

# LAKE AND RESERVOIR HYDROACOUSTIC ASSESSMENTS

William M. Pate  
Research Associate

Andrew J. Treble  
Aquatic Research Data Analyst

Adam G. Hansen, Ph.D.  
Aquatic Research Scientist



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Aquatic Research Section  
317 West Prospect Road  
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Tracy Davis, Hatchery Technician, Fish Research Hatchery  
Andrew Perkins, Hatchery Technician, Fish Research Hatchery

Alexandria Austermann, Librarian

Prepared by: 

William M. Pate, Research Associate

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

George J. Schisler, Aquatic Wildlife Research Chief

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*The results of the research investigations contained in this report represent work of the authors and may or may not have been implemented as Parks and Wildlife policy by the Director or the Wildlife Commission.*

## INTRODUCTION

Hydroacoustic surveys enable rapid estimation of the depth-distribution, density and abundance of pelagic fish species such as kokanee (*Oncorhynchus nerka*; Brandt 1996). Mobile hydroacoustics is a quantitative method for sampling the water column of a large lake or reservoir that allows for greater spatial coverage than passive methods such as pelagic gill netting or active methods such as midwater trawling (Hubert 1996). However, some pelagic netting is required for target verification and assessment of key species. Hydroacoustic surveys are generally most effective in this regard when few pelagic species are present. Colorado has many coldwater reservoirs containing relatively simple pelagic fish assemblages comprised mostly of salmonid sport fish that lend themselves well to this sampling method. These waters are often large, deep, and have little structure to interfere with the transducer signal (Beauchamp et al. 2009).

Colorado Parks and Wildlife began using hydroacoustic sampling techniques in 1994, primarily as a tool for monitoring key kokanee fisheries and broodstocks that supply eggs to support statewide stocking efforts (Martinez 1994). Kokanee waters, such as Lake Granby and Blue Mesa Reservoir, provide upwards of \$30 million in economic benefit to the state annually (Johnson et al. 2009). Hydroacoustic surveys conducted on these and other waters are necessary for monitoring the health of these valuable fisheries and identifying when additional management interventions or research might be required (Johnson and Martinez 2000). Here, we report on results from standard hydroacoustic surveys conducted in 2020.

## METHODS

Hydroacoustic surveys were conducted during the week surrounding the new moon in August and September 2020 on five Colorado Reservoirs. Timing the surveys to coincide with the new moon is advantageous to hydroacoustic sampling because kokanee naturally disperse on the thermocline during dark nights (Parkinson et al. 1994; Beauchamp et al. 1997; Hardiman et al. 2004). This behavior facilitates target tracking and elimination of false targets during post-processing of raw data. August surveys included Blue Mesa (8/18/2020), Vallecito (8/20/20), and Williams Fork (8/17/2020) Reservoirs while September surveys included Blue Mesa (9/16/2020), Granby (9/14/2020), and Wolford Mountain (9/15/2020) Reservoirs. Blue Mesa Reservoir was surveyed on two occasions to quantify the difference in abundance of kokanee

before and hypothetically after most mature individuals staging to spawn in Sapinero or Cebolla basins exited the reservoir and were migrating upstream. By conducting surveys during these two periods, it may be possible to better predict run size and egg take at the Roaring Judy Hatchery.

Nocturnal hydroacoustic surveys were completed using a Hydroacoustics Technology, Inc. (HTI; Seattle, Washington) model 241 digital split-beam echosounder operating at 200 kHz. This unit was linked to a laptop computer running HTI's Digital Echo Processing software (DEP) and corresponding real-time target tracking algorithm. A global positioning sensor (Lowrance HDS5, Tulsa, Oklahoma) was also attached to the laptop computer to provide high-resolution boat and transect locations. The HTI transducer was attached to an HTI model 624 tow fin and deployed on the starboard side of the boat approximately 0.5-1.0 m below the surface. A constant boat speed of 5 km/h, ping rate of 5 pings/sec and a pulse length of 0.4 ms was used during data acquisition. Proper system calibration was confirmed prior to every survey using a tungsten-carbide sphere.

After completion of each survey, transect data were scrutinized in Echoscape (HTI, Seattle, Washington) and erroneous targets were removed. Bottom tracks were also edited if necessary. Fish targets were considered false if moving erratically (multiple echoes and directional changes in the track) or if different parts of the same track were simultaneously recorded at different depths. Other targets were scrutinized if there were large fluctuations in target strength ( $\geq 10$  dB) across the track. Once data were considered clean, the file was exported from Echoscape to an Access database. Two files were extracted from Access, which included the fish target (.FISH) and bottom (.BOT) files and both were saved as tab delimited text files for import into separate analysis software. This process was repeated for each transect.

The remainder of post-processing occurred in LabView 2011 (National Instruments, Austin, Texas) modules developed by Kevin Rogers in the HydroAcoustics Kit (HAcK; Rogers in preparation). The first step was to run the InterpretFish\_2020.vi module. This module prompted the user for the previously mentioned fish target and bottom files for the desired transect. The output included transect- and depth-specific (every 5 m depth strata) prey and predator density estimates and corresponding length frequency distributions (5 cm bins) of fish targets observed across all depths in the water column. The length cutoff for parsing predators from prey was 42.5 cm. Target strengths of tracked fish were converted to lengths using the equation developed by Love (1971). Martinez (1995) showed that fish  $\geq 42.5$  cm total length or  $\geq$

-33dB were piscivorous and primarily Lake Trout in key kokanee waters. Next, mean lake-wide density estimates were calculated using the SummarizeLake\_4.0.vi module. Lake-wide length-frequency estimates were calculated using the PlotLake\_2000.vi module. Both modules report estimates from depths  $\geq 2$  m. Unlike other waters, analyses for Blue Mesa Reservoir incorporated the RETRO SUMMARY 2020.vi module to ensure output format was consistent with historical survey results. This module has been used in conjunction with kokanee egg take from the following year in an effort to better predict future egg take trends at the Roaring Judy Hatchery. Results from the retro-summary are not used to estimate predator and prey densities. See Rogers (in preparation) for a complete description and underpinnings to each of these modules.

## **RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

### **Blue Mesa Reservoir**

Eleven standard transects (total length = 18,241 m) were surveyed on August 18, 2020, including six in Sapinero and five in the Cebolla basins. Water surface elevation during the survey was 7,482.3 ft and conditions were calm. The average lake-wide population estimate for all fish from these transects was 308,093 (Table 1). Appendix A shows detailed results from each transect. The corresponding estimated number of prey/acre (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) was  $35.649 \pm 13.462$  and predators/acre was  $1.042 \pm 0.513$ . We observed a slight increase in 20-40 cm fish (potential spawning adult kokanee) targets from 2019 (80,000) to 2020 (107,456; Figure 1). Conversely, the estimated number of 10-20 cm fish (immature) targets was largely similar between 2019 (97,894) and 2020 (97,106; Figure 2). The retro-summary provided an estimate of 262,484 prey targets and 6,519 predator targets after applying the same 425 mm cutoff and after only considering fish inhabiting depths  $\geq 10$  m (Figure 3). After parsing the average lake-wide population estimate into different 5 cm size-bins, frequency was highest in the 5-10 cm size-range at  $77,109 \pm 38,888$  fish and second highest within 10-15 cm at  $56,359 \pm 27,363$  fish (Figure 4). Lastly, fish were most concentrated within 20-30 m depths when integrated across transects (Figure 5).

The same eleven transects (total length = 19,816 m) were surveyed on September 16, 2020. The surface elevation during the survey was 7,474.2 ft. Appendix B shows details of each transect. The estimated number of prey/acre (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) for September was  $24.146 \pm 5.209$  and predators/acre was  $0.746 \pm 0.406$ . The lake-wide estimate of all fish targets was 208,784

(Table 1). The retro-summary demonstrated a decrease in the lake-wide abundance of prey fish from 262,484 individuals in August to 198,461 in September (difference of 64,023 fish). Similarly, the estimated abundance of predators decreased by 1,456 individuals to a total of 5,063 fish in September. Length-frequency was again highest in the 5-10 cm size-range at 52,408  $\pm$  11,823 followed by 10-15 cm with 44,185  $\pm$  11,020 (Figure 7). Similar to the August survey, fish were most concentrated within 20-30 m depths across transects and basins (Figure 8). August-September comparisons with regard to predicting kokanee run size and egg take are ongoing.

Table 1. Lake-wide predator and prey density estimates with total abundance for all fish for Hydroacoustic surveys completed in 2020. Surface elevation was at the time of sampling and surface acres represents the total when at full pool.

Water Name	Sampling Date	Surface Acres	Surface Elevation (ft)	Prey/Acre	Predators/Acre	Lake-wide Abundance
Blue Mesa Reservoir	8/18/2020	9,180	7,482.3	35.649	1.042	308,093
Blue Mesa Reservoir	9/16/2020	9,180	7,474.2	24.146	0.746	208,784
Lake Granby	9/14/2020	7,260	8,271.3	13.139	0.960	98,948
Vallecito Reservoir	8/20/2020	2,720	7,640.8	7.576	0.556	19,827
Williams Fork Reservoir	8/17/2020	1,860	7,805.8	15.208	0.903	27,371
Wolford Mountain Reservoir	9/15/2020	1,550	7,484.2	55.675	2.516	91,696

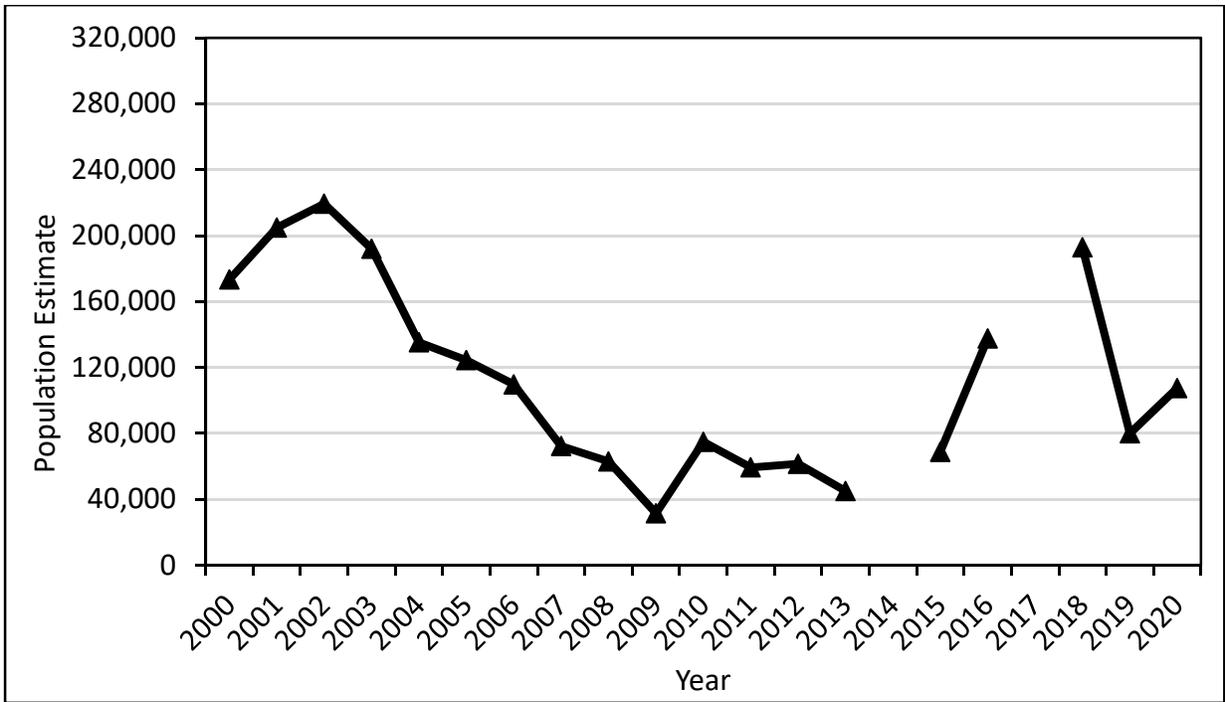


Figure 1. Estimated population size of 20-40 cm fish targets (sum over 25-40 cm size-bins and depths from HAcK output) from eleven transects acquired on August 18, 2020 in the Sapinero and Cebolla basins compared to estimates from previous years. Target strengths in decibels were converted to fish length using the equation developed by Love (1971).

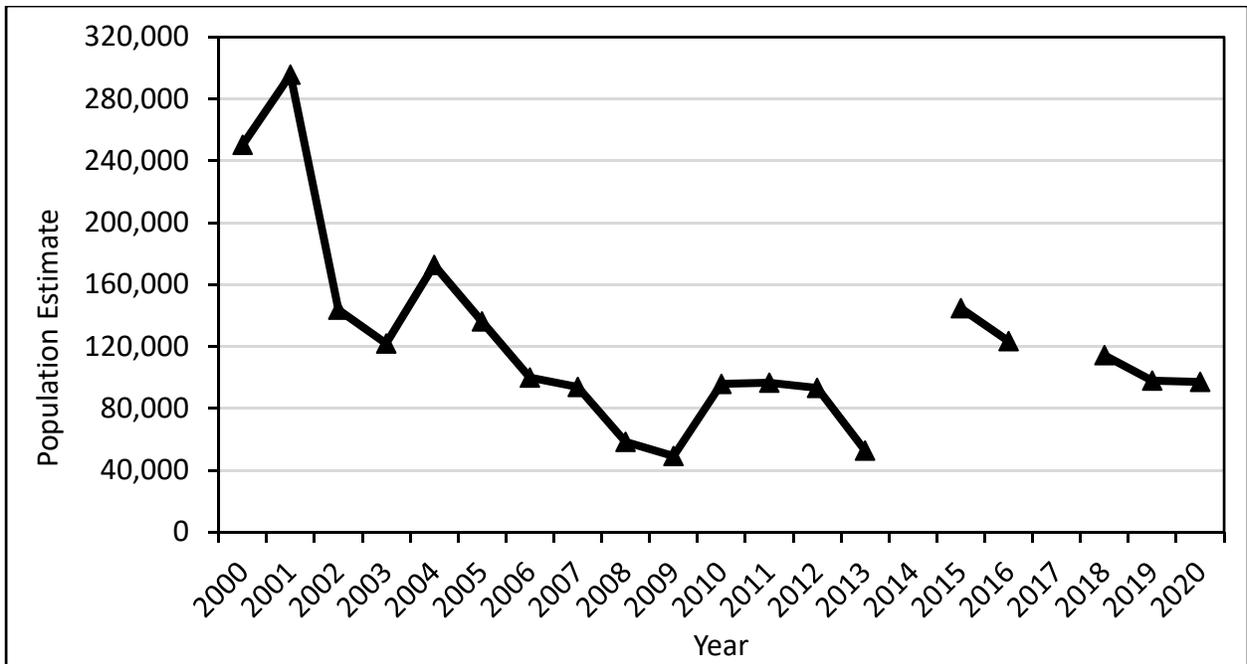


Figure 2. Estimated population size of 10-20 cm targets (sum over 15-20 cm size-bins and depths from HAcK output) from eleven transects acquired on August 18, 2020 in the Sapinero and Cebolla basins compared to estimates from previous years. Target strengths in decibels were converted to fish length using the equation developed by Love (1971).

BLUE MESA ▼	Analysis:HAck Output:2020:Blue Mesa:August:			
SURVEY DATE		August 18 2020		
This VI designed to provide Pat with reporting format consistent with 1994-97 data				
	Number Prey	Grams Prey	Number Predato	Grams Predator
<b>PER CUBIC METER</b>	(based on weighted strata estimates)		(425 mm cutoff)	
2-10 Meters	0.000034	0.000852	0.000006	0.012415
Below 10 Meters	0.000616	0.057392	0.000015	0.041217
<b>LAKEWIDE ABUNDANCE</b> (analysis based on 5 m strata)				
2-10 Meters	6755	180765	1309	2708823
10-20 Meters	28400	1463366	0	0
Below 20 Meters	234085	23003028	6519	17571039
Below 10 Meters	262484	24466394	6519	17571039

Figure 3. Estimated predator (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm total length) and prey (fish  $< 425$  mm) abundance in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on August 18, 2020. Results were determined using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit Retro Summary 2020.vi) and raw data using a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder.

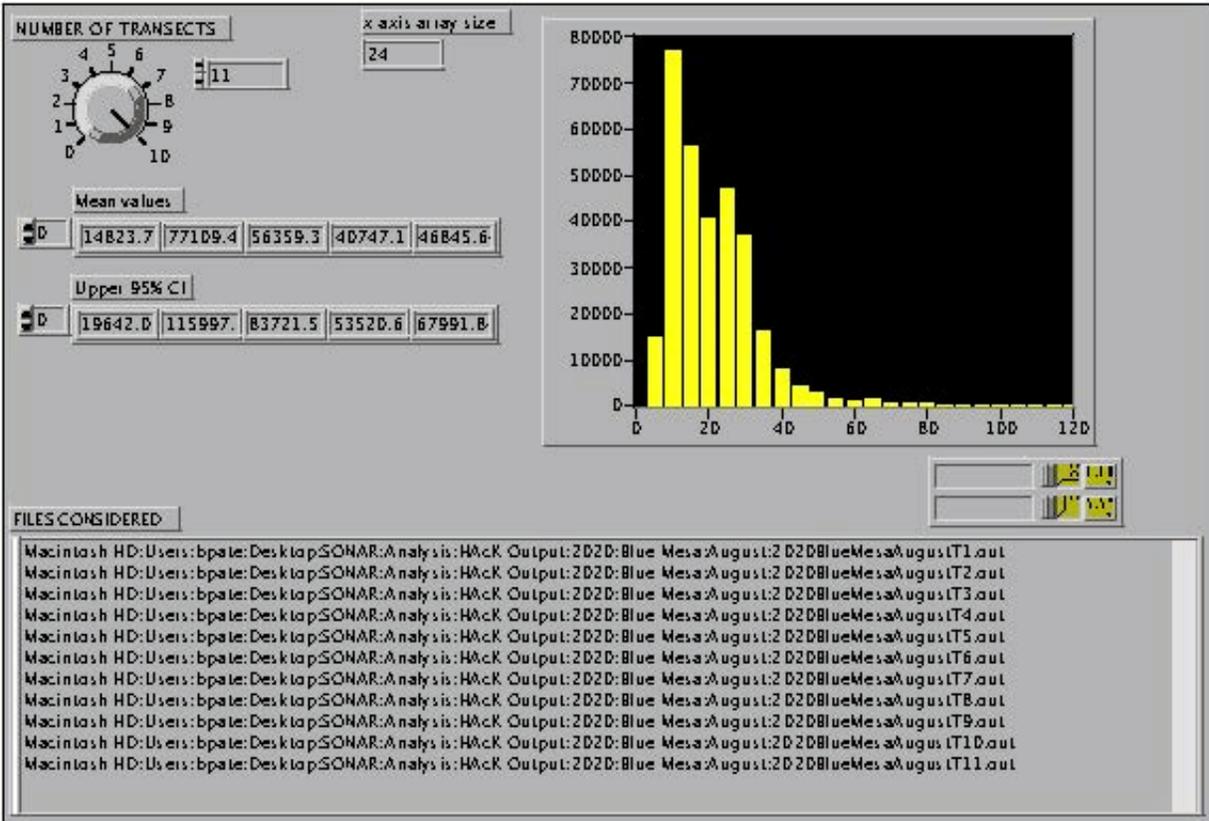


Figure 4. Mean abundance by fish length in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on August 18, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

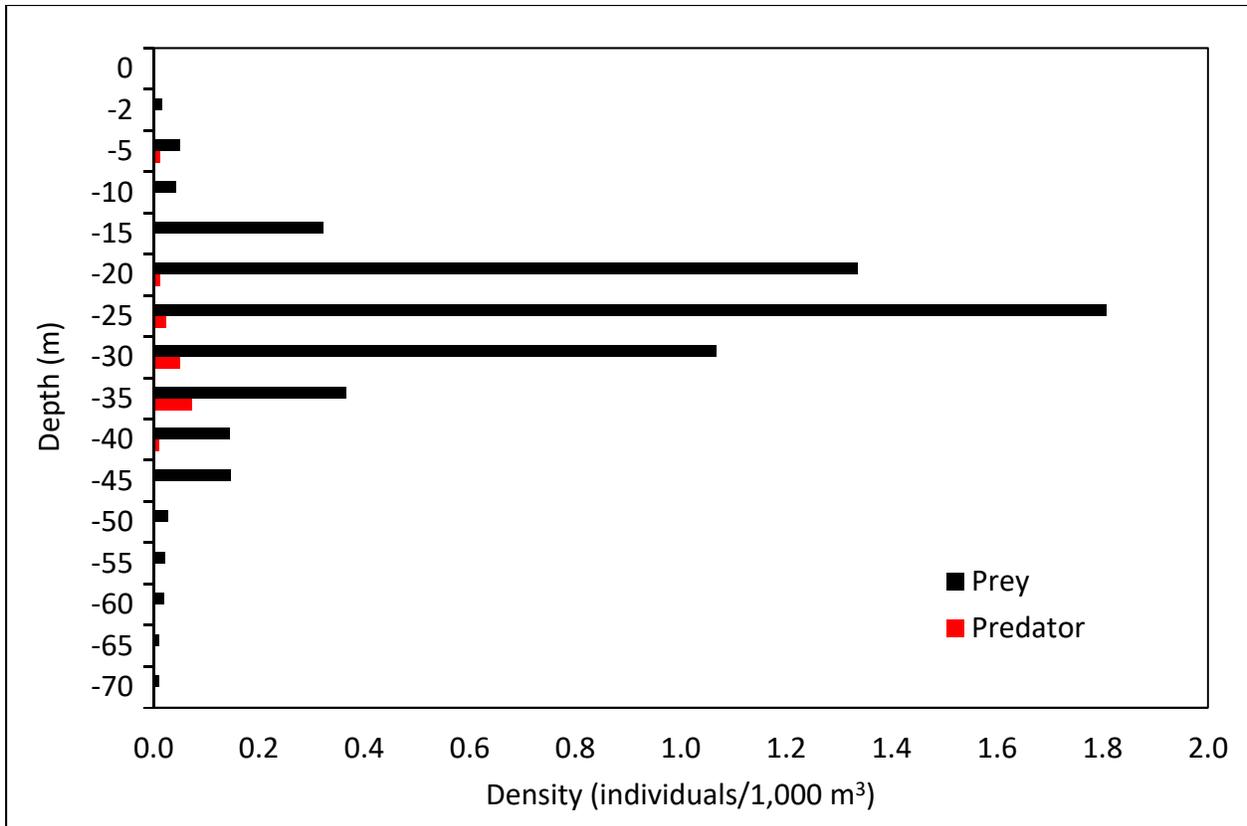


Figure 5. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on August 18, 2020 in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq -10$  to  $< -15$  m).

BLUE MESA ▼	Analysis:HAck Output:2020:Blue Mesa:September:			
SURVEY DATE		September 16, 2020		
This VI designed to provide Pat with reporting format consistent with 1994-97 data				
	Number Prey	Grams Prey	Number Predator	Grams Predator
<b>PER CUBIC METER</b>	(based on weighted strata estimates)		(425 mm cutoff)	
2-10 Meters	0.000023	0.002776	0.000006	0.042146
Below 10 Meters	0.000466	0.042893	0.000012	0.250620
<b>LAKEWIDE ABUNDANCE</b> (analysis based on 5 m strata)				
2-10 Meters	4909	605670	1309	9195446
10-20 Meters	29650	3039753	229	129579
Below 20 Meters	168811	15245777	4834	10671071
Below 10 Meters	198461	18285530	5063	10684029

Figure 6. Estimated (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm total length) and prey (fish  $< 425$  mm) abundance in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on September 16, 2020. Results were determined using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit Retro Summary 2020.vi) and raw data using a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder.

