

# NOTES from the October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Yakima Bull Trout Working Group Meeting

Meeting held at the YBFWRB Office with remote participation option from 9 to Noon

## Attendees:

Alex Conley & Kayla Gallentine (YBFWRB), Craig Haskell & Connor Cunningham (USFWS), Trevor Hutton, Steve Caromile, William Meyer, Scott Kline & Marc Divens (WDFW), Kathryn Furr & Gary Torretta (USFS), Todd Newsome, Russ Byington & Tom Elliot (Yakama Nation), Sam Scherck (MCFEG), Richard Visser, Scott Wiley & Patrick Monk (BOR), Collette MacLean (Forterra), Michael Humling (USFWS), Mitch Long (KCT), Robert Mecklenberg, John Reeves, Joel Hubble, Walt Larrick, and Dave Fast

## 1. Welcome and introductions

The group shared introductions and reviewed the agenda. The group agreed to add an agenda item to discuss priority actions in Ahtanum Creek with the Yakama Nation Watersheds Project staff.

## 2. Updates and Announcements

### Kachess Instream Project Funding

Alex gave an update on behalf of Mitch Long of the Kittitas Conservation Trust on the Upper Kachess Instream Restoration Project. Designs are completed and a contractor has been selected. KCT just received \$2 million from their application to the Ecology Stream Flow Grant Program for the project, which, when combined with secured funding from the SRFB and US Forest Service, will allow construction to be completed in a single year in 2023 rather than being phased across several years. The proposed road decommissioning and relocation of the Mineral Creek trailhead may need to find additional funding. The Ecology funding award means that YBIP funds for KCT's Upper Yakima Bull Trout projects can be shifted to cover ongoing work in Gold Creek.

### YBFWRB Bull Trout Updates

Alex informed the group that YBFWRB has signed a new agreement with Mid-Columbia Fisheries that will make roughly 20-30% of Aimee Taylor's time available to support the Bull Trout Working Group. The funding from YBFWRB will be combined with Bull Trout Task Force Funding and WDFW funding for bull trout monitoring and data analysis work to allow Aimee's position to focus entirely on bull trout year-round, a first for Mid-Columbia.

Alex asked if anyone from the Yakima attended the *Salvelinus confluentus* Curiosity Society meeting in Montana in September; no one was aware of anyone that had.

### Yakama Nation Bull Trout Project Update

Todd Newsome updated the group on the proposed Easton Bull Trout Research Facility and noted that Richard Visser is working to move this forward with the help of Urban and Roger at Kittitas Reclamation District. Work has started on the permitting process for building the facility, now that the first pump testing of state park wells has been made.

Todd noted that the good news is that ninety-five Young of Year Bull Trout were collected from Gold Creek and are now being reared in the LaSalle facility. The bad news is that no Kachess fry were captured. The group discussed why normally abundant fry were not seen in Kachess this year, noting that the high flows in June may have washed Young of Year out of the system. There were only 4 redds last year, only one of which was above the large wood jam, but in the past even lower redd counts have

resulted in abundant Young of Year.. There were thousands of Cutthroat, but they were noticeably small, raising the question of whether cool temperatures slowed growth and emergence.

Todd and Russ continue to work with Scott Wiley on securing NEPA and ESA coverage for next phase of the broader reintroduction project.

#### Trap and Haul Program Update

Craig Haskell gave an update on the USFWS trap and haul program and associated pit-tag tracking. Pit-tag antennas are largely back in place and running after many washed out last spring. Trap and haul was completed below Clear Creek Dam and 14 fish were captured. 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s were from the North Fork Tieton and were moved above the dam; the remaining Indian Creek and South Fork Tieton fish were returned to Clear Creek below the dam. Few fish were captured at other sites, leading the group to discuss why catches were higher in previous years. The group noted that many fish may have been entrained in Kecheelus and other reservoirs in the 2015 drought, creating a pulse of fish in the Yakima below the dams. The group noted that the need for trap and haul at some sites might be greatest after similar drought years.

The design work on the mobile denile fish ladder is at 100%; they are now looking at out-sourcing fabrication. The ladder will be tested at Clear Creek and potentially below Tieton Dam before being used elsewhere.

