

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Citizen Workgroup - Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan
May 16, 2019 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM (with a working lunch; public comment at Noon)
MACO Building, Helena

SESSION OBJECTIVES/AGENDA ITEMS

Refocusing...

- Welcome back... brief reminder about the Charter and our tasks here
- Today's objectives/agenda items; "housekeeping"; participant time constraints for the day; affirming the discussion ground rules and a reminder about roles
- Who's here? Who's new to the table? Who's in the audience?
- Warming up – What did you hear from your "traplines" pertinent to our tasks
- Generally - "ratifying" the April 23 meeting summary

Getting on the same page related about the Reservoirs - "Mining" the Data

- Reviewing requested data - Clarifying questions and limited discussion
- Useful/pertinent observations related to the specific issues

"Interests" at the table... Expanding understanding

- Describing the "interests of those I represent"...; Q/A – Developing mutuality

Getting back to the specific issues

- Reviewing the April work per issue with particular attention to the "Important Questions".
- Defining "alternative"
- "Round Robin" exercise – Thoughts about alternatives per issue

12:00 to 12:45 Working Lunch with Public Comment

Continuing work on the Issues

- Small group work per issue:
 - Strengthening last meeting's product
 - drafting alternatives within the pieces of the collaborative framework ("Important Questions", Interests, Guiding Principles)
 - Presentation to the full group; clarifying questions and discussion
- Testing for preferences; needed mitigation to strengthen the draft alternatives; where we think we are on the specific issues...
- Additional data needed

Where do we go from here?

- Summarizing today's meeting
- Confirming the May 29 meeting
- "Homework"; tasks and assignments

Discussion Ground Rules (Created April 23, 2019)

- *Demonstrate respect - Stay on topic; discuss issues, not persons; "hear" the other - practice active and honorable listening; allow the other to finish.*
- *Provide each other with a "safe" discussion environment - Manage your own communication and communication behaviors; be direct, but without a blunt instrument – "no guns, no knives".*
- *Strive for consensus. Allow the facilitator to use interest-based tools to assist the group in moving toward agreement. If agreement cannot be reached after additional discussion, the facilitator is given permission to poll the group and agreement will be declared based on a simple majority. That agreement will then be considered consensus.*
- *Manage your electronic devices so they are not distractions in the room.*

Plan duration/Plan responsiveness

Current situation

FWP is not free to respond to changes. We see a need for increased flexibility to make changes. Ten years is too long and not responsive enough to changes in fish counts.

“Important Questions”

- What is the financial constraint that FWP faces with consideration to changing plans?
- How many years is more ideal than 10 years?
- Can a good decision be made with data from 2 consecutive years?
- What is the appropriate balance between professional trust and triggers?
- What needs to happen in the Plan so adaptive management can occur when needed?

First cut at “interests”

- It's in everyone's interest to have a good fishery.
- It's FWP's interest to have a Plan that will help them be effective managers and help them do their job.
- It's in the interest of the Commission to have a professional Plan that results in a good fishery and that is satisfactory to the public.

Draft “guiding principles”

- We believe that an adaptive management plan is critical to good management and that a 7 year Plan is a good place to start.
- We believe that we can learn from other similar water management plans in terms of duration and responsiveness approaches, experiences, and results.
- We believe that responsiveness should be driven by science and biology (based on a 3 year average unless rapid changes dictate a more immediate response).
- We believe that the Workgroup needs to be supportive of FWP personnel in making adaptive changes based on data.

Data needs

- Continue current data collection
- Provide the Workgroup with the latest summaries.

Yellow perch - Holter

Current situation

Yellow perch are complex to manage due to unpredictability. At Holter, there is a social perception that FWP is slow to respond to changes and that's the reason for declining perch numbers. There is a social expectation based on high perch population years.

“Important Questions”

- When should FWP act and based on what?
- How much or how little should FWP act?

First cut at “interests”

- It's in the interest of families, kids, all anglers - to be able to catch perch.
- It's in the interest of ice anglers to be able to expect to catch perch.
- It's in the interest of the local area to maintain the economic benefits gained from anglers who fish for perch nearly year-round.

Draft “guiding principles”

- We believe perch are the “foundation”/keystone of the health of the reservoir system. We believe that with a healthy perch population the rest of the ecosystem can thrive.

Data needs

- Historic perch population data for both reservoirs

Yellow perch - Canyon Ferry

Current situation

It's important to achieve more realistic management goals - currently they are too high. The general angling public needs to be educated about perch ecology and management.

"Important Questions"

- How do we increase the number of perch?
- How does the River impact the fishery on the Lake?

First cut at "interests"

- It's in the interest of families, kids, all anglers - to be able to catch perch.
- It's in the interest of ice anglers to be able to expect to catch perch.
- It's in the interest of the local area to maintain the economic benefits gained from anglers who fish for perch nearly year-round.

Draft "guiding principles"

- We believe that perch are the "foundation"/keystone of the health of the reservoir system. We believe that with a healthy perch population the rest of the ecosystem can thrive.

Data needs

- Historic perch population data for both reservoirs
- Data related to how the River impacts perch on Canyon Ferry

Rainbow trout stocking and management (all Plan sections)

Current situation

The rainbow trout fishery in the Upper Missouri River reservoir system is dependent on stocking. The lack of adequate funding and availability of hatchery fish have resulted in a decrease in the quality of the rainbow fishery.

"Important Questions"

- What needs to be done to bring about adequate stocking of rainbow trout in the reservoir system? Are there reasonable strategies other than stocking?
- What would have to happen to stock at pre-reduction numbers?
- What dollars are needed and how can we influence funding for stocking?

First cut at "interests"

- It's in the interest of some anglers to be able to harvest rainbow trout because they are the easiest year round fish to catch and there is minimal cost to gear.
- It's in the interest of the diversity of the system to have a quality rainbow trout fishery.

Draft "guiding principles"

- We believe that netting surveys should be used on all waters.
- We believe that trout triggers should be removed because they serve little purpose with a stocked species.

Data needs

- Funding needed?
- Update on situation with hatcheries related to rainbow trout

Walleye management (all Plan sections)

Current situation

The goal for the Upper Missouri River reservoir system is to provide a long term, sustainable walleye fishery consisting of quality walleyes to harvest along with a diverse age structure. Due to the diverse nature of the three reservoirs in the system, each requires specific management tools to maintain a healthy fishery.

“Important Questions”

- Is it possible to increase or enhance the forage base?
- Would enhancing perch habitat improve the forage base?
- How can we proactively manage harvest in a timely manner to maintain the relationship between walleye and forage?
- How do we improve angler education to increase the effectiveness of harvest as a management tool?
- What size do anglers prefer to harvest?
- How do we increase the population of walleyes within the preferred harvest size class?

First cut at “interests”

- It’s in the interest of the Helena area to have the positive economic impact of walleye angling be understood and valued (i.e., tackle, boats, fuel, lodging, shopping, tournaments, and more).
- It’s in the interest of adults, children, families, etc. to have a variety of fishing opportunities and experiences.
- It’s in the interest of some anglers to be able to participate in competitive experiences (walleye tournaments). It’s in the interest of tournament organizers to be able to do positive marketing and have some financial gain.
- It’s in the interest of some dedicated walleye anglers to have opportunities to catch trophy fish.

Draft “guiding principles”

- We believe that a healthy walleye fishery means sustainable, quality fish with a diverse age structure.
- We believe that the fishery should provide maximum opportunity to all possible anglers to experience walleye fishing.

Data needs

- Last 10 years population data for walleyes in Hauser, Holter and Canyon Ferry
- Harvest data for walleyes for the last 10 years to compare with population data