

Panhandle Region Annual Fisheries Report



2012 Activities and Accomplishments

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Please take a few minutes to review our research and management activities in 2012. I hope you'll agree that we've had another productive year. The regional management staff recently said farewell to long-time fisheries biologist Mark Liter who's now retired. If you had the opportunity to spend time with Mark in the field or at a kid's clinic, you know how passionate he is about fishing, so I suspect you will see him on the water a bit more often. We'll have his position filled soon and be up to full speed by the field season.

This newsletter is posted on the IDFG website <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/about/offices>. If you have questions or want to share your thoughts, please give us a call. If you'd like to be included on an e-mail distribution list for periodic summaries and information, send a request to jim.fredericks@idfg.idaho.gov and we'll add you to the list.

Inside this Issue...

Lake Pend Oreille fishery recovery	2-3
Kootenai River fisheries research	4
Lake Pend Oreille trout survival studies	5
Sportsman's Park Access Upgrade	5
Steamboat Pond Improvements	5
Coeur d'Alene Lake Fishery Monitoring	6
Channel catfish evaluation	7
Cutthroat trout trends	7
Cocolalla Lake Perch	7
Priest Lake population survey	8

2013-15 Rules Mark Progress in Pend Oreille

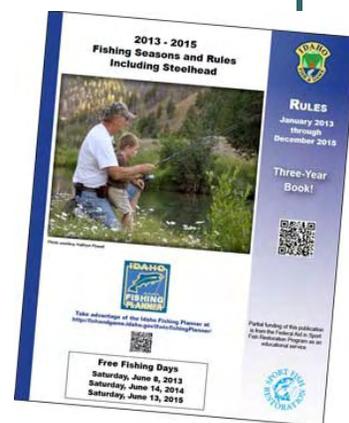
The Idaho Fish and Game Commission recently approved new fishing rules, which took effect on January 1, 2013. In Panhandle Region waters, the most significant changes are associated with Pend Oreille Lake, where the lake trout removal efforts and an improving kokanee population have made it possible to restore a limited kokanee fishery. For the first time since 1999, anglers will be allowed to keep a limit of 6 kokanee on the lake that once supported a commercial fishery for the small, landlocked salmon.

In addition to kokanee harvest, the new rules are designed to begin rebuilding the trophy rainbow trout population. This includes a reduction in rainbow trout harvest from unlimited to a six-trout daily limit, with only one rainbow trout over 20 inches allowed. Although the Clark Fork River and most Pend Oreille tributaries will remain open year-round, anglers will no longer be able to harvest rainbow from Dec 1 until Memorial weekend. The Pend Oreille lake trout harvest incentive program will continue through 2013; however, the program ended for rainbows on January 1.

Elsewhere in the region, anglers in the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe river drainages will now be required to release any trout with red/orange slashes under the jaw. The new rule is to address the difficulty anglers were having properly distinguishing cutthroat from rainbow x cutthroat hybrid trout.

The most significant statewide change is a shift to a three-year cycle. This means the new rules will be effective through 2015. The extension from the former two-year cycle was done to minimize the confusion associated with frequently changing rules. The main concern expressed about the longer duration was the ability of the Department to respond to changes in fish populations or angling pressure in a timely manner. Fortunately, the Commission has the ability to make "emergency rule changes" at any time, so even though rules are now established for a 3-year period, they're not carved in stone.

A complete set of the fishing rules is available on the IDFG website <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/fish/rules/>, or in hard copy from Idaho fishing license vendors and IDFG regional offices.



Pend Oreille Fishery Recovery Effort Update

The past year was both productive and exciting for the Lake Pend Oreille Fishery Recovery Project. In fact, the program hit some key milestones in 2012 that anglers have been looking forward to for several years. Two of these changes are particularly notable. First, the kokanee population continued to rebound and reached levels not seen since the mid-90s. This allowed us to re-open a limited harvest (6 fish daily) kokanee fishery for 2013. This marks the first time since 1999 that anglers can harvest kokanee in Lake Pend Oreille. Second, we ended the unlimited harvest and \$15 harvest incentive program for rainbow trout and adopted more protective fishing rules for 2013. The daily limit for rainbows in Lake Pend Oreille is now six fish with only one allowed over 20 inches. Tributary fishing rules also were changed to provide protection for rainbows during spawning. The change in direction for rainbow trout management was possible because of the success of predator removal efforts (i.e., fewer lake trout) and increased kokanee abundance. Over time, these rule changes will allow more rainbows to reach trophy size, especially now that they have a more abundant kokanee food supply. There is still a lot of work to be done to reach fishery recovery goals, but the positive response of the fishery in recent years is evidence that we are making great progress. Anglers have played a major role in helping to improve the fishery and we thank you for your efforts!



