

WHAT IS CONSISTENT?

Change! We began working on this edition of the Newsletter in the fall of 2005. If you have followed the newsletter, you know that 2005 edition has been missing. The Casper Management Crew has seen a great deal of change in personnel. I'm very happy to report we have recruited excellent new biologists. This, the 2005 edition and the 2006 edition are now available. Given the change in personnel, I thought a brief introduction of the people managing your fisheries might be of interest.

Mr. Paul Gerrity is originally from Cleveland, Ohio and brings his experience on big waters to the crew. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology from John Carroll University in 2001 with work experience as a fisheries technician on Lake Erie with both the Ohio Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Geological Survey from 1999 - 2002; and on Sierra Nevada reservoirs with the U.S. Geological Survey in California from 2002 - 2003. He earned his Master of Science in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University in 2005 working on the ecology of pallid sturgeon and shovelnose sturgeon in the Missouri River.

Geoff Klein, Casper's regional aquatic habitat biologist, came to us from Canada. He began his career in a microbiology laboratory in 1990, but soon moved to larger animals; stream insects in the Yukon Territory, and then zebra mussels in the Great Lakes. He finally graduated to fish in 1993, studying contaminant cycling in Ontario lakes. Geoff worked as a fisheries technician for the Game and Fish until accepting a job as the lone fisheries biologist in Arctic Quebec, which he loved and worked at for almost four years before returning to Wyoming in 2002 when a habitat position opened up. Though the fish

are smaller than in Quebec, Geoff is enjoying the availability of open water fishing year-round, and not needing an extension on his auger when he goes ice fishing.

I'm Al Conder, a third generation greenie that was attending CSU when the price of gasoline increased to an outrageous 40 cents a gallon. After working for Colorado as a fisheries technician, I began my career with the Game and Fish at Speas Rearing Station as a fish culturist. I transferred from Speas to Cheyenne to work on instream flow and water development projects across the state. I returned to Casper in 1986 as one of the management biologists and was promoted to the regional supervisor in 1996.

The Casper Management Crew was established in 1955 to manage the North Platte Reservoirs. Through the years the Crew's role expanded from the reservoirs to the tailwaters, tributaries and smaller ponds and reservoirs in the area. The Crew's primary focus was, and will be, to provide the best fishing opportunity possible in the Casper Region from Seminoe Reservoir to Nebraska. However, we are continuing to expand our management role to include not just game fish, but all aquatic wildlife. The Game and Fish is charged with the management of all the State's wildlife and we are being asked more questions about the status of all aquatic wildlife, not just game fish.

In 2005 we began to evaluate what we know and also what we do not know about the Region's aquatic resources. Most of the work done in the past has been based on the potential of a stream or reservoir to provide game fish. We have good information on the streams supporting trout, but our information on streams that do not support game fish is limited in many locations. We are beginning a process to survey many streams where we lack information on all the aquatic wildlife inhabiting the water.

ILLEGAL FISH STOCKING

Bait Fish

A Douglas man recently paid more than \$2,000 in fines and restitution for illegally importing and stocking live baitfish in a private pond near Douglas. Chad Shelver also had his bait dealer's license revoked for three years and was given 30 days suspended jail sentence after pleading guilty to transporting two loads of bait minnows into Wyoming from South Dakota and stocking fish in a private pond. The violations occurred in 2004.

After interviewing Shelver, Game and Fish personnel treated the pond with rotenone to prevent the spread of any possible nuisance species. Shelver was ordered to pay \$1,565 in restitution for the treatment, as well as \$870 in fines for the violations.

In the past, when Game and Fish biologists inspected loads of bait fish from other states, a high percentage of the them contained unwanted species. Due to the potential baitfish, a regulation prohibiting importation of baitfish was enacted in 2000 problems from importing.

