



# Green River Region Angler Update

# 2011

## Volume 6

### Inside this issue:

<i>Burbot</i>	2
<i>Proposed Regulations Changes</i>	3
<i>AIS</i>	4
<i>Native Species</i>	4-5
<i>Reservoir Updates</i>	6-7
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	7
<i>Contact Information</i>	8

## Fish Management in the Green River Region

Welcome to the sixth issue of the Green River Region Angler Newsletter. This annual newsletter is dedicated to the aquatic resources in the Green River Fisheries Region. Within this issue, we'll highlight popular fisheries as well as interesting projects and conservation issues.

Our region spans from Fontenelle Reservoir in the north to Flaming Gorge in the south, from the Bear River in the west to the Little Snake in the east, and includes all the lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and streams in between. Ours is the largest fisheries region in the state, and one of the most diverse! From trophy lake

trout to native Colorado River cutthroat, bass, kokanee, tiger trout and more, Green River has a little something for everyone!

Our crew consists of a fisheries supervisor, two fisheries biologists and one aquatic habitat biologist. Together, we're responsible for managing the fish communities and their habitat throughout the Green River Region. We manage aquatic resources for *you*, the people of Wyoming, so your input is very important and we appreciate your comments. Please feel free to contact us at 307-875-3223, or using the information provided on the last page of the newsletter. Happy fishing!



**Robb Keith**  
Fisheries Supervisor



**Kevin Spence**  
Aquatic Habitat Biologist



**Craig Amadio**  
Fisheries Biologist



**Anna Senecal**  
Fisheries Biologist

## Game and Fish Sheds Light on Legal Lighting Devices

Devices allowed for fishing:

- Worms, baits and tackle chemically enhanced to produce light (this includes glow jigs)
- Lighted strike indicators or bobbers
- Lighted pole or rod tip

Devices not allowed for fishing:

- Underwater cameras and fish finders that project artificial light beneath the surface of the water
- Submersible lights
- Battery-powered light producing lures

\*Lanterns, light sticks (glow sticks), and headlamps may not be used to lure or aid in taking fish; however, these devices may be used for the convenience and safety of the angler.



*Anglers make use of legal lighted devices while fishing for burbot on Flaming Gorge.*



Biggest fish – Ross Jackson, Kearns UT

**One angler said it best during the closing ceremony, "It was good to help be part of the solution to this problem."**

#### *Burbot Angling Take-homes:*

Glow and scent are very important – keep your bait fresh, recharge glow jigs often.

Slow presentation – burbot prefer subtle jigging movements, sometimes still fishing can be the best approach.

Move a lot – if burbot are in the area you will catch them so keep moving until you find fish.

Try different habitats – burbot can be caught adjacent to rocky cliffs, off shoals near the river channel and the backs of bays while spawning.

Minimize noise.

Ice anglers descended on Flaming Gorge Reservoir between January 22 and 29, 2011 to participate in the annual Burbot Bash. A group of concerned anglers created the event in 2008 in response to the growing population of illegally introduced burbot. Fishing, cleaning, and cooking techniques demonstrations, as well as educational seminars on potential impacts of illegal introductions, have also been a part of past and present derbies.

This year's bash was a week-long contest for cash and prizes (sponsored by Green River, Rock Springs, and Flaming Gorge Chambers of Commerce), including a \$5,000 tagged fish grand prize. Prizes were awarded to teams for the biggest fish and most fish entered during the week. Youth prizes were also given for biggest and smallest fish. The event was intended to generate local revenue, educate anglers about the burbot problem, harvest as many fish as possible, and provide data to help manage the fishery. Prior to the burbot bash, biologists from Wyoming and Utah

## *Burbot Bash, 2011*

tagged and released 500 burbot. The tagged fish not only provided the opportunity for anglers to win money, but biologists were able to collect data on burbot growth, movement, and abundance.

A total of 485 ice anglers participated and more than 4,000 burbot were entered throughout the week. Team Asay from Manila, UT caught the most burbot with 414 fish followed by Team Meeks from Green River, WY who entered 300 fish. The largest burbot caught was 34 inches and the biggest youth fish was 31 inches. All burbot entered during the event were examined for tags and only 6 were found. Those teams competed in a drawing for the big \$5,000 prize

and the lucky winner was Team Greene from Green River, WY.

The 2011 burbot bash was the biggest bash to date and we hope to see it continue to grow in the future. A special kudos goes out to all the anglers who participated in this year's bash. Not only did everyone have fun, you also helped the fishery by removing more than 4,000 burbot and increasing attention on this serious problem. One angler said it best during the closing ceremony, "It was good to help be part of the solution to this problem."

