

State of California
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
North Central Region

Frog Lake, Winnemucca Lake, Round Top Lake, and Fourth of July Lake, Alpine County

2018–2020 Angler Survey Box Analysis



Frog Lake



Round Top Lake



Winnemucca Lake



Fourth of July Lake

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Introduction

In 2018, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) installed an angler survey box (ASB) at the Carson Pass trailhead, located along the Pacific Crest Trail, to evaluate the fisheries in Frog, Winnemucca, Round Top, and Fourth of July Lakes (**Figure 1**). The trailhead is accessed off Highway 88 at the top of Carson Pass. Anglers voluntarily complete a survey form after their fishing trip, and deposit it in the ASB. CDFW uses these data to assess angler satisfaction, species composition/sizes, and general angler statistics at the identified lakes. This report covers data collected from Frog, Winnemucca, Round Top, and Fourth of July's ASB from 2018–2020.

Environmental Setting

All four lakes are in the Mokelumne Wilderness of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in Alpine County (Mussulman and Lockhart 2016). Three different watersheds are represented between the four lakes. Frog Lake is within the Carson River watershed. Winnemucca and Round Top Lakes are within the South Fork American River watershed, while Fourth of July Lake is within the Mokelumne River watershed. Much of the surrounding habitat consists of open bedrock, montane chaparral, montane riparian, and coniferous forest (CalFire). Eldorado National Forest (ENF) manages the land in the Carson Pass trail area (Lockhart and Mussulman 2016; Chellman 2018). Due to the popularity of the Carson Pass Trail, ENF has placed restrictions on the Carson Pass Management Area to ensure opportunities for solitude, a primitive recreational experience, and to protect popular camping destinations from overcrowding and heavy impacts (ENF Website).

Frog Lake

Frog Lake is a six-acre lake in Alpine County (38° 41' 16.06 N, 119° 59' 10.03 W), situated at 8,865 feet above mean sea level (**Figure 1**). The shoreline is a mix of rocks, sand, and conifer forest. The lake bottom appears to be primarily composed of mud and various-sized rock substrate. When Frog Lake spills, water flows into nearby Red Lake and the West Carson River. The lake receives water from rain and snowmelt runoff from the immediate area. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) historically stocked Frog Lake with fingerling-sized Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*; BK), Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*; RT), and Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki henshawi*; LCT) with the last recorded stocking of LCT in August 2020. Prior to stocking in 2020, the most recent stocking at Frog Lake was an allotment of RT in 2018. CDFW currently manages Frog Lake as a “put and grow” fishery. Frog Lake is open all year for fishing and other recreational opportunities, but has limited access during the winter season when there is snow.

Winnemucca Lake

Winnemucca Lake is a 54-acre lake in Alpine County (38° 40' 11.56 N, 119° 59' 36.46 W), situated at 8,995 feet above mean sea level (**Figure 1**). The shoreline is a mix of rocks and conifer forest. The lake bottom appears to be primarily composed of mud and various-sized rock substrate. When Winnemucca Lake spills, water drains into nearby Woods Lake and the South Fork American River watershed. The lake receives water from rain and snowmelt runoff from the immediate area. CDFW historically stocked Winnemucca Lake with fingerling-sized BK and RT, with the last recorded stocking of RT in 2000. CDFW currently manages Winnemucca Lake as a self-sustaining BK and RT fishery. Winnemucca Lake is open all year for fishing and other recreational opportunities, but has limited access during the winter season when there is snow.

Round Top Lake

Round Top Lake is a six-acre lake in Alpine County (38° 40' 01.84 N, 120° 00' 44.46 W), situated at 9,358 feet above mean sea level (**Figure 1**). The shoreline is a mix of rocks, willows, and conifer forest. The lake bottom appears to be primarily composed of mud and various-sized rock substrate. When Round Top Lake spills, water drains into nearby Woods Lake and the South Fork American River watershed. The lake receives water from rain and snowmelt runoff from the immediate area. CDFW historically stocked Round Top Lake with fingerling-sized Golden Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss aguabonita*; GT), RT, and LCT, with the last recorded stocking of LCT in September 2020. Prior to stocking in 2020, the most recent stocking at Round Top Lake was an allotment of RT in 2018. CDFW currently manages Round Top Lake as a “put and grow” fishery. Round Top Lake is open all year for fishing and other recreational opportunities, but has limited access during the winter season when there is snow.