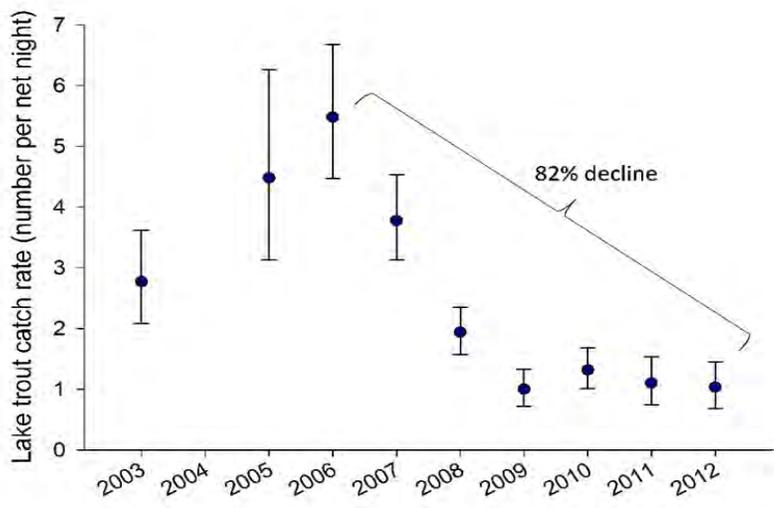
Lake Trout Control

The aggressive lake trout removal program continued in 2012 using both commercial netting equipment and the Angler Incentive Program (\$15 per fish rewards). Nets were used from mid-January through the end of April and from early September until mid-

December, which resulted in a total of 30 weeks of netting. The netting strategy has been refined over the years so that it maximizes lake trout catch rates while minimizing incidental by-catch of bull trout. Netting targets primarily juvenile (10"-16") lake trout during most of the year, except during a 5-week period in the fall when adult lake trout are targeted at spawning sites. Adult lake trout aggregate at three spawning sites in the lake, which makes them extremely vulnerable to netting.

Netting removed a total of 9,818 lake trout and anglers removed another 7,813 lake trout during the year. Since the program started in 2006, over 151,000 lake trout have been removed from netting and angling combined. Population monitoring showed that the lake trout population continued to decline in 2012. Trap net catch rates have been proven to be a good index of adult lake trout abundance, and we've seen those rates drop by about 82% since 2006 (see figure). Also, gill net catch rates at spawning sites are a good indicator of the number of adult lake trout, and they dropped by over 50% just in the past year. We also saw continued signs that juvenile lake trout are declining. Since 2006, gill net catch rates for juvenile lake trout

The number of adult lake trout caught in trap nets has declined over 80% in the past six years, reflecting the decline in the lake trout population.



have declined by 63%.

Overall, the lake trout population is continuing to get smaller and we are increasingly optimistic that we'll be able to keep lake trout at a low enough abundance over time to allow for good kokanee survival. We will be continuing to work to determine what the best and most cost effective strategy is for maintaining a low abundance of lake trout into the future.

Rainbow Trout

The Angler Incentive Program continued during 2012 and anglers removed 9,810 rainbow trout. This marked the last year of \$15 rewards for rainbows, as new rules took effect on January 1, 2013. When the program was started in 2006, the goal was to temporarily reduce the rainbow trout population to reduce predation on kokanee so that they could avoid population collapse. The long-term goal was to return to trophy rainbow trout management once the kokanee population rebounded. Ultimately, the rainbow trout population was able to withstand seven years of unlimited harvest and they did not decline in abundance. However, size structure was reduced with

fewer large fish in the population. The continued increase of kokanee allowed a return to trophy rainbow trout management starting in 2013. With these new rules in effect and more kokanee available as a food supply, anglers should expect the rainbow fishery to improve over the next few years.

Some anglers have expressed concerns about the trophy potential of the rainbow trout population in Lake Pend Oreille. Gerrard strain rainbows were originally introduced from Kootenay Lake, B.C. and are known to reach large sizes when kokanee are available as a prey source. Anglers have asked if the rainbow population in Lake Pend Oreille has retained Gerrard genetics or if they have hybridized with other strains of rainbows. To answer that question we completed a genetics study in 2012. Genetic samples from pure strain Gerrards were collected from Kootenay Lake and compared to samples taken from rainbows in Lake Pend Oreille. Genetic analysis showed that the two populations are very similar genetically and that Pend Oreille rainbows much more closely match the genetics of Gerrards from Kootenay Lake than from other strains of rainbows that were also tested. We concluded from this study that growth potential of rainbows in Lake Pend Oreille has not been compromised by altered genetics. This is good news for trophy rainbow anglers. Since genetics are not problematic, we should see the trophy rainbow fishery rebuild steadily if kokanee remain abundant. Some anglers are still interested in boosting the population with pure Gerrard rainbow fingerlings raised from eggs acquired from Kootenay Hatchery. We are currently discussing the possibility with the BC Ministry of Environment.

