State of California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Memorandum

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- From: Amber Mouser Environmental Scientist – Plumas/Sierra County Fisheries North Central Region
- Cc: Region 2 Fish Files

Subject: Fisheries Monitoring in Sierra County – Sierra Buttes.

INTRODUCTION

This memorandum encompasses fisheries monitoring surveys from 2012 through 2019 conducted in northern Sierra County from south of the Lakes Basin Recreation Area to the Sierra Buttes (**Figure 1**). All lakes surveyed in this memorandum are a part of the Yuba River drainage. As directed by the Hatchery Operations EIS/EIR (Jones and Stokes 2010), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is currently evaluating the location and status of stocked and formerly stocked backcountry fisheries. All data gathered as part of this study is incorporated into the High Mountain Lakes database and made available to both federal and state agencies. Data from this memorandum will benefit the Department in future efforts for fish stocking and wild trout management in the North Central Region.

METHODS

Fishery monitoring was completed by gill net survey or by angling survey (Phase One). Standard, 36-meter-long x 1.8-meter-high, six panel variable mesh gill nets (gill net) were set perpendicular to the shoreline via float tube. A single gill net was used in each lake during the day or overnight depending on the lake and recent planting activity. Daytime gill net sets were used to avoid mass mortality of recently planted fish in heavy recreational use waters. Captured fish were measured by Total Length (TL) in millimeters (mm) and weighed in grams. CDFW personnel conducted the fisheries monitoring surveys at Deer Lake (CA Lakes ID 12329), Packer Lake (CA Lakes ID 12343), Lower Salmon Lake (CA Lakes ID 12326), Upper Salmon Lake (CA Lakes ID 12309), Lower Sardine Lake (CA Lakes ID 12358), Upper Sardine Lake (CA Lakes ID 12360), Tamarack Lakes (Lower) (CA Lakes ID 12361), Tamarack Lakes (Upper) (CA Lakes ID 12363), Volcano Lake (CA Lakes ID 12364), and Young America Lake (CA Lakes ID 12366). Waters stocked by aerial fish plants have not been consistently planted over the last decade due to a variety of reasons such as drought, lack of appropriately sized fish, and airplane mechanical issues.



Figure 1. Map of Sierra County fisheries survey area (between Lakes Basin Recreation Area and the Sierra Buttes). All lakes surveyed in this memorandum are outlined in dark blue.

DEER LAKE (12329)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Deer Lake sits at an elevation of 7,103 feet and has a surface area of 29.4 acres (**Figure 2**). It is an artificial lake that sits just below the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). The lake is approximately 22.4 meters deep with no observed aquatic plant growth. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of rock and cobble. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the east side of the lake and drains to Sawmill Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest and meadows. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 4.3 air miles northwest of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a 3.3 mile hiking trail from the southeast via the Deer Lake trailhead that begins at Sierra County Road Sie-621 (USDA DLT), or by a 1.7 mile hiking trail from the northeast via the Upper Salmon Lake trailhead that begins at Sierra County Road Sie-720 (USDA USLT), or by a steep road (12E69) leading down from the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). The lake is approximately 0.2 air miles due east of the PCT.



Figure 2. Deer Lake looking west (CDFW 2019).

RESULTS

On June 29, 2016 and July 16, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Deer Lake. On June 29, 2016, one gill net was set during the daytime for a total of 2.0 hours and returned one rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) measuring 313mm TL and nine speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus*), ranging from 74-93mm with a 84mm mean TL (**Figure 3**). On July 16, 2019, one gill net was set near the outlet during the daytime for a total of 2.0 hours. The lake depth was approximately 8.9 meters at the deep end of the net set (36 meters from shore). The net returned three brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) (**Figures 4 and 5**) ranging from 180-470mm with a 341mm mean TL and three speckled dace ranging from 83-92mm with a 88mm mean TL (**Figure 6**). Deer Lake has been planted with rainbow trout consistently since 1952, with the exception of 1959 when it was planted once with brook trout. The lake continues to receive an allotment of fingerling-sized rainbow trout via aerial stocking. Due to the continued presence of brook trout observed during the 2019 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 3. Deer Lake length-frequency histogram for rainbow trout (RT) and speckled dace (DC) from June 29, 2016.