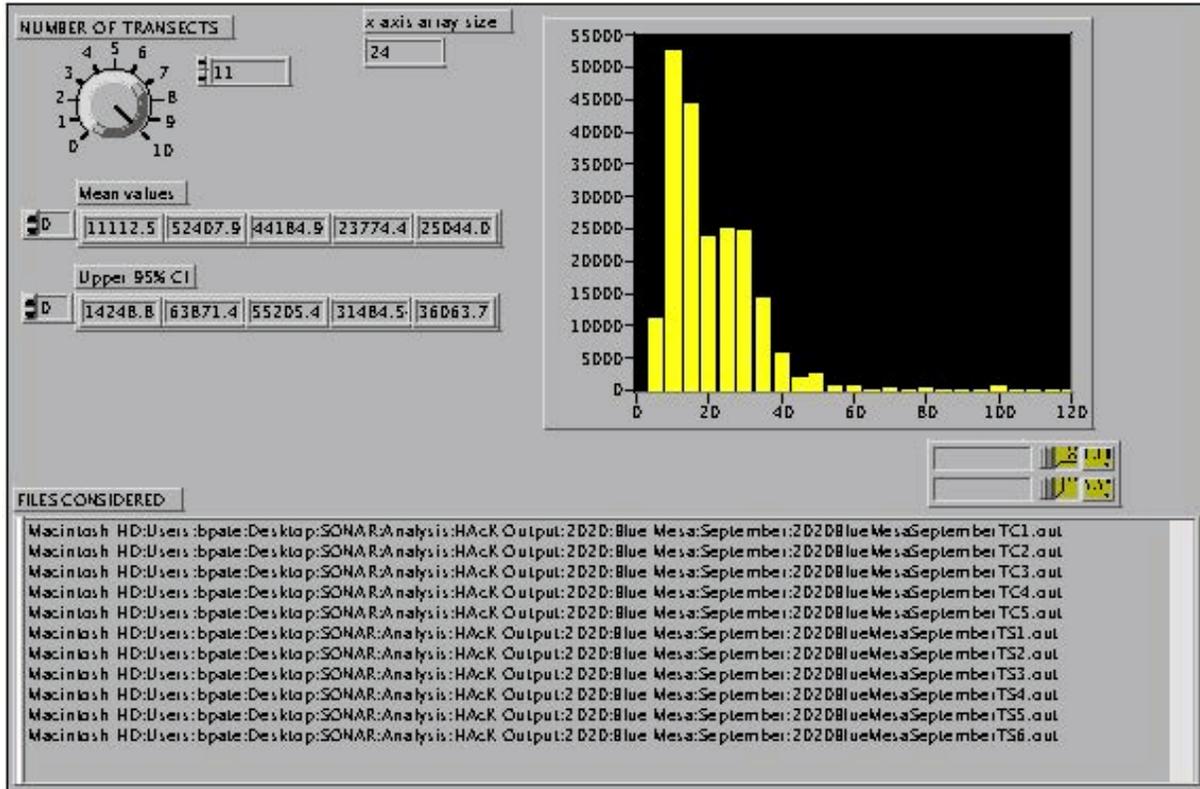


Figure 7. Mean abundance by fish length in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on September 16, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

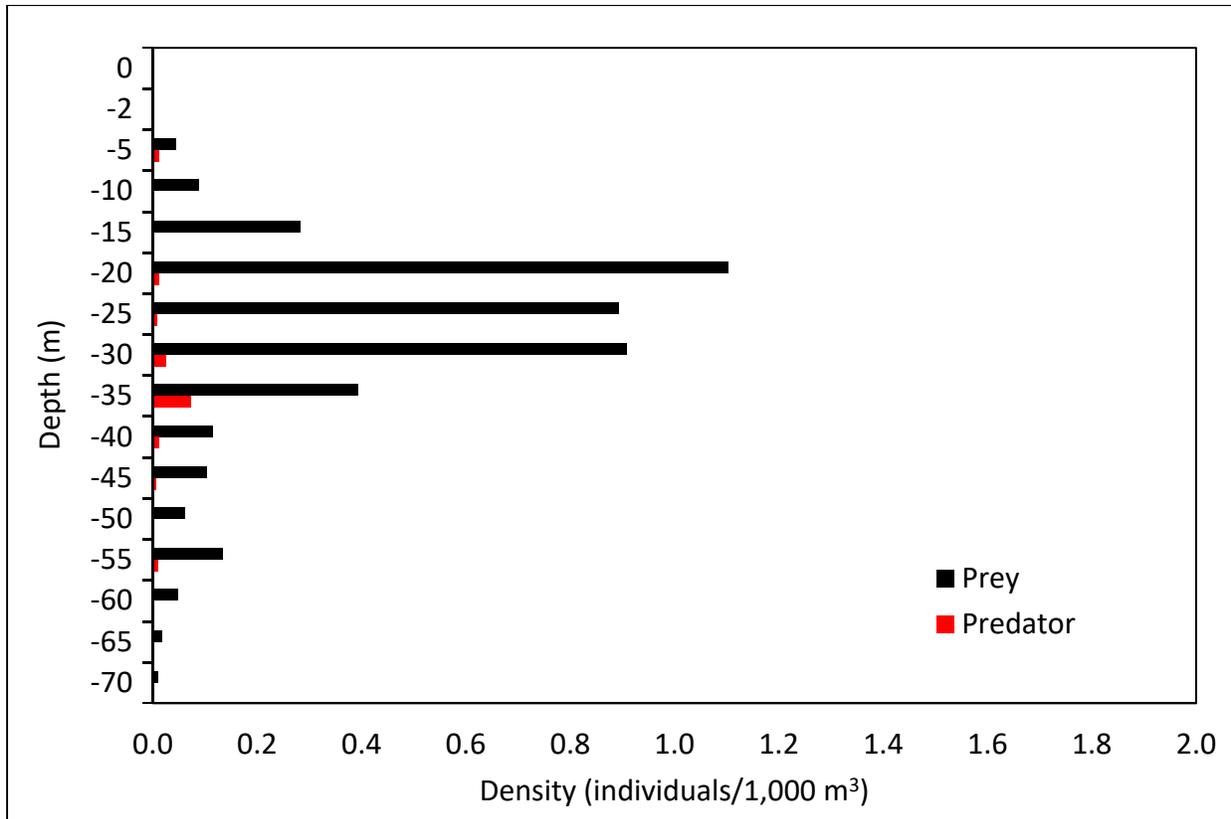


Figure 8. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on September 16, 2020 in Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq -10$  to  $< -15$  m).

## Lake Granby

There were ten transects (total length = 14,689 m) surveyed on September 14, 2020. The surface elevation during the survey was 8,271.3 ft. Appendix C shows results from each transect in detail. Length-frequency (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) was highest in the 5-10 cm size class at  $22,702 \pm 7,302$  followed by 15-20 cm at  $30,276 \pm 4,670$  fish (Figure 9). These two categories were followed closely by 10-15 cm, 25-30 cm, and then 20-25 cm. The highest density of prey was at 35-40 m depths followed by 25-30 m then 30-35 m (Figure 10). The highest predator density was observed in 25-30 m depths. The average number of prey/acre was  $13.139 \pm 3.768$  fish and predators/acre was  $0.960 \pm 0.494$ . The lake-wide abundance of all fish was estimated at 98,948 (Table 1).

When comparing estimates of fish density in Blue Mesa Reservoir and Lake Granby from the same month (September), Blue Mesa Reservoir exhibited a greater density (by 11.007/acre) of prey-sized fish <42.5 cm, but slightly fewer (by 0.214/acre) predator-sized fish >42.5 cm. In addition, the estimated total prey biomass in Lake Granby ( $10.189 \pm 3.812$  MT) was far less than Blue Mesa Reservoir ( $18.806 \pm 7.277$  MT). The depth-distribution of fish in Granby also differed from Blue Mesa Reservoir. Fish were distributed more evenly across depths in Granby, including depths >20 m which were likely predominately Lake Trout.

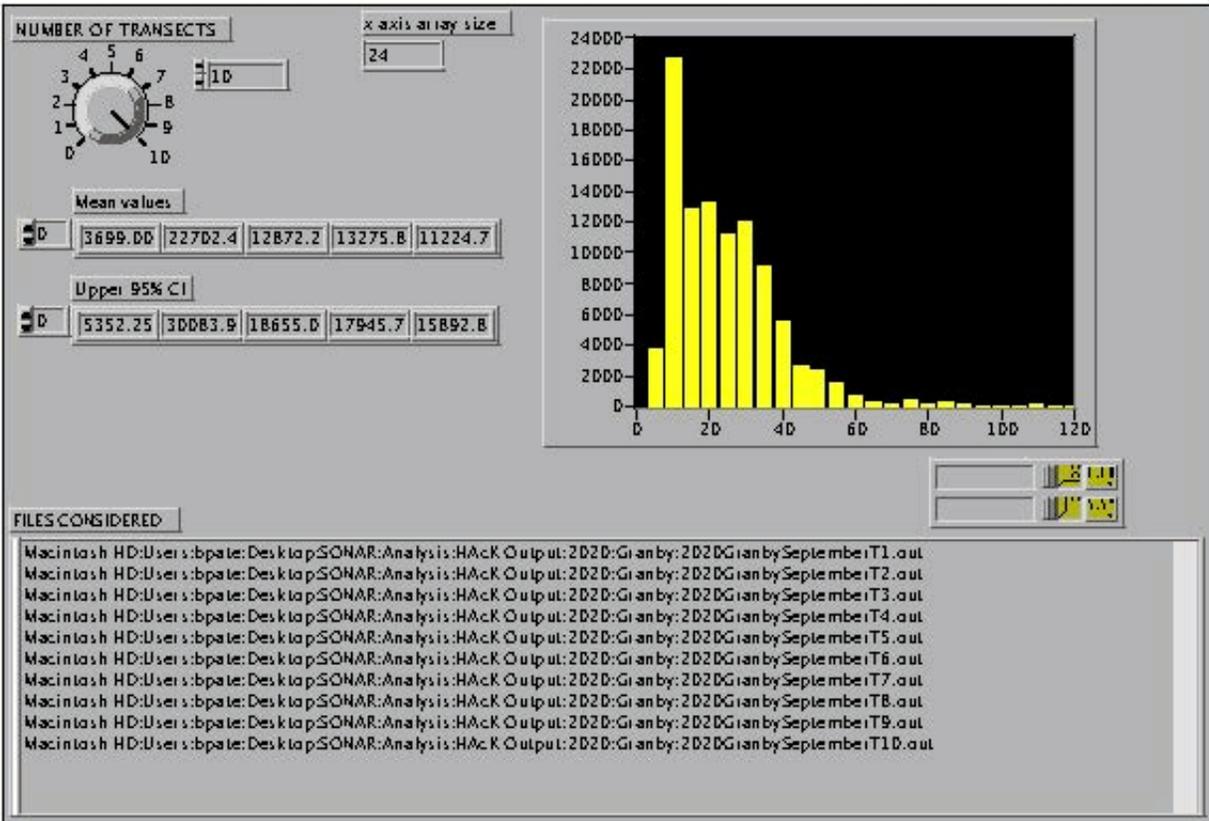


Figure 9. Mean abundance by fish length for Lake Granby surveyed on September 14, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

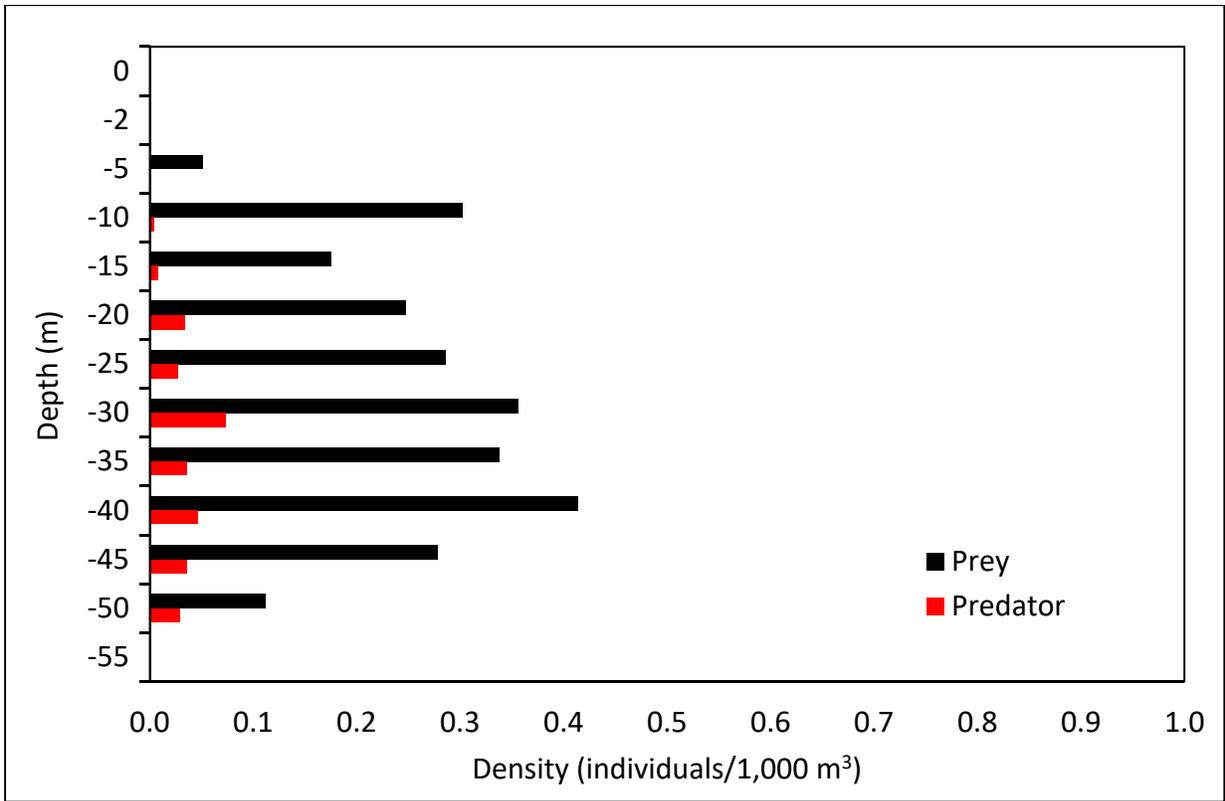


Figure 10. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq$ 425 mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on September 14, 2020 in Lake Granby. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq$  -10 to < -15 m).

## Vallecito Reservoir

There were five transects (total length = 6,877 m) surveyed on August 20, 2020. The surface elevation during the survey was 7,640.8 ft. Appendix D shows results from each transect in detail. Length-frequency (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) was highest in the 10-15 cm size class at  $8,780 \pm 8,585$  fish followed by 5-10 cm at  $5,665 \pm 5,225$  (Figure 11). There were  $<1,000$  fish per 5 cm bin at sizes  $\geq 25$  cm. The estimate for the 15-20 cm size bin was  $1,715 \pm 1,188$ . The highest density of prey was observed within 10-15 m depths followed by 15-20 m and then 5-10 m (Figure 12). The highest predator density was observed within 2-5 m depths. The average number of prey/acre was estimated at  $7.576 \pm 7.168$  and predators/acre was  $0.556 \pm 0.712$ . Total fish abundance was 19,827 (Table 1). Transect 5 was added in an attempt to increase sample size and survey deeper water. However, no part of the reservoir surveyed was deeper than 20 m.

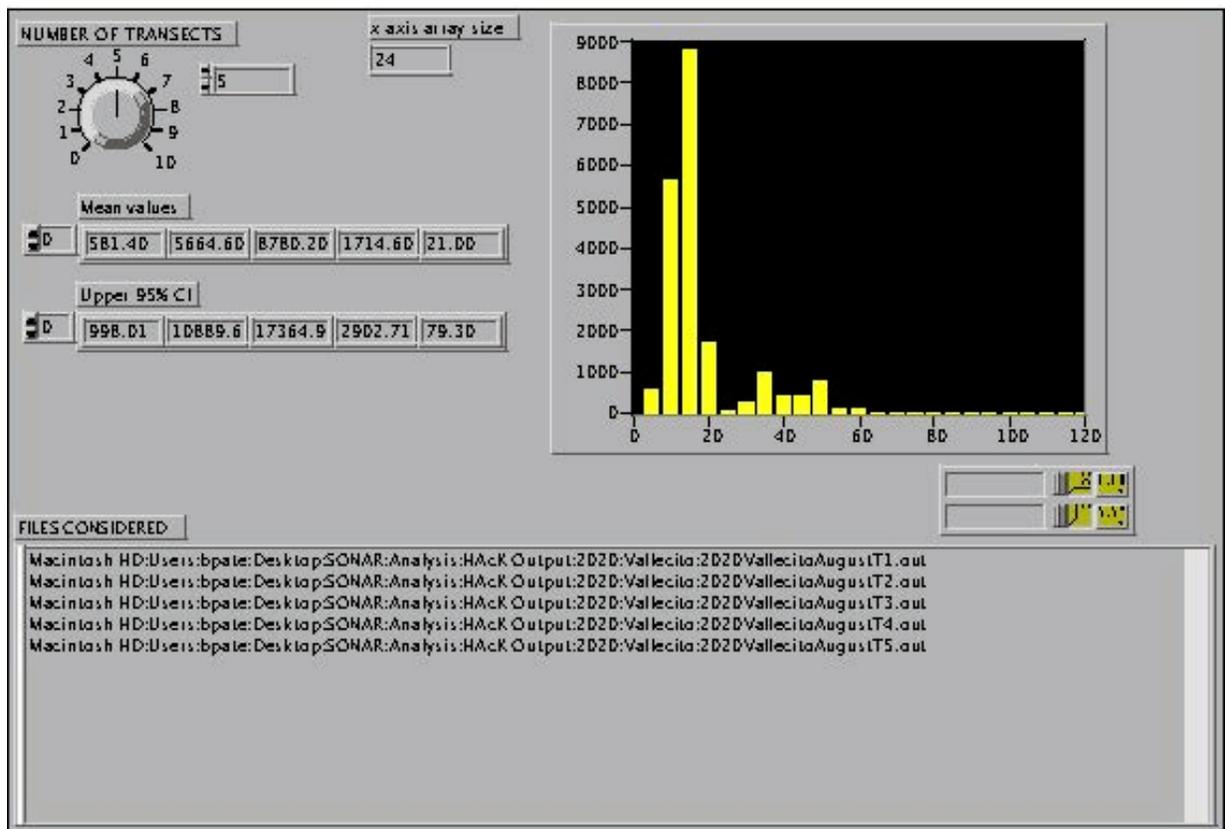


Figure 11. Mean abundance by fish length for Vallecito Reservoir surveyed on August 20, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

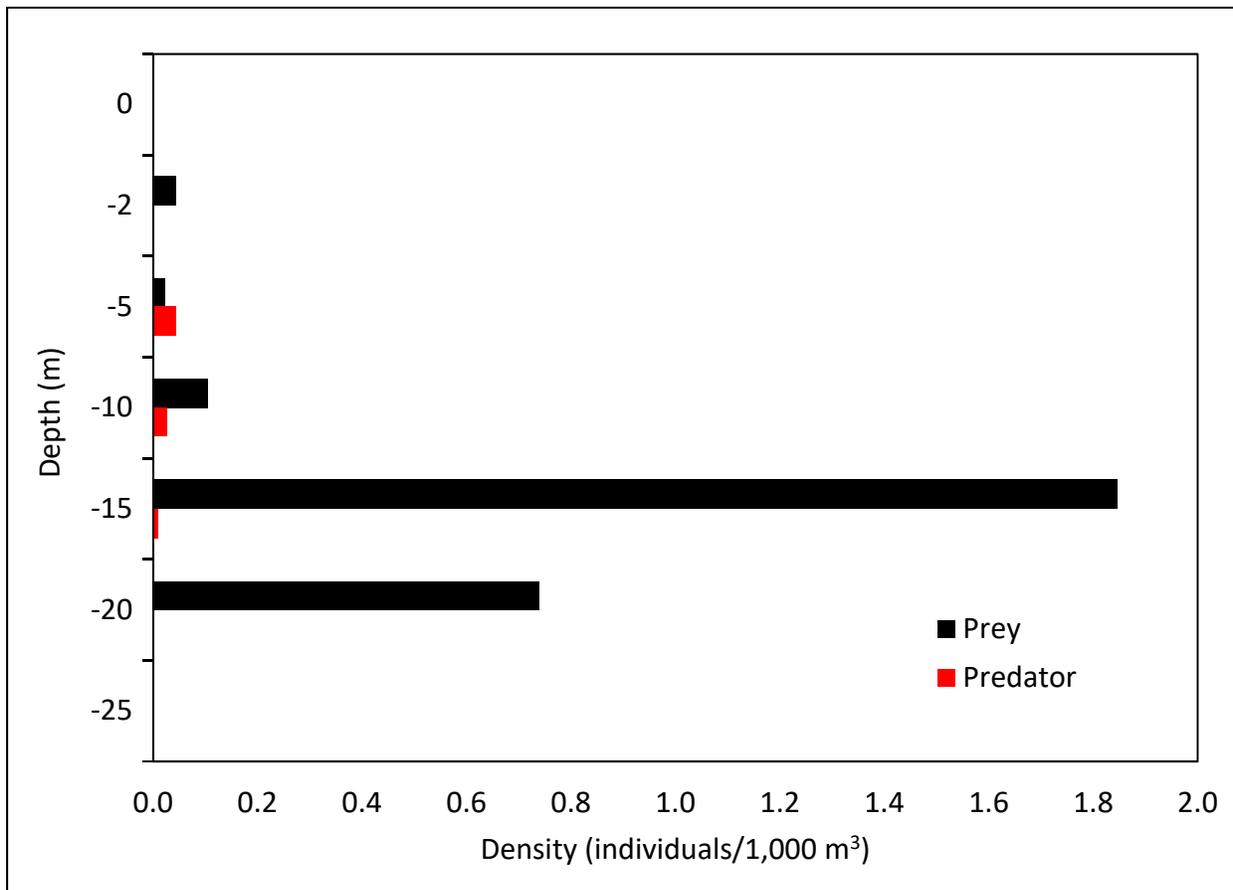


Figure 12. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on August 20, 2020 in Vallecito Reservoir. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq -10$  to  $< -15$  m).

## Williams Fork Reservoir

There were only two transects (total length = 6,877 m) surveyed on August 17, 2020 in Williams Fork Reservoir. The surface elevation during the survey was 7,805.8 ft. Appendix E shows results from each transect in detail. Length-frequency (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) shows a typical right skewed graph, and abundance was highest for the 5-10 cm size class at  $6,592 \pm 36,746$  fish followed by 10-15 cm targets at  $4,826 \pm 27,687$  (Figure 13). The highest density of prey was observed within 15-20 m depths followed by 20-25 m then 10-15 m. The highest predator density was observed within 25-30 m depths. The average number of prey/acre was  $15.208 \pm 55.119$  and predators/acre was  $0.903 \pm 0.260$ . Total fish abundance was estimated at 27,371 (Table 1). It should be noted that these very large confidence intervals are indicative of a large standard deviation between the two transects in this survey.

