

## **Bull trout face another potential obstacle**

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Selkirk Conservation Alliance objects to planned timber sales

PRIEST RIVER -- The unique run of bull trout that return each year to Priest River and then migrate upstream on the Middle Fork East River may have to encounter one more obstacle to their survival with additional timber harvests planned on Idaho Department of State Lands for 2005, according to the Selkirk Conservation Alliance.

The SCA believes that the additional harvesting could threaten the bull trouts' potential for future survival. Paul Seracki, program coordinator for the SCA, said the entire East River drainage already has a 303(d) listing for sediment and the Middle Fork has a listing for heat.

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act establishes requirements for states and tribes to identify and prioritize water bodies that are water quality limited, (i.e. water bodies that do not meet water quality standards).

Following bull trout assessment study by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, that utilized radio-telemetry tracking and electrofishing efforts to determine spawning areas and the extent of the migration from Pend Oreille lake and river.

Following their assessment, IFG officials stated in their 2003 report, "Despite invasions by brook trout, introductions of brown trout, and intensive timber management within this watershed, bull trout have managed to persist in the MFER. These risks, coupled with the uniqueness of this population and the small area they occupy puts this population at risk of extinction."

Seracki said, "extinction" should not be an alternative and that the fish already have to deal with post-spawn stress, predation, lack of feed, interbreeding and hybridization with brook trout, and potential poachers are even walking the bank.

He said during the Fish and Game study, bull trout were found on the banks near dispersed camping sites by fisheries biologists involved in the study, but it could not be determined if these fish were illegally harvested. He added that the introduction of additional sediment and "inadequate" stream buffers that may blow down could also increase stream temperatures that could jeopardize these fish further.

"It looks like they are putting the timber sales directly adjacent to the critical spawning habitat," said Seracki.

Scott Deeds, USFW fish biologist at the Spokane office, said that his agency, the IDFG, and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality will be meeting with IDL officials in early April for an agency-only meeting to discuss the planned 2005 timber sales and future activities planned for the drainage. The meeting will be held in Coeur d'Alene.

"We're going to be talking about how unique of a (bull trout) population that exists there," said Deeds.

He said they would also be asking about how far IDL has progressed in preparing a Habitat Conservation Plan, which details how an agency will manage the land to protect endangered species. Following completion of the plan, the IDL may submit it to the USFW for approval.

IDL officials were not available for comment at press time.