

Char: catch-and-release needed?

Char are still a concern for regional fish biologist Dennis Ableson, who has for several years been trying to find ways to protect them from overfishing.

"We've been spending more time in the field. We now know more about them than we did (several) years ago."

But, he said, the char fishery doesn't look any better for the additional knowledge.

"None of the information we had three years ago has been contradicted in any way."

Past information he and his fellow biologists gathered indicated that char stocks were dwindling. Lakes which once were touted as having trophy char have been over-fished to the point the populations are endangered, if not wiped out.

"We have far, far too many lakes in our region where those fish don't exist any more."

Char, according to his

past interviews, are a late-maturing fish — in some lakes not breeding until their 10th or even 15th year. Harvesting the trophy-sized fish is similar to killing off the best breeding stock on a farm.

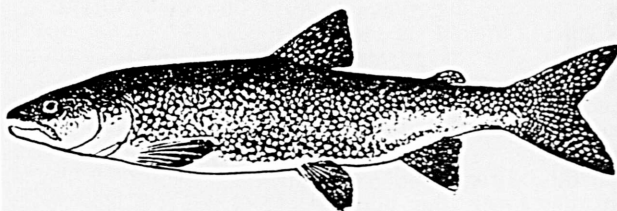
Ableson has often gone on record as supporting a catch-and-release program for them as is the case for steelhead.

A case in point is Arctic Lake which has had a catch-and-release regulation for char for many years. He said even after more than five years the lake has not regenerated despite a total closure of char fishing.

Several lakes in this region have Dolly Varden (another char species) release regulations in force as well.

"It's not necessary to have an in-depth knowledge of every single lake in your region, because with every lake we look at, our char are behaving exactly the same. Our char populations are behaving exactly the

ANGLER'S FILE



Lake Trout

LATIN NAME: *Salvelinus namaycush*.

OTHER NAMES: Char, laker and Mackinaw trout.

CHARACTERISTICS: These slow-maturing fish are prized because of their size. Steady angling pressures and over-fishing are decreasing their populations to the point catch-and-release programs are being used in many lakes.

WHERE FOUND: Most large lakes within this district.

SIZE: Some caught in commercially in nets have been reported as more than 100 pounds but the accepted angling record is 65 pounds.

DIET: Insects and small fish.

COMMENTS: Deep lines are needed to catch these in mid-summer.

same as they are everywhere else in North America — going down."

Some hope is in sight, however.

"What we have got, in a positive light, is a growing recognition on a provincial perspective, of the value of these fish and the value of management limitations biologists have when dealing with these fish. The principle tool is management. There are no known enhancement techniques within the (char) waters themselves."

He said unlike trout or salmon, char can't be easily restocked. Any programs are costly and long-term.

"It's going to take 10 years before the fish (a stocked char) gets large enough for anglers to catch it."

This means any provincial restocking program would last 10 years. For trout, anglers can see results within two years.

He said all three regions of northern B.C. — Peace, Omineca and Skeena — have been co-operating to develop a char fishery strategy.

They have sought information from char researchers across Canada. No place in North America has had success with char stock regeneration programs, he said.

"The time is coming when a 20-pound char will be a trophy of a lifetime."

In earlier interviews Ableson referred to lakes in the Northwest Territories where all char angling is catch-and-release.



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