

The Cutthroat Chronicles

Official Newsletter of the Snake River Cutthroats

March, 2021

A Message from the President *by Matt Woodard*

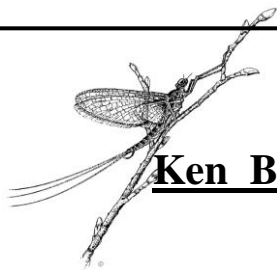
As I write this, the month of March is almost here. The wishful thinking on my part is that maybe will soon have a little warmer weather and some open water to fish.

I hope that all of you have had time to enjoy our monthly Zoom meeting presentations. Personally, I have found them quite informative and entertaining. We began with Matt Klara from Big Sky Anglers, then Kelly Glissmeyer, and just recently Boots Allen. Next up will be Kenly Bitton who will talk steelhead fishing and fly tying. It is certainly not the same as an in-person meeting, but it keeps us all safe from COVID and still provides some interesting information for all. I want to thank board members George Klomp and Charlie Allen for their help in getting us some great Zoom speakers!!

There has been quite a bit of news in the Post Register of late on the Kilgore Gold Project. The comment period on that ended February 11, 2021. Canada's Excellon Resources and its subsidiary Otis Gold Corporation are seeking permitting to drill several test holes to evaluate whether or not to proceed with an open pit cyanide heap leach mine. I believe that we need to watch how this proceeds very carefully. The history of these types of mines is horrible. The State of Montana has banned them since 1998. If we get to the point in the process that USFS will be seeking comment on the mine itself, we simply need to say no!!

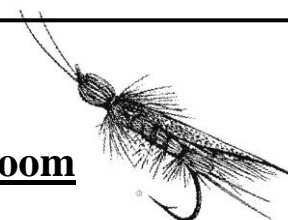
I have had some discussion with the South Fork Initiative folks about partnering with them on work they are continuing to do regarding Rainey Creek in Swan Valley. There will likely be a need for volunteers to cut willows. Stay tuned for that! Other news on that front is that Dave Westkamp will be taking over the lead from Bryce Oldemeyer as the project manager for the South Fork Initiative / Henry's Fork Foundation. Dave worked for the Nature Conservancy prior to taking on his new role.

Be well and stay safe out there. Things are improving slowly, but we are not out of the pandemic quite yet.



UPCOMING EVENTS March 10th, 2021 7PM

Ken Bitton on Tying Steelhead Flies via Zoom



Snake River Cutthroats

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**Steelhead Flies by a Master:
Ken Bitton**



He comes from a Mormon family which settled in Swan Valley while other family members chose hard scrabble land in the Chilly area on which to pioneer. In the Steelhead world he is known as “Bitty” the consummate steelheader, and knowledgeable guide on the Clearwater River system. Gruff but of affable and generous personality, he can also spin yarns about being the same with South Fork cutthroats.

What is lesser known is that Ken is an accomplished fly tier. Accomplished to the point that he can declare Marvin Nolte, the world class Atlantic salmon fly dresser as a mentor. He also has creations from the fly tying vise specific to the South Fork.

But Ken’s true passion is in steelheading, and that is where most of his fly tying time is directed. We will have a chance to see through the magic of ZOOM Ken’s mastery for tying effective steelhead patterns.

**Notes from the Boots Allen Meeting
Paul Voegeli**

Boots Allen of Victor, Idaho, presented this timely topic at the Snake River Cutthroats General Zoom Membership during a stormy February 10th evening. Boots, a well-known and respected fishing guide of 30 years and authority readily shares his interesting experiences and knowledge.

Boots began to fish during what he termed “the winter gap” thirteen seasons ago through a client asking for guide services. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has defined a winter catch and release season on certain waters. These are given in the Upper Snake Region fishing regulations. They combined with climate change warming allow for more approachable waterways. Thus there are more opportunities to “take a poke”, as Boots stated, at winter angling.

During winter knowing slower current flow, troughs, deep lies and holding waters are the keys to success. Boots referenced a matrix approach based on methods by George Daniel and Landon Mayer. Grids of 4 foot by 4 foot dimensions on the surface of the water, and placing three to four casts of varying depth and retrieval in each is an optimal way to success. Observing air and water temperatures also helps. Boots discussed trout forage and stream entomology. While surface hatches are minimal during the winter, there is more sub-surface action and therefore the deeper presentation of nymphs and larval patterns placed directly in front of the fish is most productive. Capnia stonefly nymph and midge pupa patterns are particularly effective. Long, slow stripping makes streamer patterns productive.

