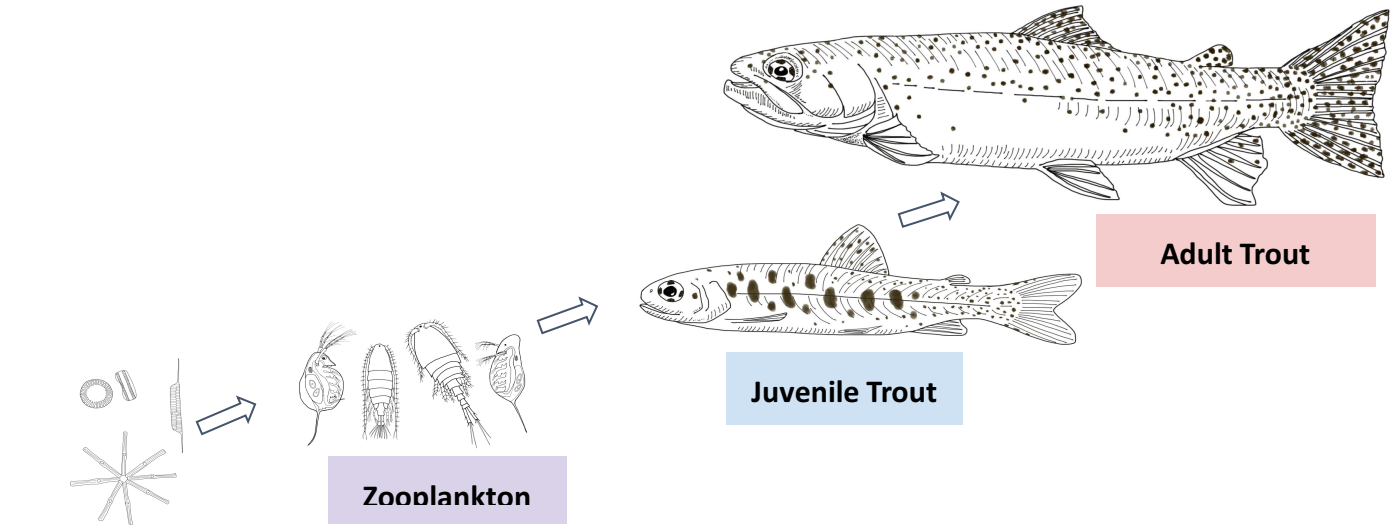
Flathead Lake Zooplankton

Scientists at the Flathead Lake Biological Station study the plankton living in the lake. Plankton are defined as small and microscopic organisms that drift in water. Scientists typically separate them into two groups: phytoplankton and zooplankton. Phytoplankton use photosynthesis to produce their own food just like plants do on land. Zooplankton are small animals. A simple food chain in Flathead Lake would be: Phytoplankton are eaten by zooplankton. Zooplankton are eaten by small fish. Small fish are eaten by large fish.



A nice overview of zooplankton can be found here: https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/invertebrates/zooplankton/

Data are provided from monthly sampling of zooplankton from the Flathead Lake monitoring program at the Flathead Lake Biological Station over several years. These data include three different kinds of zooplankton found in Flathead Lake. Cladocerans range in size from .2mm to 6.0mm long, these are the largest zooplankton. Copepods range in size from 1.0mm to 2.0 mm long. Rotifers are very small and are usually 0.1mm to .05mm long.

What do you notice about the zooplankton in Flathead Lake? Are they more abundant at different times of the year. Do their numbers change from year to year? What do you think this tells you about the health of Flathead Lake?