



“Conserving Wildlife - Serving People”

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2012-2013 Fish Regulations

The most significant changes for the 2012-2013 Fishing Regulations involve separate trout limits for reservoirs/lakes and streams. In previous years, anglers could only keep one trout over 20 inches, but that regulation is now history on Wyoming's lakes and reservoirs. Anglers lucky enough to catch multiple trout over 20 inches can keep all of them – up to their six fish limit. A number of lakes and reservoirs harbor good numbers of trout greater than 20 inches and the new regulation allows the keeping of these fish. “Most reservoirs host stocked trout – which are put in for anglers to catch, so it made sense to let anglers decide what size they want to keep,” said Dirk Miller, fisheries management coordinator. “With the higher water levels the last couple of years, growth rates have increased significantly and there are just more 20-inch-plus trout out there.” Anglers looking to keep fish on streams and rivers now have the limit of three fish per day and only one can exceed 16 inches. In drainages 1 (Snake River), 2 (Wind/Big Horn), and 4 (Green and Bear) of western Wyoming, there is also the stipulation that no more than one of those fish can be a cutthroat over 12 inches. “Streams and rivers are a significantly different trout habitat than lakes and we manage them differently,” Miller said. “Trout don’t grow as fast and most stream populations are wild fish that rely on natural reproduction, so it makes sense to have more conser-

vative limits.” Other changes include the removal of brook trout length restrictions and reducing the whitefish limit. “Brookies reproduce so well and generally grow so fast, we just didn’t think size restrictions were needed on most waters,” Miller said. “And in most cases the populations would benefit from the additional harvest.” But, as with most regulations, there are exceptions such as the heavily fished brook trout waters in the Pole Mountain area between Cheyenne and Laramie, which still have a six fish limit. As in previous years, there are a number of waters in the state that have exceptions to the general statewide provisions. These exceptions are listed on pages 23-33 in the fishing regulations booklet. Regulations are available at Game and Fish offices, license agents, or online at the Game and Fish website wgfd.wyo.gov. Anglers are reminded that their fishing license can be purchased through the WGFD website.



Special points of interest:

- Wyoming’s Free Fishing day is Saturday June 2, 2012!
- Summary of last year’s activities.
- Aquatic Invasive Species News.
- Unique fishing opportunities
- Look for the WGFD on Facebook and YouTube!

Preventing Aquatic Invasive Species in Wyoming

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) can be aquatic animals (zebra and quagga mussels or rusty crayfish), aquatic vegetation, or aquatic diseases (whirling disease). These species are often called “aquatic hitchhikers” because they can hitch a ride on your equipment or in your boats. Aquatic invasive species can have far-reaching impacts on our water resources if they become established. Many of these species permanently change stream and lake ecology, negatively affecting native species and our prized sport fisheries. In addition, zebra and quagga mussels can attach to your boat and equipment and cause damage.

The Wyoming AIS Program was started in 2010 and is continually supported through funding by the Wyoming legislature, decal fee, and partnerships. The goal of the AIS program is to prevent the spread of harmful invasive species through outreach, watercraft inspections, and monitoring. Doing this protects the water resources of Wyoming for all users whether it be recreational boating, fishing, waterfowl hunting, irrigation, or city water supplies. Ongoing support from water users of all types is critical to preventing the spread of AIS.

All types of boats (wakeboard boats, jet skis, fishing boats, kayaks, canoes, rafts, drift boats) and recreational gear can harbor invasive species. Anything that comes into contact with water can potentially move AIS. You can stop the spread of invasive species. Before you launch or move to another water, follow these simple steps:

Drain: All water must be drained from your boat and fishing gear. This includes the ballast, bilge, livewell, motor, and bait buckets. Leave wet compartments open to dry.

Clean: Remove all plants, mud, and debris from boats and gear. Scrub any mud from waders and wading boots and rinse clean.

Dry: Dry boats and gear thoroughly – 5 days in the summer, 18 days in spring/fall, or 3 days of freezing.

Also, remember that live baitfish must be contained in a bait bucket or small container and must be accompanied by a valid Wyoming live baitfish receipt or seining license. Do not carry baitfish in a boat livewell with water. Livewells should be drained of all water before launching.