Staying warm and comfortable through proper winter gear is a must. Nothing beats Neoprene waders and layered clothing throughout. Boots also addressed the “ice in the guides and reel” situation. Chapstick is a solution Boots mentioned as are other petroleum distillates. (author’s note: more information on the de-icing effects of lipids could be a topic in future SRC monthly meetings ...). Thank you, Boots!

Electronic Newsletters Available

For those still receiving hard copies of the newsletter via standard mail, but would prefer to receive it via email, please send your email address to Carol Staples, our membership chair, at casbas@cablone.net.

Fewer mailings mean more dollars for conservation projects. The fish will appreciate your cost-saving efforts.



Hitting the Water Hard at Henry's Lake

By Jenn Vincent – IDF&G Fisheries Biologist

Anglers spent a record number of hours fishing the hard deck at Henry's Lake during the 2020 ice fishing season with over twice the total number of estimated fishing hours than the 2019 ice fishing season. Despite this amount of angling effort, anglers harvested fewer trout during the 2020 ice fishing season than the 2019 season. Anglers harvested 22% of the trout they caught during the 2020 season and caught trout at a rate of 0.40 trout per hour.

Over the past year, COVID-19 has created many challenges for each and every one of us. One thing is for certain, this year has proven how important outdoor opportunities are in helping us all to step away and recharge even if just for a few hours. It was evident that many anglers took the opportunity to get Out and try their luck at some trophy-sized trout. Henry's Lake is known internationally for its trophy sized trout. Anglers have a chance at catching Yellowstone Cutthroat, Hybrid (Yellowstone Cutthroat x Rainbow Trout), on Henry's Lake. Although the lake is a great place to visit throughout the year, ice fishing is a great opportunity for anyone to fish without need for a boat or specialized gear. Anglers can fish with minimal equipment and can access the lake easily by foot or snowmachine from many public access points.

In order to collect the necessary information, we interviewed 154 anglers. Most of the anglers we interviewed (80%) were Idaho residents.

Anglers caught an estimated total of 27,756 trout over the season and harvested an estimated 6,175 of these fish. Anglers harvested 22% of the trout that they caught. Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout was the most commonly captured trout at 46% of the catch, followed by Hybrid Trout at 42%, and Brook Trout at 12%.

Anglers fished the hard water this past year for an estimated total of 69,144 hours over the entire ice fishery. This compares to 34,511 hours during the 2019 ice fishery (Table 1). The total number of trout caught and harvested this season is most closely comparable to the 2013 survey although the 2013 catch rate is three times higher than observed in 2020.

Table 1. Estimated total angler hours, total trout caught, total trout harvested, percentage of total trout harvested (%), and season catch rate (total number of trout caught/hour) for the 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2020 ice fishing seasons.

	Year				
	2013	2016	2018	2019	2020
Tot. angler hours	21,833	9,354	34,556	34,511	64,144
Tot. trout caught	25,657	962	23,099	44,006	27,756
Tot. trout harvested	6,046	308	2,993	8,336	6,175
% trout harvested	23.6%	32.0%	13.0%	19.0%	22.2%
Catch rate (trout/hour)	1.18	0.10	0.67	1.28	0.40

Anglers caught an estimated 0.40 trout/hour through the ice which is less than the catch rate observed during the 2019 ice fishery which boasted a 1.28 trout/hour (Table 1). Our 2019-2024 [Fisheries Management Plan](#) for the state specifies that IDFG manages Henry's Lake for a goal catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour. Henry's Lake has had two consecutive good water quantity and quality years attributing to



great water conditions, and fishing seasons have responded with good catch rates. We suspect the increase in angling pressure this year was related to recent good catch rates on the lake and impacts from the pandemic.