Fourth of July Lake

Fourth of July Lake is a 15-acre lake in Alpine County (38° 38' 58.28 N, 120° 01' 02.37 W), situated at 8,172 feet above mean sea level (**Figure 1**). The shoreline is a mix of rocks, willows, and conifer forest. The lake bottom appears to be primarily composed of mud and various-sized rock substrate. When Fourth of July spills, water flows into Summit City Creek, eventually contributing to the Mokelumne River. The lake receives water from rain and snowmelt runoff from the immediate area. CDFW historically stocked Fourth of July Lake with fingerling-sized BK, RT, LCT, and Kokanee Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*; KS), with the last recorded stocking of KS in 1982. CDFW currently manages Fourth of July Lake as a self-sustaining BK and RT fishery. Fourth of July Lake is open all year for fishing and other recreational opportunities, but has limited access during the winter season when there is snow.

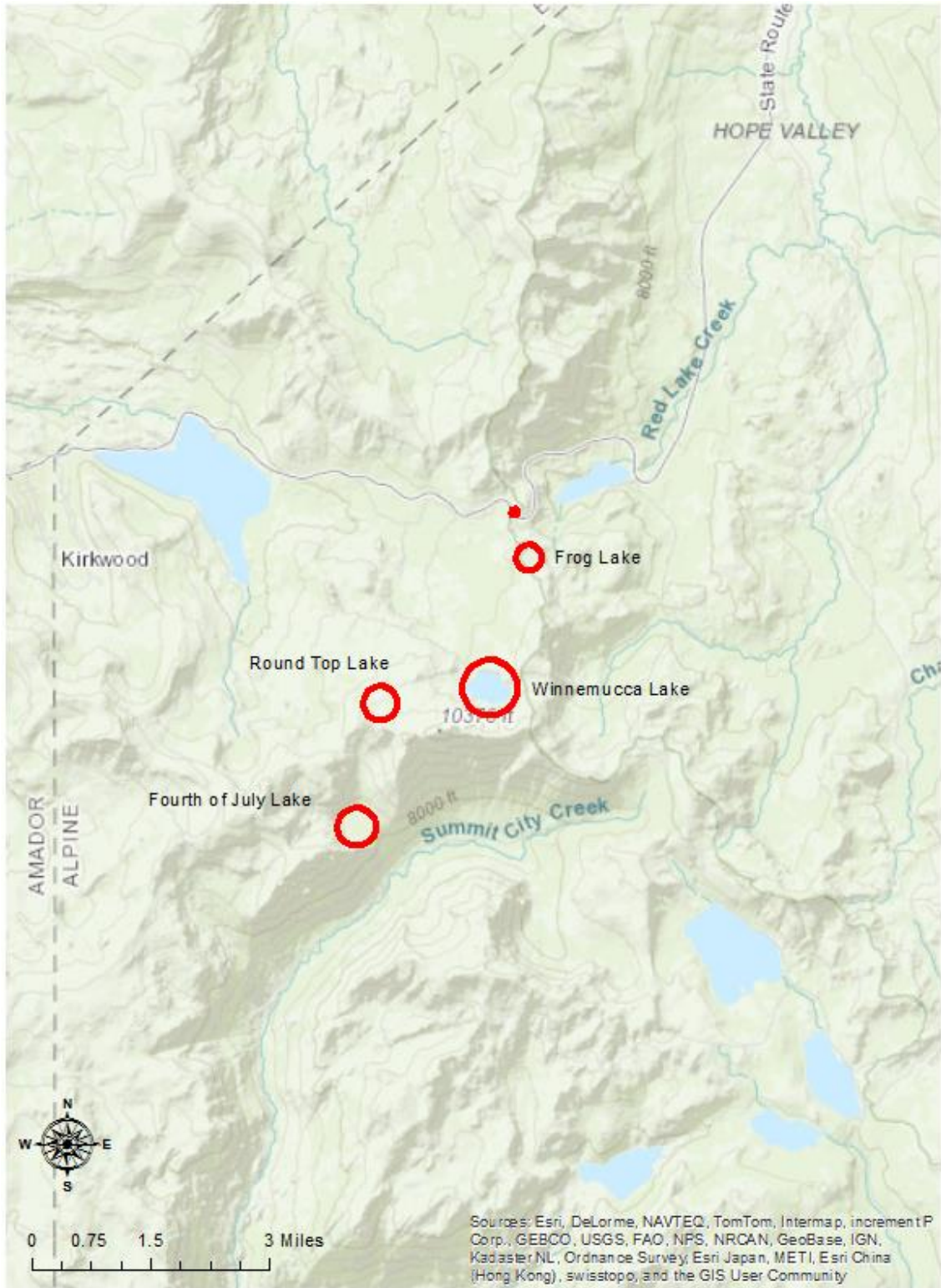


Figure 1. Frog Lake, Winnemucca Lake, Round Top Lake, and Fourth of July Lake (circled in red). Location of the Angler Survey Box is indicated by the red dot.

Methods

The survey asked anglers for information regarding the lake fished, type of gear used, and the number of landed fish. This information was used to calculate catch per angler. Anglers were also asked the size and species of landed fish and whether they kept or released their catch. Lastly, anglers were asked three questions, and their answers were recorded on a scale of -2 to +2, with “+2” representing most satisfied and “-2” representing least satisfied. The questions pertained to the level of satisfaction with their overall angling experience, and with the size and number of fish they caught. Anglers were able to use the back of the survey form to include additional comments (**Appendix 1**).

Results

In 2020, 18 anglers responded to the survey, compared to 25 in 2019 and 14 in 2018 (**Table 1**). In 2020, 79 fish were caught between the four lakes, compared to 69 in 2019 and 28 in 2018. In 2020, the greatest number of fish were caught at Fourth of July Lake (n = 45), compared to Frog Lake (n = 36) in 2019. This is the second time in three years that Fourth of July Lake had the greatest number of fish caught. In 2020, Fourth of July Lake had the highest catch per angler average (9.0) for a third consecutive year (20.0, 2019; 3.5, 2018).

