

TROUT LINE

SUMMER
2013



Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited

Hot Water and Trout

Take care out there

As of mid-July, streamflows on many Montana rivers and streams were about half of historical averages. Water temperatures were reaching ranges that stress trout. By the time you read this, conditions might have improved. But it's unlikely. And so we offer this advice on how you can help during times of drought to save today's fish for tomorrow.

In general, and depending on the stream, trout thrive best with water temperatures ranging between 54 F. to 63 F. Depending on species, once temperatures rise above the mid-60s F., trout can start feeling the adverse effects of high temperatures. Feeding activity slows. Sustained swimming becomes more laborious. The ability

to compete with other species for common food sources is reduced once temperatures approach the 70s. Higher temperatures can also affect equilibrium. Lethal temperatures, depending on species, range from the mid 70s to the 80s. However, it's possible for trout to survive at these temperatures if they locate cool thermal refuges, or if these high temperatures are moderated by drops in temperature at night.

There are no hard and fast criteria that definitely determine when it's okay to fish and when it's not. But anglers should be extra-cautious handling trout when water temperatures reach the mid 60s. Consider packing a thermometer in your vest. It's wise to avoid waters

where temperatures exceed 70 F. or more each day during a sustained period. Watch fish behavior after you release them. If they're sluggish or seem slower to recover than usual, they could be stressed from the effects of high temperatures.

With this in mind, here are some ideas for conservation-minded anglers to consider when flows drop and water temperatures soar:

- Avoid streams where low flows and high temperatures pose problems to fish. Explore smaller higher-elevation streams and lakes where fish are much less affected by drought. Montana has thousands
See *DROUGHT*, page 4

by Staff

CSKT offers alternatives for Flathead Lake

In June, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes released their long awaited draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) on strategies to reduce non-native lake trout abundance in Flathead Lake. The tribes' priority is to increase the dwindling bull trout and cutthroat trout populations in Flathead Lake and the upper Flathead River system. The lake trout population in Flathead Lake is around carrying capacity at an estimated 1.5 million fish. Competition and predation posed by the introduced lake trout have severely reduced once robust migratory populations of native fish in the lake, Middle and North Forks of the Flathead River. Bull trout are now

federally listed as threatened and it is illegal to deliberately fish for them. Cutthroats in the lake and rivers must be released.

The lake trout explosion resulted from a misguided introduction by state biologists of mysis shrimp into the system. The abundance of shrimp dramatically increased survival of juvenile lake trout that exploit them. It also reduced angling opportunities. Buoyed by a large population of kokanee salmon, as well as bull trout, cutthroat trout, perch and the occasional lake trout, Flathead Lake once supported up to 170,000 angler-days a year. But

See *FLATHEAD*, page 5

by Bruce Farling



Flathead Lake migratory bull trout

MONTANA TU'S MISSION is to conserve, protect and restore Montana's world-class coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

Founded in 1964, Montana Trout Unlimited is a statewide grassroots organization comprised of 13 chapters and approximately 3,600 TU members.

montanatu.org

TROUT LINE is published quarterly by Montana Trout Unlimited.

EDITING AND DESIGN.....BRUCE FARLING
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Printed on recycled paper using eco-friendly inks.

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FROM THE VICE CHAIRMAN

Take a moment and recall fishing as a kid. You probably remember simply taking a cheap rod, a plug, a spinner, or a fly, and going off with your friends and family. And returning with memories that last a lifetime.

I caught my first bull trout and westslope cutthroat in the 1970s in Glacier National Park. At that time it was easy to simply walk to the end of a dock or along the shore of one of the park's pristine lakes and catch our native trout, no special skills or equipment required. Now because of invading lake trout most of those native fish are gone.

Those early experiences helped form the conservation ethic I inherited from my parents and friends. The memories

have informed my willingness to write letters and op-eds, to support coldwater fish and habitat, to attend numerous meetings, and to pass along to future generations the knowledge about wild and native fish that I have been fortunate enough to acquire.

These experiences from decades back often come to mind when I fish and work to protect, sustain, and recover our coldwater fish populations, especially the native fish in my backyard. I'm grateful for these experiences and look forward to many more to motivate me and others working for wild and native fish, the water and habitat they need, and the opportunities they can provide for future Montana kids.

