

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Citizen Workgroup - Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan
May 29, 2019 (Meeting 3)

Session Summary

COMPLETED SESSION OBJECTIVES/AGENDA ITEMS

Getting Started...

Workgroup members stated their names and who they represent and observers introduced themselves. The Group also affirmed their discussion ground rules as follows:

- 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.

Approving the May 16 Workgroup meeting summary

The Workgroup approved the May 16 meeting summary without correction or addition.

New Data Review

Adam reviewed the new data that was requested at the May 16 Workgroup meeting and explained that he also had information about other similar water body plans in case the Group wanted to look at them.

Another look at “Interests”

Workgroup members restated and discussed their “interests” to further mutual understanding and how those interests could be part of the discussion leading to alternatives and recommendations.

“Round Robin” exercise – Collecting final individual Workgroup member thoughts about Alternatives and Recommendations

Rainbow trout stocking and management (all Plan sections)

- Maintain stocking
- Set goals of 4-6 trout/net – Canyon Ferry, Hauser, Holter
- Stay the course
- Set goals based on long term data about stocking
- Maintain trout fishery based on recent history with full funding for stocking
- Maintain current stocking as funding allows
- Maintain successful stocking rates
- Maintain 5 fish limit to provide opportunity on these hatchery fish

Yellow perch – Holter

- Set goal at 6 per net
- Set goal at 6 to 10 per net
- Set goal at 10 to 20 per net – 25 daily; 50 possession
- Trending below 6 per net – 25 daily; trending above 10 per net – 50 daily
- Harvest does not affect perch numbers; these are strictly social limits.
- Recognize the importance of perch as a sport fish to provide/maintain opportunity
- Set goals based on monitoring date
- Manage conservation while maintaining opportunity

Yellow perch - Canyon Ferry

- Set goals at 8 to 10 per net
- Catch and release open water on perch
- Live bait allowed year round

Yellow perch – Hauser

- Set goal at 6 to 8 per net

Walleye management (all Plan sections)

- Canyon Ferry goal – 5 to 8 per net; PSD – 30 to 60; 10 fish daily – 2 fish 15 to 20 inches; one over 20 inches
- Eliminate the 3 inch gill net
- Maintain the tournament
- Holter goal – 4 to 7 per net; PSD 30 to 60; creel daily 6; one over 28 inches (no 20-28)
- Hauser goal – 4 to 7 per net; PSD 30 to 60
- Maintain current regulations
- No Holter tournament
- Recognize how Walleye impact other species
- Consider long-term viability; set goals based on monitoring data
- Slot limit for Canyon Ferry; cull small fish – recruit into older age classes
- Holter – Keep 10 fish limit to keep walleye in balance with the perch population and keep perch and sucker habitat sustainable
- Do annual reviews of slot limits

Plan Duration/Plan Responsiveness

- Do a simplified 10 year plan with goals with range for abundance for each species
- Remove triggers – use range within goals per species based on historical data (abundance, condition, growth rates)
- Provide annual updates and allow the public to have input on Plan/potential changes
- Treat each species with equal consideration (independently); history shows that trout, perch, and walleye are not totally interrelated
- Perpetual Plan with annual reports and opportunities to adjust; PSD goals per species with reliance on fisheries professionals to determine the best means of achieving goals
- Adaptive Plan – CAC use – goal-based longer term
- Let anglers should the burden of more difficult regulations; let us take responsibility
- Use a public process to adjust goals
- More FWP education with public to help them understand thinking behind goals, creel limits, etc., and how species interact with each other
- Make responsible decisions quicker based on population trends of all species

Final Alternatives and Recommendations

After full discussion including assuring that the “Important Questions” were answered; the Guiding Principles were honored; and the “interests” were considered to the best degree possible, the Workgroup agreed to forward the following consensus alternatives and recommendations to the Department:

Plan Duration/Plan Responsiveness

Alternatives

- **Create a 10 to 15 year plan with annual updates based on meetings with a Citizen Advisory Group.**
- **Set goals to replace triggers in the current plan.**
- **In general, give priority consideration to analysis of trend data of biological and scientific data from annual gill netting.**
- **Generally, consider 2 to 3 years of data; however, the Department reserves the option of looking at annual changes based on significant events or if there is a data point significantly outside the normal range of the goal.**

Recommendations

The Workgroup agrees that all alternatives can go forward as acceptable.

“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?

Overall Interests

- It’s in everyone’s interest to have a good fishery.
- It’s is 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.

