

Yakima Bull Trout Working Group

Thursday, April 1, 2021

8:58 AM

Attendees:

Todd Newsome, Russ Byington (YN), Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Emily Smith, Connor Parrish (MCFEG), Gary Torretta, Eric Merten (USFS), Melissa Speeg (KCT), Josh Rogala, Marc Divens, Scott Kline, Bruce Hiener (WDFW), Jason Romine (USFWS), Richard Visser (BOR), Jason Lederer (Forterra)

2021 field season work planning:

Emily Smith informed us that the BTTF will start in mid-June and Kelsey Martin will be rejoining us this year and Emily Euker, 2020 MCFEG intern, will be the other crew lead. They will run Wednesday-Saturday, Wednesday and Thursday will be dedicated to night work, Friday rock dams, and Saturday outreach and education.

Scott Kline informed the group that rescues will be Wednesday and Thursday evenings, with the possibility of Fridays. In August and September there will be some overlap with night snorkel surveys, rescue and redd surveys. There might be a need to break up into smaller teams during the busy times so we can cover more ground. If Box Canton above Peek-a-Boo falls reintroduction does happen in the 2021 field season there will need to be monitoring once a week happening in the end of July, and on weekends to assess recreation impacts.

There will be 2 types of snorkel surveys happening this field season, adult survey during daytime and night snorkels for long-term population demographics. Deep Creek was brought up, it dewateres every year and the group has not done many rescue events, the group may want to focus one or a few rescue efforts on Deep Creek this year.

Todd Newsome spoke to the work that the Yakama Nation is going to be doing this summer. They will focus 1 week on YOY rescues to ensure uniform size/ growth in the hatchery tanks from Gold and Kachess. The rest of the summer they will be helping rescue and relocate upstream. There will be a capture of 300 YOY in South Fork Tieton River to raise in La Salle until they are juveniles that will be placed in Taneum. He noted that the fish that are at La Salle now are doing well and growing fast and are feeding on rainbow trout now. The Yakama Nation is also looking to electroshock for brook trout in Teanaway. The Yakama Nation is planning on releasing the 2020 rescued fish that are at the La Salle hatchery at the end of May. They will release them at the mouth of Thetis Creek, Gale Creek, and the Upper Kachess River.

Jason Romine informed us that USFWS plans on doing trap and haul again this year and focusing on Bumping upstream of the barrier and setting up temperature loggers in Bumping.

Josh Rogala plans of doing passage monitoring at his usual sites and encourages people to report recreationist that are driving on the Keechelus reservoir bed.

Marc Divens noted that redd surveys will follow the same protocol as last year, there will be a calendar of survey dates that people can sign up for. There may need to be more focus of the more difficult to access reaches like Crow Creek. We also need to remember to survey South Fork Tieton below the spawning index.

The group also discussed the possibility for more eDNA samples to be taken and exploring the areas where we received positive eDNA hits in the past like NF and MF Little Naches. Todd did note that they did look for redds at NF Little Naches heavily 2 years ago and saw nothing, but they could have been a little early. It might be beneficial to look in the streams based on temperature changes and not dates so we have a better chance of seeing fish if they are there. There was the discussion of maybe doing some exploratory surveys on Spinola and Log Creek, as Spinola likely has a bull trout population.

Temperature loggers are going to get collected soon from Taneum and Big Creek. As a group we should come up with or find a protocol to follow when it comes to setting up temperature loggers so we can make sure the data we collect is accurate and useful. Loggers will be going into or are in Box Canyon, Kachess, Teanaway, Swauk, and possible more places if loggers are available, BTTF can deploy loggers in early June.

We are still working with different agencies COVID protocols, so keep other updated as your agency updates their policies.

Afternoon Session

1:00 PM

Attendees: Andrew Matala, Russ Byington, Shawna Warehime, Todd Newsome (YN), Emily Smith, Connor Parrish (MCFEG), Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Katy Pfannenstien, Robes Parrish, Jose Vazquez, Aimee Taylor, Jason Romine, Cynthia Raekes (USFWS), Eric Merten, Gary Torretta (USFS), Paul James (CWU), Melissa Speeg (KCT), Marc Divens, Scott Kline, Maureen Smalls, Steve Caromile (WDFW), Jason Lederer (Forterra), Joel Freudenthal (BOR), Michael Callahan (ECY), Bob Mecklenburg (Gold Creek Land Owner)

Updates and Announcements:

Following introductions, the group welcomed Jason Lederer as the new contact with Forterra.

