Welcome to the eighth issue of the Green River Region Angler Newsletter. This years edition features news regarding future funding and budget cuts, new AIS regulations, recent mercury advisories, Flaming Gorge, Colorado River cutthroat trout, burbot, the Little Snake River and habitat improvement projects.

The Green River Fisheries Region spans from Fontenelle Reservoir in the north to Flaming Gorge in the south, from the Bear River in the west to the Little Snake in the east, and includes all the lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and streams in between. Ours is the largest fisheries region in the state, and one of the most diverse! From trophy lake trout to native Colorado River cutthroat, smallmouth bass, kokanee salmon, tiger trout and more, Green River has a little something for everyone.

We manage aquatic resources for you, the people of Wyoming, so your input is very important and we appreciate your comments. Please feel free to contact us at 307-875-3223, or using the information provided on the last page of the newsletter. Happy fishing!

Game and Fish Funding Issues and Proposed Budget Cuts

Facing increasing costs and an inability to raise license fees, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department is proposing a 6.5 percent reduction to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission’s Fiscal Year 14 budget. These proposed cuts are 10 percent below the department’s fiscal year 2013 budget but also account for some increasing costs in fiscal year 2014. The proposed cuts are in addition to a 3 percent reduction to the fiscal year 2013 budget.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission gave preliminary approval of the budget cuts at its March 20-21 meeting in Gillette. The commission will take final action on the budget at its July 8-10 meeting in Saratoga.

“Because our license-fee increase proposals failed in the legislature this year, we are proposing some significant cuts to next year’s budget, including cuts to programs and personnel,” said Game and Fish Director Scott Talbott. “At the same time, we
Funding and Proposed Budget Cuts Continued

will continue to work with the legislature, our partners, and citizens from across the state to find an adequate source of funding for this agency."

Included in the proposed cuts to the commission’s budget is a reduction in the number of issues of Wyoming Wildlife magazine from 12 to 6 annually. The department proposes eliminating the annual Wyoming Hunting and Fishing Heritage Expo, which takes place every year in Casper. Fish stocking could also be reduced by as much as 20 percent.

Other programs considered for reduction include: contributions to the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Wyoming; the department’s fund for access and conservation easements; funding for habitat and sensitive species projects; capital improvements to fish hatcheries and other department facilities; printing of the Access Atlas for sportsmen (this will still be available online); the department’s Leadership Development program; Wild Times publication for schoolchildren; the National Archery in the Schools Program; and the National Fishing in the Schools Program.

The department also proposes reducing its personnel budget by approximately $900,000 by leaving some positions vacant. Many additional cuts are proposed throughout the department, including reducing the department’s vehicle fleet, reducing out-of-state travel, and others.

The department receives a majority (80 percent) of its funding from license sales and other fees paid by hunters and anglers. Only about 5 to 6 percent of revenue comes from the general fund.

Throughout its history the Wyoming Legislature has approved periodic license fee increases to keep pace with rising costs and increasing responsibilities. The most recent license fee increase was in 2008. Inflation continues to increase the cost of doing business, and lower-than-desired deer and antelope productivity in many parts of the state in recent years has required issuance of fewer hunting licenses, reducing annual revenue. Without additional revenue the department will be forced to make additional cuts in fiscal year 2015. For more information contact: Eric Keszler, 307-777-4594

New Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Laws for 2013

By now you’ve heard of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and are well aware of the damaging effects invasive species such as zebra and quagga mussels could have on Wyoming’s water resources. Just a few of the negative impacts invasive species can have include impeding water delivery, clogging pipes and pumps used to supply your drinking water, clogging water intakes on your boat which can destroy the motor, and removing the food source for many of the fish you like to catch.

Now for the part you may not have heard yet. The 2012 Wyoming State legislature passed a new statute. The statute requires a boat transported into Wyoming from March 1 through November 30, to be inspected for AIS before launched in Wyoming.