“Guiding Principles”

- We believe that an adaptive management plan is critical to good management.
- 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 we can learn from other similar water management plans in terms of duration and responsiveness approaches, experiences, and results.
- We believe that the Workgroup needs to be supportive of FWP personnel in making adaptive changes based on data.)

Rainbow trout stocking and management (all Plan sections)

Alternatives

- Set a goal of 4 to 6 to net with leeway for FWP to apply numbers per waterway.
- Stay the current management course: Return historic stocking levels to pre-2017; continue population monitoring through gillnet surveys; maintain the 5 fish limit.
- Collaborate with State and federal agencies and private entities on habitat enhancement projects UMR watershed including education.

Recommendations

The Workgroup agrees that all alternatives can go forward as acceptable.

“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?

Overall 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.

“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.)

Yellow perch – Holter

Alternatives

- Set a goal of 8 to 12 per net.
- If harvest does not impact perch number in Holter:
 - Trending below 8 per net, 25 day limit
 - Trending above 10 per net, 50 day limit
 - Possession – 2 daily limits
- Provide education to the public on voluntary conservation.

Recommendations

The Workgroup agrees that all alternatives can go forward as acceptable.

Yellow perch – Hauser

Alternative and agreed upon Recommendation

- Set goal at 6 to 8 per net

Yellow perch - Canyon Ferry

Alternatives

- **Set 8 to 12 goal for incentive for population improvement.**
- **Maintain the current 10 fish limit; determine how perch harvest affects the perch population at Canyon Ferry and adjust limits accordingly; consider raising the limit if trending up from 10/net.**
- **Enhance habitat with partners' dollars.**
- **Use ponds for forage enhancement.**
- **Provide education to the public on voluntary conservation.**
- **Explore live bait use in the winter.**

Recommendations

The Workgroup agrees that all alternatives can go forward as acceptable.

“Important Questions”

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

Overall “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 and as an important sport fish.

“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.)

Walleye management (all Plan sections)

Alternatives

- **Adjust possible bag/limits based on yellow perch goal.**
- **Improve public outreach to expand awareness of the Management Plan, rationale for the Plan and its parts, and management regulations and actions (e.g., signs, social media, tournaments, boat shows, traditional media, angler groups, etc.).**
- **Recognize anglers' preferred size of Walleye – 14 to 18 inches.**
 - **Missouri River population: Use catch and release as a tool; explore management options for the River; do monitoring to maintain data on the River; use creel surveys and recreation surveys and evaluate.**
 - **Manage for preferred fish size of 14 to 18 inches.**

Walleye management (all Plan sections) Alternatives cont.

- **Canyon Ferry population (separation between yellow perch and walleye):**
 - **Set goal at 5 to 7 net based on the net survey and PSD 30-60 (exception if yellow perch not reaching the goal range, up regulations as a tool.)**
 - **Manage for preferred size of 14 to 18 inches.**
 - **Set slot limits based on abundance and PSD goals to inform the slot.**
 - **Use 3 inch net to set trophy limits; consider doing away with the 3 inch net because of number of large fish lost to the date collection).**
- **Holter population:**
 - **Set goal at 4 to 6 and PSD 30-6-**
 - **Adjust bag/possible limits based on the yellow perch goal.**
 - **Use abundance and PSD for bag limits; consider adjusting the slot limit and reducing the bag limit.**
- **Explore opportunities for forage enhancement.**
 - **Partner with other organizations/agencies to artificially enhance forage.**
 - **Explore use of a snow fence, plastic – place and remove; pilot project.**
 - **Explore minnow enhancement (fatheads)**

Recommendations

The Workgroup agrees that all alternatives can go forward as acceptable.

“Important Questions”

- What can be done to improve sucker as forage?
- What might improve more permanent perch forage? 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 Walleye do anglers prefer to harvest?
- How do we increase the population of walleyes within the preferred harvest size class?

Overall “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.

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.)

Where do we go from here?

- The facilitator will summarize today's meeting including the alternatives and recommendations and Adam will distribute them to the Workgroup and put them on the Department website.
- The Department will present a reservoir management plan update during a commission work session on June 18 at FWP HQ. It will be informational only, and the commission will not take any action. The presentation will only take a few minutes followed by Commissioner's questions that could be answered by anyone from this citizen workgroup in attendance. If you are unable to make it to Helena, you can listen on the FWP website. We expect the fisheries portion of the meeting to start around 10:00 am.
- The Department will hold public meetings to review and get feedback about alternatives from this group and the remainder of the Plan. Workgroup members will be asked to attend at least one of the public meetings. Adam will coordinate attendance at those meeting with the Workgroup members.