The genetic study showed that Pend Oreille rainbows are very similar to Kootenay Lake Gerrard rainbows and growth potential of rainbows in Lake Pend Oreille has not been compromised by altered genetics



Kokanee

We completed our annual kokanee population surveys in 2012, which allowed us to determine how well the population responded to various management actions (i.e., predator removal). A variety of monitoring occurred, but most important were the hydroacoustics and trawling surveys in August. These surveys allow us to estimate the abundance of kokanee in each age class and total biomass of kokanee in the lake. We saw modest increases in the kokanee population from 2008-2011, but the estimates in 2012 were even more encouraging. Kokanee biomass, which is the total amount of kokanee of all sizes combined, was the highest it has been since 1996 (see figure at right). We were especially pleased to see very strong younger age classes of kokanee. We estimated that there were about 8.3 million fry, 4 million age-1 kokanee, and 1.6 million age-2 kokanee. These estimates are far stronger than we've seen over the past decade. Overall, the kokanee population is the strongest it has been since the mid-1990's. With strong younger age classes we should continue to see more spawners return in coming years.

Survey results indicated that the kokanee population has rebounded enough to once again support a

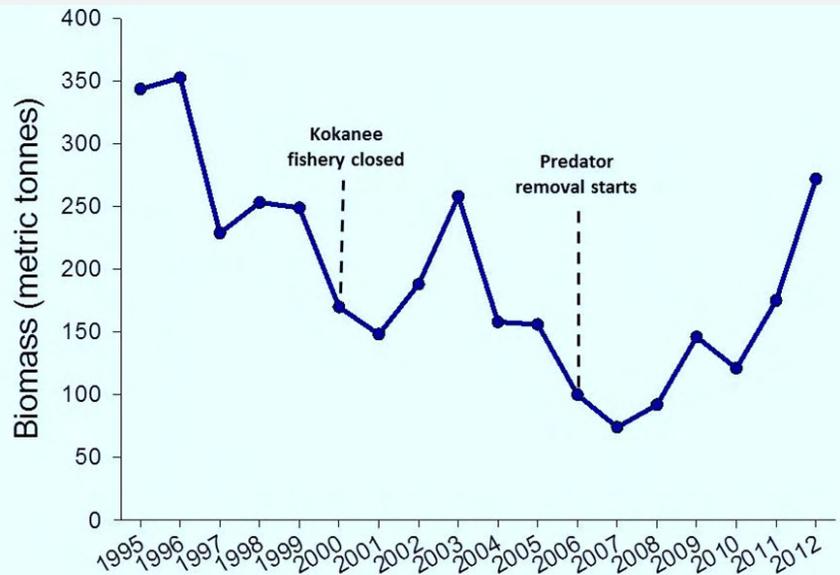
recreational fishery. We were able to re-open a limited harvest fishery for kokanee in 2013. The daily limit is now six fish. This is the first time since 1999 that anglers have been allowed to harvest kokanee in Lake Pend Oreille. If the population continues to increase and sustains itself at a higher level, we eventually will be able to allow a higher daily limit.

Hatchery operations at Cabinet Gorge and the spawner trap in Sullivan Springs were very successful in 2012. In June and July, nearly 7 million kokanee fry were released into Lake Pend Oreille after being raised at the Cabinet Gorge Hatchery. About 160,000 kokanee spawners returned to the trap at Sullivan Springs in November and December. The hatchery crew collected 13.3 million kokanee eggs. These eggs will have the hatchery at full capacity this winter and allow for a strong fry release this coming summer.

It is great to have the hatchery running so strong after struggling to collect even half a million eggs as recently as 2007.

In addition to annual kokanee monitoring, we also continued several kokanee research studies in 2012. Most notable are two separate research projects that we are collaborating with the University of Idaho to complete. One project is evaluating kokanee spawning ecology and is helping us to better understand what habitat conditions kokanee need to spawn successfully. This information will help us to better evaluate the influence of lake level manipulations. Another project is evaluating the distribution of zooplankton and Mysis shrimp in the lake. This will help us learn more about the food supply for kokanee and the influence that Mysis shrimp have on that food supply. And, it should allow us to refine our hatchery stocking practices to improve kokanee survival. —Andy Dux and Nick Wahl

Estimates of total abundance of kokanee in Lake Pend Oreille as measured in "biomass" or total weight of the population, and the response of the population to the fishery recovery effort.