Chris

OPTIONS FOR MONTANA TU CONTRIBUTORS

Automatic fund transfers are an easy option for those of you who'd prefer to regularly donate to Montana TU. To make a one-time, monthly, quarterly or annual pledge of ANY amount to Montana TU, simply clip this form, fill it out and mail to MTU at PO Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807 Or, call Kate at Montana TU's Missoula office toll-free: 888-504-0054.

YES! I'd like to contribute to Montana Trout Unlimited.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____

DONATION OPTIONS

- One-time donation of \$ _____.
- Monthly pledge of \$ _____ per month.
- Quarterly pledge of \$ _____ every three months.
- Annual pledge of \$ _____ per year to Montana TU.

PAYMENT METHOD

- I have enclosed a blank, voided check and authorize my bank to transfer funds to Montana TU.
- I want to pay by credit card: (circle one) MC VISA AMEX DISC
Card# _____ Exp. Date _____

Thanks to all who generously contribute to help conserve, protect and restore Montana's coldwater resources. Every dollar counts!

Promising project set for Darlington Ditch on the lower Madison

This fall, TU's Madison-Gallatin Chapter is sponsoring a cooperative restoration project on Montana FWP land along the lower Madison River. Once a few more pieces fall into place, nearly two miles of the Darlington Ditch will be engineered with riffles, pools and runs emulating spring creek habitat. The project objective is to improve the waterway as spawning and rearing habitat, as well as create a refuge for adult trout from the lower Madison River.

PPL Montana has matched Mad-Gal TU's \$50,000 contribution for the project. The power company's support comes out of its mitigation fund, established as a condition of receiving federal licenses for its dams on the Missouri and Madison Rivers. Also

cooperating in the project are Montana FWP and Montana TU.

Darlington Ditch, located near the Cobblestone Fishing Access Site, was created in 1948 as a borrow site for the 12-miles of flood-protection dike that the Army Corps of Engineers constructed on the east side of the Madison River. The stream is maintained by base spring flows and seasonally augmented by flows from the river, which are diverted for local irrigators. The channel has previously been modified in attempts to improve habitat, but the results were mixed. The design and investment for the new project, however, are more refined and seem certain to produce high-quality habitat along one of Montana's great trout rivers.



Montana TU Conservation and Fly Fishing School July 14-18, 2013



A huge thanks to all our supporters and volunteers that made this camp a great success!

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DROUGHT (from page 1)

of stream miles and hundreds of lakes that have good fishing and are not crowded. Avoid visiting waters that historically attract extra angling pressure because of fishing closures elsewhere, such as the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Try not to contribute to more river crowding.

- If you must fish during extended warm periods, fish in the morning when air and water temperatures are coolest. Avoid fishing in the afternoon and evening when temperatures are highest. Avoid fishing at night. On some rivers, this is when dissolved oxygen concentrations critical for trout survival are the lowest.

- Avoid direct handling of fish and use extra caution with native species such as cutthroats, grayling and bull trout. Release fish as quick as possible. Use one of the many catch-and-release gizmos that are in flyshops. Resist the temptation to hold fish out of water for photos. Consider just catching a few fish then calling it a day, instead of fishing from morning until night.
- When streamflows and temperatures become very acute, consider doing something else. Montana has no shortage of alternative outdoor opportunities.

Be diligent in following appeals for voluntarily cut backs on angling. Be sure to comply with the restrictions

and closures that Montana FWP might implement during extreme drought. We urge anglers to be patient if state biologists don't have definite answers about exactly when and where it's okay to fish when flows are low and temperatures high. These are tough calls. In order to maintain Montana's high quality angling, the fish deserve a conservative approach. The angling you give up temporarily today will help preserve opportunities for the future.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ANGLING DURING PERIODS OF LOW FLOWS AND HIGH STREAM TEMPERATURES, CONTACT MONTANA TU AT 543-0054 or Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT STREAM TEMPERATURES AND TROUT

