

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
**Citizen Workgroup - Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan**  
May 16, 2019 (Meeting 2)

**Session Summary**

**COMPLETED SESSION OBJECTIVES/AGENDA ITEMS**

**Refocusing...**

The Workgroup was welcomed back and members who were not able to attend the first meeting were introduced. The Workgroup Charter was affirmed as well as the following discussion ground rules the group established at their first meeting.

- 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.

Workgroup members briefly discussed comments they heard from their “traplines” and the pertinence of those comments to this process.

Workgroup members also approved the April 23 meeting summary (Meeting 1) without edits.

**Getting on the same page - Observations and Comments about the Data**

The Workgroup discussed several pieces of data/information they had requested at their first meeting – particularly data related to the 5 specific issues. The following are some observations about that data:

**Walleye – Canyon Ferry; Canyon Ferry Summary**

- Slots appear to be working (e.g., 2011, 2012, 2013) with people keeping fish – with 39% quality fish (with some caveats).
- How do we moderate the changing cycle?
- Can/should adaptation occur earlier?
- “Raised limit” worked as a tool – growing larger fish.
- Some data is/will be conflicting.
- Angling pressure is one of 2 highest years.
- Trout numbers have little to do with walleye – we need to look at whether ties need to be so specific in the Plan.
- Fisheries dynamics and people’s attitudes are influenced when fish are worth keeping.
- Proportional Stock Density (PSD) should be 30 to 60 – and we have good numbers, good distribution, relative abundance and good structure. Add age to length (growth rate); where is abundance noted? These are indicators of the health of the fishery.
- The Montana Walleye Waters table is useful.

### **Holter Summary**

- Perch numbers should be looked at earlier.
- Lots of young perch don't necessarily mean increased numbers of older perch. Perch numbers are affected by flushing, natural mortality, fluctuating waters, Walleye, etc.
- Measuring success should be based on a "goal" of Perch abundance in each water rather than triggers... waiting for triggers.
- Perch are going through their natural cycles – they are in balance as before increased numbers of Walleye in the 1980's. Walleye fishery ins in good shape.
- If the fishery is good, lots of fish, abundance goal met, why not raise the limit?
- Should Perch be used as an abundance trigger?
- Are high Walleye numbers detrimental to the fishery?
- There is disagreement among members about "balance" and "triggers".

### **Hauser Summary**

- Pleasure boating activity gets in the way of angling.
- Do turtles affect the fisheries?
- Flush occurs in the spring – can't fish where fish are located.
- When waters are in shape, fish are easy to catch at Hauser – good eating size.
- Could live bait be used in the winter?
- Can size limits help?
- Pike impacts the fishery.
- From a business perspective, there are logistics problems. Fewer customers use Hauser because access is difficult – some is there but more is needed.
- Might slot limits be tried to result in people keeping fish?
- Communication and education are key.

### **Yellow Perch**

- We're seeing little Perch in Holter – not as great as in the past but pretty good – 5 to 6 inches in nets.

### **Rainbow Trout**

- Large percentage of hatchery trout
- Should spawning beds be restricted or other tools used to protect them – during fishing seasons?
- Why does the Rainbow fishery get more attention?

### **Survey Results**

- Greatest dissatisfaction with Canyon Ferry
- More satisfaction with Holter than the other two waters
- Higher trout satisfaction indicated by numbers of responses
- Should out-of-staters be allowed to answer the survey?

### **"Interests" at the table...** Expanding understanding

After review of the data, Workgroup members individually described their "interests" and discussed them to encourage mutual understanding at the table as they move toward drafting alternatives and recommendations.