Kootenai River Fisheries Research

Understanding Juvenile White Sturgeon Movement in the Kootenai River Canyon



A radio tag is surgically implanted into a juvenile white sturgeon in the Kootenai River.

In 2011, biologists with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks captured five juvenile sturgeon in the Kootenai River almost 20 miles upstream of the Idaho/Montana border. These fish all originated from the Kootenai Tribal hatchery and had been stocked downstream in Idaho. Though these weren't the first sturgeon collected above

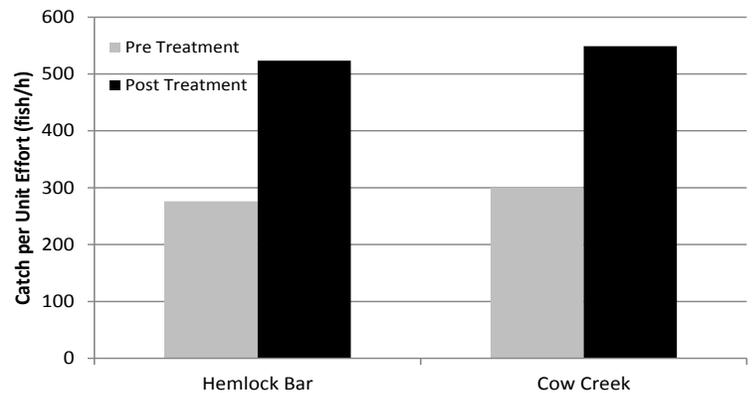
Bonniers Ferry, the captures suggested a significant number of juvenile hatchery sturgeon migrate upstream to Montana to reside. Interestingly, initial length-at-age analysis indicate growth of these fish greatly exceeded similar aged sturgeon captured in lower sections of the Kootenai River below Bonniers Ferry.

To better understand movements and utilization of the upper river by white sturgeon, we continued the effort to capture fish in the canyon section of Idaho and Montana in 2012. The project was conducted in cooperation with biologists from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. To determine movement patterns of individuals in this river reach, we surgically implanted transmitters in seven juvenile sturgeon and established telemetry receivers further upstream in Montana. These receivers collect movement data automatically, greatly increasing the amount of information we can collect from tagged fish. We plan to download receivers in late winter 2013 when flows subside to evaluate any downstream movements. Understanding the movements of these individuals will allow us to determine where sturgeon growth is fastest, and may determine future release locations of hatchery reared fish.—Pete Rust

Nutrient Restoration Continues to Improve Fishery

2012 marked the eighth year of nutrient additions to the Kootenai River. In cooperation with the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI), phosphorous has been added during the growing season (June-September) to stimulate primary productivity in the river since 2005. Monitoring conducted by the KTOI shows continued increases in periphyton and macroinvertebrates. Insect densities in the treatment reach have increased by more than four times during the period of 2006-2010 as compared with 2002-2005, and fish populations have continued to respond positively to this increased abundance and diversity of food. Population monitoring conducted every fall indicates that catch (fish/h of electrofishing) in the treatment reach sites (Hemlock Bar and Cow Creek) has nearly doubled since nutrient addition began (see figure).

The rainbow trout population (primary sport fishery on the river) has also responded positively to nutrient additions, as well as to a regulation change in 2002 to a two fish limit, none under 16 inches. Rainbow trout catch at the Hemlock Bar site increased from 22 to 33 fish/hr. Additionally, relative weight, which is a measure of fish condition, has also increased in the treatment reach.—TJ Ross



Number of fish (all species) collected at sampling sites in the Kootenai River before and after the nutrient restoration project.

Hatchery Program Helping to Restore Burbot Population

IDFG fishery biologists have captured 67 burbot in hoop nets thus far in the Kootenai River. This is a substantial increase from previous years and a result of recent hatchery releases from the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to recover the dwindling population. Although not a complete substitution for natural production, supplemental hatchery stocking is possibly a means of sustaining the population and eventually rebuilding a recreational fishery. Information gained from these hatchery fish indicates excellent growth and survival of early releases from 2009 and 2010. The results thus far are encouraging and demonstrate that aquaculture may be a useful tool in restoring a once popular and unique fishery.—Ryan Hardy



The Kootenai River is the only place in Idaho with burbot.