Figure 4. Deer Lake length-frequency histogram for brook trout (BK) and speckled dace (DC) from July 16, 2019.



Figure 5. Deer Lake brook trout (CDFW 2019).



Figure 6. Deer Lake speckled dace (CDFW 2019).

PACKER LAKE (12343)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Packer Lake sits at an elevation of 6,227 feet and has a surface area of 11.0 acres (**Figure 7**). It is an artificial lake that sits approximately 0.6 air miles to the east of the PCT. Accurate depth measurements were difficult to acquire due to dense aquatic plant growth. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of mud, sand, cobble, and some rock. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the northeast side of the lake and drains to Packer Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek, and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest with some meadow attributes such as lakeside willow growth. The lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 3.4 air miles northwest of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by paved road from Sierra County Road Sie-621 (a.k.a., Packer lake Road) and continuing on Packer Lake Road.



Figure 7. Packer Lake looking west (CDFW 2019).

RESULTS

On July 18, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Packer Lake. One gill net was set during the daytime for a total of 2.0 hours. The lake depth was approximately 2.2 meters at the deep end of the net set (36 meters from shore). The net returned three brook trout ranging from 131-281mm with a 197mm mean TL and 19 speckled dace ranging from 80-105mm with a 90mm mean TL (**Figures 8 and 9**). Packer Lake was planted with both rainbow trout and brook trout consistently from 1950 to 2009, when brook trout plants were discontinued. The lake continues to receive an allotment of catchable-sized rainbow trout. Due to the size classes of brook trout present during the 2019 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 8. Packer Lake length-frequency histogram of brook trout (BK) and speckled dace (DC) from July 16, 2019.



Figure 9. Packer Lake speckled dace (top) and brook trout (bottom) (CDFW 2019).

LOWER SALMON LAKE (12326)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Lower Salmon Lake sits at an elevation of 6,375 feet and has a surface area of 25.2 acres. It is an artificial lake that sits the furthest downstream of three associated lakes, including Horse Lake and Upper Salmon Lake. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of silt, woody debris, and aquatic vegetation (Shaffer 2005). A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the east side of the lake and drains to Salmon Creek, which ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest with some meadow attributes, such as willow growth. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 3.4 air miles northwest of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a closed Forest Service road from Sierra County road Sie-720 (a.k.a., Salmon Lake Road).

RESULTS

On July 11, 2017, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Lower Salmon Lake. One gill net was set overnight for a total of 15.4 hours. The net returned seven brook trout ranging from 180-337mm with a 274mm mean TL, 29 speckled dace, and 55 rainbow trout ranging from 89-405mm with a 154mm mean TL (**Figure 10**). Lower Salmon Lake was planted with both rainbow trout and brook trout consistently from 1930 to 1989, when brook trout plants were discontinued. Brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) were planted from 1934 through 1936, however, none were observed in 2017. The lake continues to receive an allotment of fingerling-sized rainbow trout via aerial stocking. Due to the size classes of brook trout present during the 2017 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 10. Lower Salmon Lake length-frequency histogram of brook trout (BK) and rainbow trout (RT) from July 11, 2017.

UPPER SALMON LAKE (12309)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Upper Salmon Lake sits at an elevation of 6,503 feet and has a surface area of 39.3 acres (**Figure 11**). It is an artificial lake that sits between three associated lakes, including Horse Lake and Lower Salmon Lake. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of mud and rock with no observed aquatic plant growth. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the southeast side of the lake and drains to Lower Salmon Lake, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest with some meadow attributes, such as willow growth. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 4.0 air miles northwest of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by Sierra County road Sie-720 (a.k.a., Salmon Lake Road).



