

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan – CAC Meeting
May 6th, 2020

In attendance: Mike Agee, Bart Bratlien, Pete Cardinal, Jim Gillespie, Dale Gilbert, Jason Rhoten, Troy Humphrey, Adam Strainer

In attendance via Zoom: Eric Roberts, Richard Stuker

WELCOME!

Jason Rhoten – Gave group an overview of the UMR CAC role and process. Small, informal group. Committee appointed in Feb by the commission. Ground rules. Regs overview.

FWP Updates on Management Plan Area waterbodies:

Missouri River – Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir Fisheries Update

- From Spoon via Adam Strainer: Still learning about walleye movement into the river. 2020 monitoring is occurring as we speak. Walleye migrating into the river within the last two weeks (25 fish last week). Also continuing to monitor rainbow (RB) and brown (LL) trout populations annually. Introduced the topic of FERC relicensing at Toston and the ongoing mitigation discussion.
- CAC Discussion:
 - Gillespie: climate change and warmer river, change from trout to walleye? Continue monitoring to see what is driving trout declines.
 - Gillespie/Cardinal: Concerns about herbicides in the waterways and how nutrients cause big impacts. Concerns about rock snot, algae. What about chemical use on the roadways?
 - Gilbert: Toston FERC. How can he and other advocates get involved (Roberts informed the group of a public process)
 - Pete: What about northern pike (NP) in Toston Dam and the river? (Strainer - Nothing post-2013. NP are now spread throughout the system. Seeing more caught by anglers.) What about monitoring of the reservoir levels?
 - Agee: What's the latest on blue green algae in Holter and how does it impact area fisheries? (Strainer – informed group on harmful algal blooms (HAB) reporting through DEQ)

*** NOTE: Consider inviting DEQ/EPA to talk about nutrients/pollutants at a future meeting?

Canyon Ferry Reservoir 2019 Fisheries Update

- Troy Humphrey – survey results and other observations
- CAC Discussion:
 - Gillespie: What did catch and release look like in 2019; walleye (WE) and RB?
 - Bratlien: RB stocking, how long to bounce back? Understanding the delayed effect from reductions in 2018 & 2019. Expect abundance to decline until 2020 stocking recruit. Are RB caught in sinking gill nets?
 - General discussion - 2020 Pines for perch Project? (Humphrey – Initially canceled because of COVID-19 response. However, FWP now able to move forward with only a small number of FWP staff, no volunteers in May. Kanta re-delivering concrete blocks.

- Cardinal: How is the ling population? (Humphrey - Not what they used to be.)
- Gilbert: Would like to see additional walleye data; length frequency histograms. (Humphrey provided data to Gilbert)
- Pete: Believes perch goals of 6-10 per net may need to be altered to achieve goals. (FWP and CAC members – like to see current goals in place for a couple years before changing)

Hauser (HA) & Holter (HO) Reservoir's 2019 Fisheries Update

- Adam Strainer – survey results, management changes, and other observations
 - Bratlien: Hauser NP update? (Strainer – NP continue to become more common throughout UMR Reservoir system, especially in Lake Helena)
 - Agee: SMB in HA/HO? Above CFR? (Strainer - Nothing in nets, one angler report in HA tailrace. Increasing in CFR and seeing a few in lower reaches of the river upstream of Canyon Ferry. Overall, mostly small fish reported and observed at this time.)
 - Cardinal: LL below HA, KOK impacts? Good time to reintroduce KOK to HO? (Strainer - Beaver Creek restoration project in 2020-2021 could help LL recruitment. Start this summer. Benefits by 2022.)
 - Gillespie: Dead kokanee in the fall effect LL's? (Strainer – historically, there were fungus concerns; FWP continues to monitor.)
 - Cardinal: HO perch limit change? (Strainer - Destination YP fishery while maintaining opportunity with higher limit of 25 daily. Expect to see 1-3/net until next boom. Regulation change due to increased public input, although not needed biologically.)
 - Cardinal: Seeing more ling in HO. May be another yellow perch (YP) limiting factor. (Strainer/Humphrey – ling are difficult to sample; FWP will continue to monitor population.)

