

LOWER CLARK FORK RIVER DRAINAGE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Lower Clark Fork River begins at its confluence with the Flathead River and terminates at the inlet to Lake Pend Oreille in Bonner County, Idaho. In Montana, this drainage falls almost entirely within Sanders County. The river flows for 94 miles through a drainage of 1.4 million acres before exiting the state. Elevations range between 2,191 and 8,735 feet. Approximately 83% of the land within the drainage is managed by the Lolo and Kootenai National Forests. Privately owned land is primarily confined to the valley floor and the Thompson River drainage. Primary land uses include agriculture, wilderness, forest products, recreation and hydropower generation.

There are 49 lakes or reservoirs in the drainage, totaling 14,483 surface acres. Numerous, natural headwater lakes are found at higher elevations. The largest of these lakes, Wanless Lake, lies within the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness area. The Thompson, Bull and Vermillion rivers are the largest tributaries contributing to the lower Clark Fork. The lower Clark Fork River is comprised of riverine and reservoir habitats. Approximately 62 miles of the river has been inundated by the Thompson Falls, Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs. These reservoirs were impounded to generate hydroelectricity. Noxon Reservoir is the largest reservoir impounding an area of 7,592 acres at full pool followed by Cabinet Gorge (2,848 acres) and Thompson Falls (969 acres).

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Diverse habitat types throughout the Lower Clark Fork River drainage provide numerous fishing opportunities, including warm, cool and cold water sport fisheries and important habitat for native species. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, yellow perch and several trout species are the primary species targeted by fishermen. Native species management is primarily focused on trout and whitefish.

Native species within the drainage include bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, longnose and largescale sucker, northern pikeminnow, peamouth, longnose dace, redside shiner, and Columbia slimy and Rocky Mountain Rocky Mountain sculpins. Native species management is focused on salmonids with an emphasis on bull trout recovery. The lower Clark Fork River and several of its tributaries are designated as bull trout critical habitat. Bull trout in this drainage exhibit both resident and migratory life histories with some fish moving to mainstem rivers, reservoirs or Lake Pend Oreille to mature. Primary impacts to this species include passage barriers, habitat degradation and introduced species. Currently these impacts are being addressed through the Avista Utilities and PPL Montana hydromitigation programs, which are required by FERC and stipulated in their operating licenses. Fish passage at the Thompson Falls Dam, owned and operated by PPL, is facilitated by a fish ladder that began operation in spring 2011. Upstream passage at the Cabinet Gorge Dam, owned and operated by Avista Utilities, is facilitated by a capture and transport program that returns adult fish to their natal tributaries based on genetic assignments. Additionally, the juvenile trap and transport program traps out-migrating juvenile bull trout from tributaries and transports them to Lake Pend Oreille. Both utilities have programs to protect and restore tributary habitats. In Lake Pend Oreille, lake and rainbow trout are being suppressed by Idaho Fish and Game to benefit kokanee and

migratory bull trout, many of which originate in the Clark Fork drainage. An experimental nonnative fish suppression and exclusion project is being conducted in the East Fork Bull River to assess the effectiveness of weir exclusions and fish removal on brown and brook trout.

The lower Clark Fork drainage contains numerous high elevation ponds and lakes in tributary headwaters. Many of these waters contain fish that are supported by natural reproduction or stocking. Westslope cutthroat trout are the primary species found in most of these habitats, however, some waters contain brook trout and rainbow trout. Access to many of these lakes is limited to non motorized travel; some are accessible by vehicle. Angling pressure is highest during the summer and fall when these waters are accessible.

Tributaries to the Clark Fork River provide angling opportunity for trout. The Thompson and Bull Rivers receive significant angling pressure with other tributaries receiving considerably less. With the exception of the Thompson River, tributaries are closed to angling between November 30 and the third Saturday in May to protect spawning westslope cutthroat trout.

The Thompson River below its confluence with the Little Thompson River remains open year-round, providing fishing opportunity for whitefish and trout anglers. Trout fishing is limited to catch and release for all species between December 1 and the third Saturday in May and cutthroat and rainbow trout must be released year-round.