1. In general, optimum growth for salmonids occurs when temperatures range between 54 F. to 63 F.
2. In general, some species are a little more tolerant of higher temperatures than others; or, in some areas local populations of a particular native species can be more tolerant of higher temperatures than the same species elsewhere. But this occurs only after generations of adaptation (for example, redband trout of the Great Basin are more tolerant of higher temperatures than redband trout found in the upper Columbia basin).
3. In general, salmonids can adjust more easily to higher temperatures if the temperature increase occurs gradually. Sudden elevations of temperatures can cause acute fish kills.
4. In general, high temperatures found in Montana streams will often not cause direct mortality. However, warm water can compound the effects of other stressors, such as disease or energy depletion resulting from competition and catch-and-release angling.
5. In general, dissolved oxygen concentrations will drop as water temperatures rise, because warmer water can hold less oxygen than colder water. Conversely, as water temperatures rise, oxygen demands also rise, because the fish's metabolism rises. If the oxygen needs exceed the available oxygen, the fish becomes stressed or can even die. Ideal dissolved oxygen concentrations for active trout can be around 9 parts per million (ppm) or higher, which is normally only found when water temperatures are below 68 F. When levels of dissolved oxygen drop below 6 parts per million, trout become stressed. Feeding, predator avoidance and sustained swimming becomes difficult. Below 4 ppm, trout can die. Dissolved oxygen levels in the Clark Fork at night during the summer have been recorded below 6 ppm.

There are no hard and fast criteria that definitely determine when it's okay to fish and when it's not. But anglers should be extra-cautious handling trout when water temperatures reach the mid 60s. It's wise to consider avoiding waters where temperatures reach 70 F. or more each day during a sustained period. Watch fish behavior after you release them. If they're sluggish or seem slower to recover than usual, they could be stressed from the effects of high temperatures.

FLATHEAD (from page 1)

lake trout eliminated the kokanee, and seriously reduced bull trout and cutthroat numbers. Last year angling pressure on the lake was an estimated 33,000 angler-days.

The tribes, who own the southern half of the lake have tried to reduce lake trout numbers by coupling liberal state angling regulations with twice-a-year angling tournaments called Mack Days. But tribal, federal and other biologists agree the strategy hasn't reduced lake trout numbers because natural recruitment easily offsets the fish anglers take. The tribes have studied alternative suppression strategies for a number of years – using sophisticated population modeling and scientific peer review with state and federal biologists, academic researchers and nationally recognized lake trout specialists.

The DEIS identifies several



Bull trout like this were once more common in the Flathead

alternative strategies: Maintaining existing management, which means continued risk to bull and cutthroat trout populations already in decline; and three alternatives that reduce lake trout numbers by combining recreational angling with Mack Days and different levels of gillnetting, resulting in reduction by 25, 50 or 75 percent of the fish eight years old and greater. Montana TU supports Alternative D, which would eventually result in 75 percent fewer fish older than eight years old. This alternative has the highest probability of improving native fish numbers in the shortest run. Like the other options, Alternative D still leaves plenty of lake trout in Flathead Lake for people who fish for them, mainly a small cadre of charter boat operators and other folks with powerboats and specialized gear. Lake trout are generally not available to a wide variety of anglers as were

kokanee, cutthroats and bull trout.

Without independent data to counter the tribes' science, Montana FWP, charter boat operators and a few others vociferously oppose alternatives that include gillnetting. They claim bull trout and cutthroats are doing just fine -- though finding

them in the lake is really difficult. They say gillnetting will inadvertently kill too many bull trout and leave too few lake trout for anglers. They also claim it might result in algal blooms in Flathead Lake because fewer lake trout might mean more Mysis. Mysis eat other zooplankton. Fewer zooplankton means more phytoplankton, including algae. But the threat of algal blooms is speculative. Further, experience has shown there are ways to reduce bull trout bycatch to acceptable levels. In addition, all the alternatives will ensure lake trout numbers continue to exceed a million fish, which will be plenty to support sportfishing. In contrast, biologists estimate fewer than 3,000 adult bull trout now remain in Flathead Lake.

The DEIS was developed in consultation with fishery professionals familiar with the Flathead system from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Forest Service. Lake trout researchers from the Midwest and Montana State provided modeling and other analysis. Only Montana FWP, which has not developed any of its own science to back its resistance to gillnetting, opposes using this tool.

The tribes could announce a final decision in early fall. Montana TU urges its members to tell the tribes to select alternative D. Contact Les Evarts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes at lese@cskt.org and tell him you support Alternative D.