Table 1. Average catch statistics from the 2018 thru 2020 Angler Survey Box for Frog, Winnemucca, Round Top, and Fourth of July Lakes. NA = Not applicable

Lake	2018			2019			2020		
	Fish Landed	Total Anglers	Catch per Angler	Fish Landed	Total Anglers	Catch per Angler	Fish Landed	Total Anglers	Catch per Angler
Frog	2	4	0.5	36	12	3.0	15	5	3.0
Winnemucca	12	5	2.4	13	11	1.2	19	8	2.4
Round Top	0	1	0.0	0	1	0.0	0	0	NA
Fourth of July	14	4	3.5	20	1	20.0	45	5	9.0
Total	28	14		69	25		79	18	

From 2018–2020, anglers used either bait, lures, or flies while fishing these four lakes (**Table 2**). In 2020, four lure anglers that fished Fourth of July Lake had a 11.3 catch per angler rate and the highest catch per angler average of the four lakes. In 2020, two fly anglers at Winnemucca Lake had the second highest catch rate per angler (5.0). In 2020, lure anglers at Frog Lake had the highest catch per angler average (3.5) for any specific gear type for the first time at that lake. No anglers reported fishing at

Round Top Lake in 2020. Similarly, in both 2018 and 2019, only one angler reported fishing at Round Top Lake, and in both years the reporting angler caught zero fish.

Table 2. The frequency of anglers that used each angling method and their corresponding catch rates from 2018 thru 2020.

	Frog Lake		Winnemucca Lake		Round Top Lake		Fourth of July Lake	
	Number of Anglers	Catch per Angler	Number of Anglers	Catch per Angler	Number of Anglers	Catch per Angler	Number of Anglers	Catch per Angler
2018								
Bait	0	NA	2	3.0	1	0.0	0	NA
Lure	3	0.0	1	2.0	0	NA	0	NA
Fly	0	NA	1	2.0	0	NA	4	3.5
Not Recorded	1	2.0	1	2.0	0	NA	0	NA
2018 Totals	4		5		1		4	
2019								
Bait	1	3.0	3	2.7	0	NA	0	NA
Lure	6	2.33	2	0.5	1	0	0	NA
Fly	0	NA	1	0.0	0	NA	1	20.0
Multiple	5	3.8	5	0.8	0	NA	0	NA
2019 Totals	12		11		1		1	
2020								
Bait	0	NA	1	4.0	0	NA	0	NA
Lure	2	3.5	4	0.5	0	NA	4	11.3
Fly	2	2.5	2	5.0	0	NA	1	0.0
Multiple	1	3.0	1	3.0	0	NA	0	NA
2020 Totals	5		8		0		5	

