



2018

the wyoming game & fish department

# CASPER REGION angler newsletter

photograph © Trent Tatum

## Wet Your Line!

### New Regulations for 2018:

If you went fishing last year, you likely have a copy of the 2017 regulations booklet living behind your truck seat, rolled up in a tackle box, or serving as an oversized coaster on your coffee table. But just like last year's calendar, now is a good time to recycle the old fishing regulation book and pick up a new 2018 edition to look over before you hit the water. If you have not already done so, you can grab a copy of the 2018 regulation booklet at whatever store you get your licenses, at any regional Game and Fish office, or on our website at <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Fishing-and-Boating/Fishing-Regulations>. While you read through your new booklet be sure to keep an eye out for regulation changes (highlighted in blue) so you remain current and legal during your outings in 2018.



### INSIDE:

#### Fishery Updates

<i>Seminole</i>	2
<i>Cardwell</i>	3
<i>Pathfinder</i>	3
<i>Alcova</i>	5
<i>Robertson Road</i>	6
<i>Morad Park</i>	6
<i>Glendo</i>	7
<i>Thirty-three Mile Ponds</i>	8
<i>AIS Review and Update</i>	8
<i>The Crew</i>	10

### Notable Regulation Changes for 2018

One thing you might notice is that most of the regulation changes that went into effect in 2018 either pertain to our Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program or the use of baitfish. First, boaters in 2018 are reminded that all bilge and ballast plugs must be removed from watercraft and all water drained immediately after leaving the water and they must remain open while the watercraft is being transported by land within the state. Anglers may transport legally obtained live baitfish over land in containers as long as they are not part of a watercraft and are free of any aquatic vegetation.

from the central waterways of the North Platte River

## Regional Fisheries Updates



### Seminole Reservoir

If beautiful scenery, few crowds, and excellent trout fishing are your thing, then this would be a good year to head to Seminole Reservoir. With excellent survival of the nearly 100,000 Rainbow Trout stocked annually out of the Dan Speas hatchery, the trout population has continued to improve. Sampling last spring showed mostly two and three-year-old Rainbow Trout that averaged over 14.3 inches and 1.3 pounds, with a few fish upwards of 20 inches. Anglers venturing to the southernmost reservoir on the North Platte could also potentially hook into a very nice wild Brown Trout, particularly if they focus their efforts in the Platte Arm. While far fewer browns were captured during our trout netting, the biggest measured in at 26.6 inches and 10.8 pounds!



In addition to its booming trout population, Seminole Reservoir is also well-known for supporting a healthy Walleye fishery. After rising steadily from 2011 to 2015, the Walleye population has remained fairly consistent over the past four years. Fall sampling showed that this leveling-off of the population is being driven by good recruitment in 2015 and 2016 and a nearly equal reduction in the number of fish over 15 inches. This reduction of older fish is most likely a combination of poor recruitment from a number of years ago that resulted in weak year-classes and considerable harvest of Walleye once they reach 14 to 16 inches in length. However, many fish do manage to survive this bottleneck, and there are large fish prowling the lake, the largest in our sample was 31.0 inches and 8.7 pounds. That said, Walleye in Seminole grow very slowly, and it could be a few years before the current average length of 14.6 inches sees much of an increase.



### Cardwell Access, North Platte River



After declining from 2012 to 2015, the trout population in the Cardwell walk-in area upstream of Fremont Canyon has begun to rebound over the past two years. Through our standard annual sampling that took place in mid-October of last year we estimate that the Cardwell reach has roughly 800 trout, at around 1,500 pounds of trout, per mile. Although past numbers were in excess of 1,200 trout per mile, the recent decrease in the number of trout sharing limited food and space resources in the river has helped to make bigger fish. Rainbow Trout, which made up around 80% of the population, averaged 16.4 inches and 1.9 pounds and contained fish over 20 inches for the first time since 2014. And while the average size Brown Trout was smaller at 13.1 inches and 1.3 pounds, the largest brown captured throughout our sampling measured in at 24.5 inches and 4.75 pounds.



