

FISHERIES PROGRAM PLAN



LOLO NATIONAL FOREST

2001

Lolo National Forest

Fisheries Program Plan

Western Montana, from a fish and fisherman's view

Western Montana is one of the premiere trout fishing areas in the country. Ask a trout fisherman anywhere to name one geographic area that captures his or her imagination in the off-season, and chances are, nine times out of ten “Montana” will be one of the first words out of their mouths. The Missoula area is smack-dab in the center of all of this, with the Bitterroot, Clark Fork, Blackfoot, and Rock Creek all less than a half hour from town.

Ecologically, Western Montana offers a tremendous amount and diversity of streams, rivers, and lakes that have the potential to support some of the strongest populations of native westslope cutthroat and bull trout in the Columbia River basin. The elevations, latitude and geologies prevalent on the forest combine to form the perfect place for these species to not only survive but to flourish. These are really the main reasons that people focus on our region when it comes to trout fishing – the fish grow big and there are seemingly endless places to pursue them.

The Lolo National Forest is poised to take advantage of the unique ecological richness and famous fishing in the area by developing a high profile Fisheries Program that enjoys the support and recognition of the public and agency professionals, both locally and nationally. With this backing, the program will be situated to aggressively contribute to the overall conservation and restoration of aquatic habitats, benefiting fish populations and overall ecosystem health.

With this perspective in mind, we have developed the following framework to outline the Vision, Goals and Objectives of the Lolo National Forest Fisheries Program.

What is Fisheries Program, and why do we need it?

In the past decade, protecting and improving our nation's water resources has become a major social and ecological issue. The public wants it, our laws require it, and fish populations desperately need it. The contributing role that National Forest system lands play in this effort is emphasized in direction at every level of the Forest Service organization.

A major goal of the Lolo Forest Plan, through incorporation of INFISH, is the protection of riparian resources. The Lolo Vision statement emphasizes clean water, stable soils, and healthy populations of fish and wildlife. Nationally, the Natural Resource Agenda places the maintenance and restoration of healthy ecosystems and watersheds as the number one priority, while the very first objective of the Strategic Plan is to improve and protect watershed conditions. The entire Clean Water Action Plan is devoted to improving the quality of our nation's water resources. The need to transcend this direction into improving fisheries at the local level is clear. This will require a balanced program that incorporates an integrated perspective of landscape processes and their effects on aquatic systems.

We believe a balanced program is important for several reasons.

First, it allows for a more integrated view and management of landscapes, building on the shared functions and processes of upland and riparian areas from ridge tops to stream bottoms. To achieve success in meeting integrated goals for fish, wildlife, vegetation, etc., we need a proactive fisheries program with clear objectives and priorities.

Second, we believe a balanced program will foster support for the program and the forest from both our peers and the public. As such, we realize a balanced program includes support *to* other resource areas. We believe that support of our program can only be achieved by nurturing working relationships both internally and externally – by providing technical expertise, analyses and documentation, education, and other services needed by our peers and the public. Support is gained when support is given.

Third, program balance encourages efficiency by adding emphasis to previously overlooked program elements that contribute to long-term

improvements in our understanding of the systems we manage. Science-based assessments will be a cornerstone of the program.

Finally, a balanced program is a program we can all be proud of – one of the most fundamentally important factors of all.

This Lolo Fisheries Program Plan provides a framework for development of annual plans at the district or zone level. It details a common vision and outlines six broad goals that are expected to remain consistent across the forest for several years. Specific objectives are provided to ensure that we meet these goals, however the precise work plans including locations, timing, and action items will be identified in plans developed by individual biologist by March 31 of each year. Each plan will be approved by the Fisheries Program Manager. The framework should be reviewed every five years, or as conditions change, to assure that the vision, goals and objectives are consistent with existing knowledge and needs of fisheries on the forest.

VISION

The LNF Fisheries Program will develop, foster, and promote the proactive conservation and restoration of fish populations and aquatic habitat by focusing on maintaining and restoring natural watershed processes that support healthy, vigorous populations and habitat. Our success will be based on mutually understood and supported goals and objectives. Assessments and recommendations will be based on sound scientific principles that promote consistency and efficiency. In conjunction with the watershed program, we will provide service to other resource management programs, striving at all times to achieve multidisciplinary integration of issues and opportunities in landscape assessment, planning and implementation. Under this vision, the Fisheries Program will become an integral part of determining the forest priorities and course for the future through an evolving concept of “Watershed Health Management”.