Additionally, any watercraft that has been in a water infested with zebra or quagga mussels within the last 30 days, is required to undergo a mandatory inspection before launching in Wyoming during ALL months of the year. While we realize that this may take some adjustment for boaters and is an added requirement when bringing your boat into Wyoming, it is a necessary step to keep our waters free of harmful invasive species.

The goal is to make it as easy as possible for nonresident boaters and resident boaters transporting their boat back into the state to get this mandatory inspection. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) will staff check stations at key entrances into the state as frequently as possible during the boating season (April 15 through September) and we encourage all boaters to plan ahead to have their watercraft inspected at one of these locations. In the Green River Region, watercraft check stations will be operated at the Evans-

Zebra mussel

Quagga mussel
New AIS Laws for 2013 Continued

There are no known populations of zebra or quagga mussels in Wyoming to date, but they have rapidly invaded waters across the country and are present in over 34 states including Colorado, Nebraska and Utah. They could be present in Wyoming waters before our monitoring can detect them, so even if you only boat or fish in Wyoming, it is important that you always Drain, Clean, and Dry. There are currently populations of other invasive species in Wyoming (Asian clam, New Zealand mudsnail, and curly pondweed) and we do not want these species moved to another water. You can report an aquatic invasive species sighting at ReportAIS@wyo.gov.

Native Colorado River Cutthroat Conservation in SW Wyoming

The 2012 season saw the wrap-up of two major milestones in Colorado River Cutthroat trout restoration in the upper Green River Drainage. Fish migration barriers were constructed on Dirtyman Creek (tributary to High Savery Reservoir) and Hell Canyon Creek (tributary to Savery Creek north of Big Sandstone). The barriers will protect these streams from invasion by rainbow and brook trout. Rainbow trout hybridize with native cutthroat trout, contaminating their gene pools, reducing biodiversity and eliminating any native adaptations. Because of the collaborative efforts of willing landowners, Trout Unlimited, BLM and Game and Fish, these two native cutthroat trout populations may remain so for future generations. Management actions such as these have prevented the listing of Colorado River Cutthroat trout under the USFWS Endangered Species Act.

Colorado River cutthroat trout

The Savery Creek drainage with major landmarks. Triangles indicate fish barrier locations.
Wyoming Fish Consumption Advisory

Fishing is picking up around the region and so are the number of questions about the recent fish consumption advisory and levels of methylmercury in the flesh of angler caught fish.

There is great deal of current, useful information and recommendations included in Wyoming’s Fish Consumption Advisory posted on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s website (wgfd.wyo.gov, click on “Fishing and Watercraft,” then “Fish Consumption Advisory” in the right hand column).

The Wyoming Health Department is working with Game and Fish to provide information about how to include fish in a healthy diet. Fish are an important part of a healthy diet because they contain high quality protein and other nutrients, are low in saturated fat and contain omega-3 fatty acids. Unfortunately, fish also contain methyl mercury and some fish contain much more than others. Anglers need to take into consideration the information in the fish consumption advisory when deciding how frequently to eat fish that have elevated levels of methyl mercury.

According to the Wyoming Department of Health, The Fish Consumption Advisory recommends the amount and type of fish to consume to recognize the health benefits of eating fish, while limiting consumption of mercury to safe levels. Our bodies can safely metabolize small amounts of consumed methyl mercury, so it may take months or years of regularly eating fish to accumulate levels that could become a health concern. The advisory includes information for the general public as well as specific information for sensitive groups, including pregnant women, women of childbearing age and children younger than 15. It includes specific consumption advice for fish caught from waters in the state that have been tested for levels of methylmercury. The advisory also provides general fish consumption advice for waters that have not been tested. The online advisory will be updated as new mercury testing results become available.

Regional fisheries biologists have sampled fish in reservoirs and lakes across Wyoming so if you plan to fish Fontenelle Reservoir or Flaming Gorge Reservoir, the advisory will provide consumption recommendations by species and size group for the fish that have been sampled to date. It is important to look at the advisory for a specific water. The levels of mercury in a particular species can vary greatly between waters.