The group noted that several fin-clipped fish (rescues returned instream or reared at LaSalle) have been seen in surveys in Box and Kachess this summer.

#### Redd Survey updates

Marc Divens gave an update on redd surveys. Naches surveys are almost finished, and the team is now working on the remaining Upper Yakima populations. The South Fork Tieton count is 70+ redds, though historically it was 100+, so there seems to be a downward trend. Deep Creek has at least 125 redds. Indian Creek is at ~75 redds which is an increase over recent years, but still less than its peak years. The group discussed the history of partial passage barriers and debris flows in Indian Creek and noted that it is good to see the red counts increasing.

#### State and Federal Bull Trout Programs

Steve Caromille noted that the draft Species Status Assessment report is due to be completed by the end of October or beginning of November. It will be put out to tribal review first and then a few weeks later rolled out to other partners. He also discussed plans to continue state/USFWS meetings with local bull trout work groups to review and update species status and threats data, and said they hope to schedule a meeting with the Yakima Bull Trout Working Group in late January/early February. Steve and Alex noted that our work in Yakima Basin has been used as a model in other parts of the state, and that partners in the Methow Basin are now organizing to do a Bull Trout Action Plan.

### **3. Comments on the YBIP 10-year Plan for Bull Trout**

Craig Haskell walked the group through the final draft of the YBIP 10-year Plan for Bull Trout and discussed how the plan relates to other documents. The group suggested adding placeholder actions for habitat work for the Naches Ahtanum populations and for brook trout control. Craig noted that the deadline for any further comments is prior to the November 3<sup>rd</sup> Habitat Subcommittee meeting, when that group will review and approve the plan.

#### **4. Demographic Survey Updates**

Scott Kline presented a presentation on the 2022 demographic surveys. He looked at changes in the distribution of redds and juvenile age classes over time and noted that data shows increased Young of Year upstream, which is consistent with the hypothesis that recent wood placements would help young of the year avoid being washed down below Big Pool Falls, which are impassable to small juvenile fish. He also noted that there has been an increase in brook trout in Box Canyon Creek, with 5 sightings this year after years of zero being found in the creek. This is concerning but not surprising; the group asked whether temperature data shows warming that would correlate with increased bull trout presence, and whether or not Big Pool Falls is a barrier to Brook trout. Scott will be further analyzing this year's data over the winter.

Scott noted that while only 2 young of year bull trout were found in the fish rescue efforts, several were found further upstream in the demographic surveys. The group discussed the potential for large wood projects in Mineral Creek. Scott noted that this year, Deep creek had few cutthroat and sculpin, Indian Creek had very few cutthroat and sculpin and no tailed frogs, while the S. F. tieton had no brook trout and lots of bull trout and cutthroat trout.

#### **5. Upper Ahtanum Habitat Project Ideas**

Tom Elliot and Kelsey Harbick of the Yakama Nation Watersheds Project joined the call and asked for input on potential restoration actions in the Upper Ahtanum watershed that they could potentially include in grant applications they are developing. They are open to collaboration with the state beyond Yakama Nation Reservation boundaries, and noted that low-tech wood projects that benefit lamprey and bull trout would be a good fit. The group briefly discussed current and past projects in the Ahtanum and reviewed the relevant section of the Yakima Bull Trout Action Plan. Richard Visser highlighted that connectivity throughout Ahtanum from the Tampico area to the Yakima River is a major limiting factor for bull trout, and that at some point, flow, temperature, and floodplain restoration work should happen. Others noted that Ahtanum is the only population in basin that is exclusively resident and that the best thing we can do is reestablish an adfluvial population. The group recommended following up with DNR staff on possible projects, including work around Treephones Campground, and noted that it would be valuable to do a more in depth review and update of the Ahtanum section of the BTAP and further discuss future actions, including possible supplementation, for the Ahtanum population.

#### **6. Timing and Topics for Next meeting**

Alex reminded the group that the next meeting will be on December 6<sup>th</sup>. Potential topics include work planning for 2023, review of the year's final redd data, eDNA results and next steps and more. Alex thanked John Reeves for sharing information on a proposed rezone near Gold Creek and promised to share that link via email.