

May 18, 2023 Bull Trout Working Group Meeting Notes

Attendance In-Person: Aimee Taylor (MCF), Scott Kline (WDFW), Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Connor Cunningham (USFWS), Gary Toretta (USFS), Zac Zacavish (MCF), Craig Haskell (USFWS), Trevor Hutton (WDFW), Brittany Beebe (USFWS), Kayla Gallentine (YBFWRB)

Remote Attendance: Kathryn Furr (USFS), Walt Larrick, Kathy Robertson (USFWS), Russ Byington (YN), Jason Romine (USFWS), John Reeves, William Meyer (WDFW), Todd Newsome (YN), Katy Pfannenstein (USFWS), Mitch Long (KCT), Joel Hubble, Andrew Matala (YN), Erin Eaton (TU)

Updates and Announcements

Easton Dam PIT antenna is up and running in the juvenile fish screen bypass thanks to Pat Monk of BOR. The antenna can communicate with PTAGIS. PIT antennas at the adult ladder are being planned but the completion date is not known.

Late winter (Feb/March) tributary flows in the reservoirs were on track with 30 year lows.

Yakima Basin Science Management Conference: Scott to present on science at box canyon/Kachess. Russ will present on rescue, rear and release. Aimee is interested in potentially presenting or collaborating with Scott. Mitch – not likely to have the capacity to present.

Scott is building a schedule for field work this summer.

Salvelinus confluentus curiosity society (ScCS) – BTWG to host for May 2024?
AFS – in Michigan (August?). No one in this group is likely to attend.

Brittany Beebe (USFWS MCFWCO) has been promoted to the new YRBWEP Liaison position (Craig's old position). Craig has moved into the Yakima Lead position (Jason's old position) and Jason is now working out of Leavenworth as the Deputy Project Leader.

There has already been verified Bull Trout poaching in closed areas at Clear Creek dam. Free fishing weekend (June 10th weekend) Aimee plans on being up at Clear Lake for outreach/patrol.

Discussion to invite local game enforcement to BTWG meeting – for example new WDFW Sergeant in the area.

BTTF is still awaiting cultural resource approval to move forward with rock dam removal. USFS does not have a timeline for completion, but the request has been elevated and Kathryn Furr is working hard to get this through before summer. Rock dams are identified as important actions in the integrated plan.

The SRFB grant review process is underway and there are two proposals for funding for Bull Trout projects: Gold Creek in-stream restoration project, and the design phase for Cold Creek passage by TU.

Bull Trout Video: Mitch Long

Mitch is proposing to contract North Forty productions. They propose a 4-5 minute, interview driven, informational video providing an overview of BT in the Yakima Basin and advocating for a sense of urgency to restore populations to healthy levels. Goal is to educate the public, gain support for restoration.

Aimee – it would be helpful to have an accessible website to accompany outreach efforts. A one stop shop for public engagement and education. The video would be hosted there, as well as education like brook vs bull trout ID, actions they can do, etc. QR codes to the website could be posted on signage and outreach materials.

Designing a new web page could include citizen science forms for rock dam reporting, bull trout sightings, etc.

Cold Creek Passage Project: Erin Eaton

TU is working on a proposal for passage on Cold Creek, a tributary of Keechelus lake that is potential rearing habitat for Gold Creek bull trout populations.

In the early 1900s, Milwaukee railroad installed a culvert which created a massive elevation drop downstream, eliminating fish passage. BoR attempted to rectify the passage. Unfortunately, the BoR passage fix blew out within a few weeks after construction in the first high water event.

Larrick – it seems like BoR has a responsibility to rebuild?

Newsome – if the BoR is the project lead it will take too long for them to get to it. BoR should be involved in the ESA funding.

Willey –BoR would like to be involved but they have a list of current project priorities: Cle Elum fish passage, Tieton fish passage, Clear Creek Dam, etc.

BoR has some information as to why the initial design failed due to concentrated weather events. Erin and Scott Willey to connect to share information.

How do we characterize the habitat – do we call it spawning habitat or rearing habitat? TU is working with WDFW to come do an assessment of the creek. BTTF may be available to assist.

SRFB funding, Water smart grant, and NOAA funds are currently being asked for- just for design costs.

PIT tag antenna to be installed in Cold Creek mouth by USFWS before the end of May.

Brook Trout Removal Discussion: Trevor Hutton

Trevor wishes to talk about brook trout suppression in Bull Trout areas.

Over the years it's been handled at various levels (opportunistic bonks, targeted removal, email chains that "force" staff to remove any brookies they come by, etc). The goal is to come up with a consistent narrative of fish management authority from WDFW to other partners/managers in the basin. For example, a non-federal employee shocks brook trout, what do we do with it?

Trevor aims to create a policy specially targeting managing non-native game fish. Public perception is important. We want to avoid a PR issue. Trevor's responsibility is to document appropriately so that we are on the same page on what the plan is, across agencies. Trevor plans to generate a one-pager or similar living document that lays out WDFW approved management actions.

Trevor asks where there should be brook trout suppression happening, whether it is targeted or opportunistic. He notes that opportunistic killing of brook trout likely makes no difference. Are there areas where we should do targeted suppression?

Yes, but staff capacity to implement is the limiting factor.

Aimee says snorkel surveys in Deep Creek found more brook trout than expected.

Todd says their effort in Jack creek (Teaway) removed about 600 in one day.