Mercury levels increase as fish get larger and older. Therefore, a general rule is to keep smaller Wyoming-caught fish for eating. Predatory fish, such as walleye, brown trout, lake trout, catfish, and burbot, often accumulate more mercury because they eat other fish. Some commonly eaten fish low in mercury are rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and kokanee.

Flaming Gorge Creel Survey Planned for 2013

Anglers hitting the water this summer on Flaming Gorge Reservoir will notice a lot of activity by the Wyoming Game and Fish and Utah DWR. The two agencies will conduct a three month creel survey between mid-May and mid-August to collect information from anglers that will help biologists with future management of the fishery.

Angler creel surveys are an important tool for collecting information used to adjust fishing regulations and stocking programs. Creel survey data allows managers to assess catch and harvest rates, meaning how many fish of each species anglers are catching and, of those, the proportion of fish being harvested or released. The data also provides information about species composition, size structure, and body condition. Once all the data is analyzed it helps provide insight into how the fishery is performing and helps guide adjustments to management strategies.

It has been ten years since a large-scale creel survey was conducted at Flaming Gorge and the fishery has experienced substantial changes since then. The most notable change has been the invasion of illegally introduced burbot and impacts the predator is having on other sport fish in the reservoir. In addition, the harvest limit for small lake trout (<28 inches) was increased following the last creel survey in 2003, due to concerns over the escalating number of lake trout and potential impacts to other sport fish like kokanee salmon and rainbow trout. One goal of the creel survey is to determine if the increased limit has resulted in reduced catch rates for small lake trout. The creel survey also provides insight into how certain species may be affecting others from a predator-prey relationship perspective. That information is valuable when deciding whether changes to regulations or stocking strategies may be needed.

For more information about the creel survey or the Flaming Gorge fishery, call the Green River Game and Fish Regional Office at (307) 875-3223.
Burbot become Nongame Fish in the Green River Drainage

Most anglers are now aware of the problem with illegally introduced burbot populations in the Green River drainage. However many anglers may not be aware of the fact that illegal fish introductions have become a widespread epidemic and that something needed to be done to help biologists manage against these threats.

Illegally introduced game fish can have significant, long lasting, negative impacts on desirable game fish populations. Introduced fish are often aggressive predators that outcompete existing game fish populations, reducing their number and increase the cost of fishery management. Recent findings have found some of these game fish show elevated levels of methyl mercury in their tissue which can pose human health risks and diminish the effectiveness of harvest as a management tool.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has addressed these situations by establishing liberal creel limits. Anglers can significantly impact fish populations through overharvest, and lessen the impact of fish introductions on native and other game fish.

Regulations requiring harvest of undesirable species such as burbot in Flaming Gorge created problems in the past for anglers who didn’t want to consume the fish. As a designated game fish, under state law burbot could not be “wasted”. Additionally, a regulation should not encourage excessive consumption of fish suspected to have elevated mercury levels.

The Wyoming Legislature addressed the issue in 2013 by passing a bill that grants the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission the authority to designate, through rule and regulation, specific species of game fish as non-game species in specified waters. This action allows for harvest and disposal or “waste” of specific fish in specific waters where a species is undesirable. At the same time, the statute allows for the protection afforded by game fish status in the remainder of the state.

So, what does this mean for burbot in the Green River drainage? They are now classified as a nongame species and game fish regulations no longer apply. Elsewhere in the state they are still considered game fish and standard regulations apply.

This is a major step forward in the fight to suppress burbot populations and minimize impacts to local sport fisheries. The regulation change means that anglers can now legally dispose of all burbot they catch but do not intend to eat. This allows biologists to continue encouraging the harvest of every burbot caught in the Green River drainage and eliminates issues associated with wanton waste or high mercury concentrations.

Despite their nongame status, burbot must still be disposed of properly and discreetly. Leaving fish on the ice, along the bank or next to an access road is NOT proper disposal and will result in a littering citation if you are caught. Besides, it does not demonstrate good ethics and is not courteous toward others.