*Biologists (Ryan Moseley of Utah, left and Craig Amadio of Wyoming, right) demonstrate how to tag fish during the opening ceremony.*



## *Burbot Angling Tips and Tactics*

Burbot can be caught on a variety of fishing gear: from jigging spoons to dead bait. A local favorite has become soft plastic glow jigs tipped with sucker or chub meat. Burbot are usually found on the bottom in areas with rocky substrate and generally prefer a non-aggressive presentation. Anglers that like jigging use a slow, discrete presentation. Other anglers have success with still fishing (dead sticking)

using cut bait or a dead minnow just off the bottom with a slip sinker. Once they bite, hooking them can be a little tricky. They do not strike like trout. Let them take the bait and start swimming away before setting the hook.

The best time to fish for burbot is at night, however anglers also catch them during daylight hours. Generally speaking, burbot rest in deeper water and move in shallow at night to

feed. They are also thought to spawn in shallow water during January, making them especially vulnerable to anglers at that time. Burbot are most active and popular with ice anglers during the winter, but can be caught in the summer using the same methods used through the ice.



## Proposed Regulations Changes: to take effect January 2012

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is considering some changes to the current fishing and watercraft regulations and the public has an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed changes. The public can find the proposed 2012-2013 fishing regulations on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/regulations/index.asp>. The Department is accepting comments on the proposals from April 22 through June 6, 2011.

Comments on fishing regulations can be mailed to Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Attn: Fishing Regulations, 5400 Bishop Blvd. Cheyenne WY 82006 or the com-

ments can be made on line at: <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/regulations/index.asp>. Comments on watercraft and license issuance regulations can be sent to Wyoming Game and Fish Department, 3030 Energy Lane, Casper WY 82604.

Public meeting were held statewide during May. All comments will be presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission prior to their July 7-8 meeting in Sheridan where they will make final decisions on these regulations.

Regulations Changes Highlights: Making separate statewide trout daily limits for lakes (6 trout with no length restriction) and streams (3 trout no more than 1 over 16 inches).

- Excluding lake trout from the trout daily limit and establishing a lake trout daily limit of 6 no more than one lake trout over 24 inches.
- Modifying the brook trout limit by eliminating the no more than 6 brook trout shall exceed 8 inches. The resulting daily limit on brook trout would be 16.
- Reducing the mountain white fish daily limit from 25 to 6.
- One proposal, if adopted, will allow anglers to fillet or otherwise process their catch once the angler is off the water and done fishing for the day.

To review all the regulation proposals and rationales for the proposed regulations changes, go to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish>

### Can you ID These Fish?

A



B



A: Tiger trout. Note brook trout-like wiminculations throughout body. Tiger trout tend to be brightly colored. B: Splake. Note lake trout-like body appearance, brook trout-like white leading fin edges, and a moderately forked caudal (intermediate to lake and brook trout). Not clear in this photo are the brook trout-like wiminculations that splake have across the top of their body.

## Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS): a year in review

The Green River fisheries management crew along with 7 aquatic invasive species inspectors spent the majority of April through September preparing for and implementing the State of Wyoming's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program throughout the Green River Region. Major reservoirs: Flaming Gorge, Fontenelle, Viva Naughton, Sulphur Creek, High Savery and Big Sandy, were generally covered during peak boating days (typically Thursday through Sunday). High-use and high-profile reservoirs such as Flaming Gorge Reservoir received a higher level of coverage than other waters. By all accounts the program was a success, both in terms of the level of coverage afforded, and the number of inspections completed.

Over the course of our inspection period, 6,376 watercraft inspections were conducted. Of these, only seventeen were considered "high-risk" (due to previous use in an infested water or state, unknown prior use, or presence of standing water) and only five of these resulted in decontaminations. The highest inspection activity occurred during late July. Of the 6,376 inspections conducted, 5,481 of them took

place on Flaming Gorge.

Green River resource users' observed propensity to travel underscored the importance of this program, as mussels are

(see figure, Right). Of these, the majority of nonresident users came from Utah and Colorado. After leaving in-region waters, interviewed boaters indicated they would travel to over 60 different waters in 10 states.

With some 2010 successes under our belts, and a new appreciation for

the importance of the program, we are looking forward to an equally successful and productive second year. Remember: "Don't Move a Mussel!"