Riverine portions of the Clark Fork River provide some fishing for smallmouth bass and northern pike, and limited trout fisheries. Native suckers and minnows dominate this habitat. Cold water species such as trout and whitefish are limited due to warm summer water temperatures.

Reservoirs on the lower Clark Fork River are popular warm and cool water fisheries. Yellow perch and northern pike are pursued by anglers year round and largemouth and smallmouth bass fishing picks up as water temperatures warm in the spring. Noxon Reservoir hosts up to seven bass fishing tournaments annually and currently holds the state record for northern pikeminnow and largemouth bass. Spring walleye fishing between Thompson Falls Dam and Noxon Reservoir is increasing in popularity as the illegally introduced population expands.

Walleye were illegally introduced into Noxon Reservoir in the mid to late 1980s. Since then, walleye catch rates slowly increased until 2009 when catch rates began to rapidly increase, doubling in 2010 and 2011. Expanding walleye populations pose a significant predation threat to native and sport fisheries in Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs and future management actions will focus on this species.

One sub-impoundment on Noxon Rapids Reservoir and two on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir provide angling on smaller bodies of water not directly connected to the reservoirs. The Frog Pond on Noxon Rapids Reservoir and Triangle Pond on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir are community fisheries that are stocked with rainbow trout. Triangle Pond is also a popular burbot fishery when ice conditions are safe. Queens Cut on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir is a popular fishery for perch and bass that is not actively managed.

HABITAT

Tributary habitat in the Lower Clark Fork Drainage has been shaped by numerous natural and man-caused conditions. Somewhat unique to the area are sections of streams that seasonally go dry each year, caused by coarse gravel and rubble deposited in basins during the time of Glacial Lake Missoula. Intermittent stretches have partially isolated some upstream fish populations and selected for mixed or resident life histories in some streams. These conditions are not fully understood and are currently being researched.

The Thompson River has a unique habitat trait in that water temperatures cool as water flows downstream. The headwaters of the Thompson River begin at the outlet of the Thompson Chain of Lakes. Summer temperatures in these lakes are generally warm and elevate stream temperatures at their outlets. In the lower drainage, cold, pristine tributary inflows lower water temperatures. Fish Trap Creek and the West Fork Thompson River are the primary contributors of cold water.

Tributary habitat has also been shaped by land use throughout the lower Clark Fork. Timber production and grazing have been the primary land uses and have led to numerous problems including fragmentation associated with culverts and roads, sedimentation, bank destabilization, thermal impacts associated with degraded riparian areas, and channel alterations constructed to prevent flooding, or to move or confine streams. Road construction for timber hauling and residential development has impacted many riparian areas and stream channels. Mining has played a lesser role in shaping habitat; however, small scale mine claims exist throughout the drainage and many are active within floodplains. Proposed copper and silver mines near the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness areas could significantly alter habitat in the Rock Creek and Bull River drainages. Current estimates suggest mining could reduce base flows in these streams by seven percent.

The Lower Clark Fork drainage has eight watershed councils that actively manage drainage-wide water resource issues. Additionally, the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) is also active in the drainage. The LCFWG acts as an umbrella organization for the watershed councils and facilitates cooperation between them. The group is also active in identifying and conducting habitat restoration projects and educating landowners on proper stream and riparian habitat management. The focus area of this group ranges from the Idaho border upstream to Prospect Creek. Within this area the LCFWG has prepared or assisted with preparing watershed assessments in all the larger tributaries.

Approximately 66% of the Lower Clark Fork River has been converted from riverine to reservoir habitat by three hydroelectric facilities. All three reservoirs are run-of-the-river and experience limited drawdowns in most years. Reservoir drawdowns are limited to 10 feet in Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs. Currently, fish passage is facilitated at Thompson Falls and Cabinet Gorge dams. Thompson Falls Dam was outfitted with a fish passage ladder that has been in operation since spring 2011. Bull trout passage at the Cabinet Gorge Dam is facilitated by active capture techniques and upstream transport to the fish's tributary of origin based on genetic assignment. Permanent upstream fish traps are currently being designed for Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Rapids reservoirs. Construction of the Cabinet Gorge fish trap will likely begin in 2013. Designs for the Noxon Rapids fish trap have not been completed and a construction date has not been set.