Anglers have three options: 1) burbot are great to eat, just follow the consumption guidelines, 2) dispose of burbot in your trash at home or at your local landfill, or 3) gut the fish puncturing the air bladder and sink them in deep water where you caught them. This returns nutrients to the water and adds a little productivity to the system.

Reclassifying game fish as nongame is a substantial change for Wyoming fisheries and will only occur for select species and waters. Anglers need to keep in mind that burbot are now considered a nongame fish only in the Green River drainage. They are still a sport fish in all other drainages of the state. Make sure to always check the current regulations for waters where you fish.

160 Burbot caught by three anglers from a boat in under four hours at Flaming Gorge Reservoir last fall.
2013 Burbot Bash a Huge Success

Ice anglers descended on Flaming Gorge Reservoir between February 1-3, 2013 to participate in the sixth annual Burbot Bash.

This year’s Bash was bigger and better than ever with over 1,200 participants and lots of cash prizes, including the opportunity to catch a $10,000 tagged fish. Prizes were awarded to the top five teams for the biggest fish and most fish entered over the weekend. Youth prizes were also given for biggest and smallest fish. The event is intended to generate local revenue, educate anglers about the burbot problem, harvest as many fish as possible, and provide data to help manage the fishery.

Prior to the Bash, biologists from Wyoming and Utah tagged and released burbot for the contest. The tagged fish not only provided the opportunity for anglers to win money, but biologists were able to collect data on burbot growth, movement, and abundance.

A total of 4,287 burbot were entered throughout the weekend and first place teams with the most and biggest burbot each received $5,000. Team Meeks from Green River, WY caught the most burbot with 211 fish followed by Team Briggs with 126 fish. The largest burbot caught was 35 inches and the biggest youth fish was 32 inches. There were also 13 tagged fish entered and although nobody was lucky enough to catch the $10,000 fish, each tagged burbot was worth $300.

Special thanks goes out to all the anglers who participated in this year’s bash. You all helped the fishery by removing more than 4,000 burbot and raising awareness of this serious problem.

Tips to Catch Burbot
Burbot can be caught on a variety of fishing gear: from jigging spoons to dead bait. A local favorite has become soft plastic glow jigs tipped with sucker meat. Burbot are usually found on the bottom in areas with rocky substrate. Anglers that like jigging use a slow, discrete presentation. Other anglers have success with still fishing (dead sticking). Once they bite, hooking them can be a little tricky. They do not strike like trout. Let them take the bait and start swimming away before setting the hook.

The best time to fish for burbot is at night, however anglers can catching them during daylight hours also. Generally speaking, burbot rest in deeper water and move in shallow at night to feed. They are also thought to spawn in shallow water during January, making them especially vulnerable to anglers at that time. Burbot are most active and popular with ice anglers during the winter, but they can also be caught in the summer using the same methods one would use through the ice.

Northern Pike in the Little Snake

With the aid of a bill passed by the 2013 Wyoming State legislature, northern pike in the Little Snake River drainage are being proposed as a non-game fish species. Similar to the regulations on burbot in the Green River drainage. Under the proposed regulation, there would be no creel limit on northern pike in the drainage and all pike caught would have to be killed and disposed of properly.

Residents of Baggs will tell you tales of catching northern pike below the old Ready Diversion ditch at the HWY 789 crossing in town. The Department has known for some time of these and other incidental pike sightings, but it wasn’t until last summer that these fish stories were confirmed. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department sampled several sites on the Little Snake River above and below the town of Baggs prior to construction of stream habitat improvement projects that will provide passage for native fish and improve water delivery efficiency for irrigators. Unfortunately, this work could also encourage pike establishment in the river which would have devastating impacts on native and nonnative fish populations alike. Sensitive native species are found in the Little Snake River including cutthroat trout in the upstream tributaries. Large investments of money and time have been spent on restoring and securing these populations to prevent listing under the Endangered Species Act. Addition of a non-native, voracious predator into the system, however, could cause the State to lose much of the ecological and legal ground we’ve made towards securing native cutthroat and nonnative species within the Little Snake River drainage.