### Follow these simple steps to protect your waters:

- ✓ DRAIN** All water must be drained from your watercraft. This includes the ballast, bilge, livewell and motor. Leave wet compartments open.
- ✓ CLEAN** Remove all plants, mud and debris from equipment and watercraft.
- ✓ DRY OR** Dry your watercraft or equipment 5 days in the summer, 18 days spring/fall or 3 days of freezing. Contact the WGFDD to have your watercraft and trailer decontaminated.

easily transported between water bodies. While use by resident boaters was greater (68.6%) than by nonresident boaters (31.4%), many other states were also represented

## Green River Goes Native: The Three Species

Flannelmouth sucker (below), bluehead sucker (opposite) and roundtail chub (below), also known as "the three species" are native, non-game species that are experiencing

declines due to introduced, nonnative fish (like white sucker, burbot and creek chub). White sucker pose the biggest threat to the native suckers. Not only does the

white sucker compete with our native suckers for food and habitat, they also readily hybridize with them. Burbot, shown to prey on native suckers and sculpin, are present in the Big Sandy drainage where they pose an additional threat to the native fish of the system. The presence of this predator not only inhibits recovery of native fish, but also competes with trout for food. Additionally, nonnative creek chubs compete

with roundtail chub for food and habitat. Over the past two years, a special, native species crew (funded by the Governor's office) has been surveying natives and removing nonnatives across four drainages: Big and Little Sandy, Muddy Creek (Little Snake River drainage) and Bitter Creek. Approximately 150 miles of river were electrofished and/or seined between 2009 and 2010. As a result of this extensive removal effort, nonnative fish numbers are decreasing, to the benefit of the three species. We plan to continue mechanical removal of nonnative fish in 2011. Additionally, we will be conducting two small chemical treatments within the Big and Little Sandy drainages to remove nonnatives.



Flannelmouth Sucker

Roundtail Chub

## Green River Goes Native, Continued:

### Native Mussels

There has been a lot of talk about stopping the spread of harmful, exotic freshwater mussels like Zebra and Quagga mussels. You may not be aware that Wyoming is also home to numerous *native* mussels. These animals are well-camouflaged and often go unnoticed on our stream bottoms and lake shores. Although inconspicuous, freshwater mussels have important ecological value. They can be important “bioindicators” meaning they are species that reflect the quality of their habitats. Mussels filter the water in which they live and some species may live more than 100 years, potentially subjecting them to the long-term effects of pollution. They also provide an important source of food for wildlife like muskrats, otters, raccoons, and shorebirds.

Most native mussels in Wyoming are found east of the Continental Divide, but two species are native to the Bear River drainage in southwest Wyoming: the California Floater and Western Pearlshell.

As a result of Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s freshwater mussel research program, we have confirmed living populations of these two species of mussels throughout the Bear River drainage, and (in the

While these discoveries are exciting, freshwater mussel distribution and abundance remain poorly known and thorough surveys are needed to understand the status of these native species. A comprehen-

If you find freshwater mussels, *please do not move or otherwise disturb them*, but instead take a few minutes to help us understand them better by doing the following things. Take notes and record where they are (GPS coordinates are best), how many you saw, how big they were, and if they were alive or just empty shells. Take pictures if you have a camera, and contact a local Game and Fish biologist

You can learn more about mussels on the internet at:

[http://  
courses.missouristate.edu/  
mcb095f/gallery](http://courses.missouristate.edu/mcb095f/gallery)

[http://www.fws.gov/  
columbiariver/  
musselwg.htm](http://www.fws.gov/columbiariver/musselwg.htm)

[http://www.gf.state.wy.us/wil  
dlife/CompConvStrategy/Sp  
ecies/MollusksCrustaceans/ind  
ex.asp](http://www.gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/CompConvStrategy/Species/MollusksCrustaceans/index.asp)



*Western Pearlshell mussel shell. Native to the Bear River drainage.*

case of the Western Pearlshell) also documented range expansions. A 2010 observation of western pearlshell extended the known distribution at least 26 miles upstream of Evanston.

sive survey of western Wyoming’s native mussels is being initiated in 2001 and the WGFD would like help collecting information.

### Bluehead Sucker

You may not have known it, but Western Wyoming waters are home to several different species of suckers, many of which are native. The bluehead sucker, native to the Colorado River basin, used to be common throughout the Green River, Little Snake and Bear River drainages. While numbers of pure blueheads are plummeting, hybrid “mutt” suckers (blueheads crossed with nonnative white and

longnose suckers) are on the rise. Because of this, both the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the BLM have identified bluehead suckers as a sensitive species.

Bluehead suckers are warm-water fish that usually occur in the main current of streams. Their Diet consists primarily of invertebrates, algae and plant debris that they scrape off of



rocks using a cartilaginous scraping ridge (see photo, right). While it’s rare to catch a bluehead sucker, please release these unique fish back to the water.