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CHAPTER NEWS

Joe Brooks Chapter

In April, chapter volunteers organized a Yellowstone River cleanup day with the Madison-Gallatin Chapter. Some 171 volunteers helped clean up over 5,000 lbs. of garbage. The chapter hosted a kids fishing day in June, and looks forward to a long-awaited FEMA-funded restoration project on Fleshman Creek, which runs through Livingston, to start in August. Contact Sharon at ssfee123@yahoo.com or 579-7735.

Flathead Valley Chapter

Larry Timchak is the new chapter President. He is leading chapter efforts to generate comments on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement, issued by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, in favor of doubling the number of lake trout harvested in Flathead Lake to help native cutthroat and bull trout populations. The chapter contributed \$2,500 for an Aquatic Invasive Species inspection station in Whitefish, and created a Public Service Announcement to educate anglers on how to handle inadvertently hooked bull trout. The chapter continues to support with cash and volunteers the effort to reduce lake trout numbers in Swan Lake to benefit native bull trout. Contact Larry at 208-521-4196 or ltimchak1@gmail.com.

Bitterroot Chapter

The chapter held its 7th Annual Adult Flyfishing Clinic earlier this summer, and sponsored a Youth Conservation Expo with more than 400 participants. The chapter paid for two kids to attend Montana TU's Flyfishing and Conservation Camp on Georgetown Lake. Volunteers are gearing up for the chapter's 34th Annual Banquet and Auction, 9/27/13 from 6-9 p.m. at the



Rock Creek Confluence Work Day

Bitterroot River Inn. Contact Marshall at drtrout@mtbloom.net or 363-3485.

Big Blackfoot Chapter

This summer, the chapter is upgrading undersized culverts with bridges to restore fish passage on Klondike, Pearson and South Fork Poorman Creeks and restoring over 3,000 feet of instream habitat benefiting two important westslope cutthroat streams. In mid-July, chapter volunteers spent several days fishing with disabled veterans through Project Healing Waters. Contact Scott at 677-8420 or mountaindog231@yahoo.com.

Magic City Fly Fishers Chapter

TU's Billings-area chapter partnered with Casting for Recovery this year, a flyfishing retreat for women experiencing breast cancer. Volunteers will row, guide and share conservation tips Aug. 23-25 at the Dome Mountain Ranch in Emigrant, MT. Several county conservation districts requested chapter volunteers to demonstrate fly tying, entomology, casting and cold

water conservation ethics to their youth constituents. Between summer camps and outings that included Montana FWP, the local Audubon chapters and others, the Magic City Fly Fishers introduced fly fishing and conservation to over 1,500 kids in the region this year. The chapter, along with Montana TU, was a major contributor to a state and federal project to restore Yellowstone cutthroat spawning habitat in Willow Creek, a tributary of Soda Butte Creek in Silvergate. Contact Lyle at 896-1824 or lyle.courtnage@gmail.com.

West Slope Chapter

Tracy Wendt, WSTU Board member and Montana TU summer intern, has been busy organizing cleanup of a 200-acre parcel at the confluence of the Clark Fork River and Rock Creek purchased by Five Valleys Land Trust for public conservation, recreation and education purposes. She lined up three successful volunteer days and a fish study to assess entrainment problems in a ditch on the property that uses Rock Creek water. On July 12, Tracy helped fill a large Pacific Steel Recycling dumpster with scrap metal, then drove up to Lincoln to represent TU and help with a Kid's Fishing Day. To help with the Rock Creek Confluence project, contact Tracy at tracy@montanatu.org.

Madison-Gallatin Chapter

The chapter's Trout in the Classroom participants were allowed to release fish they raised into Bozeman ponds this year. The chapter is contributing about \$2,000 toward chemical-free boot washing stations – distributed by the Invasive Species Action Network – for fly shops in the Madison River basin. The chapter is looking to help fund potential projects to enhance cutthroat habitat in the Beehive Basin

in Big Sky and on 16-Mile Creek near Flathead Pass. Volunteers are planning a Madison River Cleanup on August 24. Details on page 8. The chapter is working with a water rights holder and Pat Byorth with TU's Montana Water Project to secure instream flows in the Gallatin River. The chapter plans to start restoration work on the Darlington Ditch this fall. See article on page 3. Contact Mark at mgt Trout Unlimited@gmail.com.