In 2020, for a third consecutive year, all landed fish ($n = 79$) measured at Frog, Winnemucca, and Fourth of July Lakes were less than 16.0 inches (in.) in total length (**Figure 2**) (Ewing 2020). In 2020, the RT modal length class at Frog Lake was 10.0–11.9 in. ($n = 9$), compared to 8.0–9.9 in. ($n = 12$) in 2019 (Ewing 2020). At Winnemucca Lake, the BK modal length class was 6.0–7.9 in. ($n = 4$) and the RT modal length class was 8.0–9.9 in. ($n = 5$). The modal length class for BK at Fourth of July Lake was the 8.0–9.9 in. length class ($n = 28$).

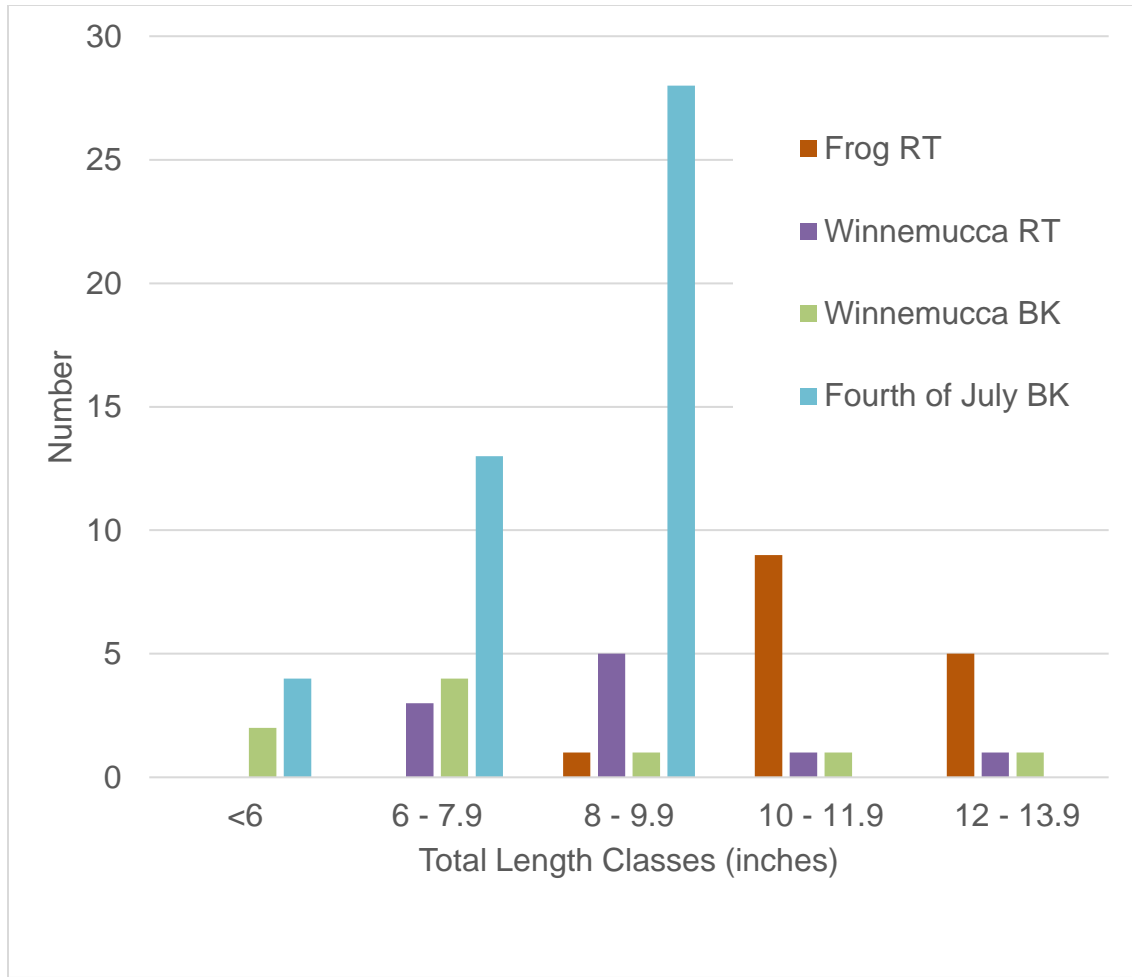


Figure 2. Frequency of fish in each length class that anglers reported landing at Frog, Winnemucca, and Fourth of July Lakes in 2020.

Of all fish landed in 2020, 56 (70.9%) were released, a decrease from those released in 2019 (n = 60) (87.0%) and 2018 (n = 23) (82.1%). In 2020, 28.0% of all RT were kept compared to 5.7% in 2019 and 66.7% in 2018. In 2020, 29.6% of all BK were kept compared to 20.6% in 2019 and 4.5% in 2018 (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Kept and released fish from Frog, Winnemucca, and Fourth of July Lakes from 2018 thru 2020.

2018	Kept			Released			Total Percent	
Species	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Kept	Released
RT	0	1	3	2	0	0	66.7%	33.3%
BK	0	1	0	0	10	11	4.5%	95.5%
Total	0	2	3	2	10	11		
2019	Kept			Released			Total Percent	
Species	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Kept	Released
RT	2	0	0	33	0	0	5.7%	94.3%
BK	0	7	0	1	6	20	20.6%	79.4%
Total	2	7	0	34	6	20		
2020	Kept			Released			Total Percent	
Species	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Frog	Winnemucca	Fourth of July	Kept	Released
RT	7	0	0	8	10	0	28.0%	72.0%
BK	0	2	14	0	7	31	29.6%	70.4%
Total	7	2	14	8	17	31		

In 2020, anglers had a positive average response to their overall fishing experience at Frog and Winnemucca Lakes for a third consecutive year and reported the highest value (1.80) at Fourth of July Lake in the last three years (**Table 4**). No anglers reported fishing at Round Top Lake in 2020. Average satisfaction with size and number of fish were also positive for Frog and Winnemucca for a third consecutive year. Fourth of July Lake anglers reported being unsatisfied with the size of the fish caught for the first time (-0.50), but were very satisfied with the number of fish caught (2.00).