## Fontenelle Reservoir

Fontenelle Reservoir, located 77 river miles north of Flaming Gorge on the Green River, is one of the most popular fisheries in the Green River region, and for good reason. The reservoir is managed for brown trout, rainbow trout and kokanee salmon. In addition to these species though, there are also smallmouth bass, cutthroat trout and a few lake trout to be caught. Anglers can expect to catch rainbow trout ranging from 16 to 24 inches, kokanee from 15 to 21 inches, and browns from 12 to 24 inches and greater.

The best fishing on Fontenelle is early spring, after ice-off and fall when water temperatures are lower. In the spring, anglers can have good luck fishing for rainbows from shore when they come in to spawn. Mid May through June or early

July is a great time of year to fish for kokanee. There are no length limits specified for Fontenelle kokanee. These fish tend to be extremely color specific in terms of which gear they'll hit, so it's best to come prepared with a good variety of tackle...just because chartreuse wedding rings worked yesterday, doesn't mean they will today. While generally found in the top 14 feet of water, kokanee may also be caught with downriggers fishing deep. Anglers fishing shallow during this time of the year, though, are likely also to catch browns, rainbows, and the occasional cutthroat trout.

Fall angling opportunities on Fontenelle Reservoir can yield spawning kokanee, brown trout and burbot. Kokanee move into the shallows against the shale cliffs at the corners of

the dam where they are readily available to anglers. If timed right, anglers can catch brown trout as they run into Fontenelle Creek and the upper portions of the Green River to spawn.

Since their illegal introduction in 2005, Fontenelle burbot numbers have skyrocketed. There is no creel limit on burbot west of the Continental Divide and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department depends largely upon angler harvest to suppress burbot and reduce their impacts to desirable trout, salmon, and bass. See page 2 for burbot angling tips.

All but the northwest portion of Fontenelle is on public land. While access roads can be found on the west and east sides of the reservoir, the gen-

eral public can no longer drive across the dam. Two boat ramps are present; one is located on the southwest side near the dam, and the other is located near the Fontenelle Creek inflow.



(Top, Left) and Mark (Right) Fowden display a beautiful rainbow and kokanee from Fontenelle Reservoir.

High Savery Reservoir, located approximately 35 miles south of Rawlins, is a great place to try your hand at catching kokanee and Colorado River cutthroat trout. It is also one of the only places in the state where you can hook a tiger trout.

Since its construction in 2004, High Savery Reservoir has been annually stocked with kokanee, cutthroat, and tiger trout. Currently, approximately 10,000 to 20,000 of each fish species are stocked. With multiple year classes of each of these three species now present in the reservoir, the 2011 fishing season on High Savery Reservoir is shaping up to be great!

### Kokanee salmon

- Anglers can expect to catch kokanee ranging in size from

## High Times on High Savery

10 to approximately 20 inches.

- Target the top 15 feet of water in the early spring, transitioning lower (40-60 feet) as the reservoir warms). A fish finder is handy for locating schools of kokanee.

### Colorado River cutthroat

- The drainages only native trout species, recent conservation efforts have spurred the reinvigoration of Colorado River cutthroat trout populations drainage-wide.
- Anglers can expect to catch cutthroat ranging in size from 9 to approximately 13 inches.

### Tiger trout

- A sterile (unfertilized) hybrid cross between female brown and male brook trout. These fish were stocked to control the numbers of white sucker found in the

reservoir.

- Anglers can expect to catch tiger trout ranging in size from 10 to 30 inches or more.

The reservoir has a concrete boat ramp, parking area and



bathroom facilities. No overnight camping is allowed at the boat ramp or around the reservoir but camping facilities can be found to the north on BLM lands and to the south in the Medicine Bow National Forest. The access road to the boat ramp is not marked, but the

reservoir is visible from the highway.

### Did you know?

The first state record for tiger trout was established in 2006 (16.5 inches, 1.6 lbs), only to be subsequently broken each year. The current record to beat is 34 inches, 5.12lb (caught in 2010 by Mel Huff of Cheyenne, below). You never know, *you* could very well be the one to hook into the next state record tiger trout!



