



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Proposed Fishing Regulation Changes for 2011 Supplement

October 28, 2010

All but two of the proposed fishing regulations for 2011 were voted on by the FWP Commission on October 7. The two exceptions included the proposal for a reduced bag limit and/or reduced number of lines on Lake Kootenai and a proposal to raise the lake trout limits from 50 to 100 on Flathead Lake. At the October Commission meeting, FWP proposed to delay final action on the Kootenai regulations until after bull trout redd surveys were conducted in October to better understand the population trajectory. The delay on the Flathead regulation was intended to allow the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (co-managers of the lake) the opportunity to hold a public hearing on the issue and then be voted on by the Flathead Reservation Fish and Wildlife Board on October 20. Below is a summary of public comments received on these two proposals during the August 6-September 6, 2010 public comment period, as well as the response by FWP staff, and the recommendation for final adoption.

Note: new language is in italics. Deleted language has a strike through it.

WESTERN DISTRICT

CHANGE – (page 33)

FLATHEAD LAKE

- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout
- Whitefish: 100 daily and in possession
- Lake trout: ~~50~~ 100 daily and in possession, only 1 over 36 inches, and all fish 30 to 36 inches must be released.
- A Flathead Indian Tribal Permit is required to fish on the southern half of the lake.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Eighteen comments were received regarding this proposal, and 16 were in favor of raising the limit and 2 were opposed. Those in favor of the regulation typically stressed the need to control this non-native fish and protect bull trout. One commenter in opposition felt that raising the bag limit would result in lower catch rates for lake trout and smaller size fish in the creel.

FWP RESPONSE: A liberalization of the lake trout limit for Flathead Lake would be consistent with the current direction of the Flathead Fisheries Co-Management Plan emphasizing angler harvest to better balance lake trout with native fish. The enhanced limit would be most effective during Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) fishing events when anglers

are given financial incentives to harvest large numbers of lake trout. On October 20, the Flathead Reservation Fish and Wildlife Board voted to support this regulation change. Based on this vote and the strong support registered through the public comments, FWP will continue to propose this regulation.

CHANGE – (page 36)

LAKE KOOCANUSA

- ~~Hook and Line: 1 rod and/or line with up to 2 hooks (includes fishing from boat, shore or on ice)~~
- Closed to burbot (ling) fishing January 15 to March 1.
- Salmon: 50 daily and 100 in possession
- Bull trout: 1 daily and in possession from June 1 through February 28, ~~maximum of 2~~ 1 fish per license year. Catch-and-release the rest of the year. **A Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout Catch Card must be in possession when fishing for bull trout.** See Special Licenses requirements for application information. All bull trout must be released immediately or killed and counted as your limit when harvest is allowed. It is unlawful to possess a live bull trout for any reason.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Sixteen commenters expressed their view on the proposal to reduce the number of lines from 2 to 1; three people were in support and 13 were in opposition. One of the supporters would have the restriction placed only on fishing while trolling. Twelve people expressed their view on the proposal to reduce the number of harvested bull trout from 2 to 1 annually. All were in favor of some restriction, with five respondents favoring the reduction from 2 to 1 and the other 7 people favoring closing the bull trout fishery all together. A common response was that reducing bull trout harvest was far preferable to losing the second line, which many deemed important for catching rainbow trout and kokanee.

FWP RESPONSE: Bull trout redd counts conducted in early October 2010 revealed that the downward population trend which began in 2007 is continuing. The number of redds in the Wigwam and Grave creek drainages, the major spawning areas in the system, was 1,234, which is only 50% of the peak number in 2006. Based on these survey results, FWP believes that harvest restrictions are warranted, and will continue to propose the reduction in bag limit from 2 to 1 to the Commission. Some commenters suggested closing the fishery; FWP does not believe this is necessary at this point because the population is still strong and there are uncertainties regarding the role that natural processes may have in the current population change. With respect to the proposal to drop the number of lines from 2 to 1, it was opposed by most commenters. However, FWP feels that the responses suggest that many anglers do not see the relation between the numbers of lines and bull trout survival. FWP believes that more time is needed to explore these issues and have a wide-ranging discussion with anglers, US Fish and Wildlife Service and British Columbia in the coming months about all other possible management options, from catch-and-release educational efforts to tackle and/or season restrictions. FWP therefore withdraws its proposal to reduce the number of lines.