Table 4. Angler satisfaction response averages for Frog, Winnemucca, Round Top, and Fourth of July Lakes from 2018 thru 2020. No average size of fish and number of fish have been calculated for Round Top Lake due to no fish being caught. No satisfaction values were recorded for Fourth of July Lake in 2019 and Round Top Lake in 2020.

2018			
Lake	Overall angling experience	Size of fish	Number of fish
Frog	2.00	1.00	1.00
Winnemucca	1.80	1.00	1.40
Round Top	1.00	NA	NA
Fourth of July	1.00	0.50	1.25
2019			
Lake	Overall angling experience	Size of fish	Number of fish
Frog	1.17	0.90	0.90
Winnemucca	0.91	1.20	1.00
Round Top	2.00	NA	NA
Fourth of July	NA	NA	NA
2020			
Lake	Overall angling experience	Size of fish	Number of fish
Frog	1.75	1.50	1.25
Winnemucca	1.57	1.25	1.25
Round Top	NA	NA	NA
Fourth of July	1.80	-0.50	2.00

Discussion

The 2020 ASB results indicate anglers caught varying numbers of trout, except at Round Top Lake, where anglers reported catching no fish for a third consecutive year. However, no anglers submitted ASB forms for Round Top Lake in 2020. CDFW conducted an angling survey in 2019 in which no fish were caught at Round Top Lake (Ewing 2019a). During the survey, CDFW noticed that a large part of the lake was very shallow. Therefore, portions of Round Top Lake may freeze solid during the winter, and result in some overwinter mortality among RT. CDFW conducted a gill net survey in 2012, during which staff measured a depth of 2.1 meters (6.9 ft.) in Round Top Lake at the ending spot of the 36 meter-long net (CDFW High Mountain Lakes [HML] Database). CDFW stocked 500 LCT into Round Top Lake in 2020, half the number of the last stocking in 2018. CDFW made the decision to reduce the stocking allotment given the reduced overwintering habitat and resources available for fish.