Many boaters spend the winter months in warmer waters, some of which are infested with zebra/quagga mussels. Some popular, and infested, waters include Lake Mead, Lake Havasu, Lake Mojave, Lake Pleasant and several other waters throughout the Lower Colorado. If you boat at any of these or other infested waters, you must contact the WGFD to schedule a free inspection before you launch in Wyoming. We need your help in making sure invasive mussels are not spread to Wyoming on your boat. Also, please schedule a free inspection if you are unsure whether a water you visited is positive for AIS. To schedule your inspection, call 1-877-WGFD-AIS

Since the Wyoming AIS program began in 2010, boaters have been very receptive to the Drain, Clean, Dry message and are doing their part to prevent spreading AIS on their boat and equipment. Since 2010, over 83,000 watercraft inspections have been conducted, resulting in just 36 decontaminations. Of those, 8 boats were found to have zebra/quagga mussels attached. Inspection stations will operate in 2012 on major Wyoming waters from May into September; but it is not possible to inspect every boat launching in the state. Do your part and make sure you Drain, Clean, and Dry your boat before launching, whether or not you encounter an inspection station.

Fifty-three waters throughout the state have been sampled annually for multiple invasive species; to date no waters were positive for the presence of larval zebra/quagga mussels-this is great news, let’s keep it that way!

Other invasive species were found in Wyoming waters during 2011. Asian clam are now present in the Laramie River and curly pondweed, a nonnative plant was found in Lake DeSmet. New Zealand mudsnail and whirling disease are also still present in Wyoming waters. Please use extra caution when using these waters and ensure you Drain, Clean, and Dry all gear before visiting another water.

More information can be found at: wgfd.wyo.gov



Update on selected waters in Laramie Region

Grayrocks Reservoir

Grayrocks Reservoir is located 9 miles east of Wheatland. Through a cooperative agreement between the Wyoming Game & Fish Commission and the Missouri Basin Power Project, these lands are being managed for public recreational activities and to maintain or improve present wildlife habitat. The reservoir was filled to capacity in 1983. The reservoir at full capacity is 3,547 surface acres. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department maintains the Grayrocks Reservoir Public Access Area (<http://wgfd.wyo.gov/access/access/grayrocks.asp>). Walleye and catfish are stocked annually. Other game fish present include bass, crappie, freshwater drum, and perch. Grayrocks Reservoir provides opportunities for fishing, boating, swimming and water skiing. Public facilities, including parking areas, vault toilets and boat ramps, are provided on the south side of the reservoir. Overnight parking or camping is restricted to the major parking areas. The north shore may also be used for overnight camping by boaters.



Aquatic Habitat Protection Biologist, Rick Huber, with nice channel catfish

2011 Sampling Results

The average length of walleye captured in sampling gear in 2011 was 14.1 inches, the largest walleye was 28.5 inches and almost 8 pounds. Smallmouth bass averaged 11.3 inches, with the largest over 16 inches. Black crappie averaged 10 inches in length in 2011. Based on gill net catches of walleye from 2000 through 2011, the percentage of walleye between 25

and 30 inches was the highest in 2011. Walleye gill net catch has fluctuated, but has been better since water levels improved in 2008. An abundant walleye year class in 2009 translated to an increase in 15 inch walleye in 2010. There again appears to be an abundant year class in 2011 of 10-12 inch walleye, which should mean an abundant 15 inch year class in 2012, and most likely an increase in the average size. The increase in favorable habitat since 2008, should lead to favorable conditions for walleye growth and survival in the future.



Fish technician, Erin Sobel with smallmouth bass at Grayrocks Reservoir

Smallmouth bass have responded to increased water levels since 2008. Drought conditions lowered the water level at Grayrocks Reservoir, which decreased the availability of shoreline habitat preferred by bass. Smallmouth bass gill net catch declined after 2002 and remained low till 2009 and has increased since, to its highest point this decade. If water levels remain high we expect the bass fishery to continue to improve. Anglers should remember the bass regulation at Grayrocks Reservoir requiring all bass <15 inches to be released.