Lake Pend Oreille Bull Trout and Cutthroat Trout Survival Study

Have you ever wondered how long a fish lives or how many die in a given year? This is a common question for fisheries biologist. Bull trout, a native fish to Lake Pend Oreille, have a fairly long life span relative to many trout. In Lake Pend Oreille these fish live much of their life in the lake. However, mature bull trout make an annual journey to small streams around the lake to spawn. Young bull trout then hatch and spend their first years of life in the stream before leaving to the lake. In Lake Pend Oreille, IDFG biologists are learning how long bull trout live and how many juveniles live to return to spawn as part of a survival study initiated in 2011. The study will measure the in-lake

survival of bull trout. The survival rates will help gauge the response to the decrease in lake trout and the increase in kokanee, a primary food source for bull trout.

In 2011 and 2012, juvenile bull trout were tagged with passive integrated transponders (or PIT tags for short) in two Lake Pend Oreille streams—Trestle Creek and Granite Creek. PIT tags are small tags, about a half inch in length, injected inside the fish. You may have seen this type of tag used by your local veterinarian to identify your pet. When a fish with a PIT tag swims past an antenna its individual number is recorded letting biologists know that fish swam by and is still alive. Antennas were constructed near the lake on both of the streams in which fish were tagged. By monitoring juvenile bull trout leaving and returning as adults to these streams, biologists can estimate what percent of bull trout survive long enough to spawn, how long they live, and how many times they come back to spawn.

In 2012, IDFG also worked with the Panhandle Chapter of Trout Unlimited to place PIT tags in westslope cutthroat trout to answer similar questions about their survival. Some cutthroat trout around Lake Pend Oreille are similar to bull trout and live both in streams as juveniles and in the lake as adults. However, others live their entire life in the stream where they were born. This study will also help answer questions about how many of each life history type are in these streams.—Rob Ryan



Sportsman's Park Access at Hayden Lake gets Facelift

Anyone who fishes Hayden Lake knows that launching a boat can be an exercise in patience. Increasing use of the lake, combined with very limited public access has put quite a strain on the existing boat launches.

IDFG owns and maintains one of only two public launches on Hayden Lake. The site, known as "Sportsman's Park" had always been a relatively undeveloped, secondary site to Honeysuckle. With the

increase in need, IDFG, with a cooperative grant from Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, recently completed a major upgrade to the site. The project, which cost nearly \$300,000, improved the approach and turn around at the ramp, upgraded the restroom, and created two paved parking areas with over 3-dozen parking spaces.

Though the project doesn't completely solve the problem of boater access to Hayden Lake, anglers will find getting on the water is now a lot easier. —JJ Teare

Steamboat Pond Improvements

Anglers enjoyed a little easier access to Steamboat Pond this summer thanks to some hard work and a financial contribution of the North Idaho Flycasters. The effort, which involved help from IDEQ, USFS, as well as IDFG involved clearing a pathway around the edge of the pond and construction of some hardened platforms. The improvements provide more areas for anglers to easily fish from the shoreline. —Jim Fredericks



Volunteers from the North Idaho Flycasters planted trees and helped build a walkway to improve angling access at Steamboat Pond.

Coeur d'Alene Lake Fishery Monitoring

Kokanee and Chinook Salmon Populations in Balance

The original reason for putting Chinook salmon in Coeur d'Alene Lake was to increase the size of kokanee. The intent was to use Chinook salmon to reduce the kokanee population, which will allow kokanee to grow to a larger size when they enter the fishery as adults. The objective is to get the average size of adult kokanee to be between 10" and 11". That is an inch or two bigger than they would otherwise be, and comes about by reducing kokanee numbers by about half.