## Pathfinder Reservoir

The annual spring netting of Pathfinder Reservoir in 2017 showed that the Rainbow Trout population has continued to steeply decline over the past four years. More specifically, gill-net catch rates of Rainbow Trout have decreased from a high of 0.80 fish per net-hour in 2013 to 0.16 fish per net-hour in 2017. Unfortunately, this decline comes despite annual stocking of nearly 100,000 catchable-sized (9 inch) Rainbow Trout. Since fish stocked into Pathfinder were nearly identical (i.e., same size, and condition) to those stocked into Seminoe Reservoir, which have done very well and improved that fishery, it is suspected that the recent trend of low Rainbow Trout survival in Pathfinder is the result of particularly high predation from Walleye. Although the Rainbow Trout will be a bit harder to find in Pathfinder, anglers will likely notice an increase in the length and plumpness of most fish they catch as the average Rainbow Trout was 17.9 inches and 2.6 pounds, with a few above 21 inches.



Brown Trout and Snake River Cutthroat add diversity to Pathfinder's trout fishery, though abundance of these species remains low. The Brown Trout population in Pathfinder appears to have remained relatively unchanged over the past few years and boasts an average length of 19.5 inches, the largest of which was 25.1 inches and 4.5 pounds. Conversely, the abundance of Snake River Cutthroat has declined sharply as individuals from the original 2011 stocking are lost to old age and more recent stocking has been heavily reduced from past numbers. Although not common, anglers who chance into a Pathfinder cutthroat will likely be pleased with their size as averages hit 18.0 inches long and 2.5 pounds.

Walleye fishing at Pathfinder should continue to be excellent in 2018 with an abundance of fish in the 12 to 17-inch range and some opportunities to catch trophy fish. The overall catch rates for Walleye in our fall gill-net surveys has held relatively stable since 2014 (around 0.9 fish per net-hour). The ability to maintain higher than average abundance is likely due to higher reservoir levels during recent years, which can increase Walleye recruitment. While there are still a good number of Walleye over 20 inches cruising around Pathfinder, even some over 30 inches, the overall abundance of this group has declined after a peak in 2014. One thing Walleye anglers might notice in Pathfinder is that the majority of fish will be a bit skinnier than they have been in recent years. The highly dense Walleye population in Pathfinder, which inherently has a lower level of productivity because of its position high in the river system, has likely resulted in forage becoming limited and everyone losing a little girth around the middle.



If you fished Pathfinder in 2017, you likely encountered one of our creel clerks. Thanks to a generous donation from North Platte Walleyes Unlimited, we were able to hire extra technicians to conduct a total of 6,219 interviews from January to August last year. Most Pathfinder anglers were from Wyoming, primarily from Natrona County, with just a few driving up from Colorado. Pathfinder anglers may have also had the good fortune to catch a tagged Walleye over this past year. These tags were placed into 131 Walleye in the spring of 2017 to assist in generating a measure of harvest by anglers. As of early-February of this year, 33 tags had been returned by anglers. Several of these fish were caught by anglers in locations very far from where they were tagged, showing that Walleye disperse throughout the reservoir.





## Alcovia Reservoir

2017 marked the third year, out of five, on our project to evaluate the stocking of trout and salmon in Alcovia Reservoir. As we try to determine which species would be best suited to the reservoir, we have been stocking Kokanee Salmon, Bear River Cutthroat, and Snake River Cutthroat on top of traditional Rainbow Trout. Despite cutting the number of Rainbow Trout to accommodate room for the other species, we found an overall increase in catch rates from 0.38 fish per net-hour in 2016 to 0.72 fish per net-hour in 2017. If you look back at our last newsletter you will see that Bear River Cutthroat were doing best in 2016 but Snake River Cutthroat outperformed all other species in 2017. These vast yearly differences emphasize why we need to conduct some of these evaluations over the course of multiple years instead of looking at just one “snap-shot” in time. Although we only were able to catch a few Kokanee in our standard sampling – they are often able to avoid our nets – our data suggests that they are still doing well in Alcovia; measuring between 9.7 and 18.4 inches with an

average length of 14.6 inches. We are still planning to sample Kokanee with sonar to overcome their poor return to nets and get an idea of the population size but have so far been unsuccessful. Our current plan is to continue stocking Kokanee, Bear River Cutthroat, Snake River Cutthroat, and Rainbow Trout for the several more years so that we can make a determination on future management in Alcovia.



After declining over the past few years, the Walleye population in Alcovia Reservoir increased substantially in 2017. The catch rate in our standard fall gill-net sampling nearly doubled from 0.26 Walleye per hour in 2016 to 0.49 in 2017. While poor recruitment of Walleye from 2013 to 2015 had previously left the population in a state of decline, our catch data suggests that there may be a substantial age-1 year class from the 2016 spawning season. Although the 2016 cohort marks the first notable Walleye year-class since 2012, it is still too early to definitively say what impact they will have on the overall population trends since age-1 fish are typically too small for our nets to catch effectively. That said, if past trends hold true where years with good recruitment (e.g., 2006, 2009, and 2012) went on to bolster the population, then the number of “eater” sized Walleye in Alcovia is poised to increase in abundance between 2019 and 2020.