## Continuing work on the Issues – Small group work per issue

### Rainbow trout stocking and management (all Plan sections) (May 16 additions/edits)

#### 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?
- *How can habitat be enhanced?*
- *How can funding for stocking be sustained?*

#### First cut at “interests”

- It's in the interest of *anglers* to be able to *catch* 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 *anglers and the local communities* to have a quality rainbow trout fishery *for fishing opportunities and for the economy.*

#### Draft “guiding principles”

- We believe that netting surveys should be used *to monitor* all waters.
- We believe trout *goals are needed to provide a baseline or to identify needed action.*

#### Beginning Thoughts about alternatives

- *Stay the current course.*
- *Enhance habitat – reduce stumping on redds.*
- *Use outside money for stocking.*

#### Additional data requested

- *The economic value of the Missouri River in this area*

### Yellow perch – Holter (May 16 additions/edits)

#### 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.
- *It's in the interest of the fisheries, its users and managers to maintain populations of Perch to support its role as a primary forage base for the Reservoirs.*

#### 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.

#### Beginning Thoughts about alternatives

- *Place interpretive signs at camps as part of an education /communication effort.*
- *Enhance habitat with partners' dollars.*

### **Yellow perch - Canyon Ferry (May 16 additions/edits)**

#### **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?
- *How can Perch habitat be improved?*
- *Based on the current condition of the Perch fishery, should the Perch tournament continue?*

#### **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.

#### **Beginning Thoughts about alternatives**

- *Stock Perch.*
- *Reduce triggers and limits- use real fish levels.*
- *Have a period of no harvest on Perch.*
- *Enhance habitat with partners' dollars.*

### **Walleye management (all Plan sections) (May 16 additions/edits)**

#### **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"**

- *What can be done to improve sucker as forage?*
- *What alternatives might improve perch forage such as more permanent habitat; pines for perch, etc.?*
- *Can we try to do something with ponds?*  
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?

## **Walleye management (all Plan sections) (May 16 additions/edits) cont.**

### **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.

### **Beginning Thoughts about alternatives**

- *Use annual harvest data/creel survey to help evaluate and manage creel limits.*
- *Consider expanding the use of slots.*
- *Establish base goals and use them for adaptive management rather than triggers.*
- *Establish PSD for Walleye (30-60).*

### **Criteria within which to draft and evaluate alternatives**

- *PSD*
- *Condition*
- *Growth rates*
- *Histograms*
- *Creel counts – harvest data*

### **Additional data requested**

- *PSD explanation/visual*

## **Plan duration/Plan responsiveness (May 16 additions/edits)**

### **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.

### **Plan duration/Plan responsiveness (May 16 additions/edits) cont.**

#### **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.

#### **Thoughts about alternatives - Responsiveness**

- *Use a CAC-type oversight committee.*
- *Consider possible rolling plans – 3-5-10 year reviews.*

#### **Beginning Thoughts about alternatives – Duration**

- *Ten or 7 years would be okay - but needs 3 to 5 year reviews to look at trends.*
- *Create some excitement around special requirements and regulations to meet goals.*

#### **Additional data requested**

- *We need to see fisheries management plans from other similar waters in terms of duration and responsiveness approaches, experiences and results.*

### **Where do we go from here?**

The facilitator will summarize the results of today's meeting and send to FWP by late May 22. The summary will be sent to Workgroup members and placed on the Department website.

### **Calendar**

- Wednesday, May 29 – 9:00 to late afternoon at the MACO building (Helena)

### **"Homework" before the May 29 meeting**

- Workgroup members are asked to:
  - Review the alternatives suggested in these notes and think about mitigation that would strengthen them.
  - Continue to think about additional alternatives related to the 5 specific issues and be prepared to explain them at the May 29 meeting.
  - Test for preference - With attention to the Guiding Principles and individual interests at the table, consider which alternatives you think might best respond to the 5 specific issues and related important questions.
- Revisit your traplines and have general discussion about alternatives. Be prepared to offer comments at the May 29 meeting.

### **Additional Data requested**

- The economic value of the Missouri River in this area
- Water management plans from other similar waters in terms of duration and responsiveness approaches, experiences and results.
- Proportional Stocking Density – Explanation/Visual