

BOISE COUNTY

Protecting Bull Trout in Boise County



The Bureau of Reclamation has two workers manning three weirs 24/7 in Boise County. Photo by Eileen Capson.

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each fish uniquely.

Two other tags include a radio tag and archival tag. They are battery operated and last for about 2 years. The archival tag is like a mini computer, and records the temperature and depth every 40 minutes. The fish must be caught by the Bureau of Reclamation to recover this information.

The fish is often "doubled-up" with a radio tag, to be located from shore. This tag also transmits the current temperature and depth of the fish. Approximately 100 bull trout were pit tagged and 30 were inserted with an archival tag. The bull trout is protected under the Endangered Species Act, and there is no reward offered from the Bureau of Reclamation.

During surgery, a small fin clipping is taken to prove genetic integrity, and its DNA is archived in the US Registry. Vidergar says only about a millimeter squared piece is needed.

Between 4 and 6 scale samples are also taken. Vidergar explained that scales will pull out naturally from time to

time, so it does not hurt the fish, and they will grow back quickly. He said the scales resemble tree rings under a microscope and will show the fish's age. Regenerated scales have uneven growth rings and



The weir stretched across the North Fork of the Boise River and detains spawning fish in trap boxes. Photo by Eileen Capson.

cannot be read.

Over the years, fish biologists have learned a thing or two about inserting tags into the fish. When tags were surgically placed in the body cavity, it had the possibility of being ejected during spawning. Mary Faurot, Forest Service Fish Biologist, said there were reports of devices "splintering out", or working their way out of the fish body. Now radio tags are surgically inserted into the muscle near the dorsal fin. It is all done under electric-narcosis to insure the fish holds still and has a quick recovery time.

The weir near Barber Flat Forest Station is constructed of metal piping and held in place with sandbags, blocking the passage for fish across the width of the river. The Bureau of Reclamation manned the weir 24/7 from August to October, and counted ap-

proximately 100 bull trout. They were responsible for unplugging the fallen leaves from the weir, and checking the traps twice daily. They also participate in data collection and record information in the field.

Weirs were first installed in Boise County to track the movement of fish and their biological habits in 2001. In 2003, the Boise National Forest conducted a road culvert study, and estimated 700 culverts to be blocked passages for fish and other aquatic organisms. The Bureau of Reclamation received funding to study the endangered bull trout from 2001 to 2006, and to conduct their weir study. They have tracked these fish during their spawning run, when the water levels are low.

In 2011, the Bureau of Reclamation received additional funding to continue tracking this threatened endangered species. They established three temporary weirs in Boise County, and will continue tracking the bull trout for 2 more years.

The Bureau of Reclamation partners with the US Forest Service. Their fish biologists also gather information on the bull trout's dynamics: their behavior, migration, life history, size and population. Mary Faurot, Forest Service Fish Biologist, said she wants to know, "What's going on when they leave the [Arrow-rock] reservoir." Through grants, they help reconstruct culverts in the Boise National Forest and expand the bull trout spawning grounds.

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Mary Faurot, US Forest Service, and Dmitri Vidergar, Bureau of Reclamation, collaborate on information gathered at the weir. Photo by Eileen Capson.

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