

## **Fish and Game plans update, public input at meeting tonight**

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SANDPOINT -- More study of the lake trout population in Lake Pend Oreille, incentives to fishermen, public feedback on potential Idaho Department of Fish and Game programs and a kokanee update are all part of a community meeting today set up by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

The department will give the public a chance to become better informed, to ask questions and offer advice at 6:30 p.m. at Community Hall.

IDFG officials will update the public on fishery recovery efforts, and on how officials plan to further study lake trout.

A plan to trap the fish live in deep water nets prompted a petition to halt the project a year ago. IDFG planned to first study the fish, and then -- if the population was sufficiently high -- harvest them.

They hypothesized that numerous lake trout were feeding heavily on a precariously low population of kokanee, which bull trout also prey upon. The kokanee could not reproduce quickly enough to keep up with the predation, officials had thought.

The population was not as high as anticipated, however. Officials estimated between 5,400 and 8,100 lake trout over 20 inches were in the lake, a number calculated by marking captured fish and then extrapolating the population through the ratio of marked to unmarked fish recaptured.

The net fishing, which took place last year throughout cold-weather months, was to begin again in fall, but IDFG decided not to continue the program this year to give more time to address public concerns over netting, to study anglers' catches and see what other options are available.

Further study of the lake trout population will help officials better understand where the population comes from and how the fish live in Lake Pend Oreille, said regional fisheries manager Ned Horner.

"One of the big questions is how many fish might be coming down from Flathead Lake," he said.

Flathead is connected to Lake Pend Oreille, and fisheries officials hypothesize that lake trout are washed into Lake Pend Oreille during high water years. The lake trout population appeared to increase after the 1997 flood and additional fish from Flathead Lake may explain a population increase, Horner said.

Officials don't know if the Flathead lake trout add significantly to the local population, but plan to study lake trout earbones collected during the Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club's spring K & K Derby to find out.

"We don't need to sacrifice any fish from the trap netting to do that work," he said.

Different chemical compositions in different lakes leave a "microchemical imprint" that scientists can examine to determine the lake of origin.

Department biologists also plan to study contaminants. Flathead Lake has an advisory for mercury, which occurs naturally in the area, Horner said.

"We want to know is that an issue here or not," he added.

Fish have been sent to the state's lab, but no information on mercury levels is available yet.

IDFG officials also plan to report on some of the work done this spring, following up on how many marked fish anglers caught during the K & K Derby to see how effective they were at controlling the lake trout population. Fishermen and women will also be asked for feedback on incentive programs for catching lake trout, and IDFG officials will ask the community what residents want the department to try.

Many said the trap netting might not be needed if anglers can effectively control fish populations, Horner said.

"We need to get more information to test the upper boundaries on how effective the anglers can be," said Horner.

The department will also discuss kokanee and pike minnow, although not all of the information obtained from studies this year are available yet.