Harry Yesness Pond

The discovery of more walleye in Harry Yesness Pond has us very frustrated. This pond is managed as a trout fishery for children and walleye don't belong here. The walleye

caught have been seven-year-old fish. Because Yesness Pond was drained in 1999, we are certain both were the result of illegal introductions. Yesness Pond is a small body of water and could not support very many walleye. But it can support a lot of smaller rainbow trout, and kids generally like to catch a lot of fish versus the possibility of catching one big fish

We'll net the pond again next spring to see if there are any more adult walleye or any young-of-the-year walleye that just hatched. If it is discovered that walleye are indeed reproducing in the pond, we may have to take drastic measures to remove them. We won't have a lot of options. We will either have to ask the city if they are willing to drain the pond, or use chemical treatments to remove the walleye. Unfortunately, we can't selectively remove only walleye; it will be a complete eradication of all the fish in the pond. Efforts to remove unwanted fish are costly and could result in lost fishing opportunities.

Because illegal fish stocking is a growing problem in Wyoming, the Game and Fish Department is stepping up enforcement to try and curb the number of violations. The Department has started to increase enforcement of illegal transport of fish or fish eggs by the issuance of citations versus warnings. Transporting or releasing live fish without authorization is illegal and could result in fines up to \$400 and/or six months in jail. Convicted persons could also face possible suspension of hunting and fishing privileges for up to three years. In addition, persons responsible for illegally stocking fish could also be charged for any clean-up efforts the department must take to return a fishery to its former condition, which could start at a couple thousand dollars.

Game and Fish requests that anyone with information about the walleye in Yesness Pond, or any angler who catches a walleye in the pond please contact the Game and Fish office at 473-3400.

PLEASE, LET IT SNOW!

We received some much-needed moisture in the spring of 2005; however, one wet spring did not replenish what we have lost in six years of drought. Several years of above average moisture are needed to restore water storage in the region. Fortunately, as a result of conservation and sound water management the large reservoirs and tailwaters on the North Platte System are still in remarkably good condition but many of our smaller waters are struggling.

33 Mile

There are several small reservoirs on BLM Land in the South Fork Powder River Drainage that have provided a lot of fishing opportunity, from bass and crappie to trophy trout. But, due to the drought, we recommend you omit 33 Mile Ponds from your list of fishing spots until the region recovers from the drought. The ponds, which have been stocked regularly in the past, did not receive any new fish for the 2005 angling season. The water is just too low or, in some cases, non-existent. Low water levels can lead to both summer and winter die-offs of fish due to lack of oxygen or high water temperatures in the summer.

We will continue to evaluate any change in the condition of the reservoirs and we plan to stock the reservoirs as conditions improve. Hopefully the increase in moisture we saw last spring will continue and provide improved conditions very soon.

Goldeneye Reservoir

Although Goldeneye has been a fishery for over 80 years, walleye are a recent addition. Fingerling walleye were stocked in 2001 through 2005 along with adult gizzard shad to provide forage for the walleye.

Results of our gill net survey in 2003 indicated the walleye would be a real success story (Table 1). The walleye averaged about a foot long with the largest being 15½ inches. The shad were all the young from adults stocked in 2003 and averaged about 2-3 inches. An average relative weight (Wr) value of 104 means the Goldeneye walleye were extremely fat.

Table 1. Gill net information for Goldeneye Reservoir, September 2003

Species	Number	Avg. L (inches)	L Range (inches)	Avg. Wt (lbs.)	Wt Range (lbs.)	Avg. Wr*
Walleye	115	12.1	5.6 - 15.5	0.7	0.1 - 1.3	104
Gizzard Shad	377		2 - 3			

*- Wr = relative weight. Essentially a measure of how fat a fish is and a value of 93 is an "average" fish.

Our gill net results in 2004 were very disappointing. The number of walleye, their condition and available forage for walleye had declined drastically (Table 2). Both the amount of water in the reservoir and the water quality had declined offering an explanation for the decline in walleye. Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) is a measure of dissolved salts and minerals in water. Goldeneye has always had high TDS, 3,000 to 4,000 parts per million, and this is part of the reason it is very productive. Like most things, some is good but too much of a good thing can cause problems. As points of reference, Glendo Reservoir's TDS is about 500 and seawater is 35,000. Due to the low water levels, TDS have become more concentrated and we are now measuring TDS over 16,000 parts per million in Goldeneye.