UMR CAC Member Reports – Group Discussion:

Mike Agee: Good to see return to RB stocking rates. Interested in Beaver Creek project and potential positive effects to overall LL fishery. What percentage of RB's below HA dam are wild; suggested FWP keep monitoring to maintain wild fish. Advocate to preserve/increase the wild fish component of the trout fishery. Outfitters in the tailrace from Gates. Number of outfitters on a short stretch a concern for TU; what's best for managing increasing observed recreational use from HA Dam to HO. Crowding at Beaver Creek a concern.

- Cardinal: Suggested encouraging people not to keep wild fish.
- Agee: Customers come to target trophy LL. Public doesn't get a fair shake in upper HO – Public being squeezed out by outfitters. Suggested improving public opportunity with “public only” fishing days (e.g. no commercial use day; 1 day per week)
- Recreation discussion: Change in use with COVID-19 response; many more people out this spring.

Pete Cardinal: fish harvest data would be helpful along with creel data. More creel information reporting at future meetings would be helpful for CAC members. Appreciates annual discussion. Meeting will be more important next year for making the tools work. Will be interesting to see how pressure changes fish populations.

- Gilbert: what are the impacts of good fishing? Information to determine what anglers do to the fishery.
- General discussion: look more into tributary and habitat issues moving forward.
- Look at more LL data

Commissioner Stuker (before leaving meeting via Zoom): Suggested staggering CAC member terms to maintain continuity of the group.

Bart Bratlien: Public input seems to be becoming more important. Hears a lot of grief about FWP, specifically regarding comments about the HO YP regulation change on Jan. 1, 2020 (e.g., FWP waited too long to make a change.) Angler education and outreach seems to be a vital part of public engagement; orange update signs really got the message out to anglers.

- How to best increase public participation in this process in the future?
- Value to regs based on social pressure (e.g., 10 perch limit on HO).

Dale Gilbert: Appreciates the effort. Overall positive outlook. Concerns about catch and release Montana Outdoors article (found in the most recent issue).

- Gilbert: Feedback on Facebook, not many comments. Why aren't there more 15-inch fish? Nervous that big fish are showing up. How does that impact future spawns. Need anglers to do a better job of harvesting small fish or FWP should consider a slot limit or regulation that forces people to keep small fish.
- Investigate ways to build habitat structures that last longer. Alternatives for spawning habitat for perch?
- Gilbert: Concerns with fishing pressure during the spawn. Pictures on Facebook of fish released and die.
- Gilbert: Anything on the table for regulations to look at? What if things look the same next year? (Rhoten/Strainer - potential to look at limits if abundance stays similar and PSD's improve. Slots might not be the answer. FWP will consider 2 to 3 years of data, starting now, and make changes if necessary.)

Jim Gillespie: UMRRFMP discussion has come a long way since he started. Concerns about crowding below Hauser and spawning redds getting disturbed. Should we think about a ramp below the dam for float access?

- Gillespie:
 - Increasing fishing pressure and expected to get worse, how does that impact a fishery (Hauser as an example).
 - Wake boats impacting terrestrial wildlife, fish, debris. Maybe consider rules to stay on the main lake?
 - Ways to improve habitat.

Conclusion and discussion regarding next meeting: Consider a better time frame for future UMR CAC meetings. Consider hosting next UMR CAC meeting before May, March? Fall meeting? December? Regulation change would likely correspond with the normal regulation cycle, but getting a possible change in the regulation book should be a secondary concern.

- Perception that an earlier meeting would be more responsive.
- Bratlien: In the shop (Capital Sports in Helena) more people comment on signs and exceptions that are posted on the fridge.
- FWP will have a lot of information for a December 2020 meeting, but some will be preliminary data.
- Group: Start with a December 2020 meeting and see how it works out.
- Eileen Ryce or Eric Roberts will update the commission on this meeting.
- Meeting minutes will be posted to the UMRRFMP website after review.

Action Items:

- Schedule next CAC meeting for December 2020
 - Strainer
- Prior to December 2020 meeting CAC members can email topics that require additional data or will be a discussion focal points, i.e. additional data for...
 - All
- Investigate possibility of a presentation on nutrients in the reservoir system
 - Strainer