

## **Pike management in southern end of Lake Coeur d'Alene takes next step**

*By Jon Firehammer, Fisheries Research Biologist*

For the last three years, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe's Fisheries Program has been paying anglers to turn in northern pike harvested in the southern end of Lake Coeur d'Alene to provide information that would allow Program biologists to more effectively manage pike in this region of the lake. Pike are a non-native, invasive fish illegally introduced into the Coeur d'Alene Basin back in the 1970's and have been shown to be a serious threat to native cutthroat trout populations due to their highly predatory nature. The reward program was just one of the measures that the Tribe's Fisheries Program has initiated since 2015 as part of an overall strategy to minimize the impact of pike on native trout recovery in the lake.

The reward program was terminated in September of this year, and we'd like to thank all the anglers who participated in this venture. The information that was gained with their help proved instrumental for the ongoing development of management strategies in the lower end of the lake. For one, we found that pike move extensively across the southern end; some fish were found to move all the way from Benewah Lake to north of the bike bridge in Hidden Lake. This suggests that efforts to control the pike population must address the entire southern end because reducing pike numbers in one location, such as Chatcolet Lake, could readily be offset by mobile pike moving in from nearby areas like Benewah Lake. We also found that the pike population in the southern end may total upwards of 2500 fish in any given year. The estimated size of this population is much greater than the pike population found in Windy Bay, where annual suppression efforts have already been instituted, and accordingly much more effort will be required in the southern end to effectively control this population.

One strategy for increasing the efficiency of management efforts in the southern end would be to identify where pike congregate to spawn in the spring. Spawning pike prefer shallow water areas with extensive vegetation for laying their eggs. Though this type of habitat is widespread in the southern end of the lake, the identification of localized, core spawning centers, if they exist, would help focus suppression efforts. Thus, this fall the Fisheries Program is planning on surgically implanting radio-tags into twenty-five pike across the southern end of the lake, and tracking these fish over the winter and spring to find out where they go. Radio-tags work by emitting a certain frequency, and by using an antenna that is hooked up to a receiver you can 'tune in' to this frequency to determine where it is coming from (similar to tuning your car receiver to a radio-station that is in the vicinity). As you get closer to the tag, the signal gets louder or clearer so that you are able to pinpoint its location. By using this technology, the Fisheries Program will be able to evaluate whether many of the tagged pike are found concentrated in a few locations in the spring suggesting spawning centers.

Because the additional information obtained from this radio-tagging study will greatly help the Tribe's Fisheries Program with its pike management endeavors, we are again asking anglers for their help. If you happen to harvest a radio-tagged pike, you can retrieve the tag and mail the tag back to the Fisheries Program for a \$25 reward. Our program can then re-implant the tag into a different pike. A tagged pike can be recognized by a wire coming out of its belly and trailing along its underside. This is part of the tag so please don't clip it thinking that it is fishing line because it will render the tag inoperable. When you are cleaning the fish, just pull the main part of the tag out of the body cavity and the wire will slip right through the body wall. A radio-tagged pike should also have another external colored tag inserted near its top fin with a readable number on it. Even if you don't happen to harvest the fish but release it back into the lake, write down this number and give us a call. Knowing where this fish was caught will also provide useful information on its movements. All of this information will be

included on placards placed at Heyburn state park headquarters and at boat ramps in the southern end of the lake for a reminder.