Northern pike likely only inhabit Wyoming portions of the Little Snake River during high water years and are largely restricted to deep pool habitat. Anglers should target plunge pools downstream of permanent structures and always be mindful of trespass laws when seeking out places to fish or float.
The popular “Cutt Slam” program, where anglers are awarded a certificate acknowledging their capture of each of Wyoming’s four native subspecies of cutthroat trout, has been around for over two decades now, and has been enjoyed by hundreds of participants from 48 states and many foreign countries. The program was the brainchild of the late Green River Fisheries Supervisor, Ron Remmick and was intended to heighten the angling public’s awareness of these unique fish and their habitats. Participants much catch and photograph each of Wyoming’s four native subspecies of cutthroat trout within each of their respective native ranges.

Wyoming is the only state to have four native subspecies of cutthroat trout within its boundaries. In fact these fish have been present in Wyoming waters since the end of the last glacial period roughly 20,000 years ago. Having been around so long, these fish are highly adapted to their natal habitats and are great indicators of ecological change. This sounds like a good thing, but it really boils down to the fact that cutthroat trout are extremely sensitive to disturbances such as changing stream flows and temperatures, introduced species, and migration barriers.

Since the Green River Fisheries Management Region is largely made up of waters within the Green River drainage, tributary to the Colorado River the predominant cutthroat subspecies found in our neck of the woods is the Colorado River cutthroat trout. Historically this subspecies of trout occupied the largest range of any of the four subspecies and included mainstem habitats of larger rivers such as the Little Snake and Blacks Fork. Currently, the Colorado River cutthroat trout occupies about 5% of its historic range and is mostly found in small, headwater streams. Extensive cutthroat restoration projects have been conducted to remove nonnative trout species which harm native cutthroat populations through hybridization (rainbow trout) and competition (brook trout). By removing these factors, cutthroat trout populations flourish and may be enjoyed by anglers.

Several good places to fish for your Colorado River subspecies are described below (see maps for each location):

1) **High Savery Reservoir Tailwater** (McCary walk-in)
Access off of CR602 and fish upstream from the road crossing, foot traffic only. Tiger trout and rainbow trout are also present. Native cutthroat have been present since the reservoir was closed in the mid 2000’s.

2) **North Fork Little Snake River drainage**
The North Fork and West Branch and their tributaries on the Medicine Bow Routt National Forest house the largest remaining population of Colorado River cutthroat trout. The terrain is rugged, but the experience is worth it!

3) **Gilbert Creek**
Wyoming shares this creek, tributary to the upper portions of the Smiths Fork in the Blacks Fork drainage, with Utah. Native cutthroat were restored to Gilbert Creek in the 1990’s.

4) **Currant Creek**
Tributary stream to Flaming Gorge originating on Little Mountain contains both native cutthroat and nonnative brook trout populations.

5) **Trout Creek**
Another Little Mountain stream, Trout Creek is tributary to Sage Creek which enters Flaming Gorge Reservoir from the east.

6) **Red and Little Red creeks**
Originating on Pine Mountain, this small stream flows into the Green River below Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Cutthroat are found in the headwaters of Red and Little Red Creeks.

For information on Bonneville, Yellowstone, and Snake River cutthroat subspecies visit the Game and Fish website.
In addition to stocking and sampling waters of southwestern Wyoming, WGFD aquatic biologists also work to improve habitat conditions to benefit trout and other animals that use river corridors, like deer, elk, moose, water birds and perching birds. These types of projects are often completed with the help of volunteers and non-profits organizations, like Trout Unlimited. In addition to enriching the experiences of anglers, hunters and wildlife watchers alike, these projects also often results in lasting opportunities for K-12 education through demonstration sites and interpretive signage. Read on for a description of a few projects from 2012 along the Green River corridor.

**Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge**

Because of its accessibility to the public, and the potential to benefit the already good trout fishery, Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge has been a hot spot for on-the-ground habitat improvement projects for decades. Recent work has focused on improving habitat conditions in side channels, and fixing dilapidated, river-wide rock structures.

