YELLOWSTONE CUTTHROAT TROUT CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR MONTANA

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List of Abbreviations

Agreement	Memorandum of understanding and conservation agreement
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
CNF	Custer National Forest
DEQ	Montana Department of Environmental Quality
DNRC	Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
EBES	Extrapolated, based on extensive surveys
EBS	Extrapolated, based on surveys
EFSSO	Extrapolated from a single survey or observation
FWP	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
GIS	Geographical information system
GNF	Gallatin National Forest
HUC	Hydrologic unit code
MCTSC	Montana Cutthroat Trout Steering Committee
MFISH	Montana Fisheries Information System
N/A	Not applicable
NPSJ	No survey, professional judgment
NRCS	Natural Resources and Conservation Service
RBT	Rainbow trout
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Service
WCT	Westslope cutthroat trout
YCT	Yellowstone cutthroat trout
YNP	Yellowstone National Park

Executive Summary

This document presents a strategy for securing, restoring, and maintaining Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri*) in its native range in Montana. Development of a conservation strategy is a requirement of an agreement developed by the Montana Cutthroat Trout Steering Committee (MCTSC 2007). Threats to the persistence of this native fish are considerable, and without intervention, further losses are inevitable. This strategy provides a framework for conserving Yellowstone cutthroat trout following the goals and objectives established in the agreement developed by the MCTSC. The spatial scope of this document is the historic range of Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Montana, which encompasses most of the waters in the larger Yellowstone River watershed. Exempted from this strategy is the portion of the Shields River upstream of the Chadbourne diversion, which is addressed in a separate document (FWP et al. 2012).

Potential conservation actions will be tailored on a site-specific basis; however, several categories encompass most of the potential actions. Continued survey and assessment is a considerable need that will identify secure populations and areas where intervention is required to meet conservation goals. Restoration of habitat is a broadly applicable category of intervention that will increase the likelihood that habitat can support this native species. Actions that fall under the category of restoration include improving riparian and in-stream habitat and water quality, removing barriers that restrict movement of Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and maintaining in-stream flows at levels to support various life history stages. As nonnative species present a major threat to remaining populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout, removal of these may be an appropriate action in some cases. Construction of barriers to prevent reinvasion of nonnative fishes may also be appropriate to ensure long-term persistence of Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations.

This strategy includes a review of waters within the historic range of the Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The purpose of these reviews is to provide an initial screen to determine the extent of the available information and currently identifiable conservation opportunities. Implementation of specific projects will entail additional review and analysis under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), or both.

This document is the first iteration of what will be continuing efforts to restore, protect, and enhance Yellowstone cutthroat trout within their native range in Montana. Subsequent documents will provide updates on implementation of projects aimed at meeting conservation goals, will include results of field investigations evaluating trends in Yellowstone cutthroat trout distribution and genetic status, and will identify emerging threats to individual populations, such as invasions by nonnative salmonids. Succeeding iterations will occur at 5-year intervals.