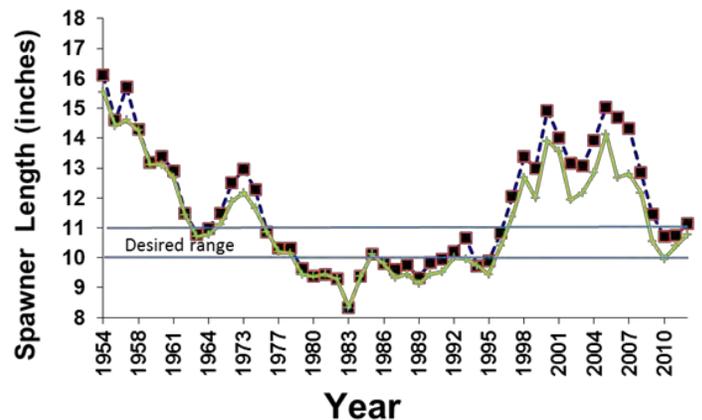
Getting the "balance" right is the tricky part. Kokanee seem to have two different population structures into which they seem to fall. When kokanee numbers were strong, like during the years from 1983 to 1995, stocking relatively high numbers of hatchery Chinook did little to increase the sizes of kokanee. Numbers of adults stayed high and kokanee growth stayed low. Then after the 1996 and 1997 floods, kokanee were much bigger than our objective but so few in number that they were difficult to catch. We had to stop all stocking of Chinook for two years in order to get the kokanee population to increase in numbers. Given that we seem to be fighting the natural tendency of the kokanee population, it is very encouraging to see their recent sizes. The overall average size of males and females has been in our desired ranged each of the last 4 years. Kokanee fishing has been very good and sizes were much better than during the 1980's and early 1990's. —Melo Maiolie

The original reason for putting Chinook salmon in Coeur d'Alene Lake was to increase the sizes of Kokanee. Getting the "balance" right is the tricky part.

Chinook Salmon Spawner Monitoring

Biologists with IDFG floated sections of the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe rivers this past fall and counted the number of redds created by Chinook salmon. These redd counts give us an index of the number of adult wild salmon that reared in Coeur d'Alene Lake. This fall we counted 94 redds in the two rivers. Although down from the 134 redds last year, this was still very close to the 100 redds that is the objective for wild segment of the population.

We also stocked 20,000 Chinook fingerlings at the north end of Coeur

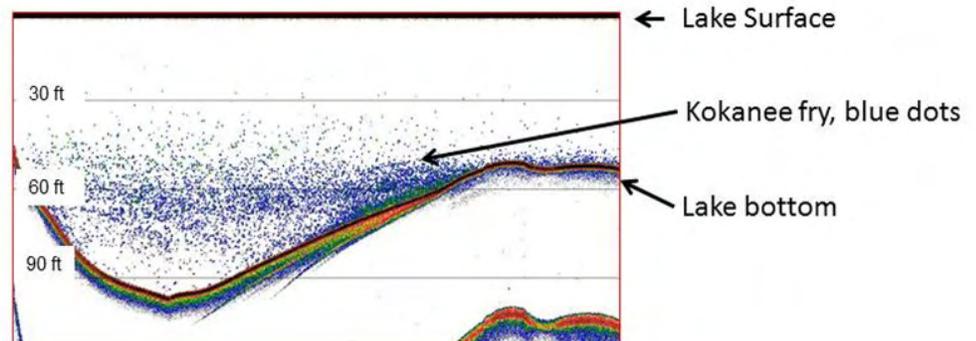


Length of spawning male (dotted line) and female (solid line) kokanee sampled in Coeur d'Alene Lake.

d'Alene Lake to boost Chinook numbers. The combination of 100 wild-spawn redds and 20,000 stocked fingerlings appear to be about the right amount to balance Chinook with their main food source; the kokanee in Coeur d'Alene Lake. Chinook sizes seemed a little larger in 2012 with a 26 pound Chinook salmon winning the "Big One" Chinook derby this past summer. Good kokanee densities in the lake this year should mean that Chinook salmon will be growing well again. —Melo Maiolie

Abundant Kokanee Fry in Coeur d'Alene Lake Bode well for Future Population

Spring of 2012 was an excellent year for the production of kokanee fry in Coeur d'Alene Lake. Our surveys showed about 13 million fry in the lake. That is an average of nearly 540 fry per acre of water and more than enough to fully "seed" the lake for future years. This year class of fry will live and grow in the lake for 5 years and will be the bulk of the fishery in 2016. —Melo Maiolie



Cross section of Coeur d'Alene Lake near Cougar Bay as seen on a scientific echosounder. Each blue or green dot represents a kokanee fry.

Biologists Complete Two Year Channel Catfish Evaluation

Idaho Fish and Game has been stocking channel catfish in Panhandle area lakes since 1985. Last year we began a study of those lakes to assess their catfish populations. During 2011 we sampled Hauser, Fernan, Cocolalla and Jewel lakes. This past summer we sampled Rose and Smith lakes and continued to monitor Fernan, Cocolalla and Jewel lakes. Catfish were collected by setting baited hoopnets, which do not harm the fish.

We caught 1,017 catfish and tagged 200 of those caught (note the tag in the catfish photograph). Though larger fish are less common, catfish are abundant in most of these lakes and have good body condition. Catfish ranged in weight from a quarter pound up to five pounds with an average weight of roughly one pound. The one lake where they did not appear to be doing well was Jewel Lake where we caught roughly one fifth as many as in the other five lakes. Anglers' catch of catfish appears to be very low based on the number of tags anglers called in to the IDFG toll free reporting line.