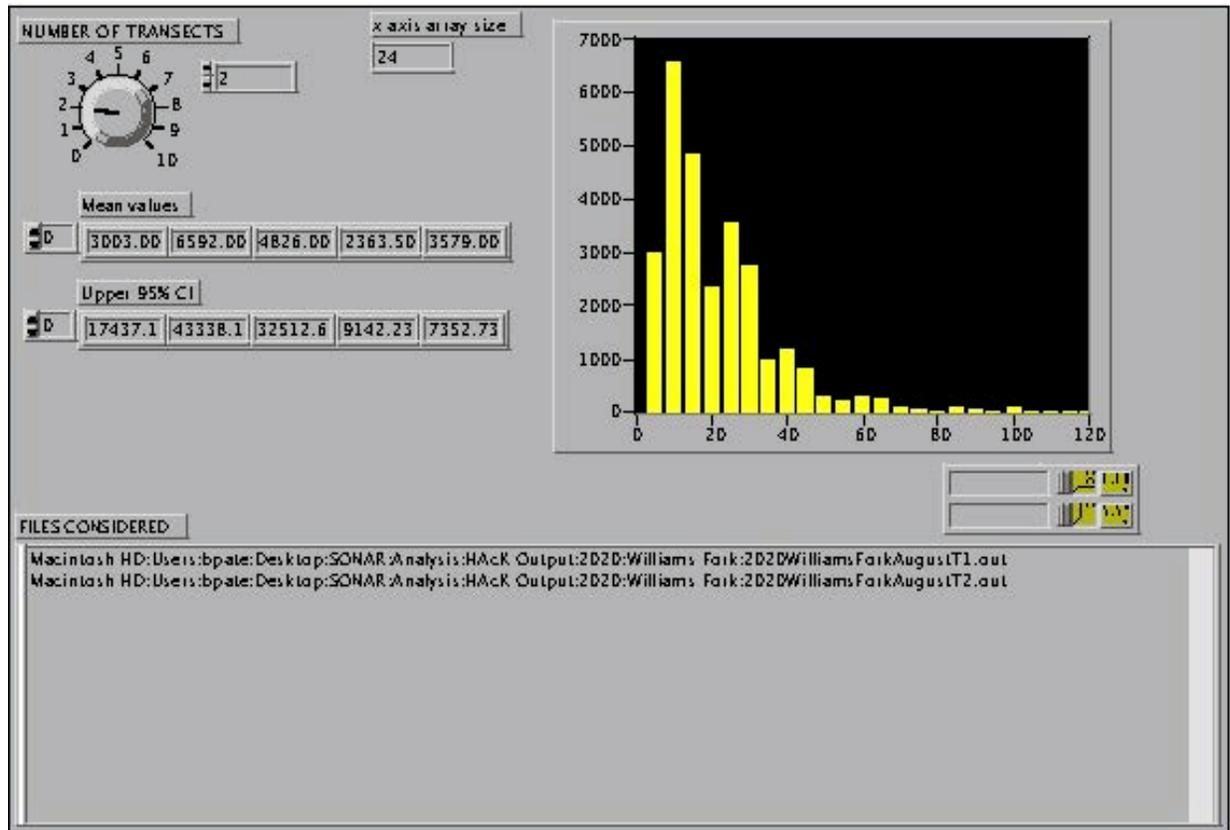


Figure 13. Mean abundance by fish length for Williams Fork Reservoir surveyed on August 17, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

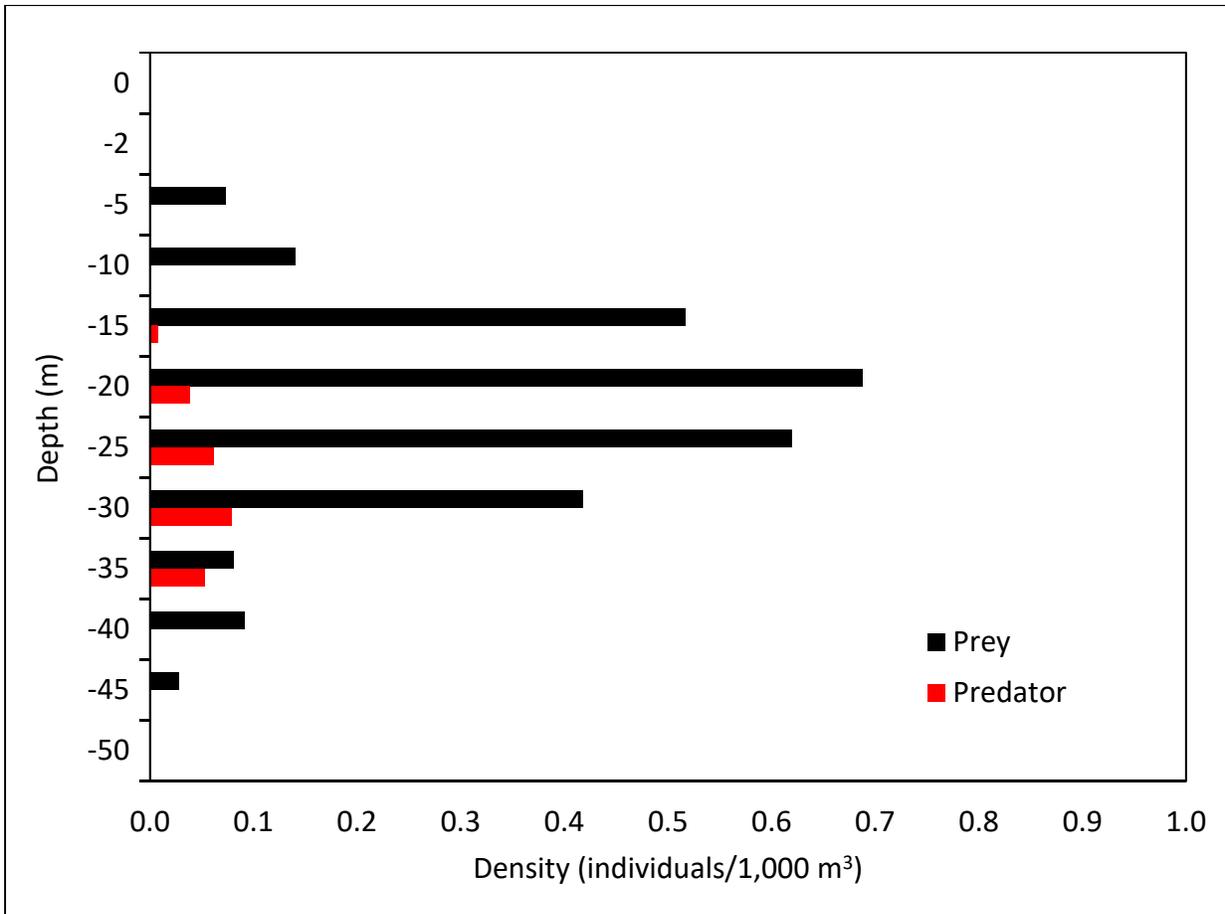


Figure 14. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq 425$  mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on August 17, 2020 in Williams Fork Reservoir. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq -10$  to  $< -15$  m).

## Wolford Mountain Reservoir

There were five transects (total length = 6,101 m) surveyed on September 15, 2020. The surface elevation during the survey was 7,484.2 ft. Appendix F shows results from each transect in detail. Length-frequency (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) was highest in the 5-10 cm size class with  $23,086 \pm 22,335$  fish followed by 30-35 cm fish at  $11,923 \pm 7,102$ , 20-25 cm fish at  $11,817 \pm 10,210$ , and 25-30 cm fish at  $11,760 \pm 4,330$  (Figure 15). All other groupings contained an estimate of  $<10,000$  fish. The highest density of prey was within 10-15 m depths followed by 5-10 m then 2-5 m (Figure 16). The highest predator density was observed within 10-15 m depths. The average number of prey/acre was estimated at  $55.675 \pm 34.289$  fish and predators/acre was  $2.516 \pm 2.881$ . Total fish abundance was 91,696 (Table 1). Even though confidence intervals were large, Wolford Mountain Reservoir had the greatest estimated abundance of prey/acre.

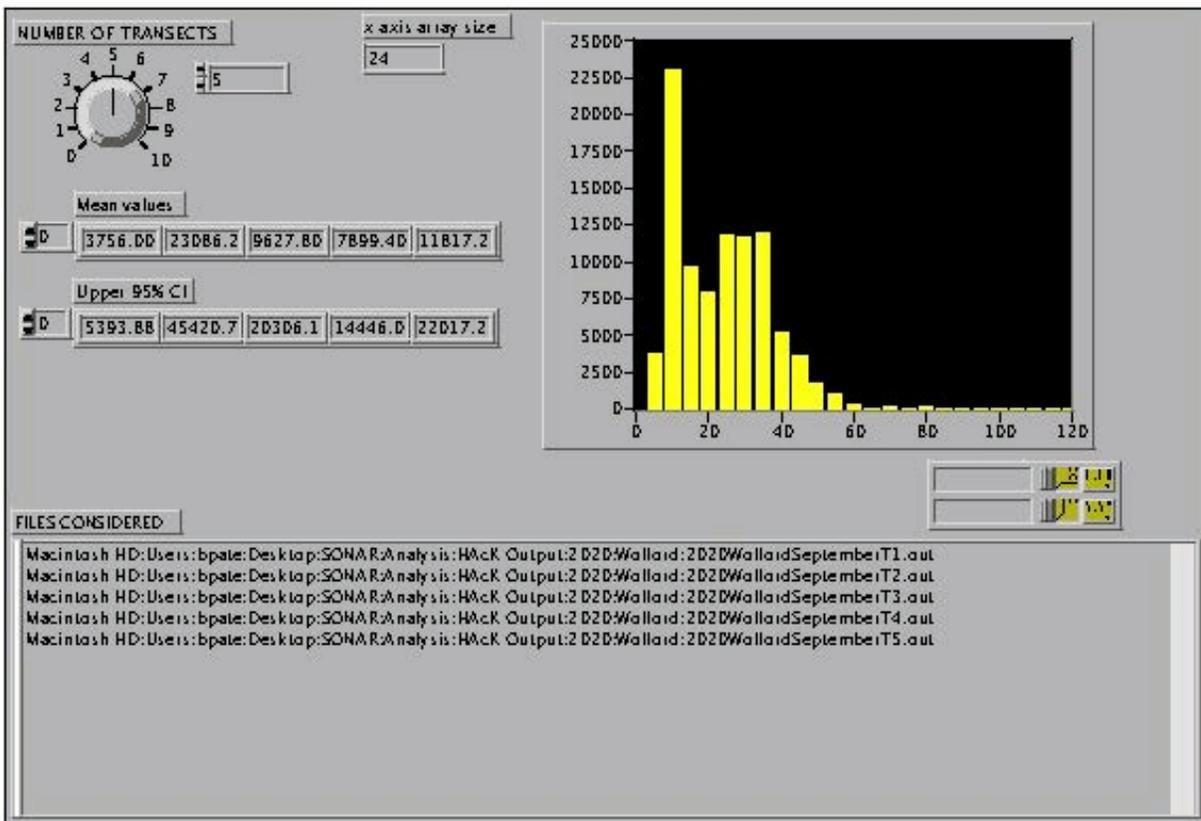


Figure 15. Mean abundance by fish length for Wolford Mountain Reservoir surveyed on September 15, 2020. Length bins for the figure at right are in 5 cm increments. Mean values and corresponding upper 95% CIs are for the first five bins up to and including 25 cm. Raw data were obtained with a Hydroacoustic Technology Inc. Model 241 Digital Split-Beam Echosounder and post-processed using a proprietary module in LabView (HydroAcoustic Kit PlotLakeLF\_2000.vi).

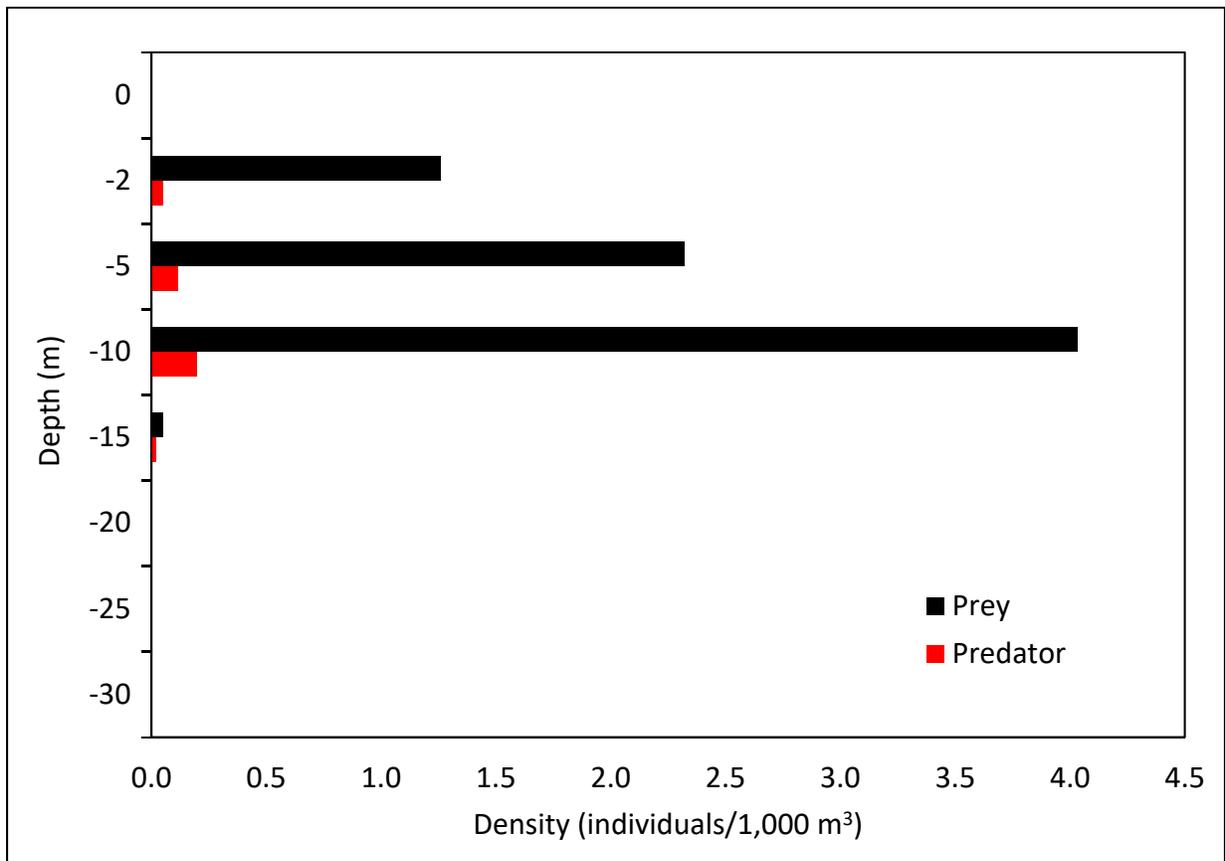


Figure 16. Estimated density of prey (fish targets <425 mm total length) and predators (fish targets  $\geq$ 425 mm) by 5 m depth-strata from the hydroacoustic survey completed on September 15, 2020 in Wolford Mountain Reservoir. Each depth category represents a 5 m bin (e.g., the -15 m bin represents the depth strata from  $\geq$  -10 to < -15 m).

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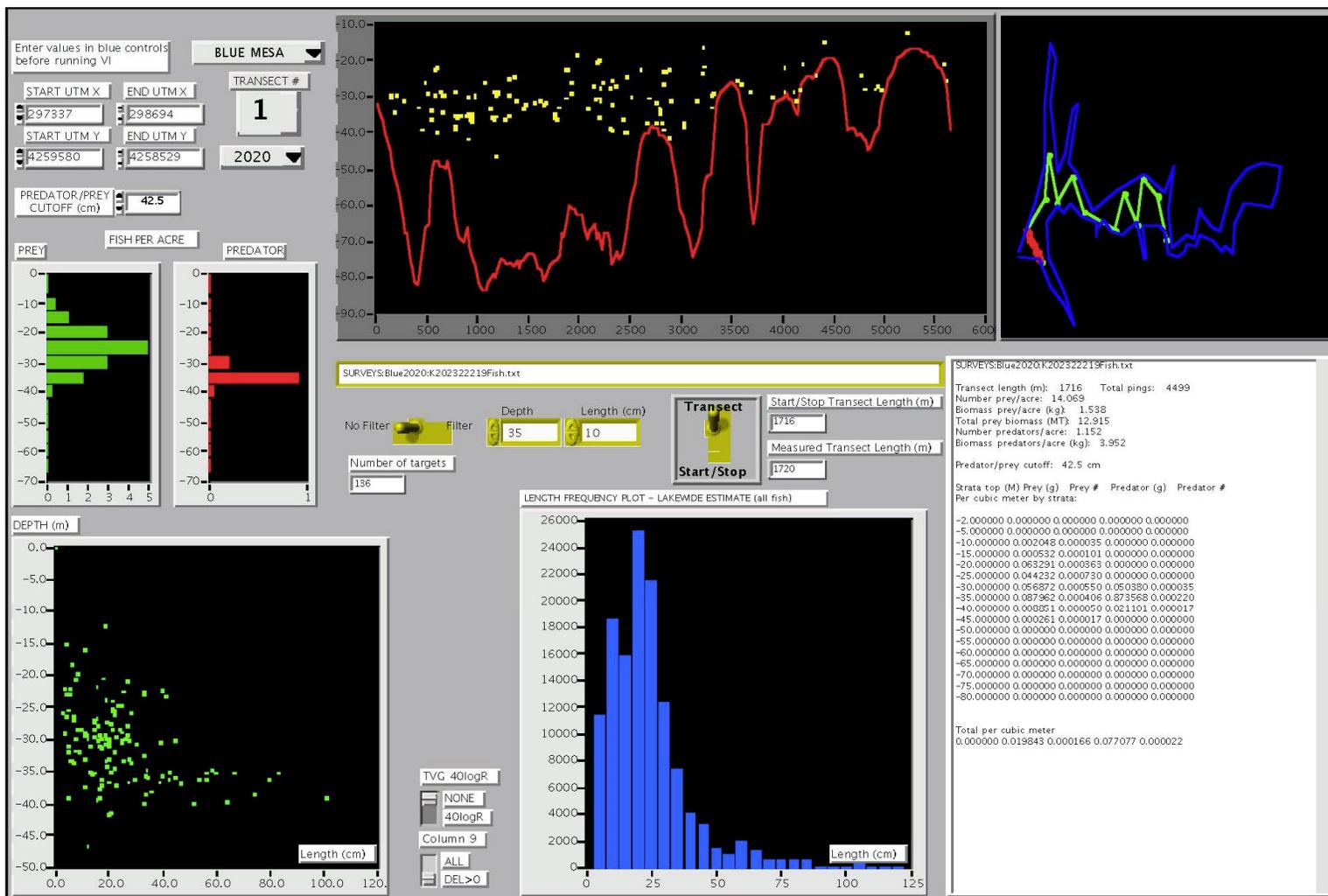
We would like to thank Kevin Rogers for development and continued training with the proprietary software package (HydroAcoustics Kit) used in LabView. We would also like to thank Dan Brauch for assistance while completing surveys on Blue Mesa Reservoir.

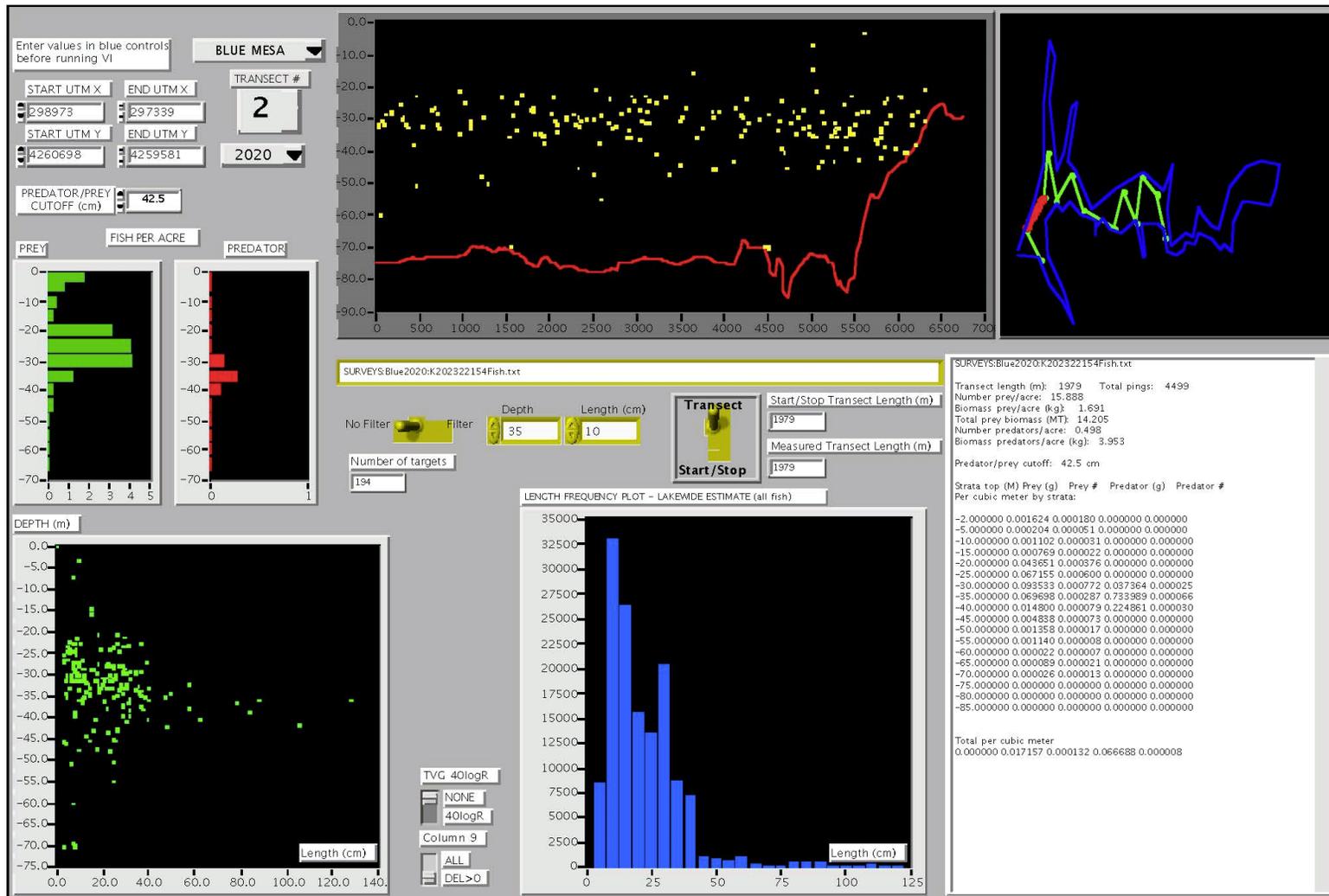
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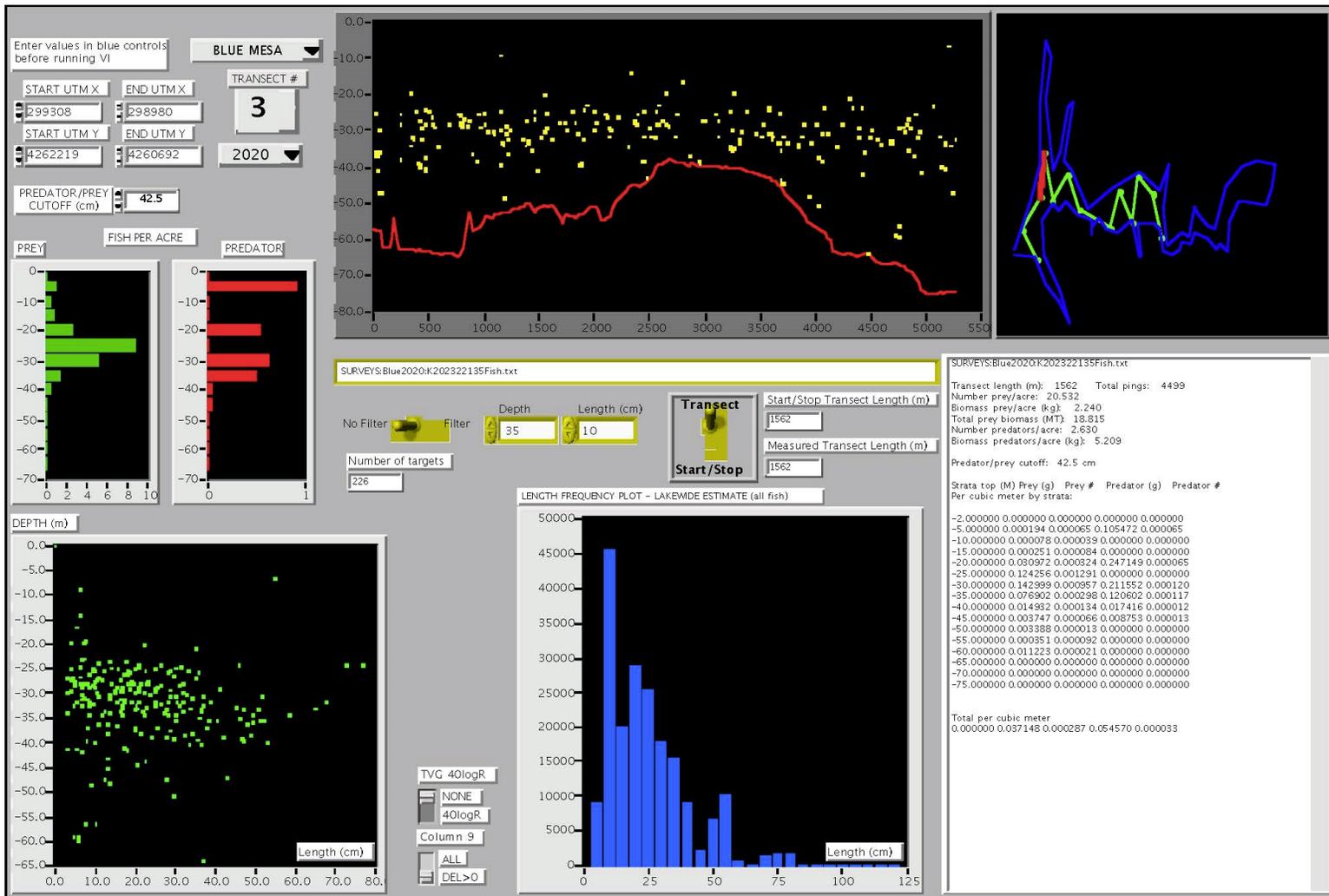
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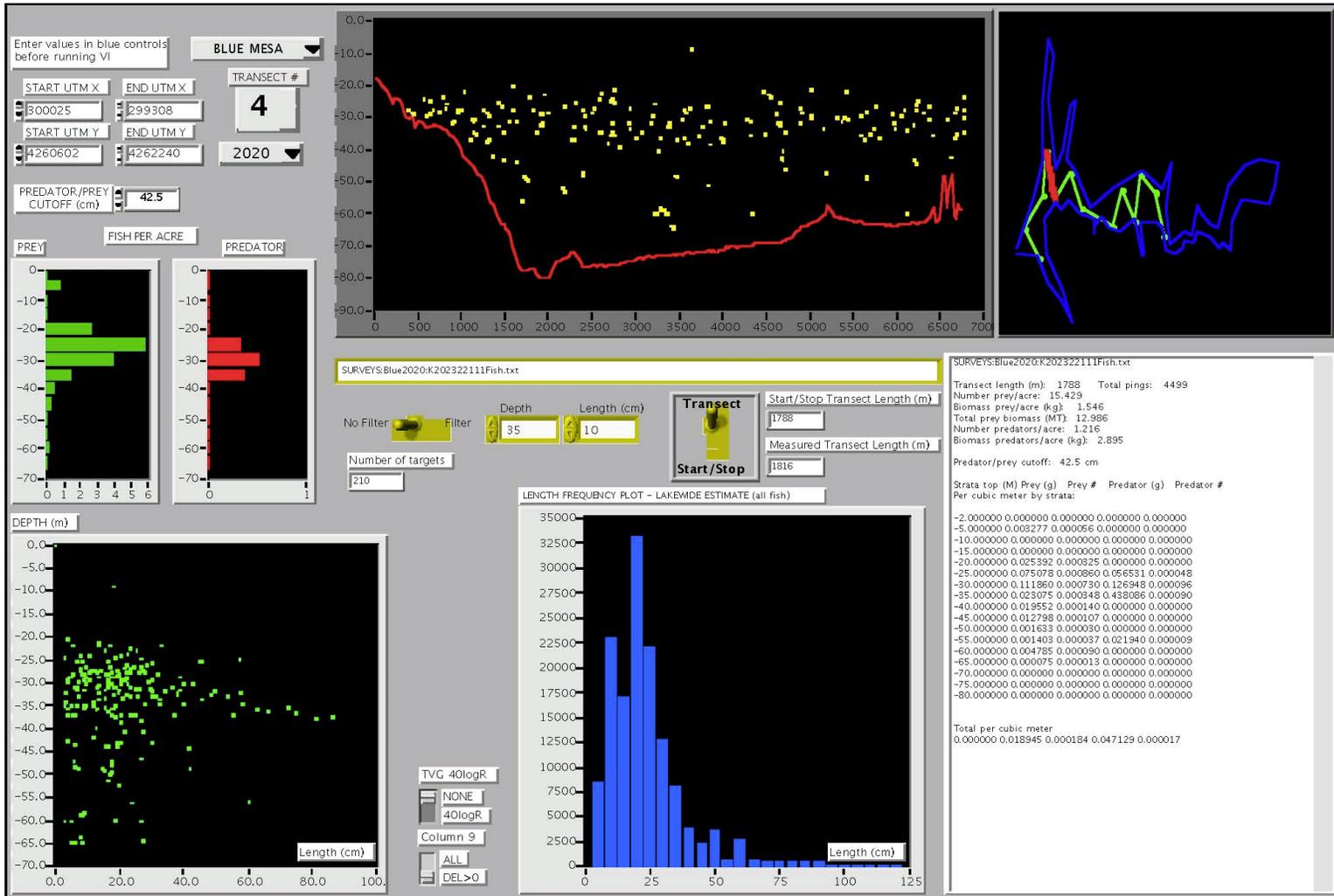
# Appendix A