Figure 11. Upper Salmon Lake looking west (CDFW 2019).

On July 17, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Upper Salmon Lake. One gill net was set during the daytime for a total of 5.3 hours. The lake depth was approximately eight meters at the deep end of the net set (36 meters from shore). The net returned seven brook trout ranging from 226-305mm with a 285mm mean TL and five speckled dace ranging from 80-87mm with an 83mm mean TL (**Figures 12 and 13**). Upper Salmon Lake was planted with both rainbow trout and brook trout consistently from 1930 to 2009, when brook trout plants were discontinued. Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki henshawi*) were planted once in 1975. The lake continues to receive an allotment of catchable-sized rainbow trout. Due to the continued presence of brook trout observed during the 2019 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 12. Upper Salmon Lake lengthfrequency histogram of brook trout (BK) and speckled dace (DC) from July 17, 2019.



Figure 13. Upper Salmon Lake brook trout (CDFW 2019).

LOWER SARDINE LAKE (12358)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Lower Sardine Lake sits at an elevation of 5,764 feet and has a surface area of 37.2 acres (**Figure 14**). It is an artificial lake that sits the furthest downstream of three associated lakes, including Young America Lake and Upper Sardine Lake. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of rock and cobble with no observed aquatic plant growth. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the northeast side of the lake and drains to Sand Pond, an artificial pond that sits immediately downstream of Lower Sardine Lake. This drains to Sardine Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 1.6 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by Sardine Lake Road, off Packer Lake Road.



Figure 14. Lower Sardine Lake looking east (CDFW 2019).

On July 17, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Lower Sardine Lake. One gill net was set near the outlet during the daytime for a total of 4.0 hours. The lake depth was approximately seven meters at the deep end of the net set (36 meters from shore). The net returned two rainbow trout ranging from 290-330mm with a 310mm mean TL, five speckled dace ranging from 90-122mm with a 99mm mean TL, and 13 Lahontan redside (*Richardsonius egregious*) ranging from 87-140mm with a 114mm mean TL (**Figures 15, 16, and 17**). Lower Sardine Lake was planted with both rainbow trout and brook trout consistently from 1950 to 2009, when brook trout plants were discontinued. Brown trout were planted from 1954 through 1959, however, none were observed in 2019. The lake continues to receive an allotment of catchable-sized rainbow trout. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 15. Lower Sardine Lake length-frequency histogram of rainbow trout (RT), Lahontan redside (LRS), and speckled dace (DC) from July 17, 2019.



Figure 16. Lower Sardine Lake speckled dace (CDFW 2019).



Figure 17. Lower Sardine Lake Lahontan redside (CDFW 2019).

UPPER SARDINE LAKE (12360)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Upper Sardine Lake sits at an elevation of 5,997 feet and has a surface area of 57.7 acres (**Figure 18**). It is an artificial lake created in 1885 (Lutes 2017) that sits between three associated lakes, including Young America Lake and Lower Sardine Lake. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of rock and cobble with no observed aquatic plant growth. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the northeast side of the lake and drains to Lower Sardine Lake, then Sand Pond, then to Sardine Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 2.1 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by Sardine Lake Road, off Packer Lake Road.



Figure 18. Upper Sardine Lake looking southwest (CDFW 2019).

On July 17, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Upper Sardine Lake. One gill net was set near the outlet during the daytime for a total of 5.0 hours. The net returned seven brook trout ranging from 205-333mm with a 269mm mean TL and 11 speckled dace ranging from 74-96mm with a 86mm mean TL (**Figures 19 and 20**). Upper Sardine Lake was planted with both rainbow trout and brook trout consistently from 1950 to 1977, when brook trout plants were discontinued. Lahontan cutthroat trout were planted once in 1973. The lake continues to receive an allotment of fingerling-sized rainbow trout via aerial stocking. Due to the continued presence of brook trout observed during the 2019 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock rainbow trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 19. Upper Sardine Lake length-frequency histogram of brook trout (BK) and speckled dace (DC) from July 17, 2019.