Any anglers wanting to try a new challenge should give these lakes a try. Channel catfish have fine eating quality and fight hard when hooked. Channel catfish are a popular sport fish throughout the United States, but here in northern Idaho they appear to be a largely untapped resource. — Kelly Carter-Lynn

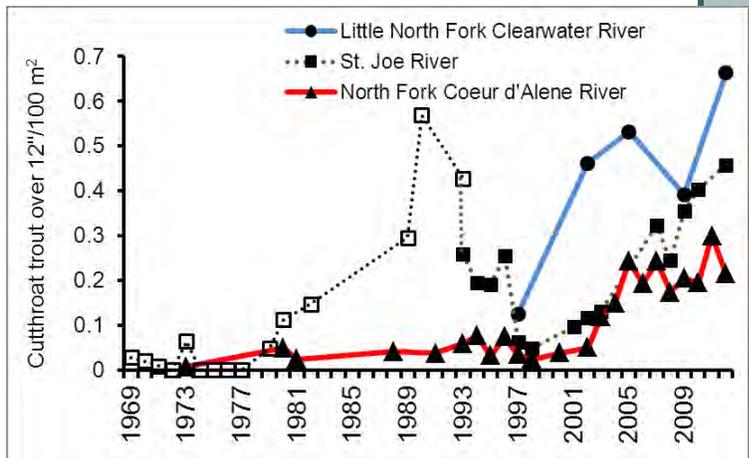


A channel catfish from Cocolalla Lake is fitted with a Carlin dangler tag.

Panhandle River Cutthroat Trout Population Monitoring

Northern Idaho anglers that like river fishing have it pretty good. There are a number of river systems that are within easy reach. Three that we surveyed this year include the Coeur d'Alene River, the St. Joe River and the Little North Fork of the Clearwater River. Field personnel snorkeled 125 short sections of the rivers, counted the fish, and estimated their sizes. It is really an eye-opening experience to see the numbers of large trout lurking in the depths of most every pool.

The accompanying graph shows the trends over the last 4 decades. Very strong increases in the numbers of trout over 12" were seen in each of the drainages. It is almost hard to imagine how few large trout there were back in the 1970's. Trout numbers were also hit pretty hard by the floods in 1996. Fortunately, all three drainages have improved since then, and all are currently at, or very near, record highs.—Melo Maiolie



The density of westslope cutthroat trout based on snorkel counts over the past four decades in transects throughout the Coeur d'Alene, St. Joe, and the Little North Fork Clearwater rivers.



Anglers Enjoy Great Ice Fishing at Cocolalla Lake

Anglers have been hoping Cocolalla Lake will provide another good ice fishing season in winter in 2013. The ice fishing on Cocolalla has become more popular over the last several winters as the size of the perch has increased. The reason for the improvement in their growth is not clear. Perch typically overpopulate small lakes and the intense competition for food keeps them stunted at a small size. Likely, we are seeing the results of lower year classes of fish, but it is unknown why their numbers would be down.

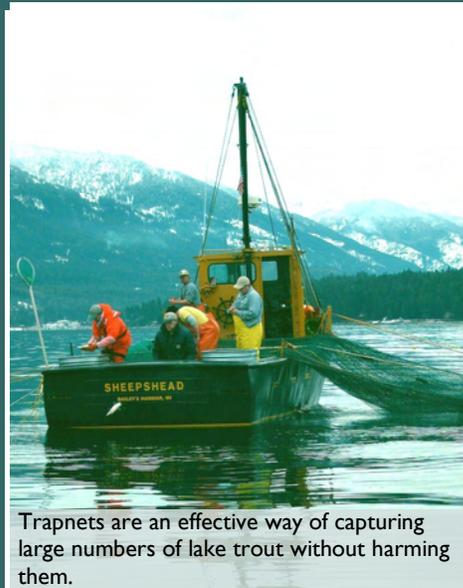
As this is written the ice is marginal. Though early ice fishing reports indicated there are good numbers of 9" to 10" perch and lot in the 6" to 8" sizes, conditions unfortunately may not favor a winter harvest this year.