Update on selected waters in Laramie Region

North Platte River (Fort Steele/Rochelle PAA)



Brown trout with Fort Steele Bridge in background

Headwaters of the Upper North Platte River originate in the mountains ringing North Park, Colorado, and join numerous other tributary streams before forming the river as recreationists know it near the Colorado-Wyoming border. All of the Upper North Platte River is floatable over 124.2 miles of free-flowing water from the boulder-strewn, torrential whitewater of Northgate Canyon near the state line, through the rolling agricultural lands of the Saratoga and Encampment valleys, down to the placid waters and sagebrush hills near Interstate Highway 80, where there is the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Fort Steele/Rochelle Public Access Area (<http://wgfd.wyo.gov/accessto/Access/fortsteele.asp>).

In Wyoming, THE WATER OVER PRIVATE LAND IS PUBLIC - where the river flows over PRIVATE land, the river banks and the land under the river are considered PRIVATE. Leaving your boat for any reason could result in trespass on private lands. Watch for blue signs along the Upper North Platte River, which indicate public lands. Blue 12"x12" squares indicate you are entering public land where fishing or landing are legal. Red signs indicate you are entering private lands where you must stay in your boat. Easements are the purchase of certain rights for public use on private lands and are typically purchased in perpetuity (such as a "permanent easement") and can be denoted on the river by blue or brown signage. They vary according to what rights the particular landowner granted

At the Fort Steele/Rochelle PAA easement rights include road access, parking areas, boat launch/landing areas, public restrooms, and the right to walk along the banks within 50 feet from the water's edge. Overnight camping may be limited or not allowed in some areas. The Upper North Platte River is known nationally for its high-quality trout angling and that is also the case at the Fort Steele/Rochelle PAA. Wild rainbow and brown trout coexist as the primary game fish with lesser populations of brook trout, cutthroat trout, and walleye.

A population estimate was conducted at the Fort Steele/Rochelle PAA in 2011. The fishery was comprised of 56% brown trout and 44% rainbow trout. Brown trout average length was 10.3 inches and 35% of the brown trout captured were >12 inches. Rainbow trout average length was 14.3 inches and 31% of the rainbow trout captured were >16 inches. The population estimate was 748 trout \geq 6 inches per mile and 773 pounds per mile. In Wyoming, a Blue Ribbon trout stream harbors over 600 pounds per mile. This is the highest population estimate for this section since 1996. Higher flows in 2010 and 2011 have improved conditions in this river section since the last sampling in 2006. Rainbow trout average length and number captured increased over what was found in 2006. Cooler water temperature and good flows in this reach likely account for the increases in rainbow trout.

Float map available at: http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/Departments/Fishing/pdfs/NORTHPLATTE_FLOATAREA_MAP0001868.pdf



Saratoga Game Warden, Biff Burton, with nice rainbow trout

How About Fishing for Something Different

Lakes and streams in Southeast Wyoming offer excellent fishing for rainbow trout, brook trout and brown trout. Sometimes however it's fun to pursue something different. Several lakes in the Snowy Range offer opportunities to catch some unique fish. It takes a little work to get to these lakes, but the experience is well worth the effort.

Dipper Lake: Located on the west side of the Snowy Range off Highway 130 and USFS Road 103 is Dipper Lake. Beginning in 2010 grayling have been stocked and good populations of grayling over ten inches have been established. Grayling are distinguished by their trout like body, bluish gray color, deeply forked tail and especially by the distinctly large dorsal fin. They are native to the northern regions of North America. In Wyoming they are native to the Madison River but have been stocked in several waters throughout the state. Grayling prefer the cold clear waters of large rivers, creeks and mountain lakes. The preferred food for grayling is insects especially terrestrial insects. Most grayling anglers fish with small flies and spinners.



Grayling in Dipper Lake

Shelf Lakes #1 and #2: An uphill 1.5 mile hike from the Lewis Lake Picnic Area will take you to the Shelf Lakes. These alpine lakes have been stocked by helicopter with golden trout every other year since 2006. Golden trout are now consistently available from the Game and Fish Culture Section due to the established brood stock at the Story Fish Hatchery. Golden trout are native to South Central California and have been distributed to some high mountain lakes in Wyoming. These fish have distinctly vibrant markings with yellow, gold and olive green tints on their sides. In mountain lakes golden trout feed primarily on plankton. Anglers must have a great deal of patience to catch golden trout. They often feed for only short periods of time so plan to spend lots of time on the water. Very small baits, lures and flies are the preferred angling methods. Bear River cutthroat trout are also found in the Shelf Lakes.

