

STATUS OF BURBOT IN MONTANA^{AFS}

Melissa R. Jones-Wuellner and Christopher S. Guy, Montana Cooperative Fishery Research Unit, 301 Lewis Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717, mjones@montana.edu

Kenneth P. McDonald, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, 1420 E 6th Ave. P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620

In Montana, burbot are native to the Kootenai, Missouri, and Saskatchewan drainages. To assess the distribution and status of burbot in Montana, we requested population characteristic data (e.g., length-weight data, catch per effort, population estimates) from fisheries biologists throughout the state. In addition, we surveyed biologists regarding their opinions about the status of burbot in their area. We were able to obtain and analyze trend data from several populations throughout Montana, but most of these data were from incidental catches while biologists were sampling for other species. Thus, low sample size was a common problem with these data and made any conclusions regarding population trends relatively unreliable. Fisheries biologists throughout the state also agreed that data was limiting to make any recommendations regarding the status of burbot in Montana. Where standardized long-term data sets existed, burbot population abundance was highly variable and likely related to discharge. We recommend that standardized sampling be incorporated for monitoring burbot populations and that sampling for burbot be specifically targeted in areas that are identified as potential spawning and rearing habitat. Despite that burbot are native to much of Montana, little is known about their overall status, usefulness as an indicator species, and function in fish assemblages.