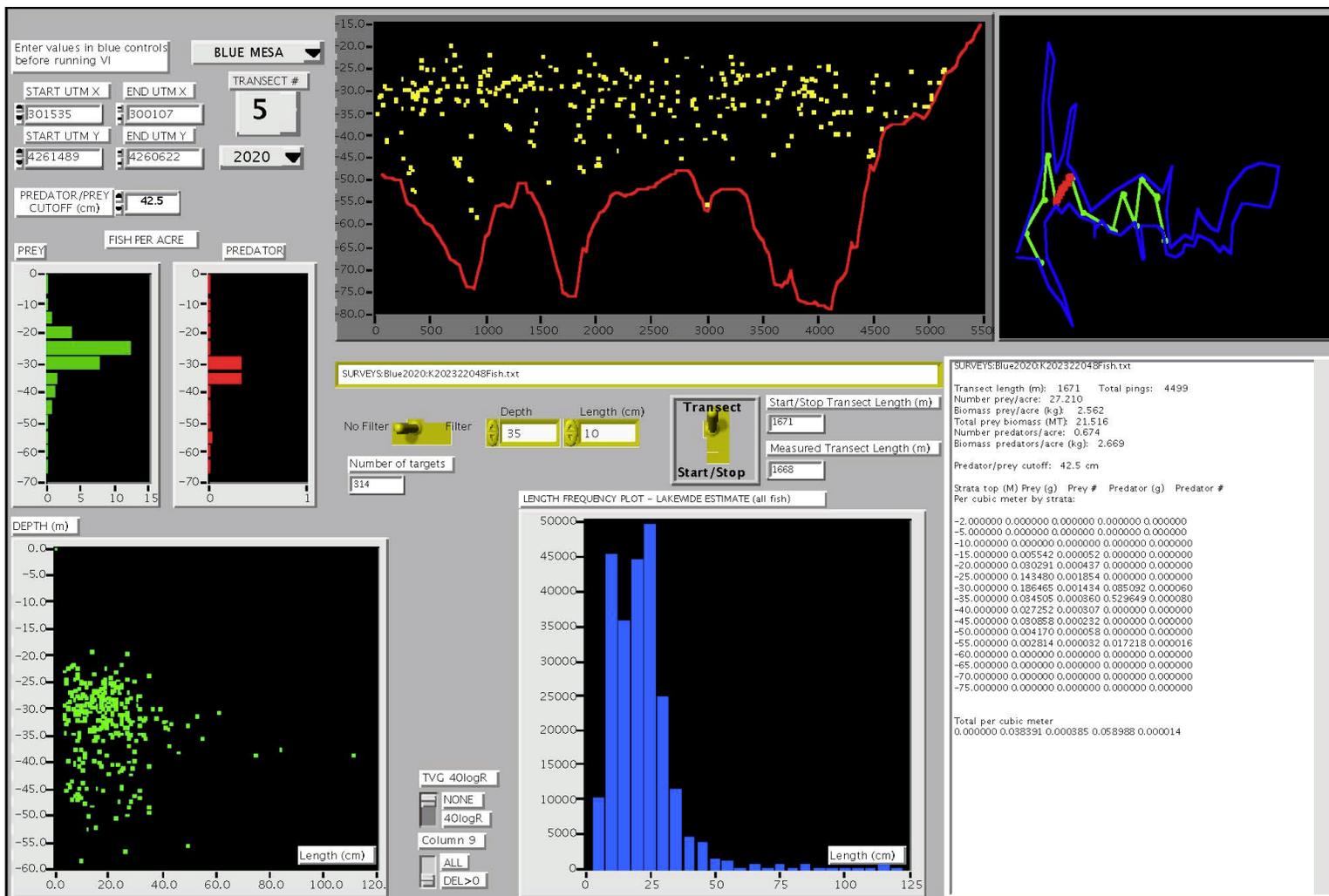
Individual transect output files from the Hydroacoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on August 18, 2020.