**Side channels**

As seasoned Refuge anglers will tell you, some of the best fishing is to be found in side channels. Not by coincidence, some of the best habitat to be found is also in side channels. In 2012, Christmas trees harvested from Miller Mountain were placed and secured in McCullen Bluff and Headquarters side channels by WGFD, Refuge crews, and Trout Unlimited volunteers. Addition of complex structure, like tree branches, provides habitat for juvenile trout, increasing overwinter survival and upping the odds that those little fish may one day become the 20+ inch “bucket list” fish that we all dream of and are so spoiled with on the Green.

**Rock Structures**

Like many structures or “sills” on the Refuge, Double Sill was constructed to feed water to a large wetland. Also like many sills on the River, when it originally went in, engineers and resource managers didn’t know a lot about what it takes to create a lasting structure that serves its intended purposes (water delivery, i.e.) without degrading the channel. In 2012, the structure was essentially re-built. As a result, anglers should enjoy safe boat passage, a stable channel, and years of good fishing downstream and in the adjacent side channel.

**City of Green River Green Way**

**Invasive Plant Removal**

Green ways are arteries of nature connecting towns and urban people, particularly children, to wild spaces. In conjunction with the City, WGFD is working to promote native plant growth along the River corridor by removing Russian olive and tamarisk, both invasive, prolific, water-hogging species. Russian olive and tamarisk have been removed from 586 acres of river corridor habitat along 5 miles of the Green River between Expedition Island and Scott’s Bottom, preserving these areas for future generations of Green River-ites to enjoy. An excerpt from an interpretive sign placed at green way access points reads: “Russian olive and tamarisk compete with native riparian vegetation for resources, strain water reserves and interfere with natural plant succession....Native riparian vegetation not only provides good habitat for wildlife and fish, but also supports the aquatic invertebrates (i.e. mayfly, caddis fly and stonefly) more than Russian olive.”

Pictured on the left are conifer trees being placed along the banks of the Green River to trap sediment and promote growth of riparian vegetation. Projects like this result in more stable banks and provide cover for fish, especially juvenile trout. Pictured on the right is the removal of a Russian olive tree on the Green River.
Big Fish Board: Fish from the Green River Region

Flaming Gorge Lake Trout

Green River Cutthroat Trout

Flaming Gorge Brown Trout

Flaming Gorge Lake Trout

Green River Rainbow Trout

Secret Reservoir Brook Trout

Flaming Gorge Lake Trout

Sulphur Creek Walleye

Flaming Gorge Kokanee Salmon

Fontenelle Reservoir Burbot

Little Snake River Northern Pike
Dates to Remember

Free Fishing Day June 1 -- The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has declared June 1, 2013 Free Fishing Day to coincide with the beginning of the National Fishing and Boating week. Residents and nonresidents may fish Wyoming waters (excluding Wind River Indian Reservation and Yellowstone National Park, which are not regulated by the State of Wyoming) without a fishing license or conservation stamp.

Kemmerer Kids Fishing Day June 1 – Located at the Kemmerer Community Pond by the overpass. Sponsored by the City of Kemmerer.

Evanston Kids Fishing Day June 8 – Located at the UP Ice Ponds, Registration starts at 7.45, Fishing from 8 am to 1 pm. Sponsored by Upper Bear River TU Chapter.

Rock Springs Kids Fishing Day June 15 – Located at the Rock Springs Pond - south side of the road leading into the Rock Springs Golf Course. Event 9 am to 3 pm. Sponsored by WGFD, Seedskadee Wildlife Refuge and Flaming Gorge/Green River TU Chapter.

Fish Division Mission Statement:
“As stewards of Wyoming’s aquatic resources, we are committed to conservation and enhancement of all aquatic wildlife and their habitats for future generations through scientific resource management and informed public participation. We will use an integrated program of protection, regulation, propagation, restoration and control to provide diverse, quality fisheries resources and angling opportunities. Our efforts will balance the productive capability of habitats with public desires.”