Missouri River Flyfishers

TU's affiliate in Great Falls sponsored two kids' fishing programs last spring, and paid for two campers to attend Montana TU's Flyfishing and Conservation Camp at Georgetown Lake in July. MRF is contributing to a bank restoration project on the Missouri River below Wolf Creek, and



Rock Creek Confluence Work Day

a temporarily delayed project on Otter Creek, a Belt Creek tributary. They host a Carp Rodeo on the Missouri River August 10, sponsored by The Trout Shop and Big R Fly Shop. Teams with up to 3 people pay \$75 to register by August 4 or \$100 for late entries. The team with the highest combined weight of carp caught on the fly from Cascade to Ulm between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. win Montana Silversmith trophy buckles. Additional prizes for biggest and smallest carp. Meet at the park in Cascade at 8 a.m., and weigh in at 6:30 p.m. at The Trout Shop Café in Craig.

Contact Denny at swedemt@yahoo.com.

Snowy Mountain Chapter

The proposed Machler Project, a large endeavor to reconstruct natural sinuosity and floodplain function along a reach of Big Spring Creek in Lewistown, has been stalled until a Century Link fiber optic cable is relocated. Chapter President Mike Chapman is courageously navigating through a labyrinth of state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as well as Century Link to get the cable moved. The chapter sponsored a women's fly casting clinic in May, and volunteers helped at a Kids' Fishing Day with Montana FWP in June. The chapter will host Montana TU's next State Council meeting on September 14. Details on page 8. Contact Mike at 538-2517 or bmchap@midrivers.com.

Pat Barnes-Missouri River Chapter

Thanks to Montana TU's mini-grant for the Aspen Trail Conservation Project, the chapter recently presented a check to the Prickly Pear Land Trust for \$2000. This project will support the first FAS in the

city of Helena along the Little Prickly Pear stream, stream bank restoration work, and a fencing project. The chapter also contributed \$750 to the Townsend school district's "Outdoor School Program." These funds will be used to purchase fly-rod/reel combo sets for casting introduction, and eventually get the children out fly-fishing on local waters. The successful F3T event in June was well received by the attendees. Contact Garrett at 422-4426 or nuclearline@hotmail.com.

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THIS ISSUE:

Drought Advice
Page 1

Flathead DEIS
Page 1

Darlington Ditch
Page 3

TROUT LINE Summer 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS

montanatu.org

8/5/13 **Comment Deadline for Flathead Lake Management**
To comment on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' lake trout management plan DEIS, go to www.montanatu.org/take-action/.

8/8/13 **Bitterroot Restoration Volunteer Day**
Meet 9 a.m. on the west side of the Safeway parking lot, 101 E. Main in Hamilton. Help disperse seed, spread mulch and organic fertilizer on newly decommissioned roads in the West and East Forks of the Bitterroot. Sack lunch provided. RSVP with Heather at 531-8657 or hwhiteley@tu.org.

8/10/13 **The Mo River Carp Rodeo**
Meet 8 a.m. at the park in Cascade. Details in Missouri River Fly Fishers update on p. 8. Contact Denny at swedemt@yahoo.com

8/24/13 **Madison River Cleanup**
9 a.m., organized by TU's Madison-Gallatin Chapter. Meet at Warm Springs/Trapper Spring Pavilion. Request details at mgtroutunlimited@gmail.com or 219-7691.

9/14/13 **Montana TU State Council Meeting**
9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Yogo Inn, 221 E. Main in Lewistown. Contact Kate at 543-0054 or kate@montanatu.org.

9/27/13 **Bitterroot TU Annual Banquet & Auction**
6-9 p.m. at the Bitterroot River Inn, 139 Bitterroot Plaza Dr. in Hamilton. To donate or participate, contact Marshall Bloom at drtrout@mtbloom.net or 363-3485.

9/27-29 **TU National Annual Meeting**
At the Madison Marriott West Hotel & Conference Center in Middleton, WI. Details & registration at www.tu.org

WANT OVER 3,500 MONTANA TU MEMBERS TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EVENT?
Please contact the Missoula office at 888-504-0054 or kate@montanatu.org to get the word out in Trout Line



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