Water quality in the lower Clark Fork River is impacted by mercury. Fish consumption advisories exist for many popular sport fish with large walleye and northern pike being the most restrictive. The source of the excess mercury is from both natural geology and upstream industrial activities

FISHING ACCESS

Fish, Wildlife and Parks maintains six Fishing Access Sites throughout the drainage. Three of these are found at the headwaters of the Thompson River on McGregor Lake and the Thompson Chain of Lakes. Two provide access to the Clark Fork River and the remaining site provides boat access to Noxon Reservoir near Flat Iron Ridge. In addition to FWP sites, the US Forest Service and Avista Utilities provide developed access at numerous sites throughout the drainage. An extensive road and trail network on public land throughout the drainage provides access to undeveloped sites.

There is 28 miles of the Clark Fork River between access points at Plains and Thompson Falls. There is a need to locate an access about halfway in between (near Weeksville) to accommodate half-day floats and complete river corridor access between Missoula and Thompson Falls.

There is a need to identify opportunities to improve fishing access in the Bull River drainage.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIRECTION FOR LOWER CLARK FORK RIVER DRAINAGE

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Lower Clark Fork River - Confluence with	32 miles	Bull trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Reestablish volitional fish connectivity. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
Flathead River to Idaho Border		All other species	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
Habitat needs and	activities: Mon	itor drainage for p	otential habit	at threats and restoration	on opportunities.
Thompson Falls Reservoir	969 acres	Bull trout	Wild	Conservation	Assess habitat use, survivorship and limiting factors of reservoir reared or fluvial fish. Continue to operate fishway for PPL Montana. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		All other species	Wild	General	Continue to monitor population trends.
McGregor Lake	1,522 acres	Lake trout	Wild	General	Manage harvest to support angling opportunity while reducing numbers to improve size and benefit other put and take fisheries.
		Rainbow trout	Hatchery	Put-Grow-Take	Provide harvest and recreational opportunity for occasional 1-3 pound rainbows. Continue to boat plant trout throughout the lake to minimize predation by lake trout.
		Kokanee salmon	Hatchery	Put-Grow-Take	Provide quality harvest and recreational opportunity for occasional salmon up to 15". Identify if continued stocking is warranted based on predatory lake trout population.
Little McGregor Lake	33 acres	Rainbow trout	Hatchery	Put-Grow-Take	Provide quality harvest and recreational opportunity for 1+ pound rainbows. Identify if stocking is warranted based on competition with stunted yellow perch population.
		Yellow perch	Wild	General	Provide for harvest of at least 8" yellow perch. Monitor population structure to determine if quality perch population can be sustained or if lake should be rehabilitated for salmonids.

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Upper Thompson Lake	294 acres	Northern pike	Wild	General	Continue to provide for liberal harvest including spearing to provide for recreational opportunity and decrease predation on Put and take fisheries and yellow perch.
		Yellow perch	Wild	General	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity
		Largemouth bass	Wild	General	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity. Through regulation, enhance opportunity for spawning size bass (>14").
Middle Thompson Lake	557 acres	Northern pike	Wild	General	Continue to provide for liberal harvest including spearing to provide for recreational opportunity and decrease predation on put and take fisheries and yellow perch.
		Rainbow trout	Hatchery	Put-Grow-Take	Identify if continued stocking is warranted based on predator populations of northern pike and bass.
		Kokanee salmon	Hatchery/ Wild	Put-Grow-Take/ Special Regulations	Maintain regulations that promote protection of naturally reproducing population with opportunity for larger kokanee Continue to monitor contribution to population of hatchery versus wild kokanee. Identify if stocking is warranted based on predator populations of northern pike and bass.
		Yellow perch	Wild	General	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity
		Largemouth bass	Wild	General	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity. Through regulation, enhance opportunity for spawning size bass (>14").
Habitat needs and if replacement is n		itor perched culve	rt between Mi	iddle Thompson Lake an	d Upper Thompson Lake for obstruction to fish movement. Identify
Lower Thompson Lake	240 acres	Northern pike	Wild	Wild	Continue to provide for liberal harvest including spearing to provide for recreational opportunity and decrease predation on put and take fisheries and yellow perch.
Continued on next page		Rainbow trout	Hatchery	Put-Grow-Take	Identify if continued stocking is warranted based on predator populations of northern pike and largemouth bass.

