

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Citizen Workgroup - Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan
May 29, 2019 (Meeting 3) 9:00 Am to 4:00 PM (with a working lunch provided)
MACO Building, Helena

SESSION OBJECTIVES/AGENDA ITEMS

Here we go...

- Good morning... anything new from Adam; today's objectives and agenda review; "housekeeping"; participant time constraints; brief reminder - discussion ground rules; who's here – at the table and in the room
- Approving the May 16 meeting summary
 - Reviewing new data - Clarifying questions/general discussion; observations related to the 5 issues

Another look at "Interests"

- Any changes based on trapline input?
- Furthering mutual understanding of "interests"

Continuing work on Issue alternatives and recommendations

- "Round Robin" exercise – Additions to the May 16 suggested alternatives

10:00 to 12:45 – Working Lunch with Public Comment

Finalizing alternatives and recommendations

- Exploring suggested additions per issue
- Finalizing alternatives:
 - Do your alternatives answer the "important questions"? Do your alternatives recognize the identified "interests" and honor the "guiding principles"?
 - Based on your group's discussion, do you recommend all alternatives going forward? Do you have a preferred – a recommended alternative?
 - Presentation to the full group

Seeking full group agreement – Testing for preference; final agreements

- Testing for preference:
 - Can all the alternatives go forward? If not, are there mitigations that would strengthen one or another of the alternatives?
 - Is their agreement with their preferred recommendation? If not, are there mitigations that would strengthen it?
- Language for final agreements

Where do we go from here?

- Process review with FWP - What happens to our recommendations? And then...?
- Further expectations/role for Workgroup members
- "Gifts" to each other

Discussion Ground Rules

- *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.*

April 23 and May 16 – Small group work on issues

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.*

Thoughts about alternatives

- *Stay the current course.*
- *Enhance habitat – reduce stomping 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.

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.

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.

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*

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 oversight committee.*
- *Consider possible rolling plans – 3-5-10 year reviews.*

Thought 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 water management plans from other similar waters in terms of duration and responsiveness approaches, experiences and results.*