When compared to the most recent open water fishery survey conducted in 2019, anglers harvested a similar proportion of fish they caught (Table 2). During the open water fishery in 2019, anglers harvested 14% of the fish they caught, while ice anglers during the 2020 season harvested 22%. The 6,175 fish harvested during the 2020 ice fishing season was just 25% of the fish harvested during the 2019 open water season, and harvest occurred at a higher rate during the open water season of 2019 (Table 2). Anglers during the 2019 open water season harvested one fish for every 7.1 hours of fishing effort while anglers during the 2020 ice fishing season harvested a trout for every 11.1 hours of fishing. Henrys Lake anglers released most of the fish they caught during both years, and the number of fish harvested is lower than the number required to result in negative impacts to the population number or average fish size in the lake. The average length of harvested trout during the 2020 ice fishing season was 18 inches for both Brook Trout (BKT) and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (YCT), and 19 inches for Hybrid Trout (HYB) with the largest HYB measuring 24.6 inches in length. Harvested trout checked in by creel clerks this season were comparable to the trout checked in the 2019 open water fishery which averaged 16 inches for BKT and 18 inches for both YCT, and HYB. Last season we had a large age-2 class of trout in the population. These fish are likely still the trout being harvested in 2020 although they have had an additional year to grow following the 2019 open water fishery.

Table 2. Creel survey results including season length (day), total angler effort (hours), total trout caught, total trout harvested, and catch rate (trout per hour) for the 2019 open water fishery ([May 25](#) through [October 29](#), 2019) and 2020 ice fishery ([October 26](#), 2020 through [January 1](#), 2021) on Henrys Lake.

	2019 Open water Fishery May 25 – Oct. 29, 2019	2020 Ice Fishery Oct. 26, 2020 – Jan. 1, 2021
Season length (day)	158	67
Total angler effort (hour)	173,477	64,144
Total trout caught	183,484	27,756
Total trout harvested	24,773	6,175
Catch rate (trout/hour)	1.06	0.40

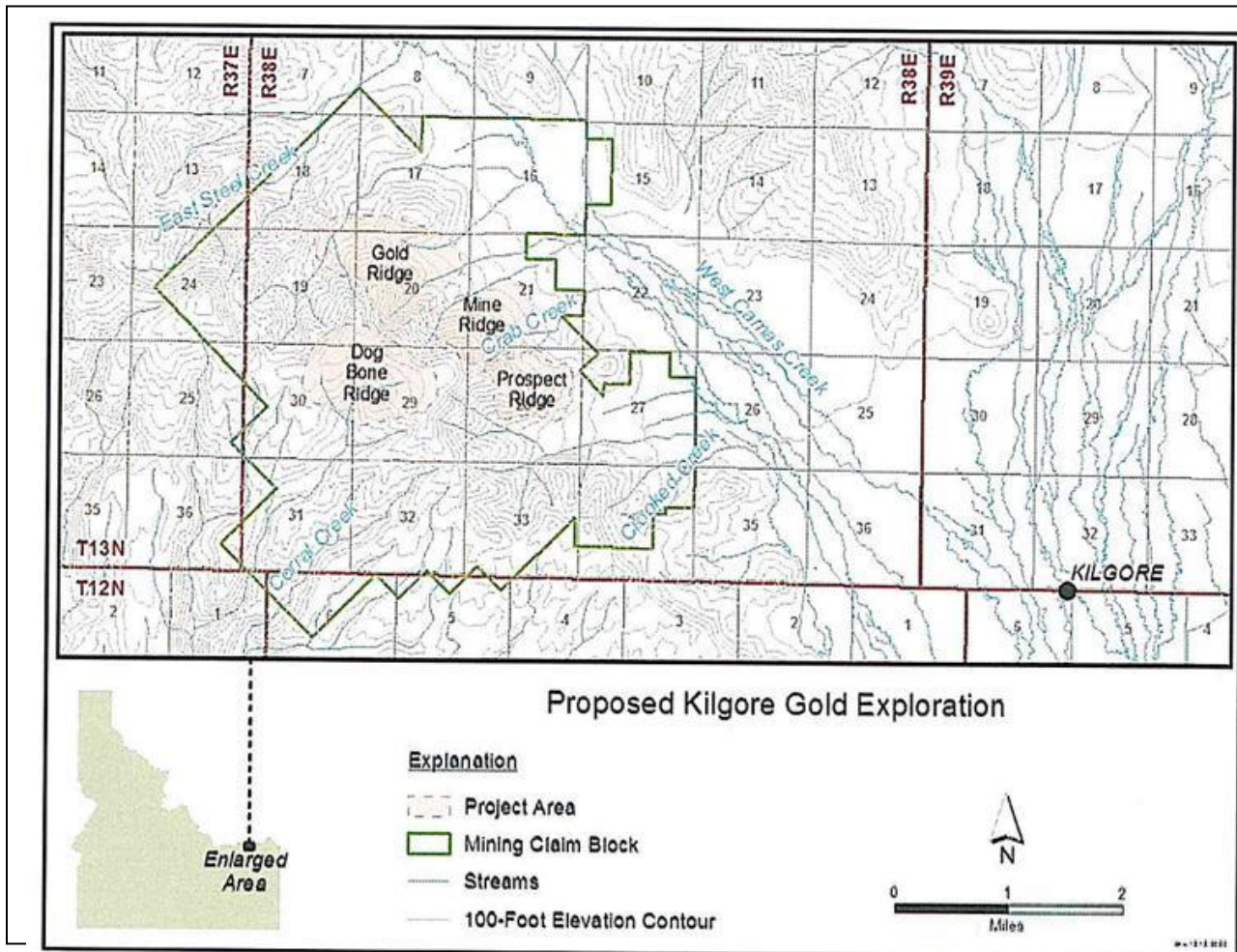
IDFG conducts a full season survey of anglers on Henrys Lake every three years to better understand how the fishery is performing. Our next season long survey will occur in 2022.