Table 2. Gill net information for Goldeneye Reservoir, August 2004

Species	Number	Avg. L (inches)	L Range (inches)	Avg. Wt (lbs.)	Wt Range (lbs.)	Avg. Wr*
Walleye	19	12.2	5.8 - 15.2	0.65	0.1 - 1.0	83
Gizzard Shad	0					

*- Wr = relative weight.

Often fish can survive in water with high TDS but, not reproduce. We had never expected the walleye to reproduce but the forage fish must be able to reproduce to provide food for the walleye. High turbidity (water looks muddy) and high TDS does not offer a very optimistic outlook for the reservoir's fishery in the near future. We will continue to work with the various parties that control the reservoir to attempt to improve the fishery.

2006 WALK-IN AREA FISHING ATLASES AVAILABLE JANUARY 1

It may not be the best time to drift a dry fly down a trout stream or cast a bass plug on a plains pond, but it is a good time to be planning this season's trips by picking up the 2006 Walk-in Area Fishing Atlas. The Atlas will be available around January 1.

The 44-page guide features 59 fishing spots enrolled in the Game and Fish Department's Private Lands/Public Wildlife Access Program. The new atlas, available at license agents and Game and Fish offices, has prominent species found in each stream or lake, plus detailed directions to reach the waters, reports Brian Olsen, Game and Fish regional access coordinator for northeast Wyoming. The program's lake acreage increased from 273 acres last year to 276 acres. Stream length enrolled has grown from 89 to 100 miles. Sixty-five landowners are participating in the fishing access program.

Olsen encourages landowners who would like to receive a payment for allowing public fishing access to their stream or pond to contact their local Game and Fish office or game warden. "Likewise, anglers who know of some potential fishing on private land, let us know and we'll contact the landowner," he said. To promote the enrollment of more waters, Olsen urges anglers to pack out their trash and any other litter they see. "It is also very important that when we do get some snow or rain, that anglers use some discretion to not tear up the access roads on private property," he adds.

Anglers and hunters are encouraged to contribute to the Access Yes program whenever they purchase or apply for a license. Access Yes donations help fund the Walk-in Area Program.

NEW NORTH PLATTE RIVER ACCESS

Two new access areas have been developed on the North Platte and we encourage you to add them to your list of fishing spots. The first is near Glenrock. A cooperative project with PacifiCorp at their Dave Johnston Power Plant has opened up float access to the North Platte River, as well as additional walk-in hunting and fishing access. This section of the river is a Blue Ribbon stream, supporting over 600 pounds of trout per mile.

The floater access just upstream of the Plant will enhance the recreational opportunities on the North Platte River and mitigate a potential hazard to floaters at the Plant's diversion dam. Additional walk-in fishing access to over 2 miles of the North Platte River and approximately 510 acres of walk-in hunting access will also be available.

In addition to granting an easement for the development, PacifiCorp donated gravel for the road, excavation and embankment work on the highway approach, access road, parking lot and boat launch.

"These new access points will provide opportunities for a wide variety of uses," said Alan Dugan, planning manager at the Dave Johnston Power Plant. "We are pleased to be able to provide this amenity to Glenrock area residents and surrounding communities."

For floaters, this new access area is a take-out point only. The North Platte River below this new access area to the dam at Dave Johnston Power Plant will be closed to floaters. Boats can re-enter the river at the access area off Tank Farm Road downstream of the power plant.

DIRECTIONS: Take Wyoming Highway 20/26 approximately 2 miles southeast from Glenrock or Exit 160 on I-25 and travel 1 mile northwest on Highway 20/26. The gravel road leads to the parking lot that is located about a half mile north of the highway.

The second new access area is a cooperative project between the Game and Fish and Wyoming Fly Casters adjacent to the Dan Speas Fish Rearing Station near Casper. New public fishing access on the North Platte River has opened up with the project that includes the acquisition of approximately 34 acres of land between the rearing station and the river. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department, with financial help from Wyoming Fly Casters, bought the land with plans to develop a wetland complex that will help purify the water leaving the rearing station before it enters the river. The land includes approximately a half-mile of access to blue-ribbon trout water that is now open to the public for angling. The new wetlands will also provide valuable wildlife habitat.

