

Yellowstone Lake – 2013 Strategy

The summer/fall lake trout (LT) suppression season on Yellowstone Lake is shaping up to be a critical time period. After the 2012 season where over 300,000 lake trout were removed, the Science Review Panel members believe that we may be on the cusp of a population crash. Several indicators are pointing in the right direction. Netting suppression levels (the amount of netting effort) have exceeded the targeted amount and 2013 projections are for this to go even higher with three Hickey Brothers boats on the water. The LT catch per unit effort declined last year for the first time in many years which is indicative of declining numbers. The cutthroat by-catch and distribution netting, which are indicators of YCT population levels, increased and more one and two year old cutthroats are being counted. The telemetry study that TU has raised money for is showing results. Seasonal LT movement patterns are being gleaned from the data, and six potential spawning beds have been identified.

During this summer and fall, telemetry will be increasingly utilized to guide the suppression. USGS scientists are right now putting together detailed month by month movement and fish concentration patterns which will be used to send the netters to specific areas of high LT use. In addition, VPS or fine scale positioning around suspected spawning beds in other parts of the Lake will pinpoint this fall's high use (spawning) areas. The one known spawning bed at Carrington Island will be the focus of what has been described as a "Berlin Wall" of gill nets this September to cut off recruitment on that spawning bed. Those LT that do get through will find a new electroshocking system ready to kill their eggs. Scientists at Montana State University are busy designing this system and hope to test it at Carrington.

Trout Unlimited has been playing a major role in fundraising for these efforts and in aiding the coordination between the NPS and USGS scientists as they put together plans for 2013. Together we are all involved in the major goal of "Saving the Yellowstone Cutthroats" of the Yellowstone Lake system.