

ADULT STONECAT DISTRIBUTION IN THE UPPER MISSOURI RIVER, MONTANA

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Stonecats, native to Montana, were sampled in the Missouri River near Craig, Montana, in the late 1800s. Subsequently, stonecats have not been sampled during intense electrofishing efforts throughout the same area over the past 24 years. The objective of this study was to determine adult stonecat distribution within a 142 km reach of the Upper Missouri River in northcentral Montana, between Holter Dam and Black Eagle Dam. The study area was divided into eight 17.8 km sections and baited hoop nets were systematically fished in each section at approximately 2 km intervals on both sides of the river. Since all eight sections were

sampled during March 2005, sampling order was randomly selected. Adult stonecats were only sampled in the most downstream 17.8 km of the study area with mean hoop net catch rates varying from 0 to 33/2-night period. Our initial results indicated that adult stonecats presently occupy only the lower 17.8 km of the study area. Canyon Ferry Reservoir's thermal influences on the Upper Missouri River system might help explain the current distribution of stonecats. Additional sampling will commence in March 2006 with an increased effort aimed at sampling younger age classes.