

Netting to resume in Lake Pend Oreille

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SANDPOINT -- The Idaho Department of Fish and Game announced on Tuesday its plans on resuming deep-water trap netting on Lake Pend Oreille this fall and winter to study fish populations.

The nets are being used strictly for research purposes, Fish and Game emphasizes.

The department used trap netting last year to study fish numbers, but also planned to harvest lake trout in a bid to aid the Pend Oreille's struggling population of kokanee.

Lake trout feed on kokanee, and Fish and Game worries their increasing numbers will thwart efforts to rebuild the kokanee population. The thought of using nets to thin the ranks of lake trout, however, angered a vocal segment of the angling community.

Last year's trap netting was halted after the population analysis phase was completed. Phil Cooper, a Fish and Game spokesman in Coeur d'Alene, said the first year of the study turned up fewer laker trout than expected.

This year's trap netting has no harvest component. With the exception of a small percentage of fish sacrificed for age and maturity determination, all fish will be released alive.

"We're not killing lake trout," Cooper said. "We're getting population estimates and the fish are being allowed to go unharmed."

Fishery managers want to update the lake trout population estimate to see if incentive and education programs aimed at encouraging lake trout harvest are having an influence. The gear will also be used to gain more information about the lake whitefish population and their life history to better understand the role they play in the Pend Oreille.

Placement of the nets will start after the Sept. 6 Labor Day weekend. Up to nine nets will be fished through the winter, but there will be a six-week shutdown period in December and/or January. Fish and Game said all nets will be removed by April.

Deep-water trap nets are anchored on the lake bed at depths of up to 180 feet. The nets consist of three parts -- the lead, heart and pot -- and they will be marked with U.S. Coast Guard-approved marker buoys. Net locations will be posted at marinas and boat launches.

The nets can be moved to increase their efficiency or to avoid conflicts with anglers on the lake. Anglers with downriggers are urged to avoid trolling between the marker buoys.

"There was a lot of opposition to the whole concept," Cooper said, referring to the 2003-04 netting plans. "I don't know if that opposition is still out there."