

Additional Panel Questions: Answered

Our experts didn't have time to answer all your questions during the *Let's Get Reel: Threats and Solutions for our Waters & Fisheries* Panel. Here are some of those extra questions answered.

1. Does FWP contemplate any further regulatory actions before the end of summer to protect what remains of the fishery?

At this time, and from a FWP perspective, the regulatory actions that would be used to protect the fishery would be the implementation of "hoot owl" closures as necessary, as well as enforcement of the current fishing regulations. No other regulatory options are being considered at this time.

2. Beavers are regarded as a conservation measure for restoring floodplains and keeping base flows up, but beaver ponds are correlated with brook trout. Should we use beavers in bull trout streams?

Mike: The spread of beaver that has been occurring across the Bitterroot is a natural event that has been facilitated to some degree by recent fires which have rejuvenated riparian shrub habitats. Although brook trout do well in beaver pond habitats, beaver ponds are also used by native trout (bull and west slope). They are especially important for overwintering habitat. So, my take is that we should not interfere with the beavers. Let them colonize the habitats that they feel are suitable.

Jason: I share similar feelings with Mike on this one, so nothing to add regarding real beavers. They do provide an important ecosystem service that our native species evolved with and generally benefit from. However, I view BDA's slightly differently. I feel that fishery composition should be taken into account before utilizing these types of structures. The jury is still out on their impact on fish passage and how they benefit one species over another, but I prefer to take a more cautious approach with these sorts of structures when we're dealing with bull trout or the potential for brook trout to expand in native fish waters.

3. How do fire management practices support the health of our fisheries? Where can I find more information about current fire management plans?

Mike: Two types of fires occur in the Bitterroot National Forest. Those that are planned and implemented to achieve certain objectives (I.e. prescribed burns), and unplanned fires (wildfires) that start as a result of lightning or human ignition. Every prescribed burn has a burn plan that spells out how and when the burn will be conducted. Prescribed burns are generally designed to be low severity

under burns that reduce fuels and rejuvenate grasses and forbs for big game forage. In the short term, the burns typically have a neutral to insignificant effect on the fishery.

In the long term, the effect may be beneficial if it reduces the chances of a high severity wildfire occurring in riparian areas in the future. For wildfires, each ignition is assessed on a case-by-case basis on how to respond (e.g. what are the values at risk, time of year, potential to grow big, etc). During firefighting operations, there are mitigation measures that are supposed to be followed to minimize damage to riparian resources (e.g. don't build dozer lines in riparian areas, don't drop retardant in water bodies, etc). For questions on burn plans and fire management strategies/objectives, I would call the Forest's head fire management officer (Mark Wilson). Mark is stationed at the Forest headquarters (Supervisors Office) in Hamilton. The office phone number is 363-7100.

5. What are the best options for protecting the river since our valley is "self contained"?

Jason: Not sure I completely understand what they are asking in this question, but staying informed and being involved with local organizations working on restoration and habitat protection in the basin is probably the single best thing an individual can do if they want to help protect the resource. As far as what are the best options are for protecting the river, in my opinion maintaining and improving the amount of cold clean water coming into the river is paramount. Additionally, habitat protection is another big one, and one that is becoming increasingly difficult with all the development going on in the valley. With water and quality habitat, the fishery will take care of itself.