Detailed information on the location of these lakes as well as all lakes and streams in the Snowy Range can be found in the map titled *Fishing in the Medicine Bow Routt National Forest, Snowy Range Area*. The map is available from area Game and Fish and Forest Service Offices. An online version can be found on the Medicine Bow/Routt National Forest Web site with this link. <http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/mbr/recreation/fishing/?recid=22482&actid=42>. Information on the map includes location of Snowy Range waters as well as species present and facilities. Another great source of angling information for all of Wyoming is the new *Wyoming Fishing Guide* available in the printed version at all Game and Fish Offices or online at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1000428.aspx>.



Plains killifish

Meet your native fish

The northern plains killifish is native to the North Platte and South Platte River drainages in Wyoming. It is a small fish that can reach a length of up to 4 inches. Its color is light brown to white with 12 or more dark vertical bars along the sides. Breeding males are more brightly colored than females with bright orange fins. Northern plains killifish prefer shallow streams with sand or gravel substrates, and can be found in lowland streams in Laramie and Goshen Counties, such as Horse Creek and Crow Creek. Conservation of this species within its native range in Wyoming is important to help maintain the diversity of native fishes in the state.

Current Status of Laramie Plains Lakes

One bright spot on the Laramie Plains is **Twin Buttes Reservoir**. During the long drought water could not be transported from Lake Hattie to fill the reservoir and it became too salty for stocked fish to survive. With higher lake levels, stocking resumed in the winter of 2010 with 12 inch fish and normal stocking of 7 inch fish during the spring of 2011. These fish have grown quickly and sampling in March of 2012 confirmed abundant rainbow trout with lengths ranging from 16 to 19 inches. Anglers are rediscovering this popular fishery with good success.



Fish technician, Katy Pfannenstein, with rainbow trout captured in 2012 sampling at Twin Buttes

The **Gelatt Lake** fishery was maintained throughout the drought and has consistently provided great fishing and exceptional fish sizes. Spring 2012 sampling indicated this fishery survived the winter for the 5th consecutive year thanks to the aeration system deployed in 2007. Rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and brook trout are found in Gelatt Lake with sizes from 12 inches for recently stocked fish to 25 inches and 8.5 pounds for the largest fish caught during sampling in 2012.

The aerators at **Meeboer Lake** have not been as successful at preventing winterkill as the system at Gelatt Lake. Enhancements to the aerators are planned for the future. The good news at Meeboer Lake is that some fish do survive the winter so a few large individuals are available to anglers. Fish are stocked each spring and grow very quickly. Ten inch fish should be available by May and those fish will be 16 inches this fall.

Because it is close to Laramie, **Leazenby Lake** continues to be a popular fishery. Rainbow trout and brook trout in a wide range of sizes contribute to this fishery. This is a lake that provides the opportunity to catch some exceptional brook trout and fast fishing for rainbow trout. Remember motor boats are not allowed.

The largest reservoir on the Laramie Plains when full is **Wheatland Reservoir # 3**. The reservoir is now full, the boat ramp is available and utilization is increasing. When the reservoir refilled in 2009, the Fish Culture Section stepped up production and 265,000 small trout of various species were stocked. The fish exhibited incredibly fast growth in the new reservoir and have now grown to over 22 inches in length. The average size of fish in Wheatland # 3 is over 17 inches. The size of fish available makes the drive to the reservoir well worthwhile.

Fish stocking at **Lake Hattie** continued through the low water years and the number stocked is increasing with additional water. Now that the boat ramp is in the water boating is more enjoyable. Many trophy sized kokanee were captured during the last sampling. Bear River cutthroat and Snake River cutthroat are also doing very well in the reservoir. With the large amount of new space and water available the catch of yellow perch is down from the low water years. Large individual rainbow trout are frequently captured by anglers and biologists are encouraged by the numbers of smaller rainbow from 2011 stocking that have been observed. These fish will quickly grow to a nice size for anglers.