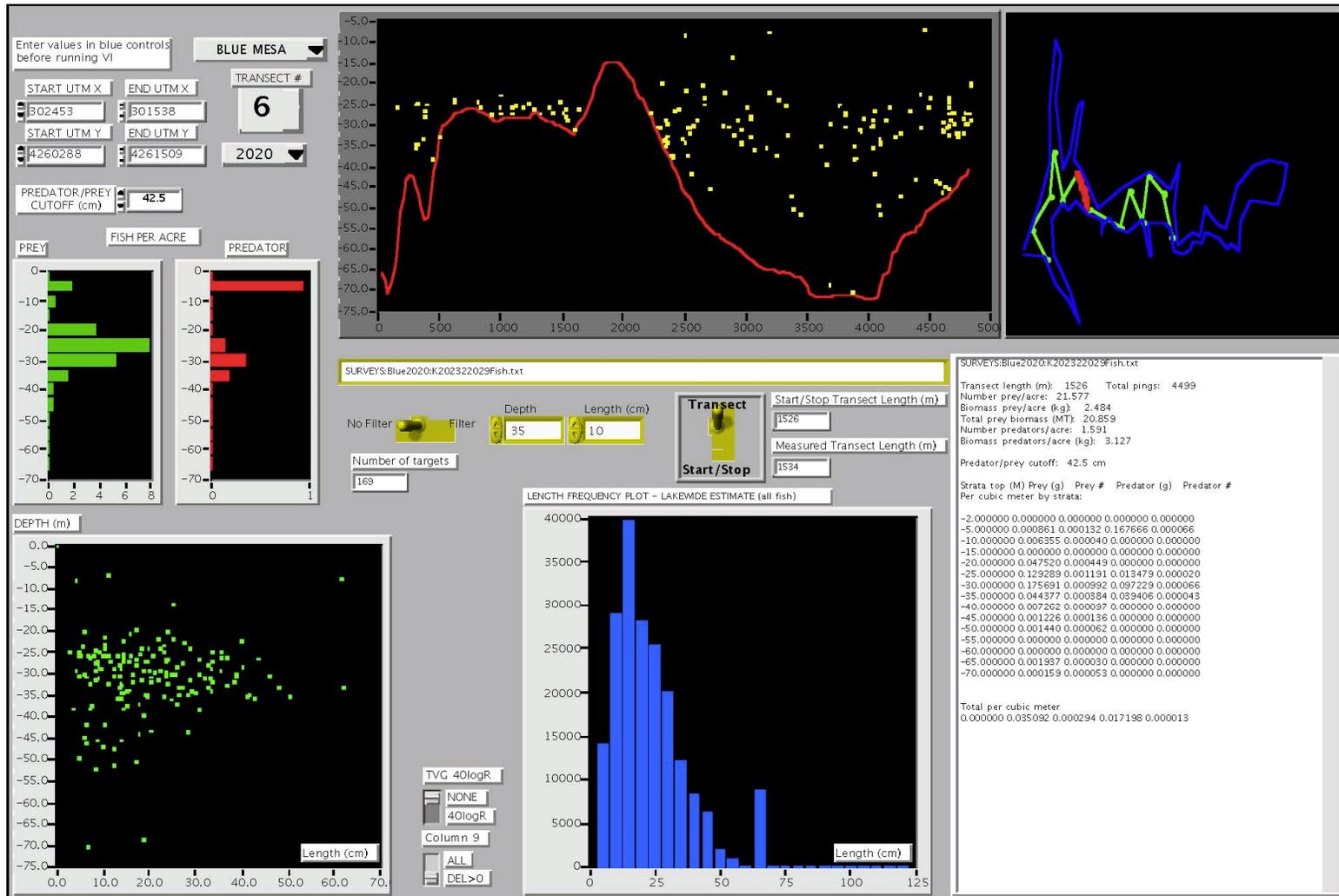


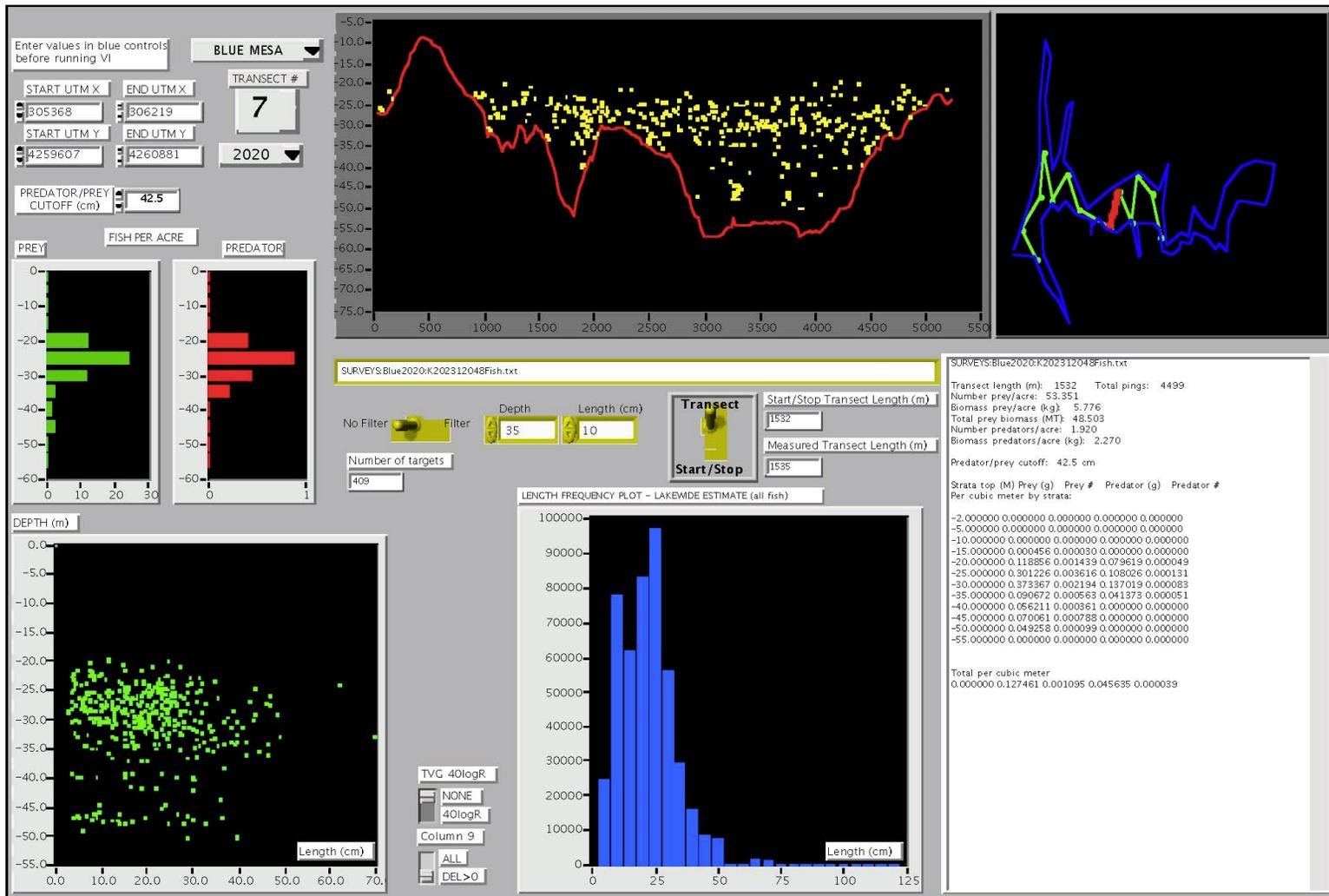


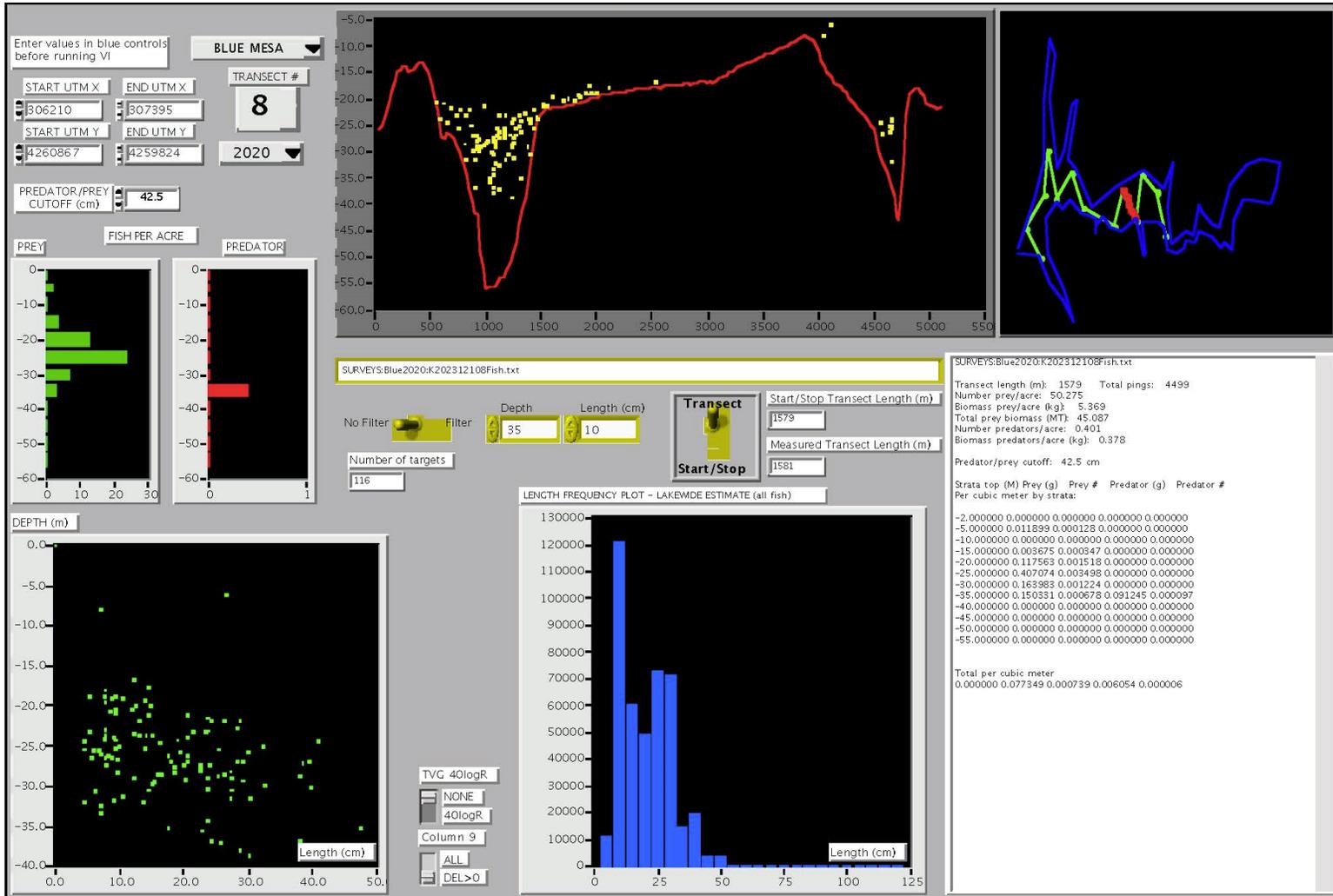


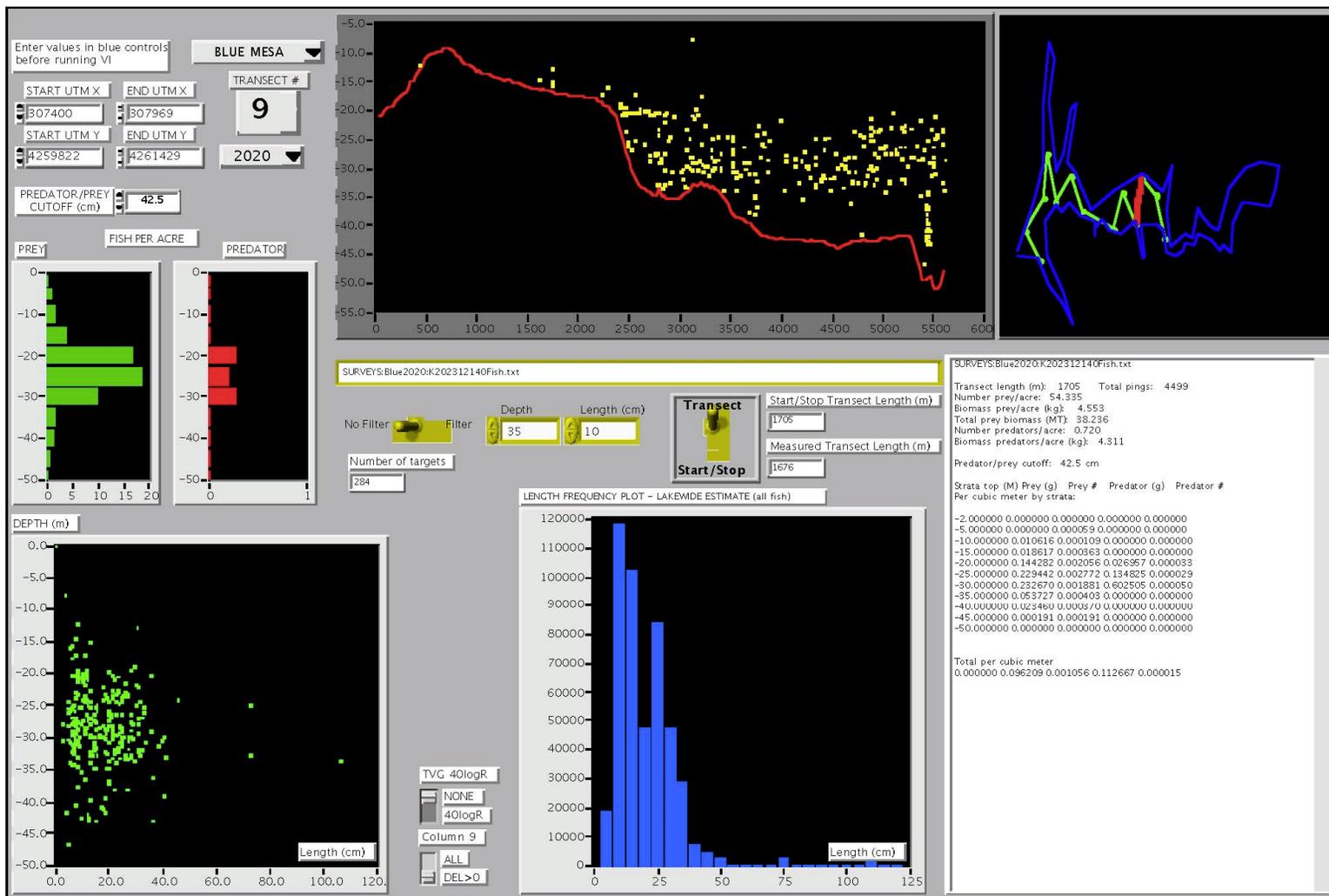


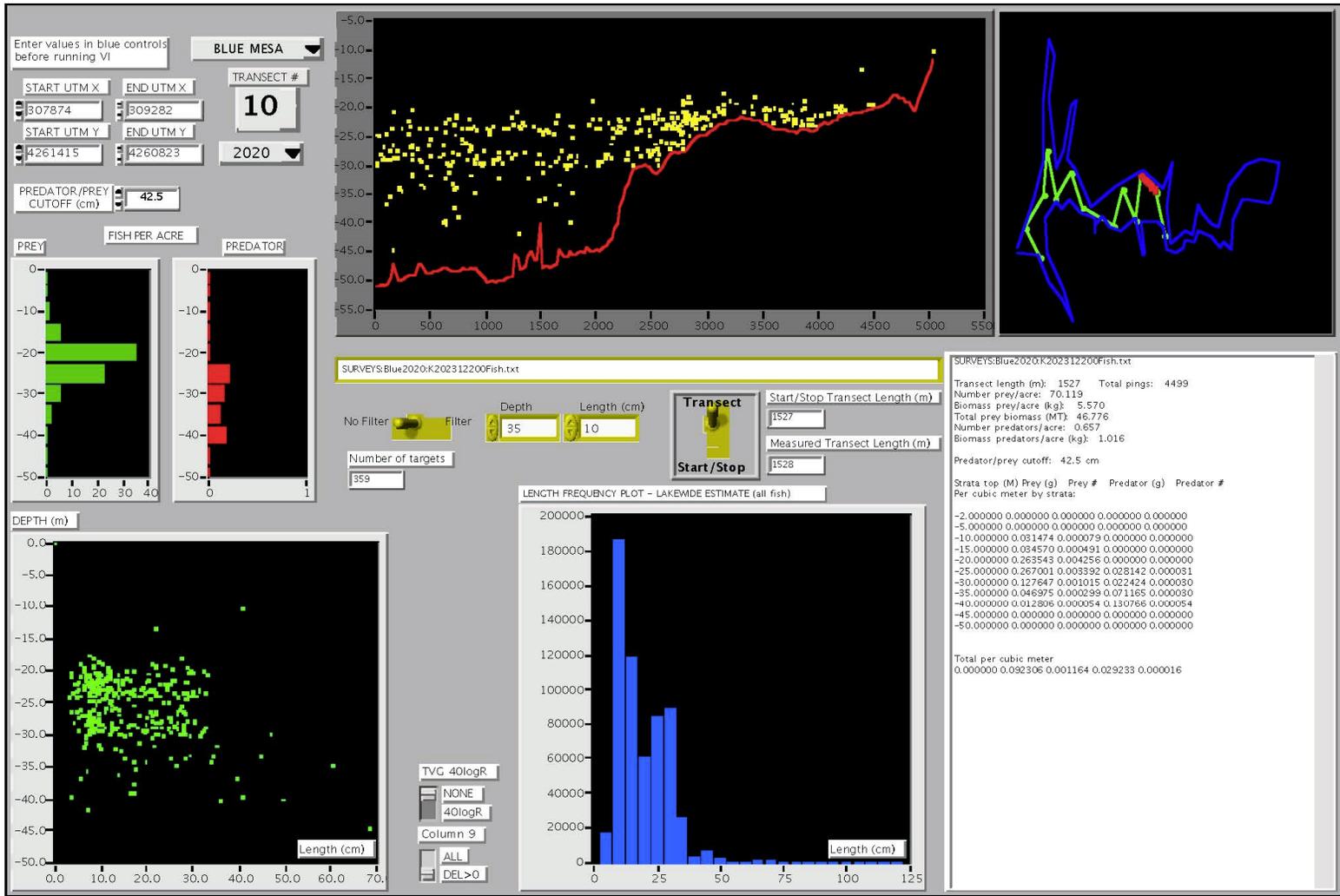


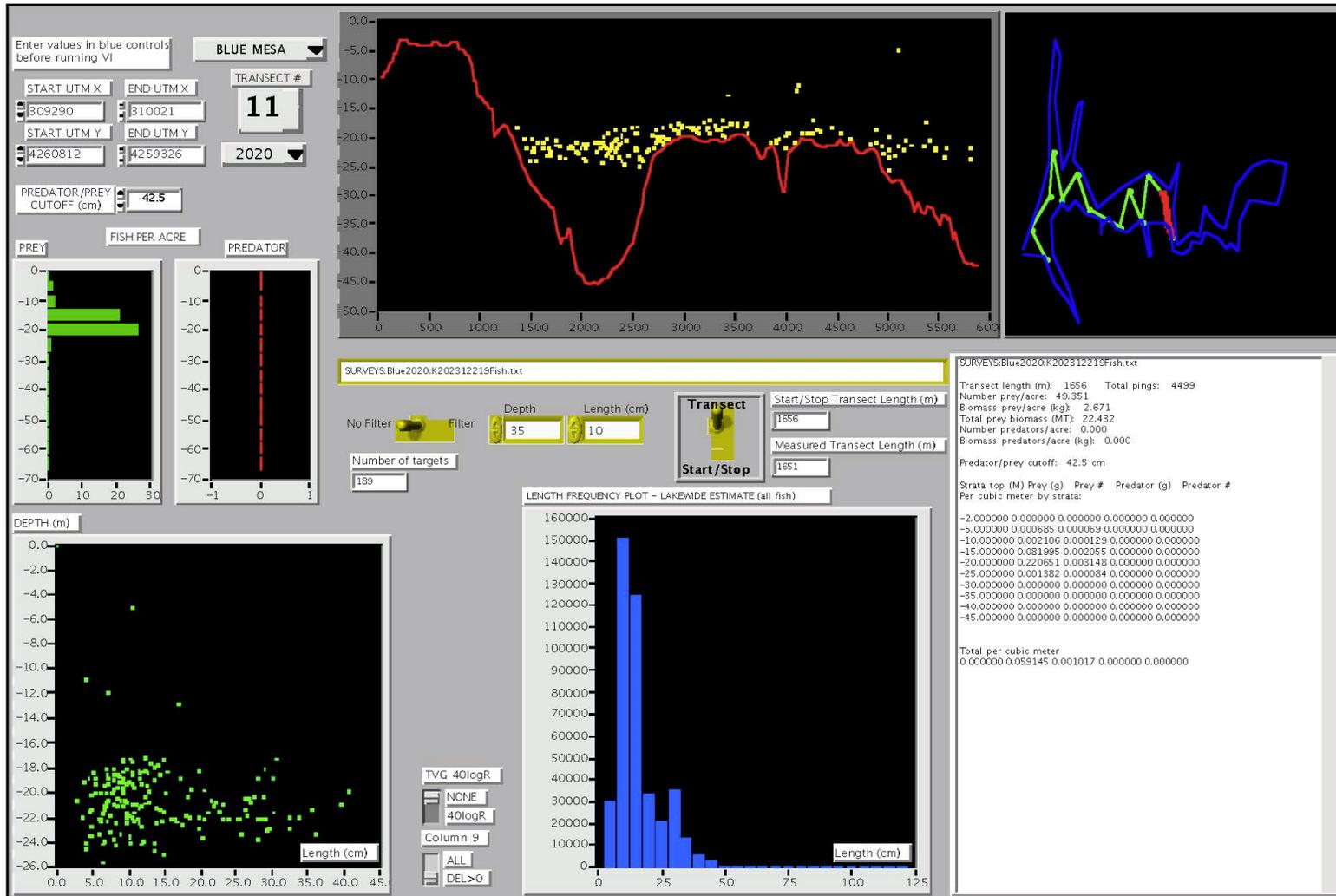






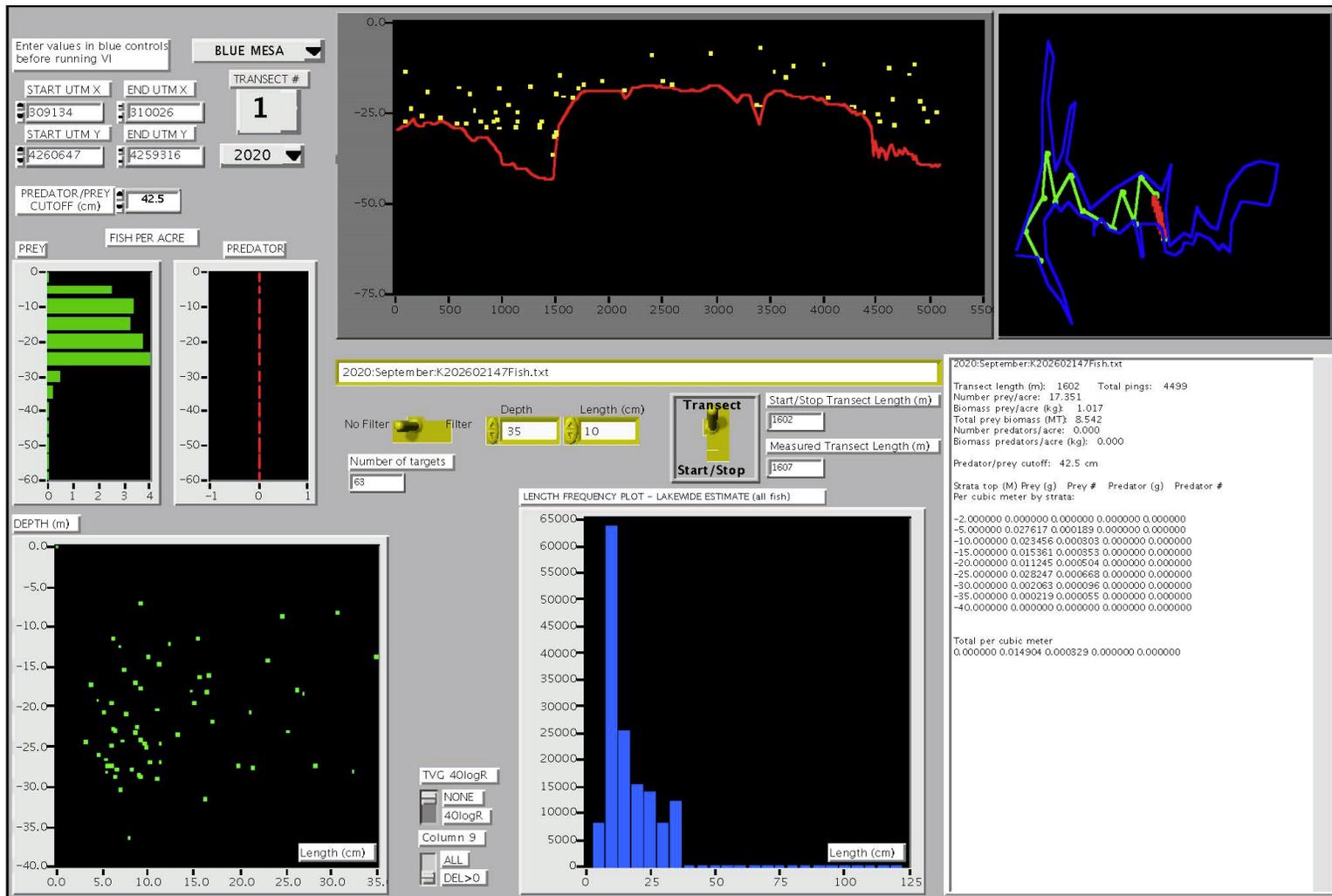


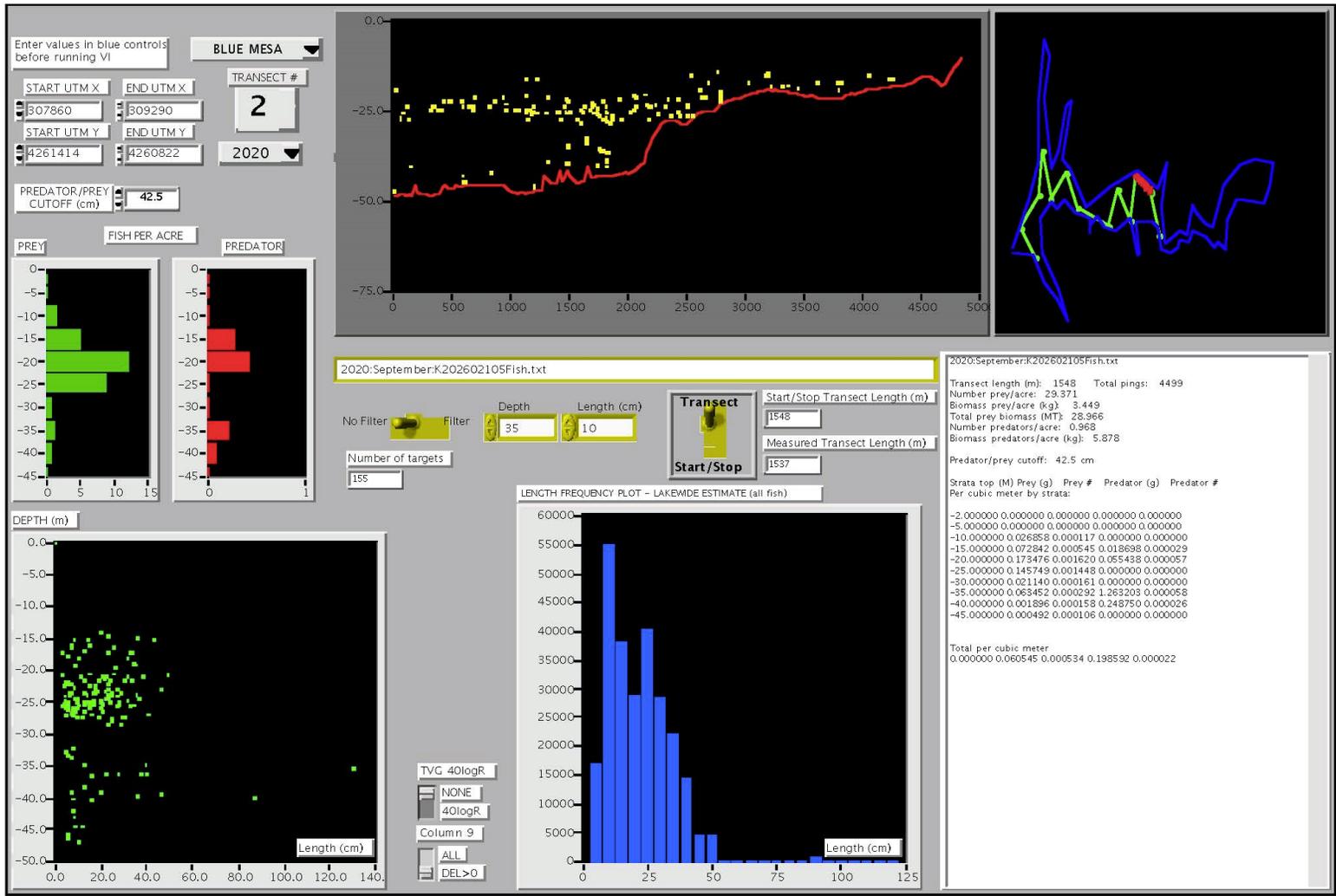


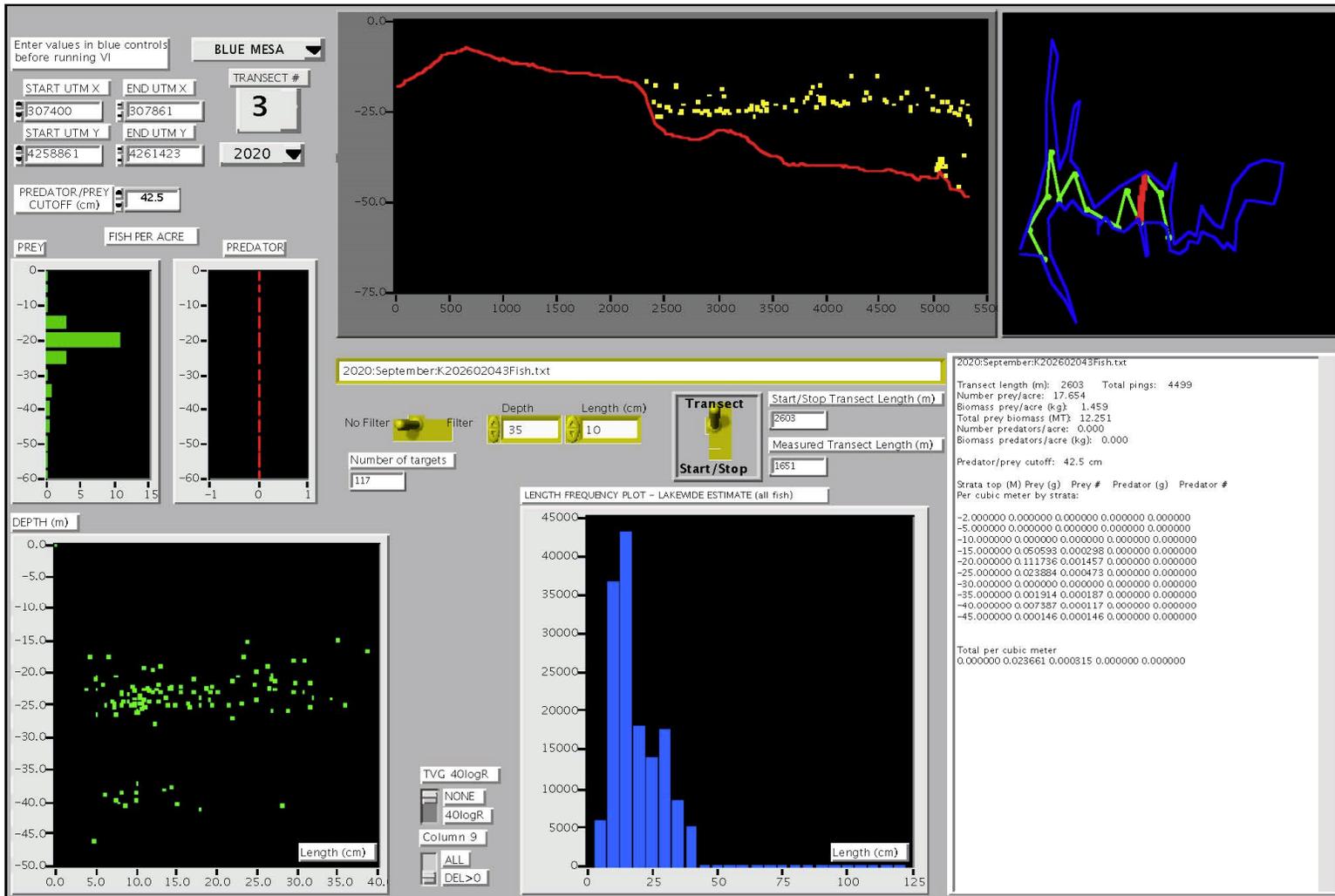


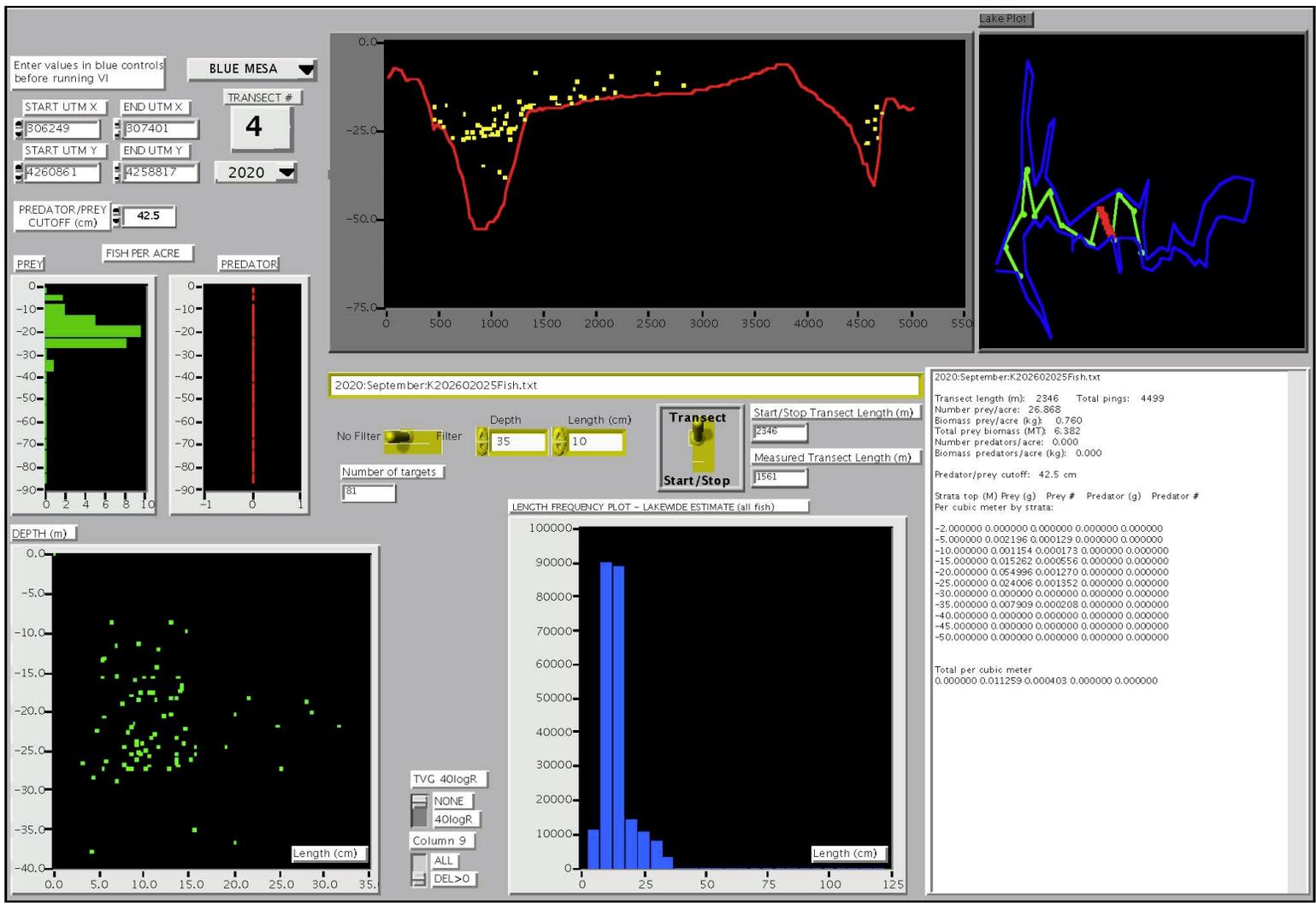
## Appendix B

Individual transect output files from the Hydroacoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Cebolla and Sapinero basins of Blue Mesa Reservoir surveyed on September 16, 2020.