A dedication ceremony for the project, known as the Wyoming Fly Casters Memorial Access Area, took place on September 25, 2005. Additional financial help from the Wyoming Fly Casters will assist in the future development of roads and public parking areas at the access site.

DIRECTIONS: Take Wyoming highway 220 approximately 6 miles from the intersection of 220 and Robertson Road, and then turn north on Bessemer Bend Road. Stay on the blacktop and follow the signs.

THE NORTH PLATTE FROM SEMINOE TO GLENDO RESERVOIR

Seminole Reservoir

Seminole Reservoir is the uppermost reservoir on the North Platte River and is primarily known for its excellent rainbow trout fishery and for occasionally producing a 10+ pound walleye. Cutthroat trout, brown trout, and lake trout are also present in much lower

numbers. In Game and Fish netting surveys in 2004, the rainbow trout averaged 14.4 inches and 1.2 pounds and the walleye averaged 14.7 inches and 1.7 pounds. The largest walleye we captured in our 2004 fall netting survey was 30.4 inches and 11.2 pounds. The rainbow trout fishery is maintained almost entirely through the annual stocking of 125,000 eight-inch trout. The walleye fishery is maintained entirely through natural reproduction. Perhaps the best news was the increase in water storage this spring. In July the storage was approaching 65% of capacity, not full, but much better than even the most optimistic predictions. The drought caused moderate impacts on the fishery.

The condition of the fish had been declining as the water storage declined. We expect this trend will be reversed with increasing water levels.

Miracle Mile- Spawning Habitat Project

The first phase of the spawning habitat project was completed in the fall of 2004. We teamed up with the Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado Interstate Gas (they provided the money) and placed approximately 700 tons of spawning gravel in the Mile. Following the placement the area was surveyed to evaluate the success and determine the amount of spawning habitat created.

While we know what we would like to create, we need to know what the river thinks of our project. Following the higher summer flows in 2005 we will resurvey the area. Based on the survey data we may tweak the material that was placed in the river to provide as much spawning habitat as possible.

Pathfinder Reservoir

July water level, at 6,700 surface acres, was an increase of about 500 surface acres from July of 2004. The increase in spring moisture provided a real benefit to Pathfinder as well as Seminoe. Predictions for Pathfinder were not good going into the spring; we expected a continuing decline in storage.

The average rainbow trout was 15.2 inches and weighed 1.5 pounds (Table 3) in our netting in 2004. Although walleye are generally not big (averaged 15.6 inches), there should be fair walleye fishing for years to come. We have reduced the number of rainbows we stock in the reservoir due to the drought. However, we expect the trout fishing to continue to be good, particularly if the increase in storage continues.

Table 3. Pathfinder gill net summary, 2004.

Species	Number Caught	Catch/ Hour	Avg. L (in.)	Largest (in.)	Avg. Wt (lbs.)	Largest (lbs.)
Rainbows	326	1.05	15.2	20.4	1.5	2.6
Cutthroats	86	0.27	16.0	19.1	1.7	2.9
Browns	25	0.08	15.8	18.6	1.3	1.9
Walleye	35	0.22	14.6	29.0	1.6	10.9

Alcova Reservoir

We have noticed a slight declining trend in the numbers of rainbow trout in Alcova in our sonar surveys. Our spring netting in 2005 in Alcova did not indicate any major changes from previous years for the rainbow trout fishery. During the summer we did receive reports that angler's success this season was much lower than previous years. Additional

netting was conducted in the fall and we are currently evaluating all the information collected on Alcova this season. This winter we will be evaluating our netting and sonar data as well as the information we received from anglers. We will use all the information to evaluate our current stocking of the reservoir to determine if some change may be necessary.