In 2020, anglers caught the greatest number of fish at Fourth of July Lake (n = 45). Fourth of July Lake also had the highest catch per angler value (9.0) for a third consecutive year. The high catch rate may be because Fourth of July Lake contains large numbers of stunted BK, which compete for a limited amount of resources. The limited available resources likely increases the aggressive feeding behavior in the fish. CDFW has not stocked Fourth of July Lake since 1982, during which staff stocked KS. The last years during which CDFW stocked RT and BK were 1979 and 1964, respectively. Between the BK and RT anglers reported catching from 2018 thru 2020, and a BK age and growth study by CDFW in 2018 (Ewing 2018), data suggest that Fourth of July Lake contains self-sustaining populations of RT and BK (HML Database). Recent CDFW sampling and reports from anglers have not detected LCT or KS in Fourth of July Lake, which suggests these species are no longer present.

In 2020, anglers caught the second highest number of trout (n = 19) and third highest catch per angler average in Winnemucca Lake. Historically, CDFW stocked Winnemucca Lake with BK, LCT, and RT. The lake now appears to mainly contain a self-sustaining BK population; however, RT are still present at a low density (Ewing 2019b). CDFW recently added Frog and Round Top Lakes to the statewide stocking allotment, receiving aerial fingerling stockings in 2017 and 2018, while funding and mechanical issues with the plane resulted in a shift to stocking fish by horse and backpack in 2020. Subsequently, the number of fish anglers reported catching at Frog Lake increased from two in 2018 to 36 in 2019. Although the number of fish anglers reported catching at Frog Lake decreased to 15 in 2020, the high catch per angler value was the same as 2019. This is an encouraging sign for Frog Lake's fishery. Due to the recent ASB results, CDFW will likely maintain the same stocking allotment at Frog Lake. However, CDFW may stock either RT or LCT into Frog Lake, depending on which species is available at the planned stocking time. In 2020, no RT were available so CDFW stocked LCT instead. As previously mentioned above, Round Top Lake appears to have poor catch rates and little to no angler usage. Therefore, CDFW reduced the allotment to 500 LCT in 2020, in hopes of lowering competition for food and habitat. CDFW will continue to monitor the Round Top Lake fishery and decide on future management practices.

In 2020, anglers using lures at Fourth of July Lake had the highest catch per angler of all three lakes in which fish were reported caught. 2020 was also the first year during which anglers reported using lures at Fourth of July Lake. In 2020, fly anglers at Winnemucca Lake had the second highest catch per angler value of the four lakes. Winnemucca Lake has a lot of open space along the shoreline, with clear and shallow water, allowing anglers good potential to see trout, so fly fishing is a great option. In 2018, 79% of all fish anglers caught from all four lakes were BK. In 2019, 51% of all fish anglers caught were RT and 49% were BK. However, in 2020, only 32% of the total

catch reported by anglers was RT, while 68% of the reported catch were for BK. The shift back to BK likely resulted from CDFW not stocking RT into Frog Lake in 2019. When stocked annually, Frog Lake appears to have a successful put and grow fishery. Future years' of ASB surveys may provide a more accurate representation of the fishery for both Frog and Round Top Lakes. These ASB results will assist with management changes (i.e. adjusted allotments) (**Appendix 1**).