DEPTH (m)

LENGTH FREQUENCY PLOT - LAKEWIDE ESTIMATE (all fish)

TVG 40logR

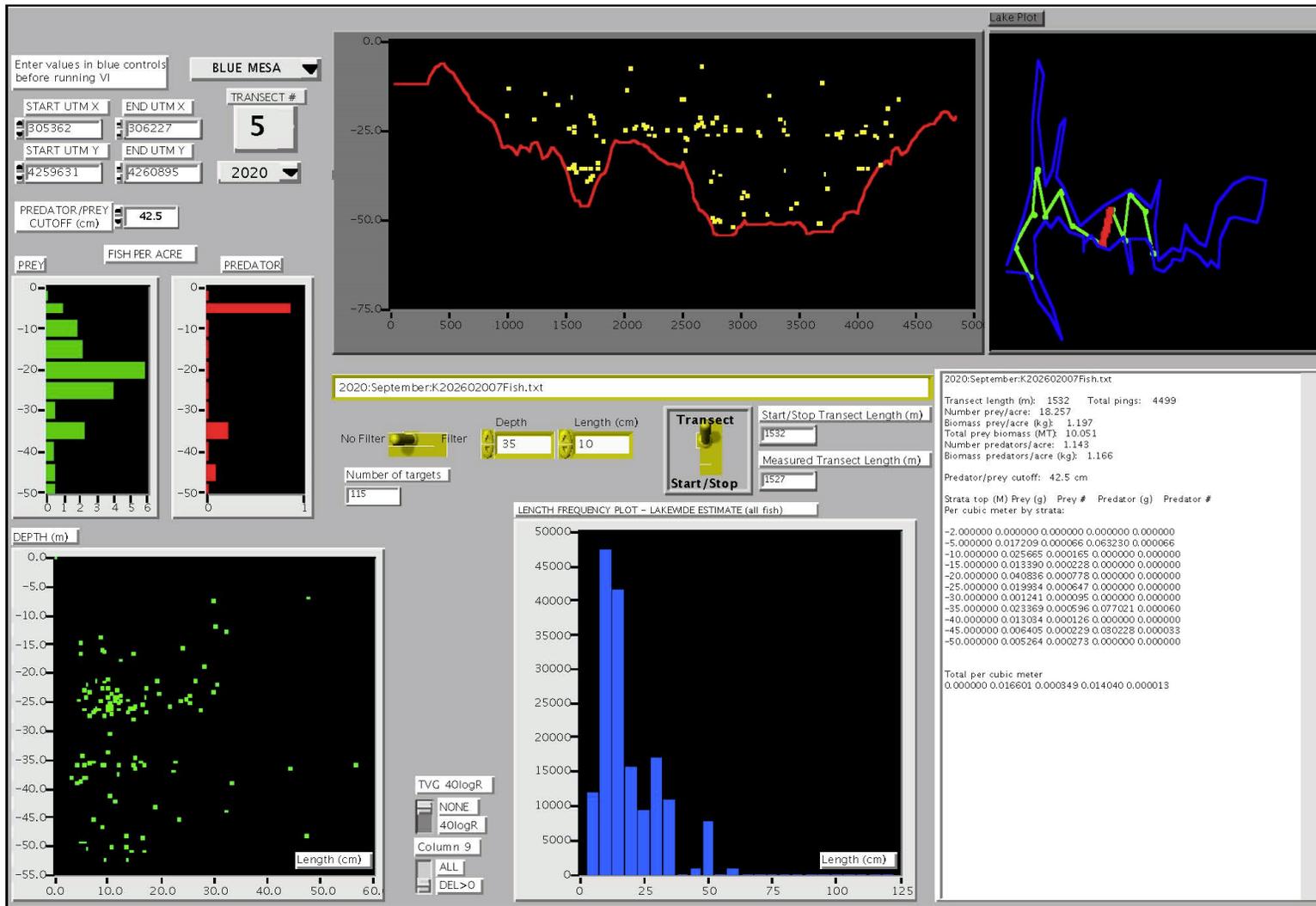
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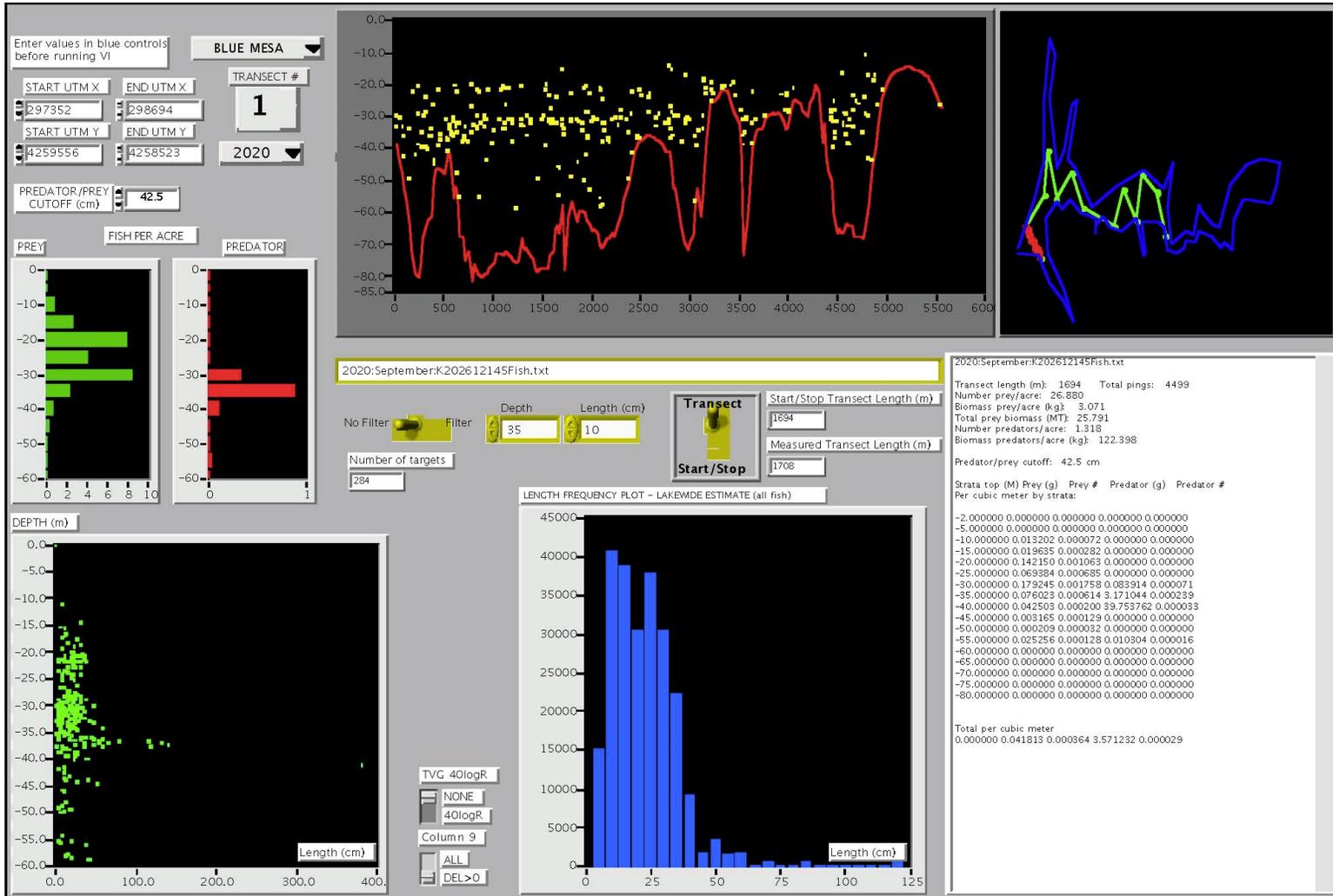
40logR

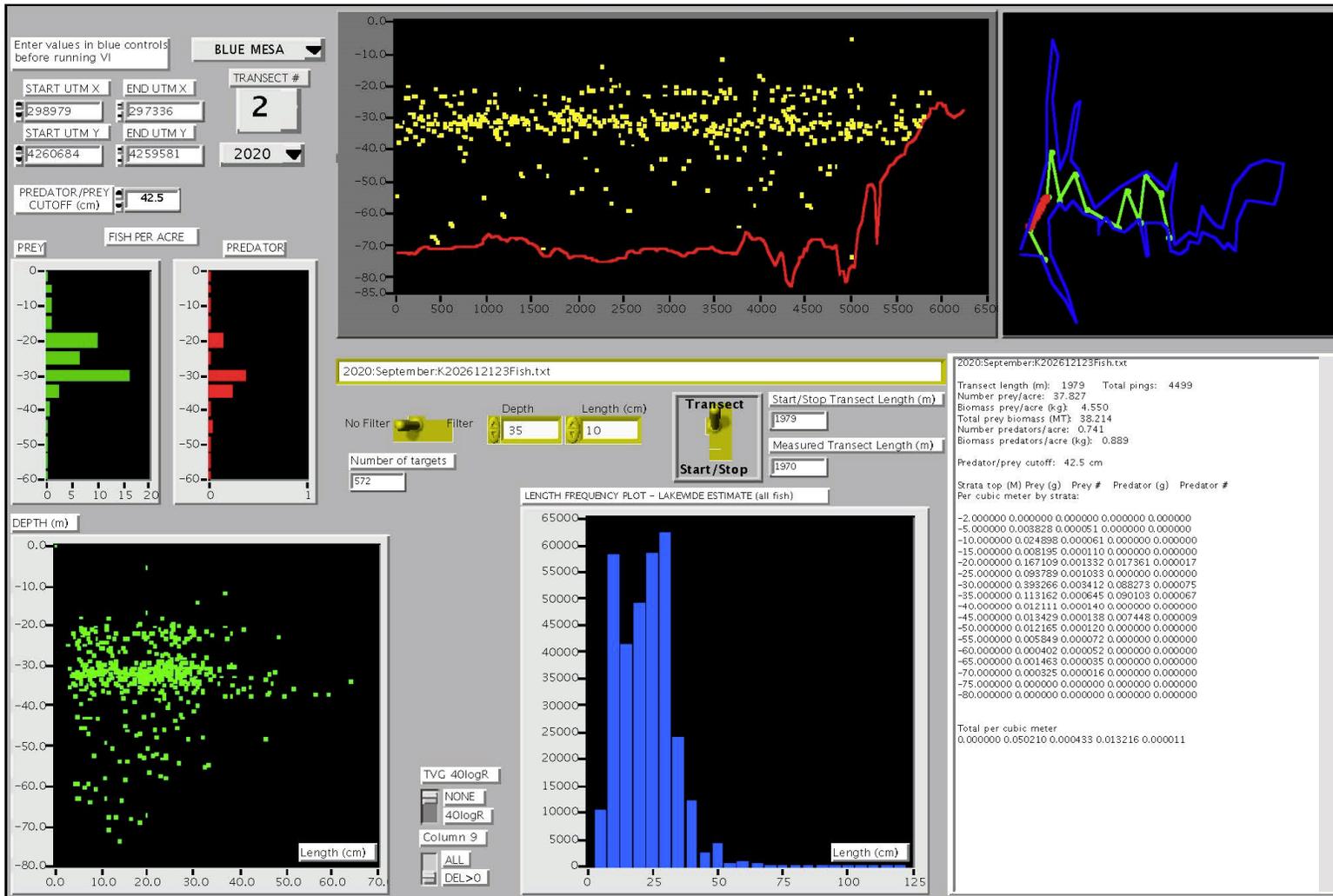
Column 9

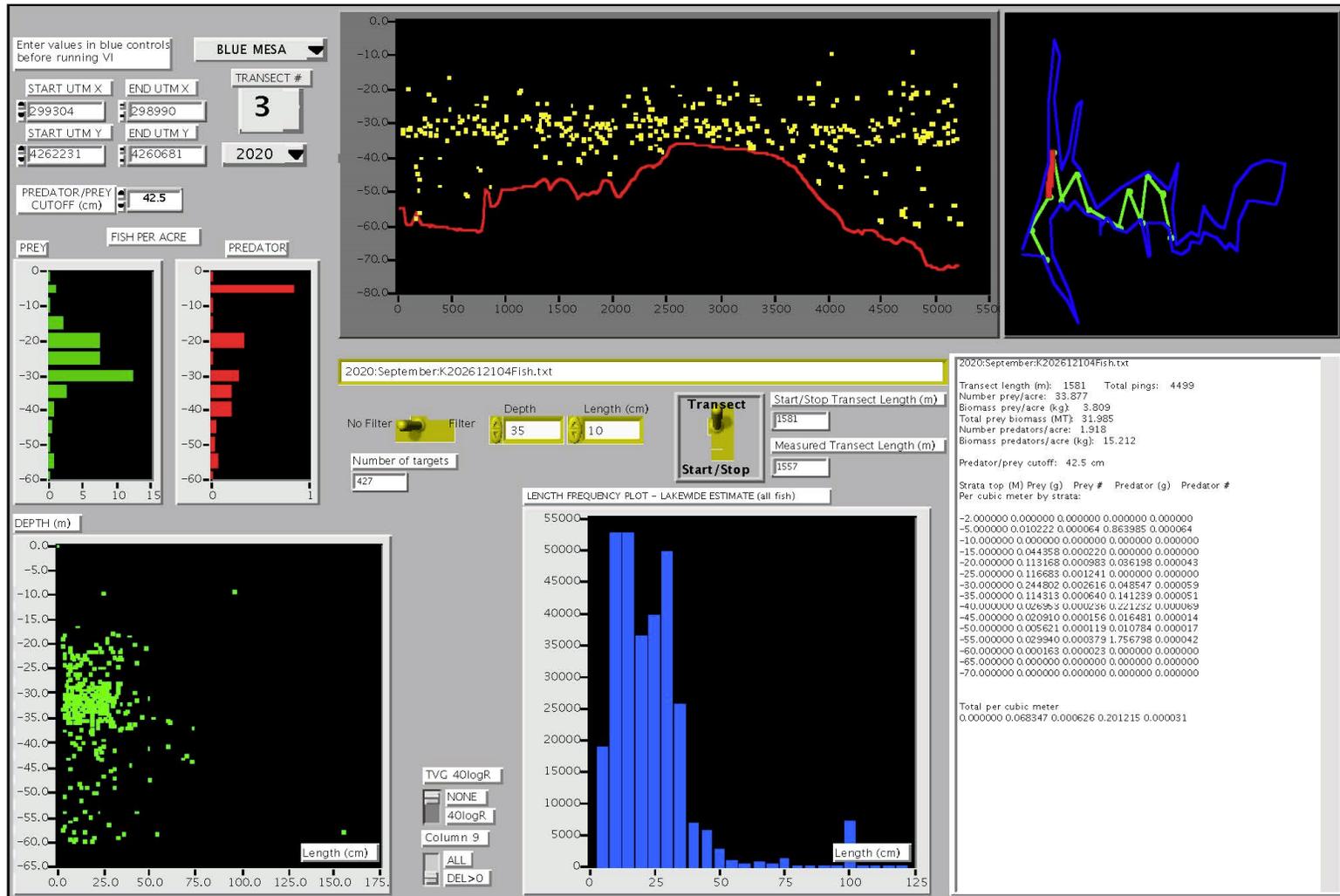
ALL

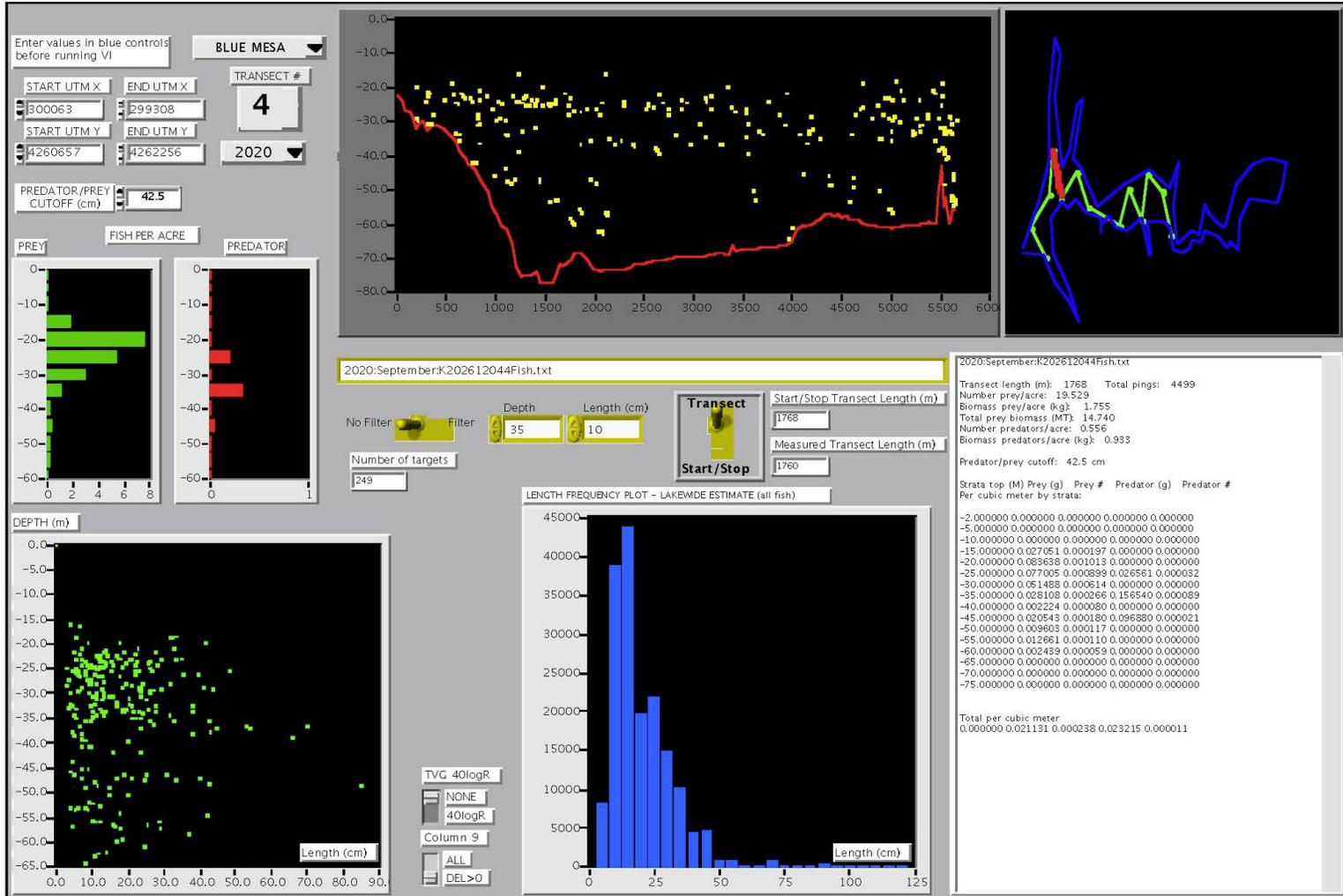
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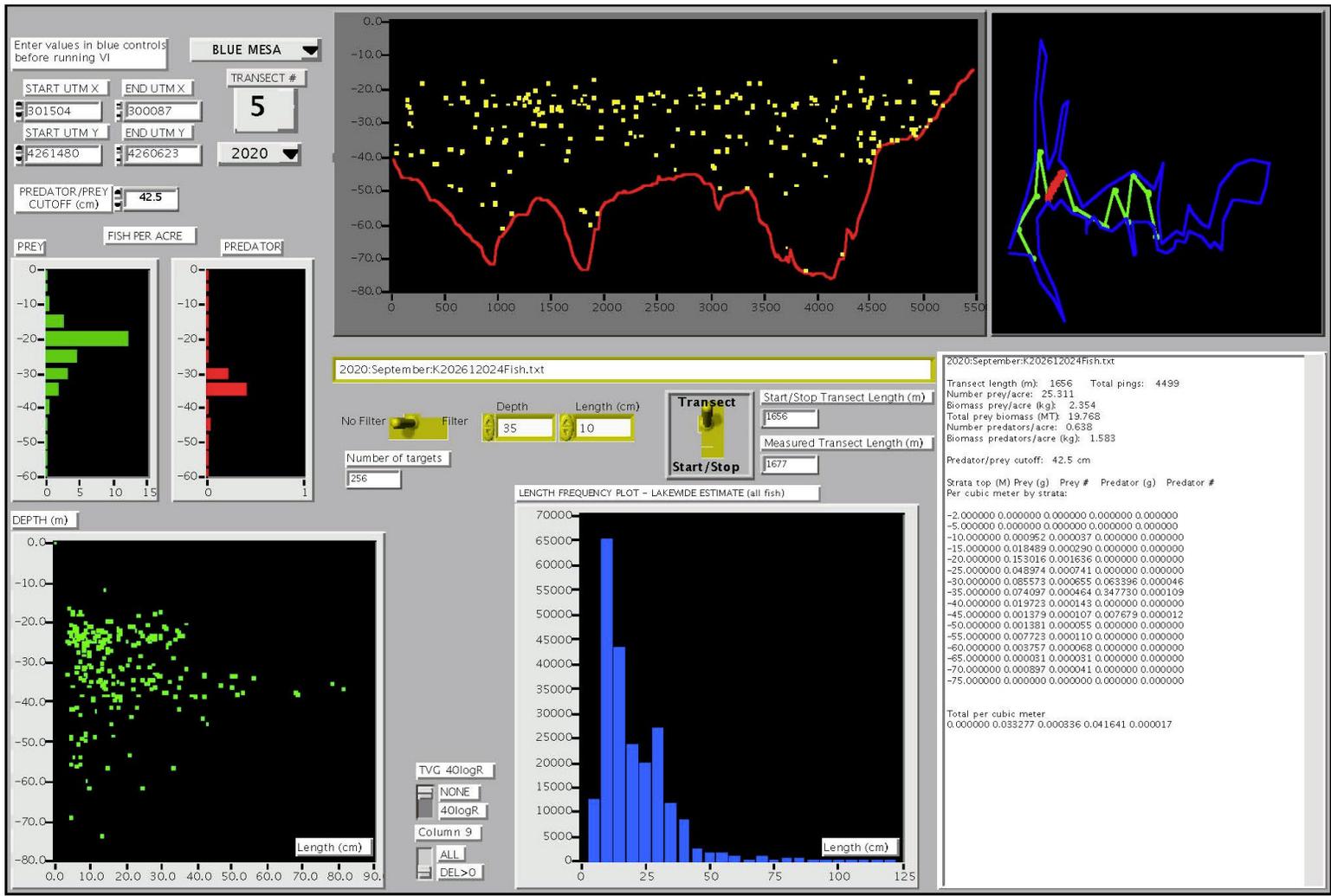


