Behavior And Characteristics Of Anglers In Bull Trout Recovery Areas Within The Upper Clark Fork Watershed[AFS]

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Recent radio-telemetry studies in the upper Clark Fork Basin (1999-2004) indicated ≤ 10-15 percent annual angler-caused mortality for adult fluvial bull trout. Because of extremely low population abundance (1-5 adults/river mi), increasing fishing pressure, concentration of fishing pressure in key bull trout habitats, vulnerability of bull trout to

angling, etc., angling is still suspected to be a significant source of mortality. With this in mind, we interviewed 544 anglers (Jun-Oct 2004) in 33 known bull trout staging and spawning areas to a sess regulation compliance, fish identification skills, angling methods and angler demographics. Anglers surveyed were primarily unguided bank anglers, although guided anglers (13%) and float anglers (25%) were represented in our sample of Montana residents (47%) and nonresidents (53%). Angling methods included fishing with flies (75%), bait (9%), hardware (10%) or some combination of these (6%). Most anglers (79%) were aware of special regulations for bull trout and overall regulation compliance was very high (>99%). However, trout identification skills were poor and the angler group that we were most concerned about (those intending to keep fish) was particularly deficient. Anglers planning to keep fish exhibited lower regulation compliance (94%) and success in identifying the five common trout species (15%) relative to catch and release anglers (46% success). These data do not provide conclusive answers to the question of angling impacts on depressed bull trout populations, but do suggest the need for education targeting specific angler groups and concerted river recreation planning efforts in order for native fish recovery to be successful.