Overall, we estimated a two-fold increase in total angler fishing hours, a harvest rate lower than that observed during a recent open water season, slightly increased size in harvested trout due to increased overall sizes of trout in 2020, and a reduced total catch rate for the 2020 ice fishery on Henrys Lake. Although the catch rate has decreased this season, Henrys Lake still provides a unique opportunity for anglers regardless of season, gear type, and experience level to try their hand at pulling in a trophy-sized trout right here in Eastern Idaho.



Kilgore Gold Exploration



Canadian Exellon Resources's Otis Gold Corporation proposes increased exploration drilling on their claim shown in the above figure. If they find good potential for more gold, the next step could be the cyanide heap leach process which can leave the countryside in an unrepairable mess with reduced wildlife habitat and huge potential to contaminate streams and ground waters. Mining could impact West Camas Creek (brook trout throughout and brown trout in lower reaches of downstream Camas Creek) and Corral Creek (Yellowstone cutts in Corral Creek and brook and rainbow trout in downstream Beaver Creek). You can view the **DRAFT Environmental Assessment on Caribou-Targhee National Forest's project website**. Let's hope the Canadians don't find anything worth mining and if they do not, will return all 140 drilling sites to pre-exploration conditions.

This isn't the only regional gold mining adventure. Increased placer mining is proposed in Caribou Basin with McCoy and Clear Creeks, both hosting good Snake River Fine Spotted cutt populations, being impacted. We have time to comment on this action. Watch the Caribou-Targhee N. F. web site.

Fly of the Month

Feather Duster Nymph

This is another West Yellowstone pattern that has gained fame. All “West” shops offer it. The Eagle family has a fascinating history in the formation of West Yellowstone and its fly fishing evolution. Eagle’s Store has a century-long record of fly fishing retailing. Wally Eagle was a fly fisher and fly tier. This is his omnibus nymph pattern, He names it after its body material.

Hook: Daiichi 2220 or equiv., size 10-16
Thread: Brown or olive, 6/0
Tail: Size 12 and larger; pheasant tail fibers,
 Size 14 and smaller: partridge hackle fibers
Rib: Fine copper wire
Body: Natural ostrich herl
Wing case: Same a tail
Legs: Tips of wing case fibers



2021 Calendar

Date	Activity
Wednesday, March 10 th , 2021	6:30 PM, Guest: Ken Bitton
Wednesday, April 14 th , 2021	6:30 PM, Guest: Damon Keen
Wednesday, May 12 th , 2021	Annual Business Meeting

Note: all membership and board meetings are proposed to be held via ZOOM until further notice.

Visit www.snakerivercutthroats.org or the Cutthroats Facebook page for a link to access membership meetings via ZOOM.

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