Visit: <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/fishing/stats/records/index.asp> to view a list of current state records

## Sulphur Creek: Walleye Update

Illegal fish introductions are a serious threat to Wyoming's fisheries and the Green River Region has certainly experienced its share of this growing problem. By now most anglers know about burbot in the Green River drainage and the problems this introduction has created. However, burbot are not the only illegally introduced predator wreaking havoc in the region. Walleye and smallmouth bass were both illegally introduced into Sulphur Creek Reservoir sometime during the late 1990s. Both species are very aggressive predators and require a lot of food to survive. In most waters that support good walleye and bass fisheries, species like shiners or shad are very abundant and provide the food that these big predators need. Unfortunately, Sulphur Creek Reservoir does not have abundant small forage fish populations and the trout fishery has suffered as a result. While

smallmouth bass have persisted, but not flourished in the reservoir, walleye are a completely different story... In an effort to control walleye populations in Sulphur Creek, the Game and Fish have adopted new stocking strategies (stocking bigger fish in the Fall when walleye tend to eat less), and allowing for unlimited angler harvest. Anglers can have a big impact on walleye numbers, particularly when the fishes' habitat is limited like it is in Sulphur Creek Reservoir. Walleye numbers have drastically declined since 2008 (see graph) as a result of angler harvest. The future of the trout population largely depends on anglers continuing to do their part to help manage the fishery in the face of this selfish and misguided introduction.

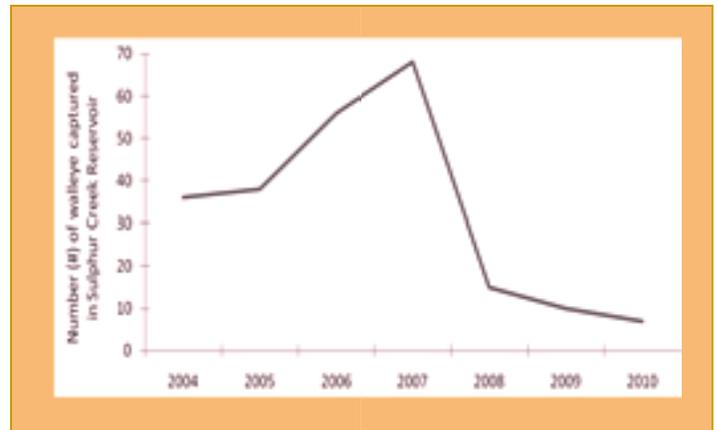
Although numbers are down, there are still plenty of walleye to be caught and their average

size was over 20 inches in 2010. They typically occupy shallow areas (<15 feet) during dusk and dawn periods when they are most active and move to deeper water (20-60 feet) during mid-day. Anglers should try pitching jigs or slow trolling spin-

ner harnesses and crank baits in these areas.



Fisheries Biologist Craig Amadio with a large Sulphur Creek walleye



## Dates to Remember

**Free Fishing Day June 4** — The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has declared June 4, 2011 Free Fishing Day to coincide with the beginning of the National Fishing and Boating week. Residents and nonresidents may fish Wyoming waters (excluding Wind River Indian Reservation and Yellowstone National Park, which are not regulated by the State of Wyoming) without a fishing license or conservation stamp.

**Kemmerer Kids Fishing Day June 4** — Located at the Kemmerer Community pond by the overpass. Sponsored by the City of Kemmerer

**Evanston Kids Fishing Day June 11** — Located at the UP Ice Ponds, Registration starts at 7.45, Fishing from 8 am to 1 pm. Sponsored by Upper Bear River TU Chapter

**Rock Springs Kids Fishing Day June 18** — Located at the Rock Springs Pond - south side of the road into the Rock Springs Golf Course. Event 9 am to 3 pm. Sponsored by WGFD, Seedskaadee Wildlife Refuge and Flaming Gorge/Green River TU Chapter

**Wyoming Hunting and Fishing Heritage EXPO 2011: September 8-11** — This year's Expo will be Thursday through Saturday, September 8-11 from 9-4 at the Casper Event Center. See <http://gf.state.wy.us/services/education/expo/index.asp> for more details.



## Wyoming Game and Fish Dept.

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### Fish Division Mission Statement:

*"As stewards of Wyoming's aquatic resources, we are committed to conservation and enhancement of all aquatic wildlife and their habitats for future generations through scientific resource management and informed public participation. We will use an integrated program of protection, regulation, propagation, restoration and control to provide diverse, quality fisheries resources and angling opportunities. Our efforts will balance the productive capability of habitats with public desires."*



This years' newsletter contributions came from the Green River Fish Management Crew. Thanks to all who pitched in.

## Happy Tails

Thanks for stopping by to read our newsletter. Be sure to pick up next years issue in which we'll update you on all the waters we're planning on visiting this coming season.  
Happy fishing!



Fall 2010 burbot sampling on Fontenelle Reservoir