The greatest number of RT anglers caught from Frog Lake were in the 10.0–11.9 in. length class ($n = 9$), followed by 33% ($n = 5$) in the 12.0–13.9 in. length class, indicating growth from the fingerling-sized stockings. Similar to 2018 and 2019, the majority of BK anglers caught in 2020 were under 10.0 in., which may explain why anglers released 95.5% of their catch in 2018, 79.4% in 2019, and 70.4% in 2020. In 2018, anglers kept approximately 67% of RT, which decreased to 5.7% in 2019, and increased to 28.0% in 2020. Most RT anglers caught in 2020 were over 10.0 in., which may explain why anglers released fewer RT when compared with 2019, during which most RT anglers caught were under 10.0 in. Winnemucca and Fourth of July Lakes are self-sustaining fisheries, with no supplemental stockings. All fish anglers caught in 2018 and 2020, and 97% of fish anglers caught in 2019, were less than 14.0 inches. These results may suggest that populations in the self-sustaining Winnemucca and Fourth of July Lakes don't have trophy-sized fish. Furthermore, these results may suggest that fish stocked into Frog and Round Top Lakes may need more time to grow. Trout in Winnemucca and Fourth of July Lakes may be limited in their growth due to population density and biomass, both of which can vary with landscape variables, such as surficial geology, catchment area, and land use (Blann 2000, 2004; Nerbonne and Vondracek 2001; Zimmerman et al. 2003). For a second consecutive year, it appears that anglers are catching larger-sized trout from Frog Lake. The fingerling-sized stocked fish are able to overwinter at Frog Lake and grow to nice, catchable-sized fish.

The primary objective when managing recreational fisheries is often to improve the quality of fishing or optimize human benefit (Pollock et al. 1994; Weithman 1999). In 2020, anglers were satisfied with their overall fishing experience at all lakes in which they caught fish (i.e., excluding Round Top Lake). Anglers were also satisfied with the size of fish they caught at all the lakes surveyed, except Round Top, which had no fish caught for a third consecutive year and Fourth of July Lake (-0.50). Anglers were also satisfied with the number of fish they caught at all the surveyed lakes in which anglers caught fish.

Future ASB data will continue to help inform trends in angler satisfaction related to the size and number of landed trout. The size and number of trout anglers caught at Frog, Winnemucca, and Fourth of July Lakes may have played a large role in the positive overall fishing experience value reported by anglers. However, angler trip satisfaction can also be influenced by factors other than fishing success (McCormick

and Porter 2014). For some anglers, satisfaction with the overall fishing experience may have been due less to the fishing itself, and more to outside factors, such as weather, fishing access, lack of crowds, and scenery.

The number of respondents almost doubled from 14 in 2018 to 25 in 2019, but decreased to 18 in 2020. The fire restrictions and camping bans in the Eldorado National Forest during much of summer and early fall 2020 may have deterred potential anglers. Ideally, the more respondents, the more feedback it provides CDFW on angler success at the fisheries. It is essential CDFW maintain the trend of increasing angler participation in the ASB survey. The goal of increasing angler participation may be accomplished by personal communication around Alpine County. Given that 2018 was the first implementation year of the ASB at the Carson Pass, anglers may still be getting reacquainted with the fisheries and ASB program. Additionally, more anglers are becoming aware of recent fish stockings at Frog and Round Top Lakes, which may help increase angling activity and lead to more ASB respondents.

Recommendations

- When possible, CDFW should continue to encourage anglers to fill out the ASB forms.
- Collect a minimum of five years' worth of ASB data to look at fishery trends over time. Data will help CDFW gather more accurate information on the Carson Pass Trail fishery.
- Continue to stock Frog Lake and Round Top Lake for at least the next five years.

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Appendix 1.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is conducting an evaluation of the fisheries at Frog, Winnemucca, Round Top, and Fourth of July Lakes. We request your help in this evaluation by providing the following information in this survey. Please use this form for one day's fishing at the specific lake by one angler only.

Circle the Lake fished at:

Frog Winnemucca Round Top Fourth of July

Date Fished: _____
mm/dd/yyyy

Primary gear type used (check one):
 Lure Bait Fly

Enter the total number of fish caught and released by species and size class:

Size	Rainbow trout		Brook trout	
	Kept	Released	Kept	Released
Less than 6"				
6"-7.9"				
8"-9.9"				
10"-11.9"				
12"-13.9"				
14"-15.9"				
16"-17.9"				
18"-19.9"				
20-21.9"				
22"-23.9"				
24"-25.9"				
>26"				

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following statements regarding your fishing experience today:

	Least satisfied		Most satisfied	
Overall angling experience today:	-2	-1	+1	+2
Size of fish:	-2	-1	+1	+2
Number of fish:	-2	-1	+1	+2

Please use the back of this form for any additional comments. Thank you for helping us manage and protect California's fisheries.