Figure 20. Upper Sardine Lake brook trout (CDFW 2019).

TAMARACK LAKES (Lower) (12361)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Tamarack Lakes (Lower) sits at an elevation of 6,716 feet and has a surface area of 2.5 acres (**Figure 21**). It is a natural lake that sits on the downstream side of the associated Tamarack Lakes (Upper), which is located to the south. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of silt, rock, and woody debris. An intermittent stream channel comes out of an outlet on the northeast side of the lake and drains to Dugan Pond. This drains to Packer Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest with some meadow attributes, such as willow growth. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 3.3 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a four-wheel drive road that is part of the Tamarack Connection Trail (USDA TCT), off Packer Lake Road.



Figure 21. Tamarack Lakes (Lower) looking south (CDFW 2012).

RESULTS

On September 12, 2012, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Tamarack Lakes (Lower). One gill net was set overnight for a total of 13.0 hours. The net returned two brook trout ranging from 225-272mm with a 249mm mean TL (**Figures 22 and 23**). Tamarack Lakes (Lower) was planted almost exclusively with brook trout from 1951 through 2000, with the exception of a single rainbow trout plant in 1986 and a single brown trout plant in 1994. All fish planting was discontinued in this lake after the year 2000. Due to the continued presence of brook trout observed during the 2012 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on the historic records and this fish survey, Tamarack Lakes (Lower) will be managed as a self-sustaining brook trout fishery.



Figure 22. Tamarack Lakes (Lower) lengthfrequency histogram of brook trout (BK) from September 12, 2012.



Figure 23. Tamarack Lakes (Lower) brook trout (CDFW 2012).

TAMARACK LAKES (Upper) (12363)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Tamarack Lakes (Upper) sits at an elevation of 6,752 feet and has a surface area of 3.4 acres (**Figure 24**). It is a natural lake that sits on the upstream side of the associated Tamarack Lakes (Lower), which is located to the north. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of silt, rock, and woody debris. An intermittent stream channel comes out of an outlet on the north side of the lake and drains to Tamarack Lakes (Lower). This drains to Packer Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek, and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest with some meadow attributes, such as willow growth. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 3.4 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a four-wheel drive road that is part of the Tamarack Connection Trail (USDA TCT), off Packer Lake Road.



Figure 24. Tamarack Lakes (Upper) looking southeast (CDFW 2012).

On September 12, 2012, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Tamarack Lakes (Upper). One gill net was set overnight for a total of 13.0 hours. The net returned 14 brook trout ranging from 105-410mm with a 264mm mean TL (**Figures 25 and 26**). Tamarack Lakes (Upper) was planted almost exclusively with brook trout from 1950 through 2000, with the exception of three years of rainbow trout plants which occurred in 1984, 1985, and 1987. All fish planting was discontinued in this lake after the year 2000. Due to the numbers and size classes of brook trout present during the 2012 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on the historic records and this fish survey, Tamarack Lakes (Upper) will be managed as a self-sustaining brook trout fishery.



Figure 25. Tamarack Lakes (Upper) lengthfrequency histogram of brook trout (BK) from September 12, 2012.



Figure 26. Tamarack Lakes (Upper) brook trout (CDFW 2012).

VOLCANO LAKE (12364)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Volcano Lake sits at an elevation of 6,359 feet and has a surface area of 5.0 acres (**Figure 27**). It is a natural lake that sits just below the Sierra Buttes. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of rock, cobble, and woody debris with no observed aquatic plant growth. An intermittent stream channel comes out of an outlet on the northeast side of the lake and drains to Salmon Creek, which ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest. The lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 1.8 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a four-wheel drive road off Packer Lake Road.



Figure 27. Volcano Lake looking southwest (CDFW 2019).