GOALS

- 1) Conserve and restore fish habitat and populations by focusing on *proactive assessment and management* of watersheds.
- 2) Use sound *science, data, logic, and natural processes and responses philosophy* in analyzing issues.
- 3) Develop *consistency and efficiency in process*.
- 4) *Nurture relationships* with the public, agency peers, and co-workers to develop *mutual ownership* in the fisheries program.
- 5) *Provide support* to other resource functions and continue to *integrate* fisheries restoration into other resource projects.
- 6) Be recognized as the *leading fisheries program* in the nation.

OBJECTIVES

To meet Goal #1 – “Conserve and restore fish habitat and populations by focusing on *proactive assessment and management* of watersheds” – **we will achieve the following objectives:**

- a) Work cooperatively with FWP to identify two watersheds (5th field HUC) per year (by priority – 1 in FWP Region 1 and 1 in FWP Region 2) to analyze and develop long-term fisheries/watershed management strategies.
- b) Finalize the fisheries/watershed management strategies by January 1 of each year.
- c) Use the fisheries/watershed management strategies to guide short and long-range forest direction and program of work (where to go/not to go).

Measures of Success: Monitor fisheries/watershed strategy achievements (# completed per year and effectiveness in influencing management direction) in Fisheries Accomplishment Report to be completed by Jan 31 of each year.

Immediate Action Item: Define population boundaries, status, and priorities for restoration/conservation across the forest by August 15, 2001 (to be used in (a) above).

Immediate Action Item: Complete Fish Creek Population Strategy with FWP as a prototype by April 15, 2001 (model future strategy frameworks based on this example).

To meet Goal #2 – “Use sound *science, data, logic, and natural processes and responses philosophy* in analyzing issues – **we will achieve the following objectives:**

- a) Use relevant scientific research in all analyses and recommendations. State uncertainty levels with all assumptions. Document logic used in analyzing issues.
- b) In all analyses and recommendations, attempt to maintain or restore natural processes and responses in aquatic systems. Discourage “band-aid” restoration.
- c) Continuously maintain technical and professional skills through training, literature review, and appropriate research, presentations, and publications.
- d) In coordination with Hydrologists, annually review data collection and monitoring needs and methodologies by March 31 of each year.
- e) Pursue opportunities to leverage resources with adjacent forests in data collection and monitoring programs. Use Forest Plan Revision aquatics outline as template.
- f) Track monitoring requirements and accomplishments to provide the feedback loop for adaptive management. Include long-term watershed condition status and project call monitoring. Produce monitoring report annually by January 1.
- g) Continue to develop GIS applications that increase analysis efficiency and improve our understanding of large-scale conditions and processes. Distribute these for use on other units (forests, regions, etc.).

Measures of Success: Forest Fisheries Biologist will review BA's to maintain consistency in application of principles and assessment procedures. Annual training/development plans will be developed by each individual, in coordination with the Forest Fisheries Biologist, and approved by the individual's supervisor as part of the annual work plan. Data collection and monitoring programs will be assessed in Annual Monitoring Report by January 1 of each year.

Immediate Action Item: Develop "Natural Processes and Responses Principles" white paper by August 31, 2001. Include scale, timeframes, disturbance levels, uncertainty, biological considerations, etc. in developing different strategies.

Immediate Action Item: Develop individual technical and professional development plans by November 1, 2001. These will be updated annually in the POW with specific training courses, presentations, etc. for the year.

Immediate Action Item: Develop a concise and user-friendly method for tracking monitoring requirements and accomplishments by July 1, 2001 (integrate BO T&C spreadsheet with Lotus projects database and road maintenance database).

Immediate Action Item: Work with GIS support to catalog all existing AML's and provide training on use where appropriate by December 1, 2001.

To meet Goal #3 – “develop consistency and efficiency in process” – we will achieve the following objectives:

- a) Develop simple, standard formats and procedures for project analyses. Improve cumulative effects analyses.
- b) Critically determine relevant issues prior to every analysis. Issues that have little or no relevance to the question being addressed will not be analyzed.
- c) Improve our on-the-ground review of projects by committing to spending at least as much time completing field reviews as completing documentation and meeting all agreed upon timelines.
- d) Together with hydrologists and computer support, develop a simple, accessible data storage, retrieval, and query system for the fisheries and hydrology programs. Incorporate GIS, existing databases, NRIS and MRIS into the final system.
- e) Meet, in conjunction with Hydrologists, in March and October of each year to provide program updates, review projects, and maintain consistency.
- f) In coordination with Hydrologists, review existing survey and monitoring programs by March 31 of each year to determine if efficiencies can be gained.

Measures of Success: Monitor project completion trends (time, numbers, etc.) compared to past history (post-bull trout listing). Provide summary in annual Fisheries

Accomplishment Report by January 1 of each year. Track appeal issues and comment letters to assess trends in acceptance. Individually monitor days spent in the field versus days spent writing documentation. One usable data system will be developed and supported by both fisheries and hydrology. Agreement on program efficiency and consistency should be prevalent at fisheries/hydrology semi-annual meetings.

