

EFFORTS TO REDUCE LAKE TROUT IN FLATHEAD LAKE TO BENEFIT BULL TROUT

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Flathead Lake was once noted for its abundant bull trout population (*Salvelinus confluentus*). *Mysis relicta*, first documented in 1981, started a cascade of trophic shifts, including increased survival of lake trout. Predation by lake trout has restructured the fish assemblage and suppressed native trout. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes co-manage Flathead Lake and have chosen to reduce lake trout by means of public angling, even though lake trout represent over 80 percent of the fishery in most years. To achieve this goal, managers are employing liberalized regulations, i.e., two lines, a bag limit of 20, and fishing contests. Based on a lottery system, the contests target fish < 710 mm (TL). The contests change angler behavior by motivating them to catch and harvest 100 percent of their limits. Currently harvest in the contests had risen to equal about 25 percent of the annual harvest. Despite these successes, there are currently no strong indicators that the present level of harvest is reducing the lake trout population size. Managers are currently evaluating whether it is more prudent to stay the course with public angling as a tool for reducing lake trout numbers, or to employ another method of reduction.