

Pygmy Whitefish Research in the Williston Watershed

The Peace/Williston Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (PFWWCP) has been collecting information for a number of years on a lesser-known fish species inhabiting the Williston watershed. Very little information is known about the biology and life history of pygmy whitefish. Fish biologists with the PFWWCP discovered this small fish in one of the local lakes (Dina Lake #1) near Mackenzie, B.C. in 1998. Pygmy whitefish are generally viewed as glacial relicts inhabiting cold, deep lakes. "These fish are very small (<14 cm in length) and can easily escape most lake assessment sampling gear," suggests fish biologist Randy Zemlak. "The pygmy whitefish is rarely seen by anglers, except in the stomach contents of larger game fish species".

The PFWWCP launched an intensive study on this fish species with Dr. Don McPhail (Department of Zoology, UBC). "Ultimately we want to know the distribution of this species, but first we have to fill in some of the information gaps," said Zemlak. After a two-year study, program biologists discovered many new life history traits of this species and this information has recently been submitted to an internationally recognized scientific research journal. Currently, pygmy whitefish are known to inhabit only 18 different lakes within the watershed. Program biologists are now verifying their most northern and southern distribution within the Williston watershed. The PFWWCP is a cooperative venture of BC Hydro and the provincial fish and

wildlife management agencies. For more information about pygmy whitefish, visit the PFWWCP website at www.bchydro.com/pwcp/



Photo: Ame Langston