 2016 accomplishments. The Bull Trout Task Force directly educated 580 anglers and recreationists, hosted 10 campground presentations, posted over 100 signs, and removed 128 recreation dams. The crew monitored for low flow and dewatering at Gold Creek, Box Canyon Creek, Upper Kachess River, Indian Creek and Deep Creek. The Bull Trout Task Force assisted with a fish salvage on Ahtanum Creek after Ahtanum Irrigation District turned off irrigation. The crew will now transition to assisting with spawning surveys and snorkel surveys.

8. USGS Modeling of Upper Yakima Populations

Judy Neibauer updated the group on the USGS pilot study for the Upper Yakima. USGS staff will begin a modeling effort for the Upper Yakima using local input for its development. The model will serve as a tool that will help make decisions about the best use of resources for recovery actions, including salvage. The model will outline fundamental objectives for the persistence of bull trout, help to identify alternatives with regard to recovery tasks, including salvage, and assist to facilitate management decisions. The first iteration of the model will be out in October.

9. Closing Items

Alex Conley showed the group the updated Bull Trout Working Group (BTWG) and Bull Trout Action Plan (BTAP) webpages on the Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board website. On the BTWG webpage you can view past meeting minutes and agendas, as well as information for upcoming meetings. On the BTAP webpage you can view completed 2016 updates and draft updates that are in progress.

Cassandra Weekes asked for feedback on the Bull Trout Working Group operations. Discussion was had and folks seem happy with the Working Group process.

The group discussed topics for the next meeting, including temperature monitoring, eDNA sampling, USGS model and salvage, bull trout captive rearing, Gold Creek update, bull trout redd count update, and brook trout removal.

The group agreed the next meeting would be held on Thursday, December 1, 2016.