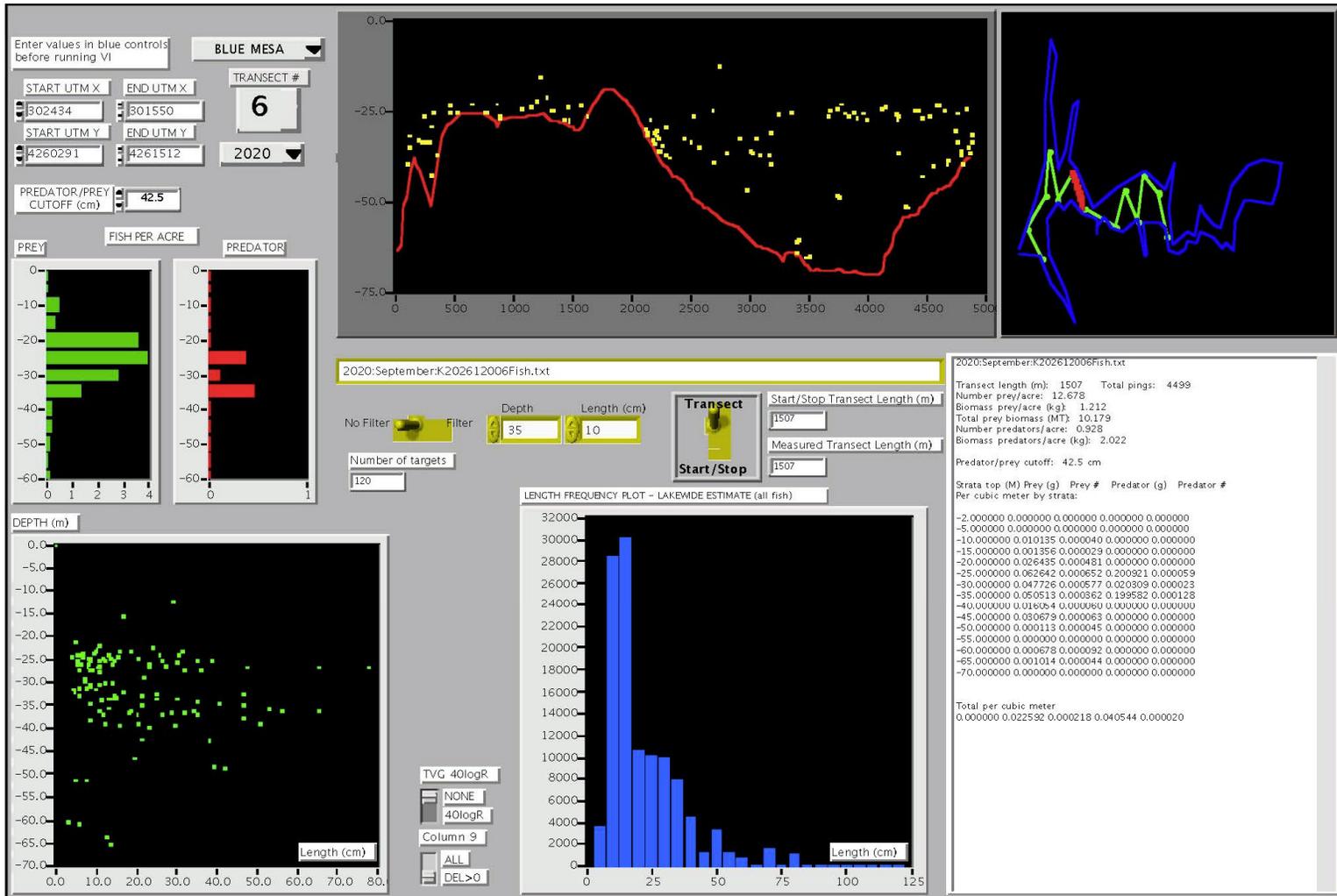






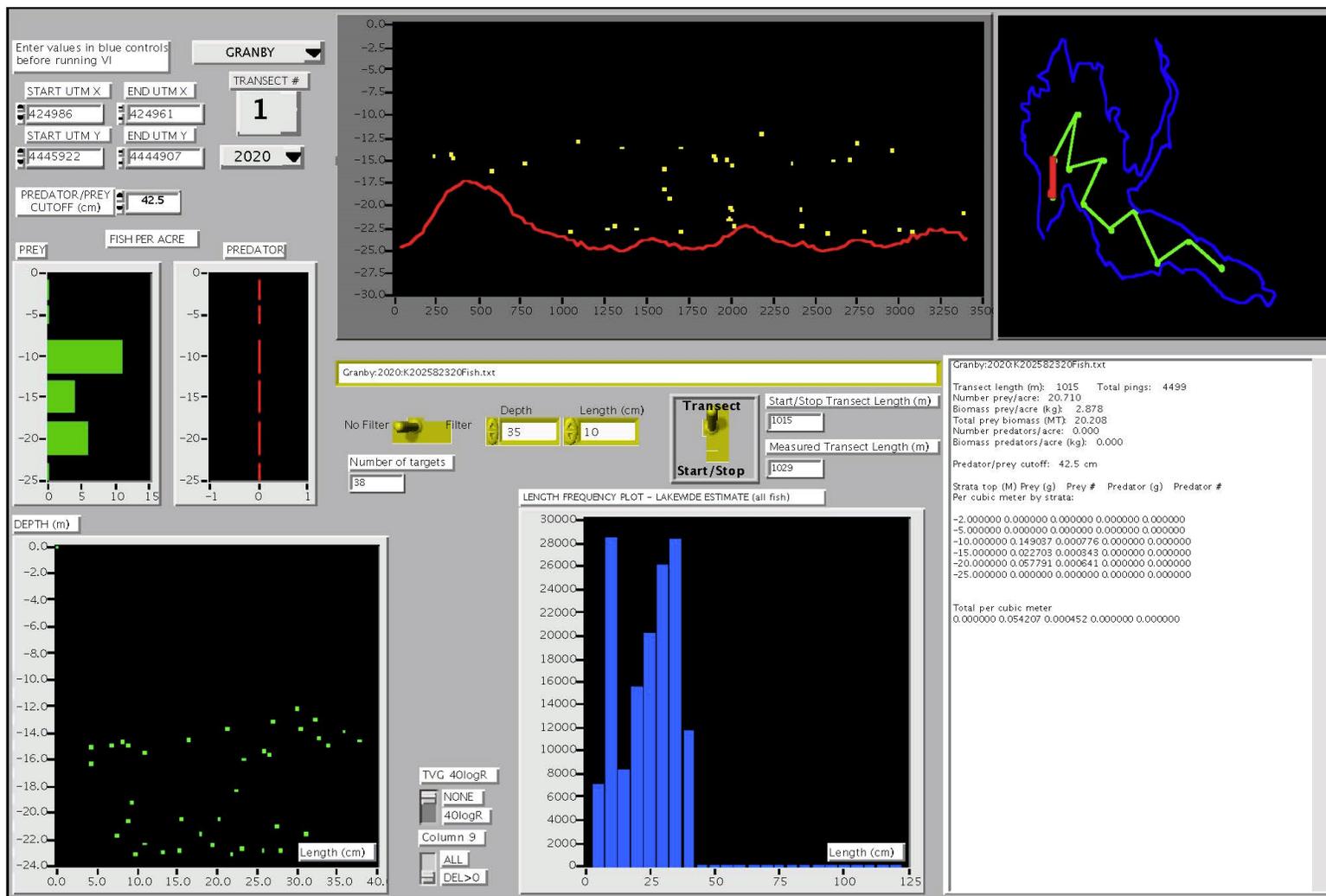


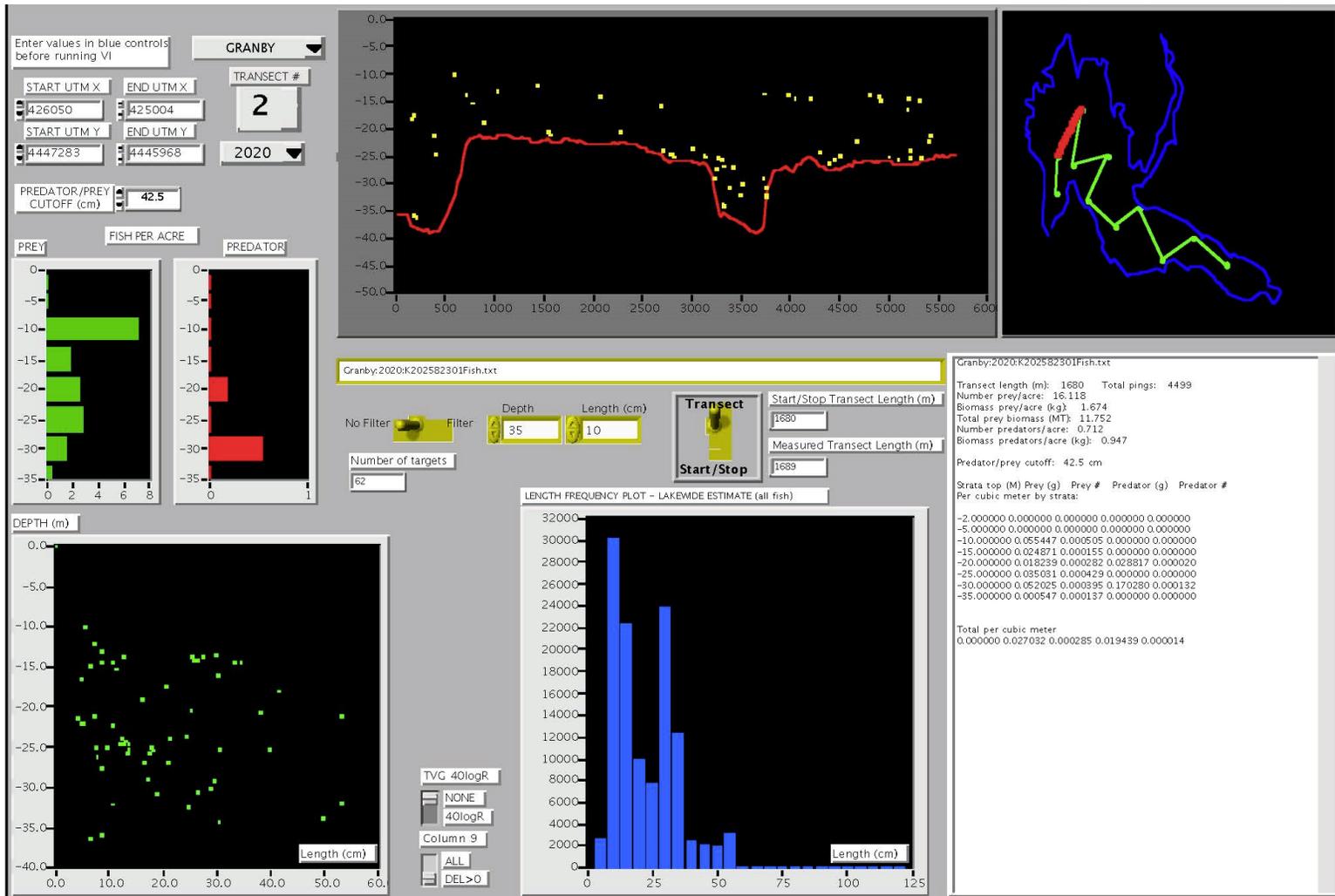


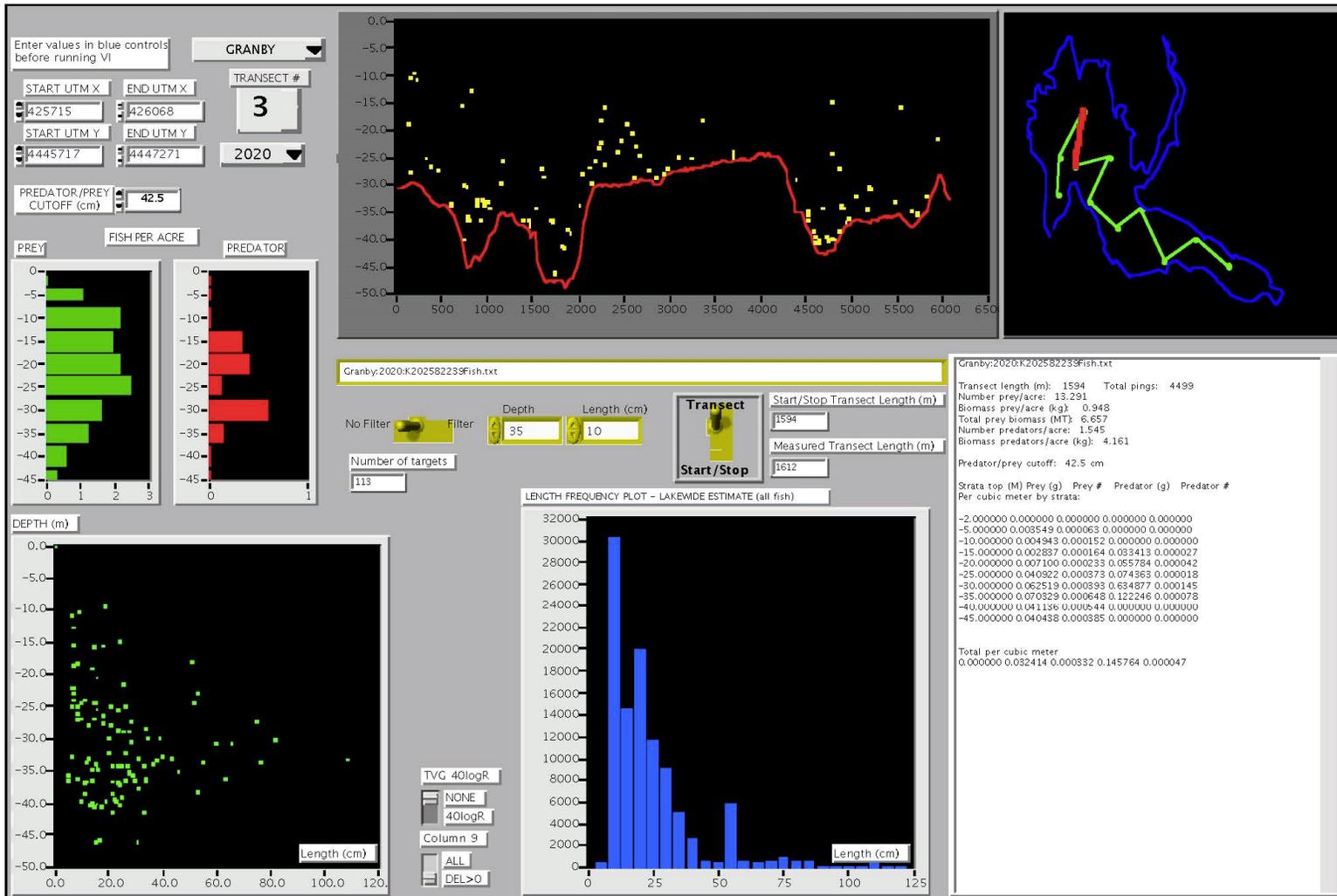


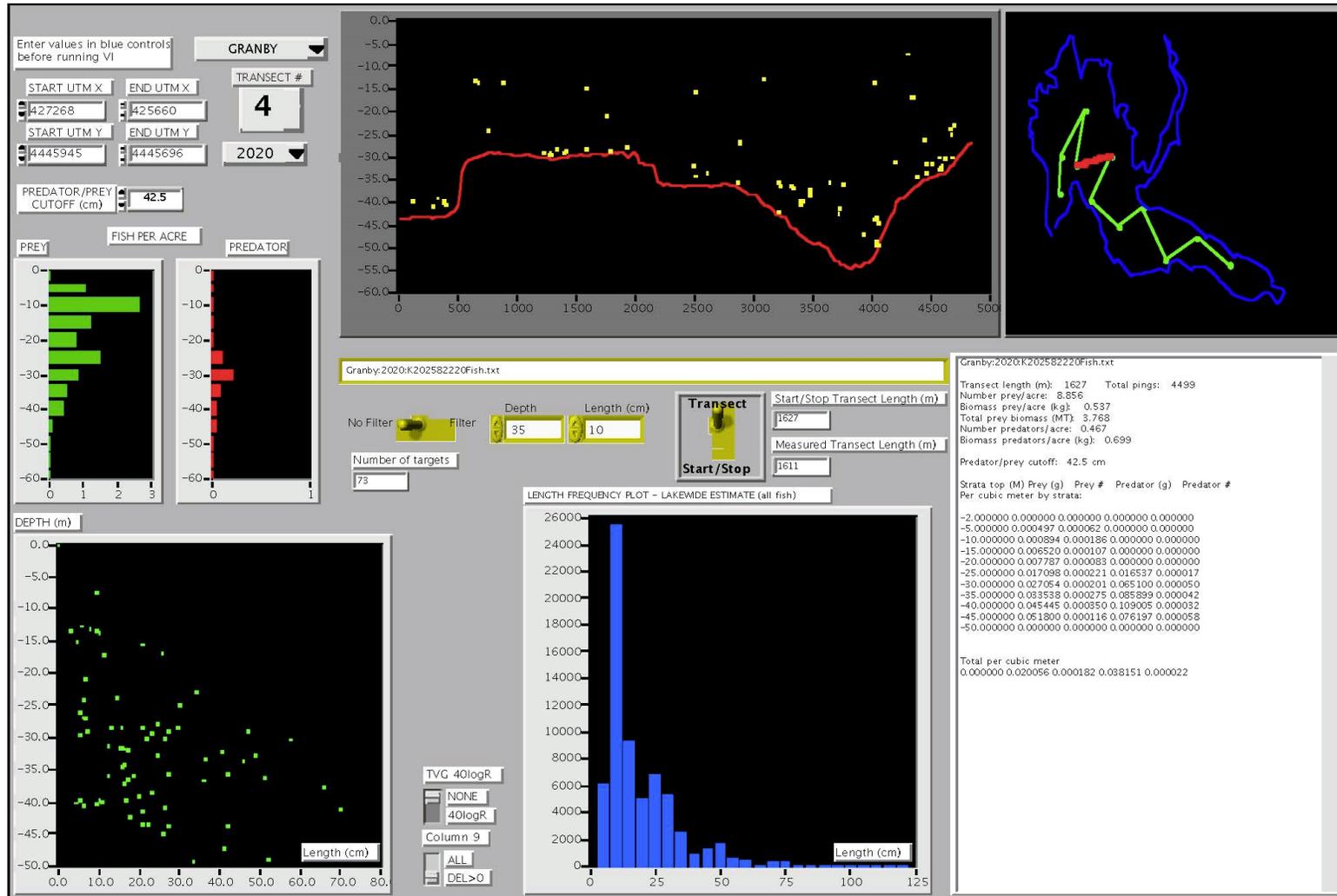
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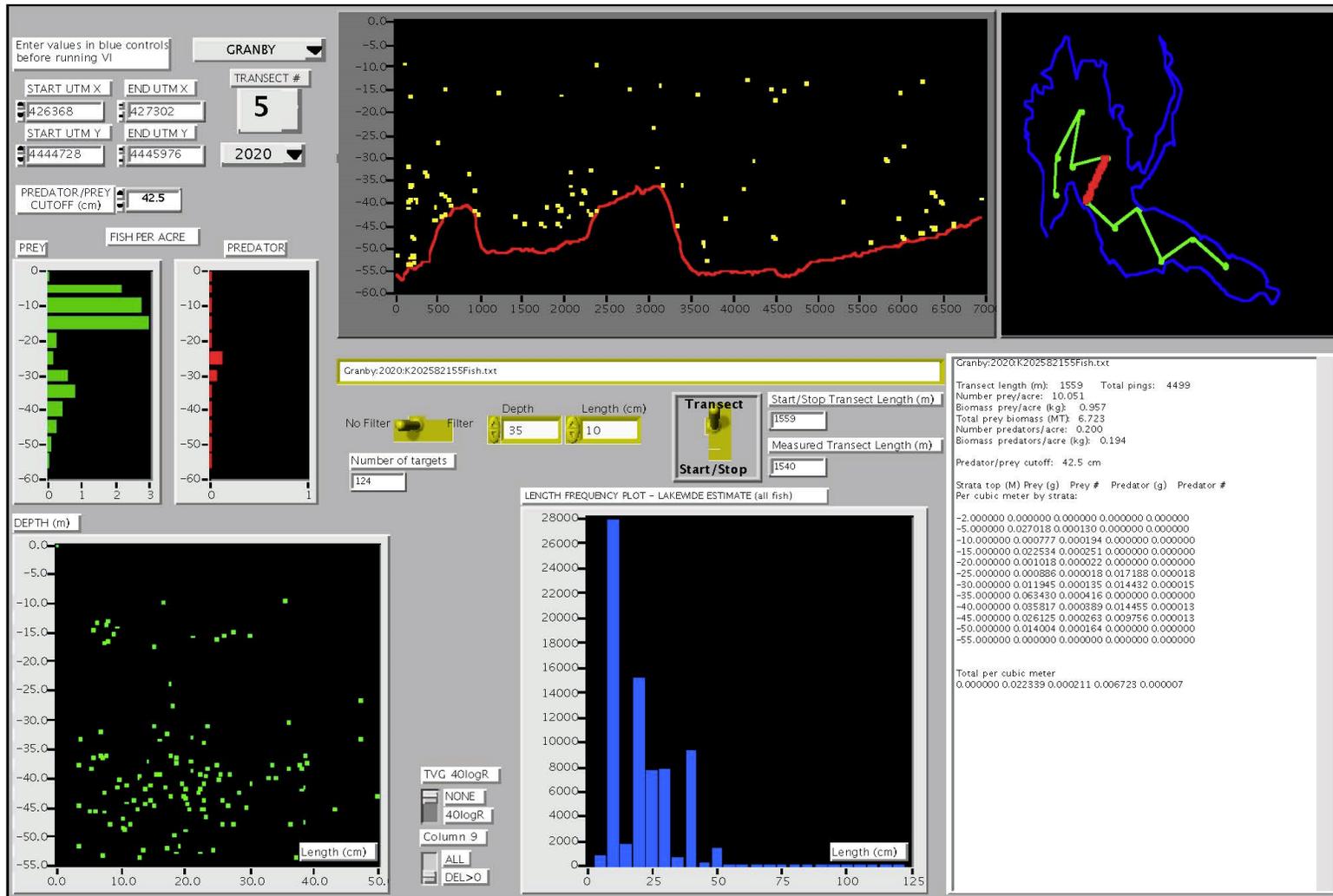
Individual transect output files from the HydroAcoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Lake Granby surveyed on September 14, 2020.

