They're (Almost) Gone: Removal of Northern Pike from Milltown Reservoir, Montana—It's Just Like Pulling Knapweed, Only Less Controversial[AFS]

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Illegally introduced northern pike (*Esox lucius*) in Milltown Reservoir represent a threat to resident and migratory native fishes. By 1999, northern pike were the most abundant species in the reservoir. I evaluated two methods to reduce the population size of northern pike and predation on native fish: summer reservoir drawdowns (targeting age-0 fish) and trap netting (to remove adults during spawning). In 2002, the population of northern pike was 2,883 ± 663 (95% CI) and trap netting removed 985 adults (34%). By 2003 the population was reduced to 786 ± 169 and I trapped 432 (55%), reducing the density of northern pike by 88 percent in 14 months. Between 2000 and 2002, bull and westslope cutthroat trout were seasonally common in northern pike stomachs. In 2003, none were detected in stomachs despite greater sampling, suggesting that the reduced northern pike population size reduced predation. Summer drawdowns killed an estimated 10,000 northern pike in 1999, 9500 in 2001, 7100 in 2002, and 3670 in 2003. Whereas drawdowns from 1999-2002 only killed northern pike, largemouth bass, yellow perch and pumpkinseed (illegally introduced non-native fish), in 2003 largescale suckers, and northern pikeminnow were detected, signifying recovery of native fishes. Any management activity that involves killing animals has the potential for controversy, whether from concerns over pesticides or lack of understanding the program's goals. Initially, managing and removing northern pike was controversial in Missoula, but as a result of public education, the public is supportive of northern pike control and ultimately the removal of Milltown Dam.