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
		Kokanee	Hatchery/	Put-Grow-Take/	Maintain regulations that promote protection of naturally
		salmon	Wild	Special Regulations	reproducing population with opportunity for larger kokanee
					Monitor contribution to population of hatchery versus wild
					kokanee. Identify if continued stocking is warranted based on
					predator populations of northern pike and bass.
		Yellow Perch	Wild	General	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity
		Largemouth	Wild/	General/Put-Grow-	Maintain recreational angling and harvest opportunity. Through
		bass	Hatchery	Take	regulation, enhance opportunity for spawning size bass (>14").
					Monitor contribution to population of hatchery versus wild bass.
					Identify if continued stocking is warranted
Thompson River	55 miles	Bull trout,	Wild/	Conservation/	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue yearlong
		Westslope	Transfer	Special Regulations	closure on angling for bull trout. Continue upstream bull trout
		cutthroat trout			transport program for fish from below Cabinet Gorge Dam.
					Assess and monitor habitat conditions. Continue yearlong
					closure on angling for bull trout.
		Rainbow trout,	Wild	Special Regulations	Continue to manage harvest to provide angling opportunity for
		Brown trout			larger trout with restrictive regulations and minimize impacts on
					native fish
		Mountain	Wild	General	Provide winter fishery for mountain whitefish in lower 17 miles of
		whitefish,			river.
		Sculpin,			
		Longnose dace,			
		Brook trout			
			n and stream	bank instability through	instream and riparian habitat restoration. Investigate causes of
elevated water ter		•	·		
Little Thompson	20.3 miles	Westslope	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the
River		cutthroat trout			drainage. Continue to limit harvest.
		Brook trout	Wild	General	Maintain liberal regulations. Determine if there are impacts on native fish.
Habitat needs and	activities: Iden	tify leading causes	of habitat deg	radation and determine	e if restoration would benefit bull trout.

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Fish Trap Creek	27.5 miles	Bull Trout	Wild/ Transport	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Special Regulations/ Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Continue to limit harvest.
Habitat needs and	l activities: Asse	ss habitat and hydr	ologic conditi	ons. Restore habitat wh	ere necessary.
West Fork Thompson River	8.4 miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transport	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
	Lactivities: Asse	Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation ons. Restore habitat wh	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Continue to limit harvest.
Prospect Creek	77.6 miles	Bull trout	Wild/	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream
Prospect Creek	77.6 IIIIes	Builtiout	Transport	Conservation	and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
		Mountain whitefish, Sculpin, Rainbow trout, Brook trout, Brown trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Continue to monitor effectiveness of the Blossom Lakes brook trout removal in the upper drainage.

Habitat needs and activities: Develop a working group to identify potential habitat restoration and mitigation projects. Restore habitat degraded by land use, roads, pipelines and power lines. Continue to monitor previously conducted habitat restorations.