Unless we have a major study on a specific fishery, we may only have an opportunity to spend a few days on a water. While we get a pretty good snapshot of the fishery, it is just a snapshot. Anglers can provide us with information from all seasons as well as year-to-year comparisons. When all our information is pointing in the same direction, we feel more comfortable that it is correct. If anglers are telling us things we do not see in our netting data, we begin to reevaluate our data and the data we are collecting on the fishery. We do appreciate information from you!

North Platte River - Gray Reef to Glenrock

The North Platte River fishery between Gray Reef Dam and the dam at Dave Johnston Powerplant near Glenrock remains one of the nation's premier fishing destinations. Numbers have dropped slightly near Gray Reef from around 2,800 trout per mile to 2,300 trout per mile in 2004 (Table 4). However, the average trout in this fishery is over 17 inches and 2 pounds! While the number per mile declined a little, the pounds per mile remained the same. This is primarily a rainbow trout fishery with brown trout and cutthroat trout present in lower numbers.

The lower flows and higher water temperatures due to drought conditions are likely responsible for the slight decline in this trout population. Low flows mean less space for trout and reduced invertebrate production (trout food) as side channels and large portions of the riverbed are left dry. The higher water temperatures associated with low flows causes an increased metabolic demand for food at times when food production is reduced.

We saw the opposite at our station at Bessemer Bend. The number of trout per mile increased from 2,900 to 5,900 but the pounds per mile increased only slightly. This is an indication of a lot of smaller fish recruiting into the population, which is very good for the future of the fishery. We have seen the mid reach act as the nursery, producing large numbers of trout. As these grow we believe they move upstream to provide the population dominated by large fish near Gray Reef. The lower flows, which are generally more stable, may have provided better spawning conditions.

Table 4: Fishery information collected in 2004 for the North Platte River between Gray Reef Dam and Dave Johnston Powerplant.

Location	Number per mile	Pounds per mile	Average length	Average weight
Below Gray Reef Dam	2,300	4,800	17.6 inches	2.12 pounds
Narrows to Speas	5,900	2,834	12.2 inches	0.8 pounds
Near Glenrock	426	668	14.9 inches	1.7 pounds

Glendo Reservoir

All walleye populations cycle and Glendo is no different. We saw incredible numbers of walleye in Glendo in the late 1990s and a decline in total numbers in recent years. The decline in walleye numbers appeared to be leveling off in 2004 and we saw the indication of small walleye entering the population. We are also seeing a few yellow perch, another indication that we may have reached the bottom of the cycle.

Assuming we have reached the bottom of the cycle, what might we expect in coming years? If you fished Glendo in the early 1990s you will remember walleyes were difficult to catch. At the bottom of the cycle, walleye numbers are reduced and forage is abundant. However, walleye numbers now are still much higher than in the early 1990s and we do not expect conditions to be as difficult. With good forage and the right spring conditions we've seen more small walleye entering into the population as we did in 1995-1998, and anglers have reported catching more 13-14 inch walleye this past year.

In 2005 anglers reported difficulties catching walleye in Glendo. While walleye numbers were still good, forage was extremely abundant this year and walleye could spend less time aggressively feeding. This abundant forage has helped maintain fast walleye growth. There is potential for better walleye fishing in the future, as two-year-old walleye, ranging from 13-15 inches, dominated our netting this past summer. These fish will be 16-17 inches next summer. Since forage typically becomes abundant in mid-late summer, fishing should be good for walleye early in the season.

Walleye are not the only fish in Glendo. The crappie population has been increasing slowly since they were introduced in the early 1990s. Wyoming's state record white crappie at 15 inches and 2.31 pounds is from Glendo. Lower walleye numbers allow better yellow perch survival and we should see more eating size yellow perch. And don't forget about the most underutilized game species in Glendo Reservoir --- channel catfish. The average catfish in our gill nets in 2004 was 20.9 inches and weighed 3.8 pounds!

Angler Input

We manage Wyoming's fisheries for you and strive to create the best fisheries possible. We always welcome your comments because your input is seriously considered as we manage your fisheries. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments about our fisheries by email at al.conder@wgf.state.wy.us or by phone at (307) 473-3400 or in Wyoming (800) 233-8544.