Dog Lake and Leech Lake are likely seed populations for the Tieton basin. High lakes and pond populations are flushing out into the systems during highwater events.

Box Canyon creek is starting to see more brook trout presence.

Scott thinks that anywhere that there are bull trout, or reintroduction areas there should be a targeted brook trout removal. Reintroduction areas might benefit the most from this.

Indian Creek has historically had Bull and Brook trout verified hybridization. North Fork Tieton also produces hybrids.

Lower Clear Creek (~2 miles) is a prime area for BT to expand dispersal, but is full of brook trout.

The Kalispell tribe is conducting a removal program that's working that could be transferrable to this part of the state. BTWG plans to invite Lead on this project to an upcoming BTWG meeting. (Joe Maroni – Kalispell, Bill Baker- WDFW)

---BREAK---

Discussion of USFWS 10-year Bull Trout Plan: Craig Haskell

The team has completed draft of success metrics as part of the 10-year plan. These metrics would guide consultation of the maintenance of the Yakima project specific to the BoR. Data was presented to the policy team which requested metrics that are more so aligned with YBIP, which are more stringent than the ESA recovery plan.

The way they set it up, population specific metrics are tied to YBIP broadly. Example, habitat acres restored, fish passage metrics for say, clear creek dam. Population scale metrics were in the old draft but those disappeared in 2015.

Adult survival metrics are also included via annual survival in some estimate: Redd count by WDFW, etc. These are all aspects being discussed in incorporating updated population metrics.

Scott and others suggest incorporating juveniles into population scale metrics.

Craig says he will send out draft success metrics and asks for comments and feedback (to go out with BTWG follow-up email from Aimee).

The next step is to present this information to the policy committee.

YBIP Funding Recommendations: Alex Conley

The legislature just approved the full Ecology funding request for the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP). The BTWG will need to update its funding recommendations based on current project status at its July meeting. Project sponsors should be prepared to give an update to the group on how they propose using recommended funding.

The recommendations currently include the following projects: South Fork Tieton bridge, Gold and Kachess river restoration, YNF Bull Trout rescue and rear, BTTF, YBFWRB BTWG/BTAP, and a WDFW Bull Trout Senior Biologist.

Aimee to send out this document for review during the meeting follow-up email.

Temperature Logger Coordination (Bull Trout waters): Zac Zacavish

Questions arise for what we want to do with temperature data with the basin.

Collect data now in established habitats to compare reintroduction areas or potential spawning and rearing streams estimated in the patch model.

We plan to start collecting temperature data in spawning indexes and along the migratory corridor, for example: three per stream.

MCFEG's larger Bull Trout Task Force team size means that loggers can be deployed earlier and give new techs a great orientation to the basin. This could set us up to have some great data for relocation discussions as well as viability of current populations.

Where do we have cold patches? and are they stable or shrinking.?

How many loggers do we want to buy and how many loggers are available to contribute to this? If we are to implement in the top, middle and bottom of bull trout bearing streams a prelim count by Aimee = 54 new loggers needed at a cost of roughly \$8,640.

Jason – What is the cost vs benefit to leaving loggers year-round? For example, are there streams that get too cold in the winter? We don't want to lose too many loggers but still want to collect important data.

Does any other entity have access to available loggers? BCD? YBFWRB? Look at Aimee's temperature map to fill data gaps.

Discussion ensued on who has loggers where, and folks that have loggers already in Bull Trout water agree to send location information to Aimee.

Teaway, Box, Kachess are well covered. USFWS PIT antenna sites all have temperature loggers (NF Tieton, SF Tieton, Indian, Clear Creek Dam, etc.)

Acoustic Telemetry Update: Connor Cunningham

6 acoustic receivers on Keechelus and 13 on Kachess gave us a total of 1.7 GB of data, 10.3 million detections.

Some fish have temperature/depth tags some are just pingers that give a general sense of location.

General trend is that the majority of detections are in Little Kachess near the north side of the lake.

It seems that some of the earlier tagged fish have batteries dying now.

Some indications in the data show if a fish has been poached, example data shows fish moving straight up water column and disappearing. It is unlikely to be avian predation because the data isn't showing fish hanging out on the surface first.

BTWG members: It would be interesting to know when (ie time of day) and where those tags disappeared and compare information to the creel surveys. Kachess creel last year showed no captured bull trout.

Question: does where the fish get released have an influence on where they stay? In 2021, there were two different release points – near the river mouth and near the point/island. Romine feels that the fish released closer to the mouth of the river seem to fare better.

John Reeves – there are more receivers on the north side than south side? How does that affect the detections? Answer is that the receivers are set up to encompass the whole lake. The topography of the North side and the Narrows requires more receivers to match the efficiency of the South Side of Kachess lake where there is more wide-open habitat.

Kachess Restoration Project and Coordination of field activities: Mitch Long

KCT met with project leads – looking at beginning to mobilize in the next week of two. Setting up staging areas, installing a gate to close areas off to traffic. Harvesting trees, 65 pieces of wood –

spotted owl detections analysis. Working from bottom of creek up, two crews working on structures. The work window is projected July through September 30th involving 7-day work week.

Fish rescue and demographic crews are to coordinate with Mitch for access to the site and information about when and where the contractors will be working.

Zac MCFEG and Josh WDFW – orthomosaic of the site?

Area will be closed to recreation during work window. Need to post this to WTA account due to the popularity of the Mineral Creek Trail.

Scott to contact Mitch about Piezometer download (June to July).