Alex spoke for Richard Visser that the BOR delta study is still happening, and he is meeting with the technical service survey in Denver to scope out the reservoir bed delta study preliminary stages. The group spoke about it before but didn't include it in current funding. Alex also noted Kachess restoration work has put in for this year's SFRB round. It was also noted that we may want to look at the Ahtanum upper WIP diversion, Joel informed the group that there is know extra head at the diversion and it is in the capital plan.

Peek-a-Boo Falls update:

Scott Kline reminded the group of the work that has already been done and set into place to have reintroduction above Peek-a-Boo falls in 2021. He noted the new completed components including a PIT tag array above the falls and using tracking with hydroacoustic tags as apposed to PIT and radio tags, with support from USFWS and WDFW. He noted the things that still need to happen. Monitoring plan, which should be out for review soon, it will include a proposal to use any bull trout at Peek-a-Boo falls as a candidate for reintroduction, even it is a 100% Kachess fish genetically. There will be a small amount of fish transported because there is such a small population to begin with. There also needs to be more enforcement/education and outreach done above the falls, which will be done by BTTF.

Scott went on to then share with the group data supporting his minimum number of fish that can be safely relocated and where the donor population would come from. Scott noted that the fish at the base of the falls can be candidates and they would be relocated, unless genetic testing came back, and they were too closely related. Jose noted that Bull Trout will sit at a passage barrier and then turn around to spawn as opposed to reabsorbing their eggs or milt. When Scott has completes the monitoring plan, we will send it out for review.

Bull Trout Genetics:

Mureen Smalls spoke to genetics and the fish that are being reintroduced. She doesn't see any genetic reason to not relocate any fish at the base of the falls. The issues, not genetic, would be if they are bull trout that are on a feeding run and are following fish on a spawning run, accidentally having relocated bull trout eating the eggs the relocated adults above the falls. From a genetic standpoint, we just can't remove too many fish from a system with a small population, but as far as mixing from Box and Kachess there wouldn't be a problem.

Alex noted that the biggest difference between Box and Kachess fish is run timing. It is unknown if that is genetic, they are genetically very similar.

As far as mixing of genetics in general with all of our relocation and introduction that we have on a table, she noted that mixing happens every year prior to impassable barriers.

Teaway Brook Trout:

Russ informed the group about the 2021 plan to electro fish for brook trout in the Teaway in Jack Creek with help from MCFEG and Trout Unlimited. This is until we can get YY male Brook Trout. This is a new practice for the Teaway so we are looking forward to seeing how accurate the eDNA hits are and how many brook trout are actually up there.

Hatchery Update:

Todd informed the group that the fish at La Salle are doing well, they are larger than last year. Both Kachess and Gold Creek fish being fed live fry now. They are going to release them in May, holding a few back for acoustic tags and possibly Peek-A-Boo relocation. Next year they will utilize La Salle and Marion Drain to hold rescued/ captured fish.

YBIP Recommendation review:

Alex reviewed the May 2020 recommendations that the group agreed upon last year. Joel updated the group on the South Fork Tieton bridge work that had most of the funds allocated towards (\$700,000). They are about 8 months behind where they hoped to be, haven't started the final design but they are in the throes of doing the BA. It has been difficult with permitting and land issues. The reservoir bed is owned by BOR so any construction activities would be under BOR but the agreement is with the USFS. They don't have an easement to be on BOR land, making the NEPA difficult. There is now a finalized letter from BOR and USFS that lays the ownership and permits, resolving property issues, which is a huge step forward. Contracts for bridge design should be done within 2 months. Yakima County should be the contractor for the construction work. The road will be surveyed and it will be obvious that it is a county road on forest service land. Currently the project is 65% design, construction may start in fall of 2021. The road may be closed all winter long since there are alternative routes around the site.

Alex then noted that the other large amounts of funds from 2020 are going to upper basin projects. This next biennium the funding amount will be smaller. We went through the rest of the 2020 projects that we granted funded.

Melissa Speeg updated that Kachess will get the majority of the 2020 upper basin funding as they are already close to a complete design. They are going to put in to SRFB this year as well.

Taneum Creek Update:

Todd spoke to the introduction of bull trout in Taneum. This summer Yakama Nation is planning to collect 150-300 YOY from SF Tieton River and Kachess River fish that will be raised for a few months in the hatchery and then released. They will collect some larger fish that would be PIT Tagged and put into the creek that day. They will have 4 PIT Tag detectors in the system. The BA is being wrapped up and will go to the USFWS soon.