Immediate Action Item: Re-structure the existing Biological Assessment Framework to focus on relevant issues (project description, effects, call) by April 30, 2001.

Immediate Action Item: Develop a set of “consistency guidelines” that describe principles and measures we will follow in determining effects calls and mitigation requirements by July 31, 2001.

Immediate Action Item: Develop a standard cumulative effects analysis procedure for fisheries by August 31, 2001.

Immediate Action Item: By August 31, 2001, develop a Data Systems Plan for (d) above in coordination with hydrologists and computer support (may need to convene a RIM team to address this issue).

To meet Goal # 4 – “Nurture relationships with the public, agency peers, and co-workers to develop *mutual ownership* in the fisheries program” – we will achieve the following objectives:

- a) Increase visibility of the Fisheries Program, internally and externally, and at the local to national scales.
- b) Improve our involvement with partners, agency peers, publics, and co-workers in developing and implementing fisheries and other resource projects.
- c) Continue to function as a unified aquatics group with hydrology.
- d) Provide aquatic education to build long-term understanding and support of fish and water values in future generations.

Measures of Success: Annually survey partners, agency peers, public and co-workers to determine their support of the program and any ideas for change. Begin prior to implementation of the new program to develop a baseline – along with update letter on the program plan. Much of this will be measured through word of mouth, increased involvement of publics, web page use, etc. Include survey summary and qualitative assessment in annual accomplishment report. Monitor partnership projects and include in the annual Fisheries Accomplishment Report by Jan 31 of each year. Each biologist will individually develop and implement an annual education program.

Immediate Action Item: Develop a Marketing Plan by June 1, 2001. (Include Web page update, Web page “what’s new”, quarterly column for local papers, FLT updates, district staff updates, local interest group presentations).

Immediate Action Item: Develop a Fisheries Accomplishment Report framework by Aug. 30, 2001. (Capurso and Bohn).

Immediate Action Item: Develop a mailing list for distribution of the annual Fisheries Accomplishment Report. (mailings to market the program – WO, RO, Forests, Districts, TU, Environmental groups, etc.).

To meet Goal #5 – “*Provide support to other resource functions and continue to integrate fisheries restoration into other resource projects*” – **we will achieve the following objectives:**

- a) Provide technical expertise in designing, analyzing, and implementing interdisciplinary projects.
- b) Be available to districts to assist in presenting issues at public meetings.
- c) Increase our knowledge of other resource areas to improve group problem solving capabilities in interdisciplinary settings.
- d) Use funds generated by timber sales, where appropriate, to achieve needed fisheries and watershed restoration objectives.
- e) Promote true interdisciplinary assessments in the IDT process.

Measures of Success: Monitor accomplishment of Forest Priority Project lists. Annual review with District Ranger’s to determine if support needs are being met. Monitor “mitigative restoration” projects.

Immediate Action Items: Develop a project monitoring plan by July 31, 2001 to track projects by effects to fish in each population watershed. The monitoring will link to GIS for visual tracking of functional status over time.

To meet Goal #6 – “Be recognized as the *leading fisheries program* in the nation” – **we will achieve the following objectives:**

- a) Produce an annual Fisheries Accomplishment Report that includes outlook, achievements, monitoring results, and emerging issues by January 1 of each year. Distribute to the Districts, Forests, Region, Washington Office, agencies and interested publics.
- b) Foster and develop a positive and exciting view of the program and the forest as leaders in healthy fish and water practices – emphasize our accomplishments.

- c) Nominate individual and program accomplishments for local and regional awards where appropriate, emphasizing recognition for success.

Measures of Success: Annual Fisheries Accomplishment Report that serves as a marketing and monitoring tool, as well as identifies out-year direction. Internally and externally, there is a positive outlook and enthusiasm for the program. Individuals and the forest are recognized for accomplishments.

Immediate Action Items: Produce an outline for the Fisheries Accomplishment Report by August 30, 2001. Use this as a prototype to determine, using FY01 data and accomplishments, whether additions or deletions need to be made. Complete the final format by January 31, 2002, incorporating this year's data for the final report.

Annual Program Requirements, by date:

January 1 – Complete (2) fisheries/watershed management plans.

January 1 – Complete Annual Monitoring Report (use in FP Monitoring Report).

January 31 – Complete Fisheries Accomplishment Report – post on web.

March 1 – Complete individual Programs of Work (each biologist).

March 31 – Meet with Hydrologist to determine data needs and collection methods.

October 15 – Annual Hydrologist/Biologist meeting to share information and plan programs.