## North Platte River – Robertson Road and Morad Park

During the first weeks of last October, we sampled the Robertson Road and Morad Park reaches of the North Platte River just west of Casper to generate trout population estimates. The Robertson Road sampling reach runs from its namesake bridge to the Wyoming Game and Fish office, which is where the Morad Park reach begins and runs through the upper end of the park's river restoration site that was completed in 2015.

The estimated number of trout throughout the Robertson Road reach was 792 trout per mile, which is well below our management objective of 1,200 fish per mile. Despite the decline in numbers, the overall weight of trout per mile increased since it was last sampled in 2015. This type of relationship (less but bigger) can generally be found in an aging population, where poor recruitment of young fish into the population lowers fish abundance while continued growth of remaining individuals increases biomass. The recent trend of poor trout reproduction in this reach of the river is most likely due to less-than-ideal river habitat and the issue of poor water conditions – such as heavy silt runoff that smothers eggs and high water temperatures – during months that coincide with spawning. In the two years leading up to our sampling, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department stocked over 300,000 Rainbow Trout into the river in an attempt to buffer against low recruitment, but we have found that this offered little relief when compared to natural recruitment.

Although we have not yet finished our multi-year assessment, initial review of the data suggests that the local trout population seems to be benefitting from the river restoration work in Morad Park. Both Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout varied in length from about 10 to 18 inches and averaged 14 inches and 1.3 pounds. While the average length was a little less for trout in the Morad Park area than elsewhere in the river, the improved habitat has made for increased numbers of fish. Catch rates, as in the actual number of fish we caught per mile of sampling, through the Morad Park reach have increased substantially from a pre-restoration low of 15 trout per mile in 2015 to 138 trout per mile in 2017; representing a nine-fold increase in just two years! We plan to sample this section of the river several more times in the upcoming years, but in the meantime, we hope you have the opportunity to get out and enjoy some of the great fishing found right here in your own back yard.





## Glendo Reservoir

Following a rebound in 2016, the Walleye population in Glendo Reservoir continued to do well in 2017. Over the past few years above average water levels in Glendo allowed for good spawning conditions and recruitment of young fish into the population; including some of the nine million Walleye fry from North Dakota that we stocked in 2016. As such, our standard gill-net catch rates increased from 1.73 fish per hour in 2016 to 2.05 fish per hour in 2017, which is even higher than the ten-year average for Walleye catch. While the overall number of Walleye in Glendo has risen sharply as of late, it should be mentioned that the population boom is currently being carried by a high proportion of small fish. Accordingly, the overall size structure (or the percentage of all Walleye in the population over 15 inches) fell from 61 in 2016 to 25 in 2017.



Angling for catfish at Glendo should be excellent this year. Our standard summer gill-netting showed that the abundance of Channel Catfish substantially increased in 2017 (0.60 fish per net-hour) when compared to 2015 (0.07 fish per net-hour). While we continue to see evidence of some very limited spawning success, our data shows that there has been high survival of catfish stocked in Glendo. Some of the older fish, which are from 2005-2008 stocking events and are now between 9 and 12-years-old, were just over 30 inches and 14.7 pounds! While there are behemoths lurking in Glendo, the average catfish is around 14.5 inches and 1.4 pounds. The good news is that these catfish are growing quickly and the vast majority of them will be in great condition as they take advantage of ample food supplies.

Populations of panfish (Yellow Perch, White Crappie, and Black Crappie) all slightly decreased from 2016 to 2017 and fishing will likely be more similar to 2015. Although five years of favorable water levels, reduced predator abundance, and the return of very small juvenile Gizzard Shad worked together to pull panfish numbers out of their 2011-2013 slump, the recent increase in the number of young Walleye is probably responsible for the decline of very young (age-0) perch and crappie. Despite this, most Walleye are too small themselves to prey upon older panfish and there should be ample opportunities to encounter these fish. The average lengths were 7.4 inches for Yellow Perch, 8.6 inches for White Crappie, and 8.8 inches for Black Crappie.