Alsop Lake is managed as a trophy fishery with special regulations designed to produce larger than average fish. Only two fish may be harvested and all fish less than 16 inches must be released. Fishing is permitted with flies and lures only. Unfortunately Alsop Lake winterkilled in 2010. It has been restocked and fish are growing quickly.

Additional information including driving locations, species present and fish identification for the entire state can be found in a new publication the *Wyoming Fishing Guide*. This guide is available at Game and Fish Offices and online at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1000428.aspx>.

Recently completed aquatic habitat projects

It was a busy year for Laramie Region Aquatic Habitat Projects. The Laramie Region actively works with partners including other governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, and private landowners to design and implement habitat projects to improve Wyoming's fishery resources. Two major projects were completed in 2011 including the Laramie River Greenbelt Habitat Enhancement and the East Fork Encampment Weir Removal and Fish Passage.



Laramie River with installed rootwad revetments near the Greenbelt

The Laramie River Greenbelt Habitat Enhancement was constructed over three years (2009-2011) through the town of Laramie. Prior to the improvements, degraded habitat conditions were characterized by a lack of quality pools, little streamside cover, infrequent and heavily embedded riffles and spawning bars, and an abundance of wide, shallow, sluggish runs with little habitat diversity. Historic low late summer base flows further aggravated these poor habitat conditions. Over 3.5 river miles received treatments including vegetated riprap, rootwad revetments, rock deflectors, and willow plantings. Some of the many funding partners for the project include Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Game and Fish Habitat Trust Fund, Laramie Rivers Conservation District, City of Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and Laramie Economic Development Corporation-Beautification Committee.

Also in 2011, a 30+ year-old fish barrier on the East Fork Encampment River was removed and the channel restored. In the late 1970s, the USFS constructed a concrete hydrology weir on the East Fork Encampment River near the confluence with the Encampment River to measure water yield in conjunction with a timber harvest study. The weir was only used for a few years. Personnel from Trout Unlimited, the USFS, and WGFD recognized the weir as a barrier for upstream fish movements. In 2011, the hydrology weir was removed and the channel restored allowing for reconnection of the Encampment River and East Fork Encampment River for brown trout, brook trout, longnose dace, longnose sucker, and rainbow trout. Approximately 8 miles of tributary stream habitat was reconnected. Funding for the weir removal was provided by Medicine Bow National Forest, Wyoming Game and Fish Habitat Trust Fund, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, USFS Resource Advisory Council, and Trout Unlimited.



Goodbye weir



Restored channel after weir removal

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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 capacity of habitats with public desires."

Many Thanks to Newsletter Contributors: Steve Gale, Lee McDonald, Christina Barrineau, Mike Snigg, and Beth Bear. Photo credits: Steve Gale, Lee McDonald, and Christina Barrineau.

Mike Snigg has been on the Laramie Fisheries Management Crew since 1985. He was promoted in August of 2003 from regional fisheries biologist to regional fisheries supervisor. Mike has over 30 years with the Department. After obtaining his Bachelor's from Simpson College in Iowa, he worked for the Department for several years, and received his Master's from UW.



Mike Snigg

Steve Gale was hired as a regional fisheries biologist in June of 2005. He was raised in North Platte, Nebraska. Steve received his Bachelor's in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from the University of Nebraska in 2000. He completed his Master's in Fisheries Management from Montana State University in 2005.



Lee McDonald

Lee McDonald transferred to the regional fisheries biologist position from the Fish Culture Section in June 2006. Prior to this assignment he was Superintendent of the Como Bluff Fish Hatchery in Rock River, Wyoming. Lee has over 30 years with the Department. Lee came to Wyoming from Pueblo, Colorado in 1975. He received his BS in Fishery Science from Colorado State University in 1978.



Christina Barrineau

Christina Barrineau was hired as the regional aquatic habitat biologist in August of 2004. She is originally from South Carolina and moved to Wyoming in 2000. Christina received her Bachelor of Science degree from Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina in 2000. She received a Master's in Zoology from the University of Wyoming in 2003.



Steve Gale