



IDAHO FISH AND GAME GOLDSHEET

May 2025 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item: South Fork Snake River Rainbow Trout Suppression Program and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Management

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Position/Title: Regional Fisheries Biologist

Agenda Item No.: 11

Bureau Chief Approval: LH

Background:

The South Fork Snake River supports the largest population of native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Idaho with migratory and resident life histories. Rainbow Trout are the largest threat to the long-term persistence of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout through hybridization and competition. Management in the South Fork Snake focuses on improving Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout abundance and includes operation of tributary weirs to remove spawning rainbow trout and fishing regulations which encourage harvest of Rainbow Trout (no daily bag or possession limits and a harvest incentive program).

Manual removal of Rainbow Trout is a relatively new management action implemented to address the goal of removing 30% of the Rainbow Trout population annually. Since 2021 the 30% reduction was achieved through angler harvest and electro-fishing. Most Rainbow trout removed by electro-fishing were relocated to other waters (including Gem Lake, the Snake River near Idaho Falls, Big Lost River, and Mackay Reservoir). The 30% reduction in Rainbow Trout has been achieved every year except 2023.

In 2024 the rainbow trout removal program relied exclusively on angler harvest with the removal of 4,007 fish. Species composition in the South Fork Snake River consisted of 34.3% Rainbow Trout, 50.2% Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout and 15.5% Brown Trout, and was the first time since 2008 that Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout made up over 50% of the trout population in the South Fork of the Snake River.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

2025-2030 Fisheries Management Plan Direction- Maintain and restore Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout population through Rainbow Trout harvest and suppression (as necessary). Complete and evaluate effectiveness of 30% annual Rainbow Trout Suppression from 2021 through 2025. Maintain Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout as the dominant trout in the South Fork (excluding Brown Trout).

Public Involvement Process:

Public input on the Management Direction for the South Fork Snake River was part of the 2024 Fisheries Management Plan which was open for 22-day public comment period. Outreach included news releases, emails and social media posts.



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Justification:

This agenda item is to update the Commission on Fisheries Management on the South Fork of the Snake River.

Staff Recommendation:

N/A – Information Only.

Suggested Motion:

N/A.