## Thirty-three Mile Ponds

Traveling about thirty miles northwest of Casper will bring you to an area commonly known as the Thirty-three Mile Country. With just a little effort you can easily find a number of small stock ponds dotting the (mostly public) landscape. The Wyoming Game and Fish manages these ponds to provide opportunities to catch both warm and cool water species. Although some rough winter and spring conditions in the past have resulted in extensive fish-kill situations in these shallow reservoirs, the past few years have been mild enough to allow most fish to endure and grow. Ponds that are currently supporting fisheries include Sheepherder (rainbow, bluegill, and largemouth bass), Camelhump (rainbow and cutthroat), Old Railroad Grade (rainbow), Greasewood (rainbow and cutthroat), Saltbush (rainbow and cutthroat) and Buffalo Bones (cutthroat). Water conditions look good again for 2018, so we will plan on stocking all of the above-mentioned ponds. If you would like more information about these fisheries or assistance locating them, contact the Casper Regional Office for details.

## AIS Update and Review

In the Casper Region, daily watercraft check stations were operated from late-April through mid-September at both Glendo Reservoir and the Torrington port of entry while roving crews rotated between other locations in the region. Inspections also took place from March 1 to November 30 at the Casper Regional office.



zebra or quagga mussels and needed to be fully decontaminated. These boats had originated from various lakes in the Midwest and were independently heading to Flaming Gorge, Glendo, and Alcova Reservoirs.

Even if you never boat outside of Wyoming, you can still do your part to prevent the spread of AIS throughout our state. We continue to keep an eye on the known presence of Brook Stickleback, New Zealand mudsnails, Asian clams, and curly pondweed through annual monitoring. The most prominent change that we found was that Curly Pondweed has spread throughout much of the Miracle Mile - section of the North Platte River and the upper most end of Pathfinder Reservoir. Due to Curly Pondweed's ability to spread via seed or very small plant fragments, we would like to remind all boaters and anglers to carefully inspect all equipment (watercraft, waders, oars, boots, etc.) for vegetation and mud and to ensure any would be hitchhikers are removed prior to heading home or to the next water.

Aquatic invasive species have the potential to negatively impact Wyoming's waters, both biologically and economically, so it is important that everyone does their part to keep invasive species from spreading. Please remember to Drain, Clean and Dry your watercraft and fishing equipment: **DRAIN** water from live wells, ballast tanks and bilge; **CLEAN** mud from wading boots and anchors, and plants from the trailer; allow your equipment to **DRY** before taking home or to the next body of water.

**ATTENTION:**  
**THIS WATER CONTAINS CURLY PONDWEED**

Curly Pondweed is an invasive plant that can compete with native plants and reduce plant diversity. It also forms dense mats that may impact water-based recreation. The seeds can be easily moved in mud or water and one small fragment can start a new population if moved to another water.

Prevent the spread to new waters by making sure you Drain, Clean, and Dry all gear before leaving this site.

**✓ DRAIN** Drain all water from your fishing gear and equipment. This includes all types of watercraft, waders, boots, clothing, buckets - anything that comes into contact with the water.

**✓ CLEAN** Clean all plants, mud, and debris from gear and equipment. Never move a plant or animal from one location to another.

**✓ DRY** Dry your gear thoroughly. Dry for 5 days in the summer, 18 days in the spring or fall, or 3 days of freezing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
1-877-WGFD-AIS or [wgfd.wyo.gov/AIS](http://wgfd.wyo.gov/AIS)

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## New Casper Fisheries Biologist



In June 2017, the Casper Region of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department welcomed Jeff Glaid as the new biologist on the Fisheries Management crew. Glaid earned his bachelor's degree from Juniata College in his home state of Pennsylvania and recently completed his master's degree at Montana State University in Bozeman. In addition to his Master's of Science research on the migration of young Bull Trout in northwestern Montana, Glaid's fisheries experience includes work as a Burbot research technician in Wyoming's Wind River drainage and two field seasons as a fisheries management technician for the Game and Fish in Lander. His unique and diverse work background also includes positions as a veterinary intern for the National Aviary and multiple wildlife technician positions in Pennsylvania and Wyoming. It was a position as field biologist that originally brought Glaid to the Casper area where he developed an obvious passion for our local fisheries.



## Casper Fisheries Management Crew



**Matt Hahn**  
Fisheries Supervisor



**Gordon Edwards**  
Fisheries Biologist



**Jeff Glaid**  
Fisheries Biologist

## Wyoming Game and Fish Department

3030 Energy Lane  
Casper, Wyoming 82604  
Phone: 307-473-3400

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/>

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