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Graves Creek	19.2 Miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transport	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout, Mountain whitefish	Wild	Conservation/ General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Identify factors limiting native salmonids.
		Sculpin, Rainbow trout, Brown trout, Brook trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
Habitat needs and	activities: Moni	tor drainage for po	tential habita	t threats and restoration	n opportunities.
Vermillion River	43.2 Miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transport	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
		Mountain whitefish, Sculpin, Rainbow trout, Brown trout, Brook trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
Habitat needs and	activities: Conti	nue to reduce sedi	ment sources	by stabilizing stream bar	nks and repairing riparian habitat.
Noxon Rapids Reservoir	7,592 Acres	Bull trout	Wild	Native	Assess habitat use, survivorship and limiting factors of reservoir reared fish. Reestablish volitional fish passage past Noxon Rapids Dam. Administer Montana portion of Avista fisheries mitigation program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
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Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
		Walleye	Wild	Suppression	Suppress illegally introduced walleye from the reservoir as possible.
		Largemouth bass, Smallmouth bass	Wild	General/ Special Regulations	Maintain later spawning closure to protect spawning bass. Monitor impacts of fishing derbies and general harvest on bass > 12".
		All other species	Wild	General	Continue to monitor population trends.
Trout Creek	30.2 Miles	Bull trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
		Longnose dace, Rainbow trout, Brown trout, Brook trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
Habitat needs and	l activities: Mon	itor drainage for po	otential habita	at threats and restoratio	n opportunities.
Swamp Creek	16.6 Miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transfer	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
		Mountain whitefish, Largescale sucker, Sculpin,	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage.
Continued on next page		Rainbow trout, Brown trout,			

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
		Brook trout			
Habitat needs ar	nd activities: Mon	itor drainage for po	otential habi	tat threats. Restore degr	raded habitat identified in the USFS watershed assessment.
Rock Creek	17 Miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transfer	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Work with partners to minimize effects of reduced base flows and habitat impacts associated with proposed mines in the headwaters.
		Rainbow trout, Brown trout, Brook trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Work with partners to minimize effects of reduced base flows and habitat impacts associated with proposed mines in the headwaters.
Habitat needs ar	nd activities: Mon	itor drainage for po	otential habi	tat threats and restoration	on opportunities with potential mine development.
Cabinet Gorge Reservoir	2,848 Acres	Bull trout	Wild	Conservation	Assess habitat use, survivorship and limiting factors of reservoir reared fish. Reestablish volitional passage past Cabinet Gorge Dam. Administer Montana portion of Avista fisheries mitigation program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Work with Idaho Fish and Game Department to assess potential for passage of fish above dam.
		All other species	Wild	General	Continue to monitor population trends.
Bull River	71.6 miles	Bull trout	Wild/ Transfer	Conservation	Continue to monitor population trends. Continue downstream and upstream bull trout transport program. Continue yearlong closure on angling for bull trout.
		All other species	Wild	General	Continue to monitor distribution and status throughout the drainage. Continue to exclude introduced salmonids (rainbow, brown, brook trout) from the East Fork Bull River. iver Watershed Assessment. Monitor potential mine impacts.

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Mountain Lakes	1,112 acres	Westslope	Wild/	Put-Grow-	Survey mountain lakes to determine distribution and status of
	total	cutthroat trout	Hatchery	Take/General	wild populations, Continue stocking to provide a recreational
					fishery with a variety of fish sizes and catch rates.
		Brook Trout	Wild		Survey mountain lakes to determine distribution and status of
				General	wild populations, Identify populations that can be managed or where removal may be necessary if impacts to native fish.
Clark Fork	1,214 miles	All	Wild	General	Survey previously un-sampled creeks to determine the
Tributary					distribution and status of the fish. Monitor previously surveyed
Streams					populations.
(McLaughlin,					
Henry, Combest,					
Boyer, Lynch,					
Weeksville,					
Swamp (east),					
Eddy, Munson,					
Quartz, Malone,					
Outlaw, Cherry,					
Squaylth-Kwum,					
Mosquito, Deep,					
Beaver, Tuscor,					
Martin, Stevens,					
McKay, Pilgrim,					
Blue, Elk)	<u>.</u> l	a at a a ation a of high	.l		vectore helitat uhan hanafizial ta vativa anacias

Habitat needs and activities: Protect sections of high quality habitat where necessary and restore habitat when beneficial to native species.