RESULTS

On July 3, 2012, July 5, 2012, and July 25, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Volcano Lake. On July 3, 2012 and July 5, 2012 the lake was sampled by two days of phase one surveys. Four anglers using lures captured 37 golden trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss aguabonita*) during 16 hours of angling, amounting to a 2.3 fish per hour catch per unit of effort (CPUE). The golden trout ranged from 155-260mm with a 201mm mean TL (**Figure 28**). On July 25, 2019, one gill net was set overnight for a total of 18.0 hours. The net returned 95 golden trout ranging from 91-178mm with a 123mm mean TL (**Figure 29**). Volcano Lake was planted with brook trout almost exclusively from 1950 through 1999, after which brook trout plants were discontinued. Rainbow trout were planted once in 1963. Golden trout plants began in 2007 (**Figures 30 and 31**). The lake continues to receive an allotment of fingerling-sized golden trout via aerial stocking. Based on the historic records and the most recent fish survey, Volcano Lake does not contain a self-sustaining fishery. CDFW will continue fish stocking and collect data in subsequent years to determine future management direction.



Figure 28. Volcano Lake length-frequency histogram of golden trout (GT) from July 2012.



Figure 29. Volcano Lake length-frequency histogram of golden trout (GT) from July 25, 2019.



Figure 30. Volcano Lake golden trout (CDFW 2012).



Figure 31. Volcano Lake golden trout (CDFW 2012).

YOUNG AMERICA LAKE (12366)

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Young America Lake sits at an elevation of 7,252 feet and has a surface area of 6.1 acres (**Figure 32**). It is a natural lake that sits the furthest upstream of three associated lakes, including Upper Sardine Lake and Lower Sardine Lake. The littoral zone habitat consists primarily of rock and cobble with no observed aquatic plant growth. A stream channel comes out of a dammed outlet on the north side of the lake and drains to Upper Sardine Lake, then Lower Sardine Lake, then Sand Pond, then to Sardine Creek, which drains to Salmon Creek and ultimately drains to the North Yuba River. The terrestrial habitat consists of mixed conifer forest. This lake is located in the Tahoe National Forest, approximately 3.3 air miles west of Bassetts, California. It can be accessed by a four-wheel drive road that is part of the Sierra Buttes Trail (USDA SBT) off the PCT, followed by a steep hike downhill or by way of the Tamarack Connection Trail (USDA TCT) followed by a cross-country hike.



Figure 32. Young America Lake looking northeast (CDFW 2012).

RESULTS

On September 7, 2012 and September 25, 2019, CDFW personnel conducted fisheries monitoring surveys at Young America Lake. On September 7, 2012 the lake was sampled by one day of phase one survey. Two anglers using lures captured one brook trout during two hours of angling, amounting to a 0.5 fish per hour CPUE. The brook trout was 220mm TL and weighed 115 grams. On September 25, 2019, one gill net was set overnight for a total of 12.0 hours. The net returned 14 brook trout ranging from 125-252mm with a 190mm mean TL and one golden trout-rainbow trout hybrid that was 131mm TL (**Figure 33**). Young America Lake was planted with brook trout almost exclusively from 1951 through 1964, after which brook trout plants were discontinued. Rainbow trout were planted once in 1963. Lahontan cutthroat trout were planted once in 1988. Golden trout plants began in 1965. The lake continues to receive an allotment of fingerling-sized golden trout via aerial stocking. Due to the numbers and size classes of brook trout present during the 2019 survey, CDFW believes brook trout will likely persist in the lake. Based on these survey results, CDFW will continue to stock golden

trout in order to continue to provide a diverse fishery. CDFW recommends increasing the annual allotment to adjust for fingerling predation loss and infrequent aerial plants. Data will be collected in subsequent years to determine future management direction. Additional information from the 2019 Young America Lake survey can be found in a separate memorandum titled *Visual Encounter Survey and Gill Net set at Young America Lake, Sierra County* (Lockhart 2019).



Figure 33. Young America Lake length-frequency histogram of brook trout (BK) and golden trout-rainbow trout hybrid (GTxRT) from September 25, 2019.

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