In any event, if ice holds up and the perch population continues to be healthy, Cocolalla should be a good choice for a family outing in the future. —Melo Maiolie

Acknowledgements:

We appreciate the partnerships and support from the many individuals, organizations and agencies that help us to achieve our mission, including:

- IDFG Volunteers
- Avista
- Bonneville Power Administration
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
- Kalispel Tribe
- Rathdrum Parks and Rec.
- Lake Coeur d'Alene Anglers Assn.
- Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club
- Panhandle Bass Anglers
- Pend Oreille Bass Club
- Shoshone Co. Sportsmen Assn.
- Bonner Co. Sportsmen Assn.
- Kootenai Valley Sportsmen Assn.
- North Idaho Flycasters
- Trout Unlimited
- Priest Lake Sportsmen Assn.
- Idaho Dept. of Lands
- Idaho Dept. of Water Resources
- Dept. of Environmental Quality
- University of Idaho
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks



Trapnets are an effective way of capturing large numbers of lake trout without harming them.

Cooperative Project to Evaluate Lake Trout Population in Priest Lake

Priest Lake has recently been the subject of lively discussion within the angling community. Lake trout, or mackinaw, have dominated the Priest Lake fishery since they overpopulated the lake in the 1980's, effectively collapsing the kokanee, cutthroat and bull trout fisheries. Though the lake trout fishery is popular with many anglers, others have advocated restoration of a kokanee, bull trout and cutthroat fishery through implementation of a large-scale lake trout suppression effort similar to that on Pend Oreille.

When IDFG scoped the issue in a series of public meetings and through a random mail survey, angler opinions were divided almost right down the middle (see Table). Because the lake trout are prolific, the fishery costs very little to manage and provides a unique opportunity for anglers in the area. The flip side is that lake trout tend to dominate systems at the expense of other spe-

cies. In terms of recreation and economics, lake trout don't attract as many anglers as other fish. Consider that angler participation was two to three times greater back in the 1950's, when it was based on kokanee, cutthroat and bull trout, than it is today, despite much easier access and the increase in the human population in the past 50 years.

Further complicating matters, biologists don't have a clear picture of how lake trout and kokanee populations in Priest Lake are interacting right now. The past two years have been marked by an increase in the kokanee population that has regenerated interest in the kokanee fishery. While it's great to see the rebound in kokanee, we can't expect it to last. Generally speaking, when a lake becomes dominated by lake trout, it's virtually impossible to restore a balanced predator/prey fishery.

Given the split public response coupled with questions about the lake trout population, diet, harvest rates, and factors controlling the kokanee population, it would be premature to make a decision about the long-term management of Priest Lake right now. For that reason IDFG is partnering with the University of Idaho and the Kalispel Tribe on a graduate research project that will help get answers to these questions.

The most important piece of the puzzle is an estimate of the current lake trout population size. To answer that question, researchers will conduct a mark-recapture study, much like those done in Lake Pend Oreille. Large, deep-water trapnets and short-duration gillnet sets will be used to collect and tag lake trout. The effort will last for 3-months this spring, and the ratio of marked to unmarked fish will be used to estimate the population. The sight of commercial-scale nets in Priest Lake might lead some people to incorrectly

The sight of large nets might lead some to assume IDFG has decided to remove lake trout from Priest Lake. That is not the case—the nets set in Priest Lake in 2013 are being used to better understand the lake trout population — not to suppress it.

Results of a public opinion survey conducted in the spring of 2012. The survey was made up of anglers who went on-line to complete the survey, anglers selected at random for a mail survey, and anglers who attended one of the public meetings.

	Sample size	Discontinue lake trout suppression in Upper Priest Lake. Manage both lakes as lake trout fisheries	Restore cutthroat, bull trout and kokanee fishery by aggressively suppressing lake trout in both lakes	No Opinion
Voluntary Web Survey	817	342 (42%)	351 (43%)	124 (15%)
Random Mail Survey	454	148 (33%)	185 (45%)	103 (22%)
Cd'A public meeting	27	14 (52%)	10 (37%)	3 (11%)
Sandpoint public meeting	12	7 (58%)	5 (42%)	
Priest River public meeting	20	9 (45%)	10 (50%)	1 (5%)
TOTAL	1,330	520 (39%)	561 (42%)	231 (17%)

assume a decision has been made to try to remove lake trout from Priest Lake. That is not the case! The nets set in Priest Lake in 2013 are being used to better understand the lake trout population — not to suppress it.

In addition to a population estimate, the marked fish will be used to estimate angler harvest rates, growth rates, and food habits. All of these pieces of information are extremely valuable for managing the fishery, regardless of whether the ultimate decision is to protect or suppress the lake trout population.

As we gather new information in the coming years, we plan to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to help guide development of a more informed, long-term management plan for Priest and Upper Priest lakes. —Jim F.