

Yakima Bull Trout Work Group Meeting

Wednesday July 8th, 2020

Virtual meeting convened at 9am

Attendees: Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Emily Smith, Ahtziry Salazar, Kelsey Martin (MCFEG), Bob Mecklenberg (Gold Creek Landowner), Marc Divens, Josh Rogala, William Meyer, Scott Kline (WDFW), Melissa Speeg, Mitch Long (KCT), Todd Newsome (YN), Michael Callahan (ecology), Richard Visser, Pat Monk, Clint Wertz (BOR), Jose Vazquez (USFWS), Collette MacLean, Shauna Warehime, Erin Kuttel

Updates and announcements:

BOR: The group was informed that there is work being done on Cle Elum passage. Box Canyon work is on hold for the time being. The BOR has had several upcoming meetings on Clear Creek Passage and they are looking at widening the ladder to 6' for future salmon use.

Yakama Nation 2019 bull trout release: 78 of 107 Gold Creek fish survived to release; they released this week 1/2 in Gold Creek under I-90 bridge crossing, 1/2 were released at the Hyak boat ramp. Both groups detected already at pit tag detector on Gold, they are feeding on kokanee fry. For Kachess fish, 152 of the 1200 collected survived to release, the numbers were lower than expected but 13% survival is still better than likely survival in wild. 1/2 of the Kachess fish were released in mouth of Kachess River, 1/2 were released by Gale and Thetis creeks. USFWS surgically implanted 5 acoustic tags; Jason Romine used 5 of the Kachess bull trout raised in La Salle Hatchery and implanted acoustic tags to held to assure survival and released at the mouth of Kachess.

Box Canyon pit tag detector installed; Kachess and Gold detectors are also operational (Kachess needs one antenna unit repaired).

Todd is passing 10 hobos to Connor for Kelsey and Ahtziry (the BTTF) to deploy in Big Creek next week.

2020 Field planning:

The group went over Scott Kline's 2020 bull trout field season calendar, he noted that all WDFW employees will not be working on Fridays during the month of July, eliminating night rescues on Thursday evenings in until August and pushing box canyon work until August as well. The group was informed that MCFEG has 5 interns this summer and they can commit 2-3 people per rescue event. Flows in both Gold Creek and Upper Kachess River have been higher than previous years, so no rescues have needed to be done, the first rescue is planned for the 15th of July.

The group talked about COVID playing a role in safety and how we can function as a crew this year. The group agreed that crew sizes of 4-6 people is ideal. Masks, separate vehicles, sanitizing equipment and social distancing will be required on every rescue effort/ joint fieldwork. William proposed that we shorten the rescue season to only the most productive weeks, Todd noted that the permit states they will take half the fish up stream and half the fish back to the hatchery, so it may be a good idea to focus the early rescue season on transporting them upstream and later season for transporting to hatchery to help increase the survival at the hatchery.

Marc talked about the 2020 redd survey season and he will develop draft schedule soon; the group noted that car shuttles may not be allowed due to COVID, so that should be thought through. Mitch noted conditions this year make it especially important to coordinate with private landowners; eg contacting SkiTour when people will be using road past the gate on Gold Creek. Marc will work with small group (William, Emily, Russ, Scott K, Connor) to look at schedule and logistics given COVID restrictions and we will touch back on redd survey season in our August meeting.

Peek-a-boo Falls

Scott Kline updated the group on the Peek-a-boo falls re-introduction efforts that are being explored. He touched base on what is in place and what is needed; USFWS will do rapid genetic tests for population/sex/age/relatedness prior to release of any fish above the falls. Crews sampled this month and caught only 4 cutthroats for pathogen analysis requested by USFWS- we will need to discuss if that is sufficient or there needs to be more caught.

USFWS and YN and Joint Board are working together to find money and materials and staff time to install above Peekaboo PIT tag antenna. Discussion by the group on whether risk of poaching was such that the project should be delayed until fishing regulations could be changed (not possible this year); the group also noted high presence of uninformed anglers, even in closed reaches- others noted that pre-spawn fish are less likely to bite, and a fair bit of habitat to spread out in; decision left to WDFW. Either way, the group agreed it is good to do outreach and enforcement with anglers this summer and understand location/intensity of pressure. It was also mentioned radio tags may be the best option to find out if poaching has an impact like we think it does, or the option of relocating young of year fish to reduce poaching was thrown out as well, but challenging with Box Canyons YOY counts so low. Melissa noted Box Canyon area recreation attracts a very diverse crowd, and that should be taken into consideration in planning outreach. Fishing regulations will hopefully be changed in 2021. Until then BTF will assist with more outreach and working with the USFS to make sure seasonal campground staff are aware of fishing regulations

Gold Creek

Mitch informed the group that the Gold Creek Restoration project is slow going, due to COVID. They are scoping contract for 3rd party NEPA and responding to comments. They are expanding piezometer network to inform Modflow model (no managed by Maggie at NSD). NSD has done a bathymetry of Heli's pond for modeling.

Upper Kachess River

Melissa updated on Kachess River project; they will have 90% designs soon for the instream portion. A pump tests will be done August/September to inform 50% design on gallery channels by June. The QUAP and HPA are taking time. A cultural survey underway using Noah Oliver of YN, and USFS engineering are beginning to evaluate road decommissioning, new trailhead and bridge (newly required at trail crossing to stay within ARBO).

Temperature

Emily overviewed the BTWG temperature map, calibration, plans for deployment. Todd noting Russ will use motorcycle trail to deploy 2 loggers between USFS sites on NF Taneum, BTF is placing loggers into Big Creek as well. The goal now is to collect good data at the end of the year to analyze.

5 Year Review

Erin introduced herself to the group and discussed the 5-year review coming up and how we can be useful. In August she will come back and we will talk about demographic data and trends, and in October we will assess threats and write core area summaries.

Pat asked if the status of reintroduced populations will fall under ESA, Erin noted they will be included unless exempted by 10J experimental population rule, successful reintroductions should help bolster status of core area.

Todd also noted the group needing to discuss genetic goals to allow balance between maintaining local genetics and creating bottlenecks.

Final Topics

Our next BTWG meeting will be August 27th, on GoToMeeting. Agenda item ideas include: using a session for demographics discussion with Erin for the 5-year review; redd survey coordination and temperature logger recovery/analysis coordination.

Adjourned 12:45 PM