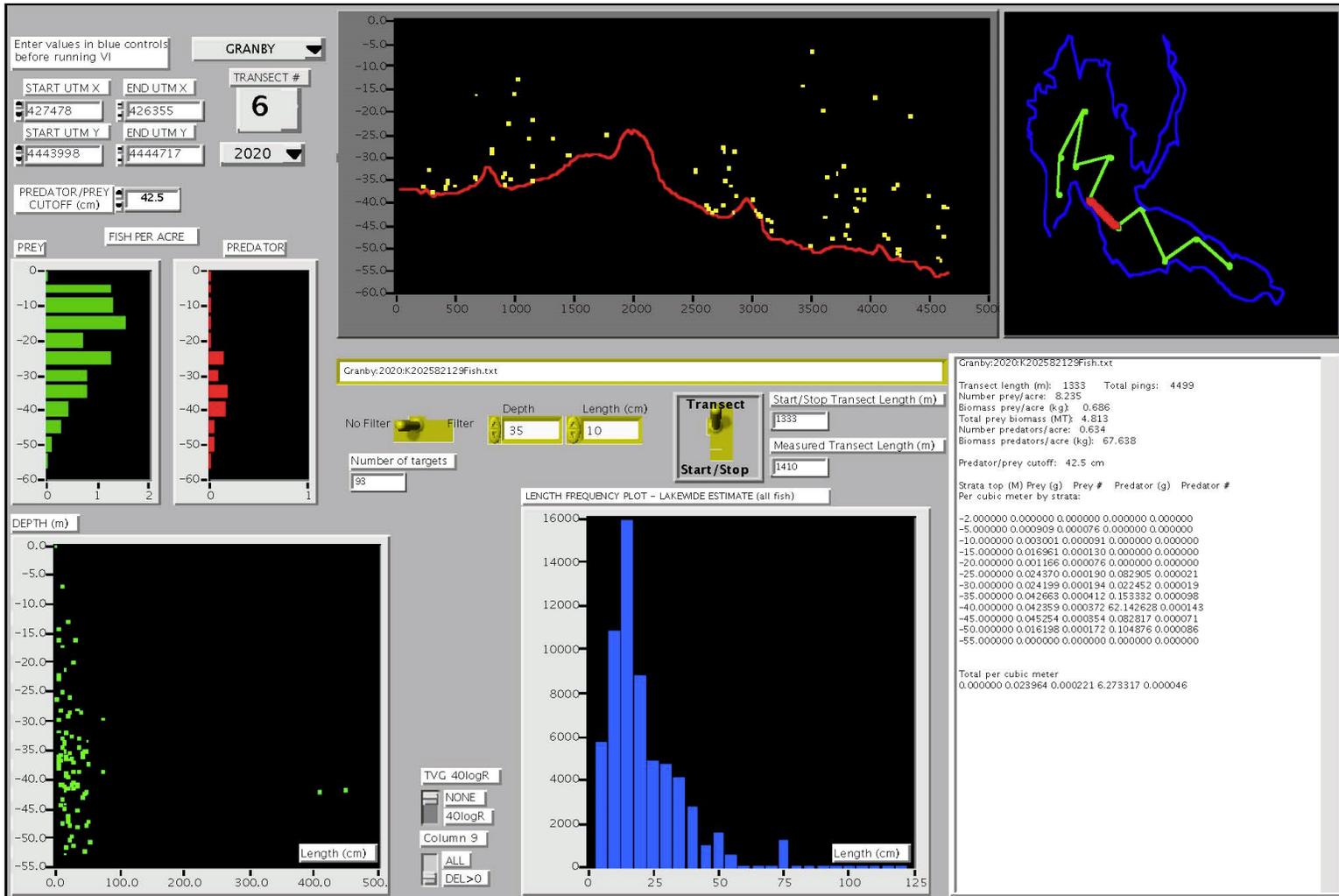


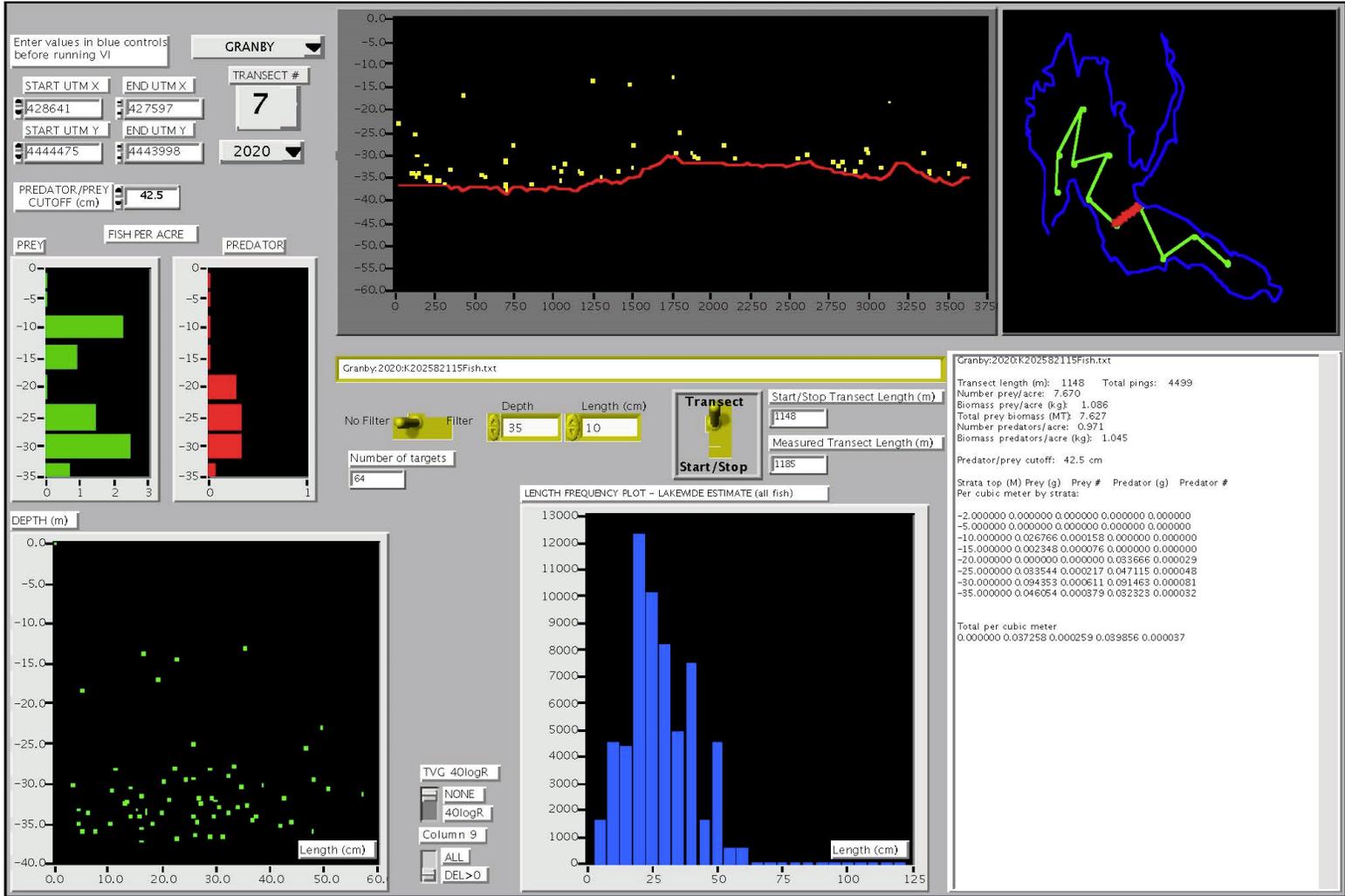


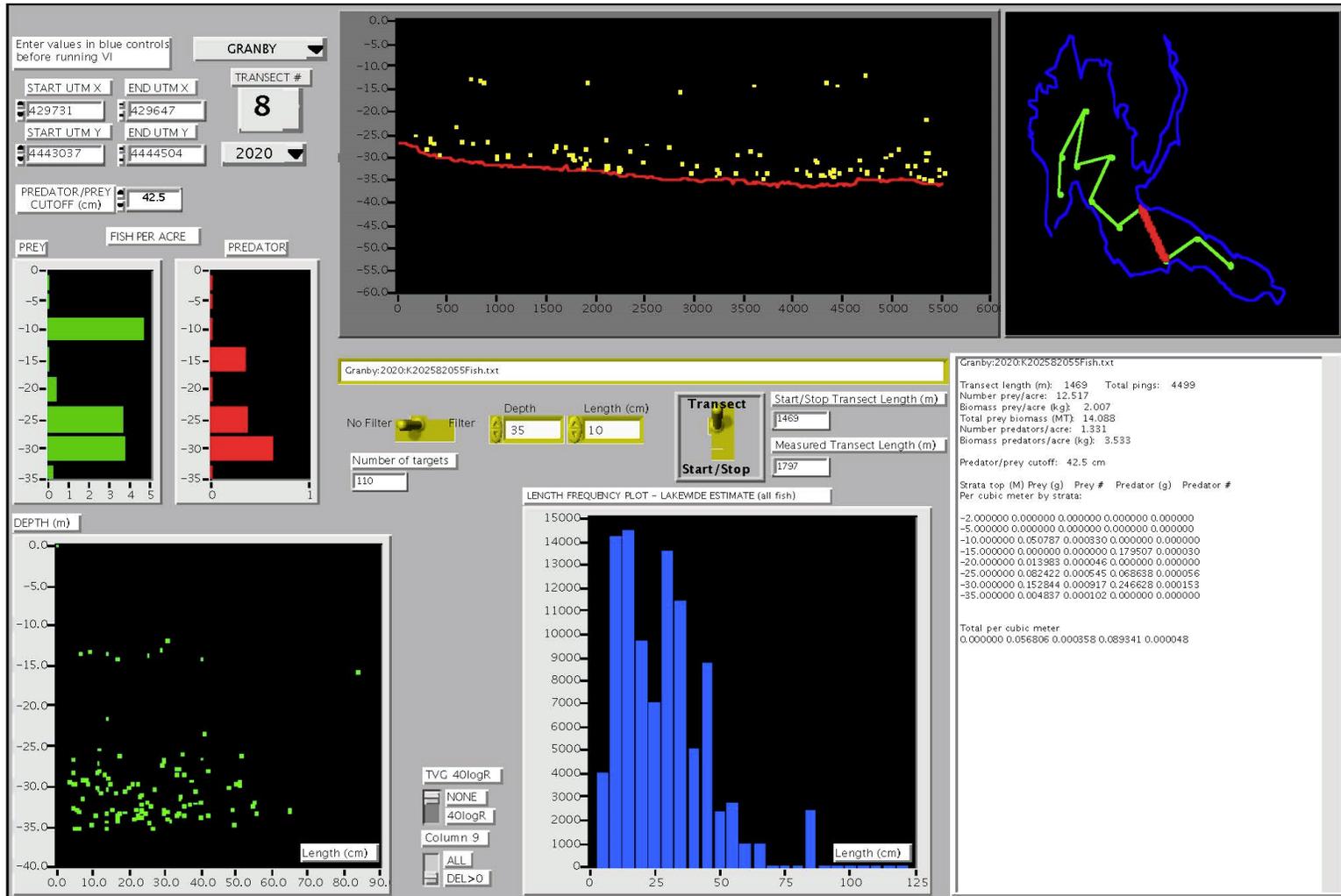


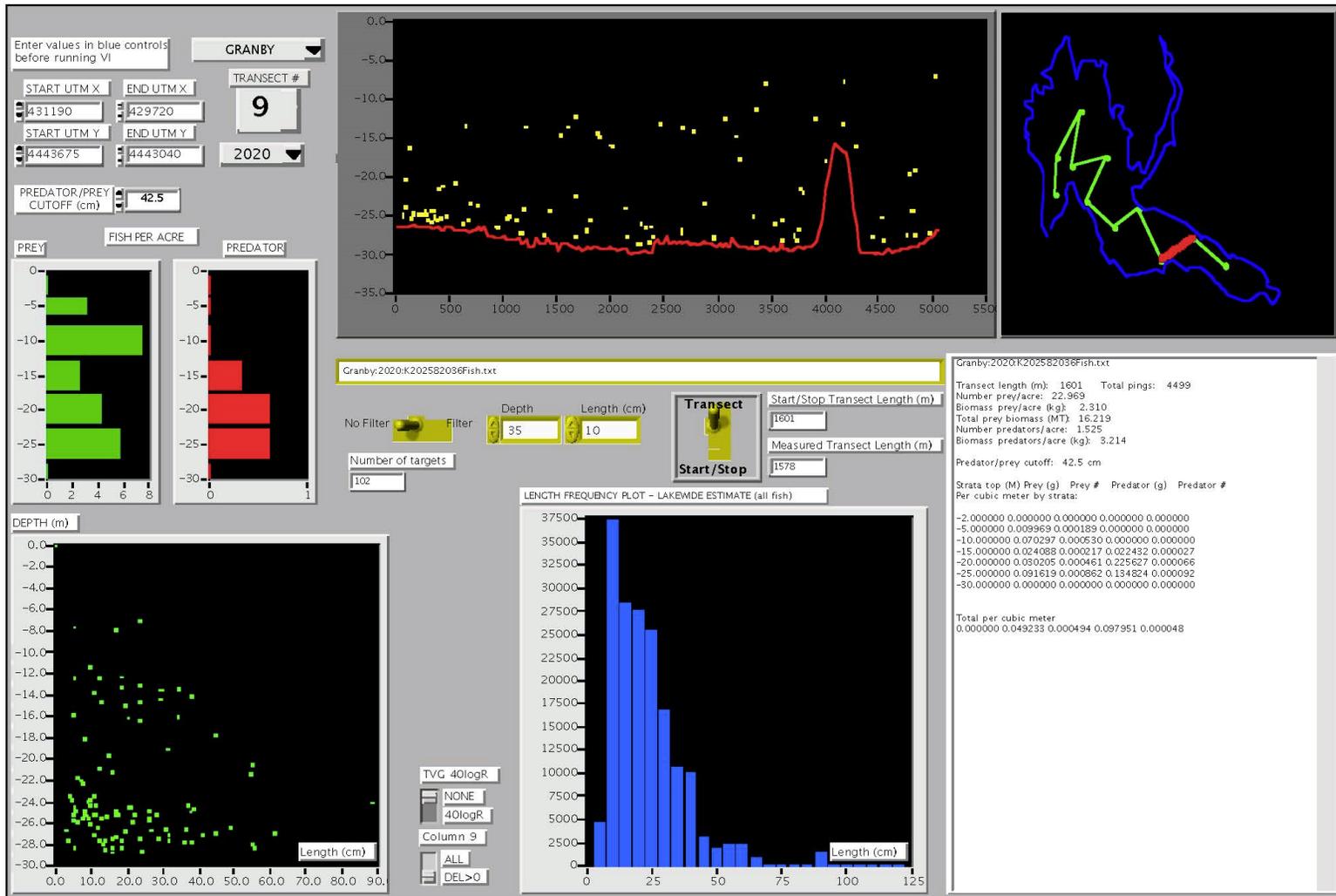


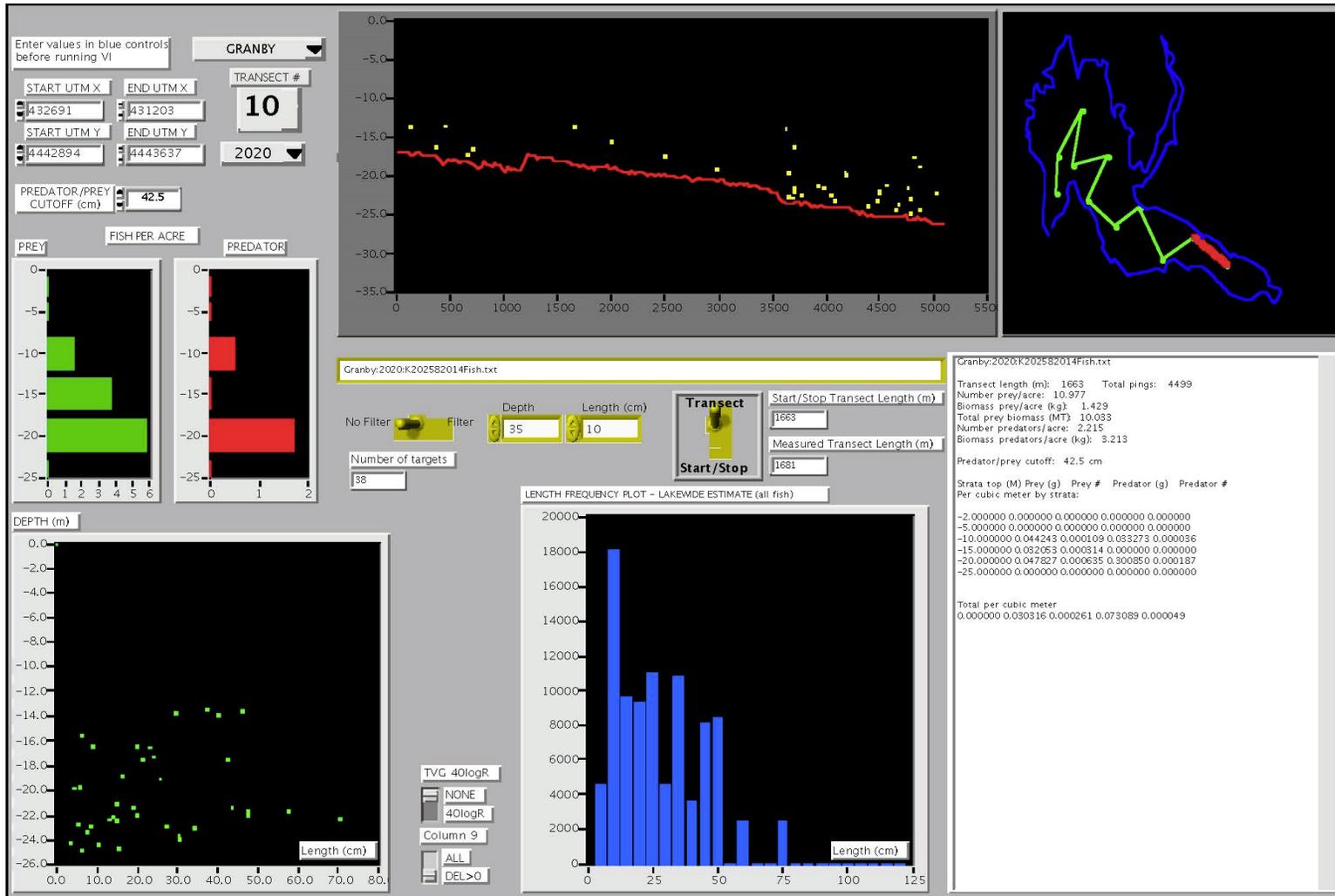






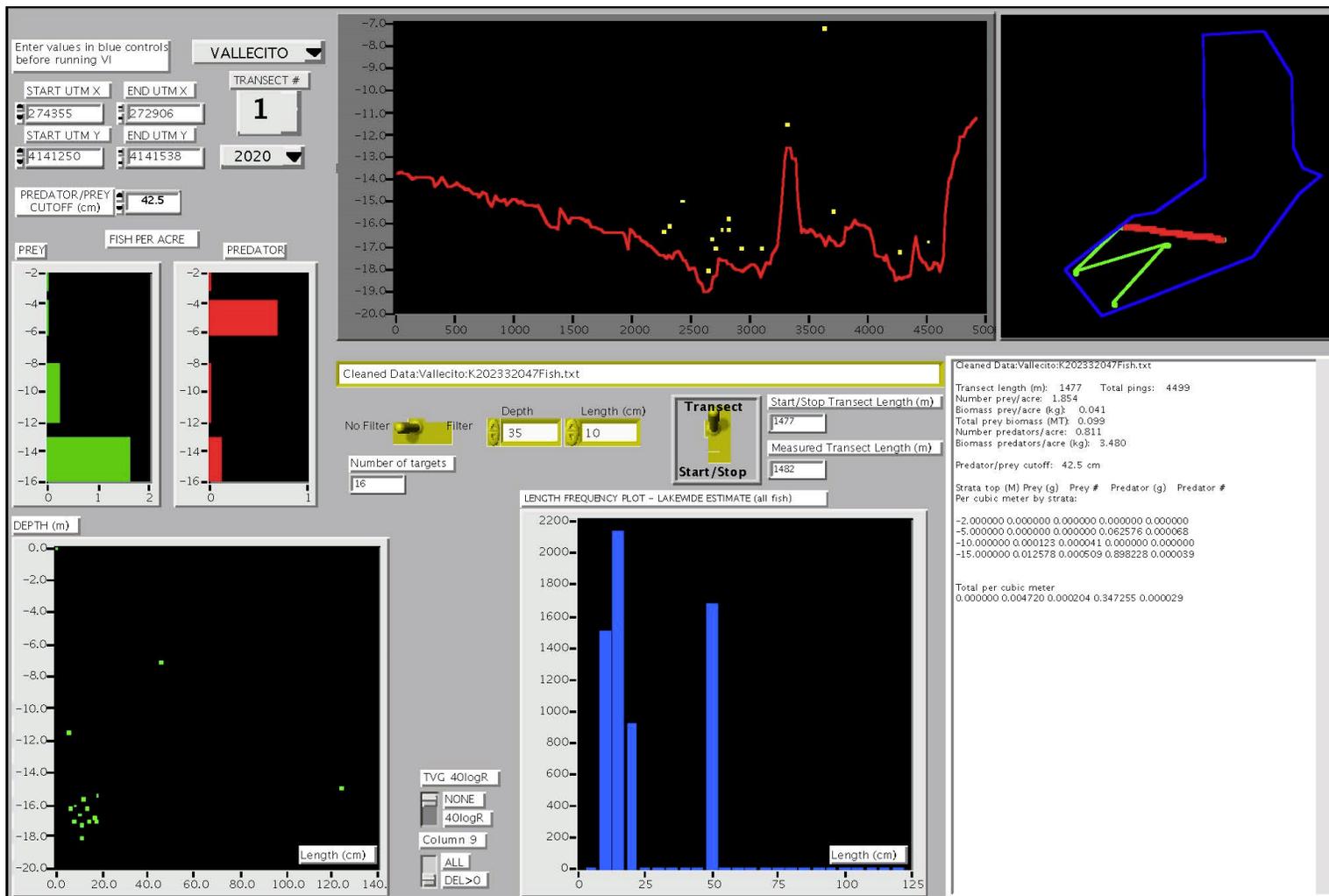


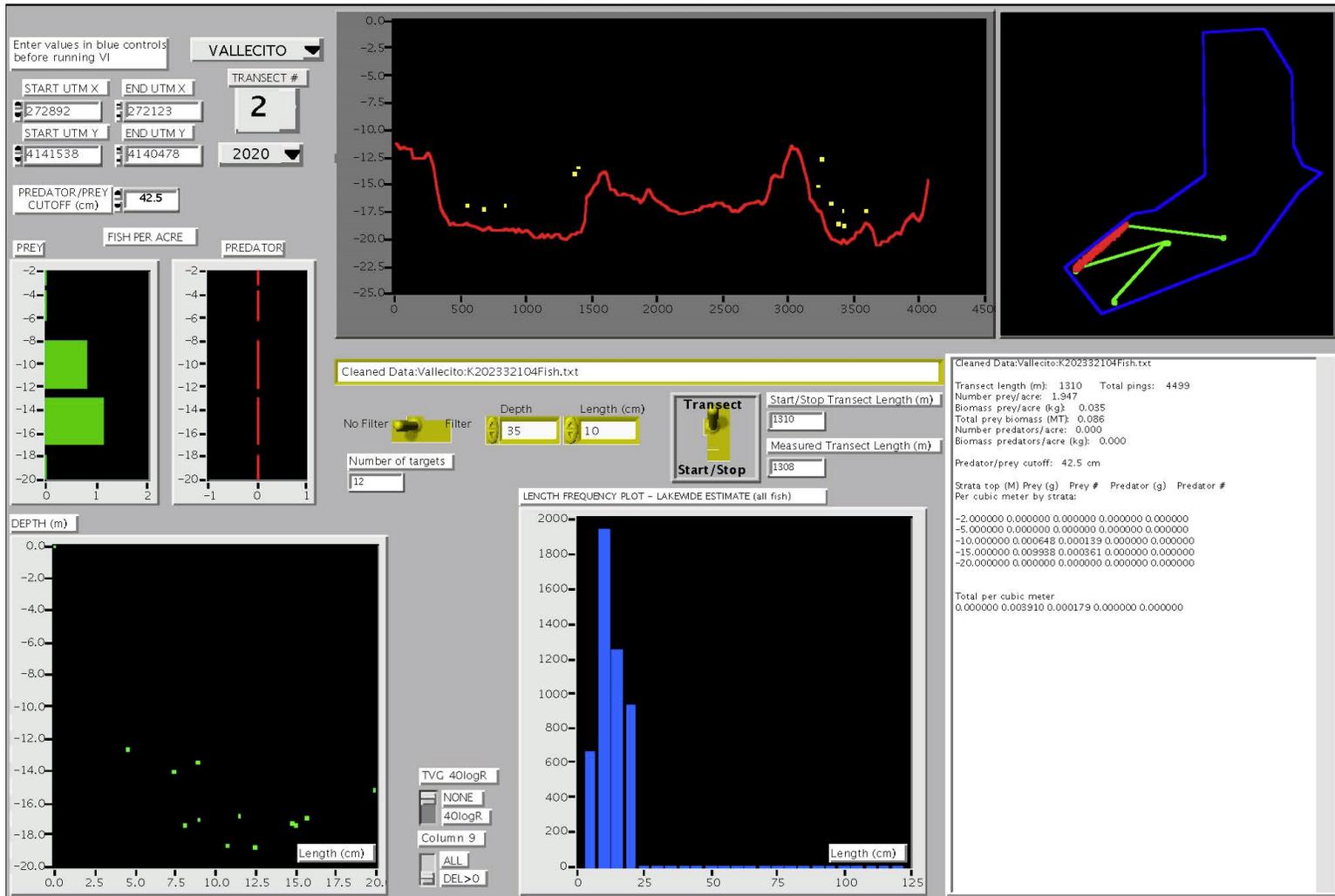


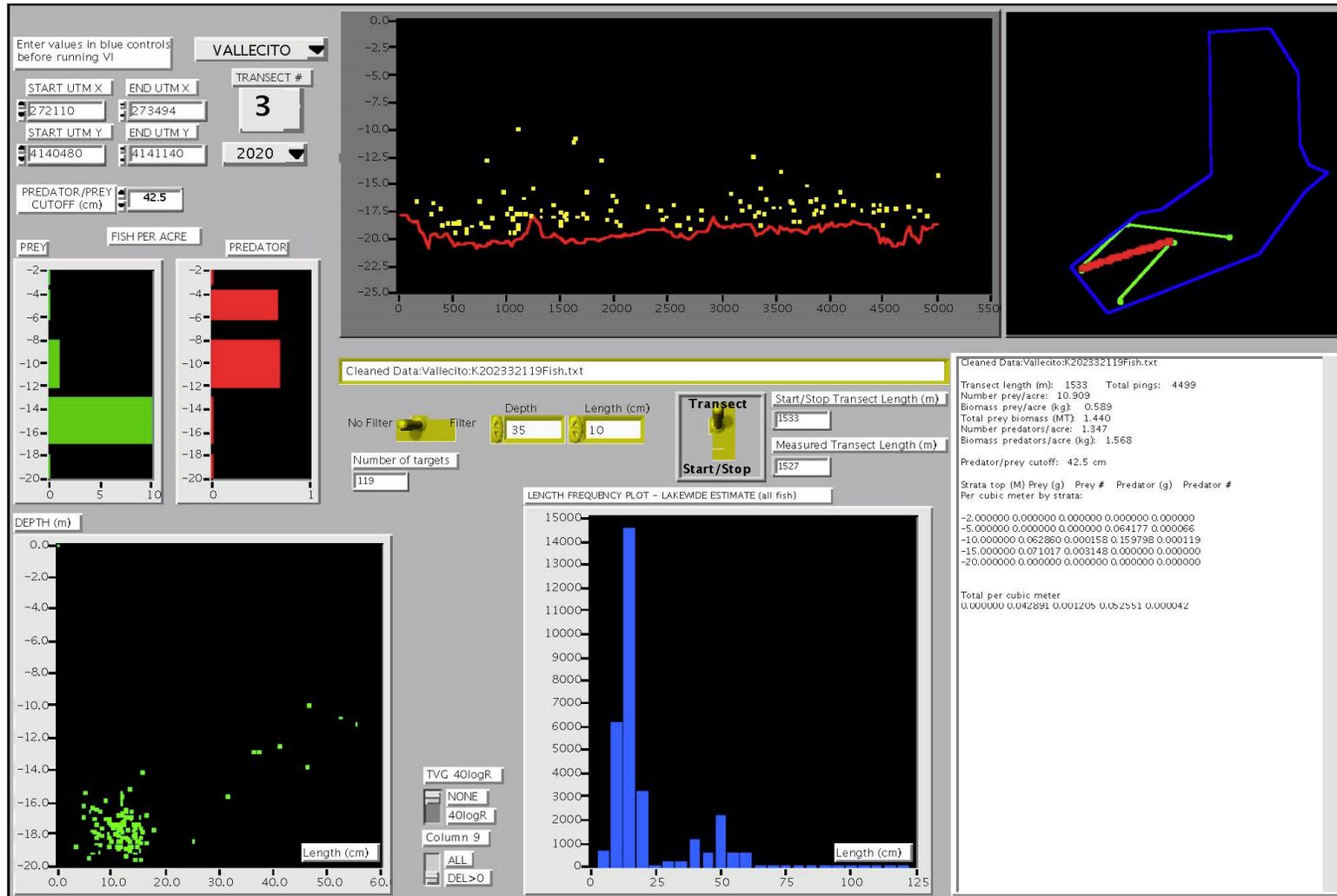


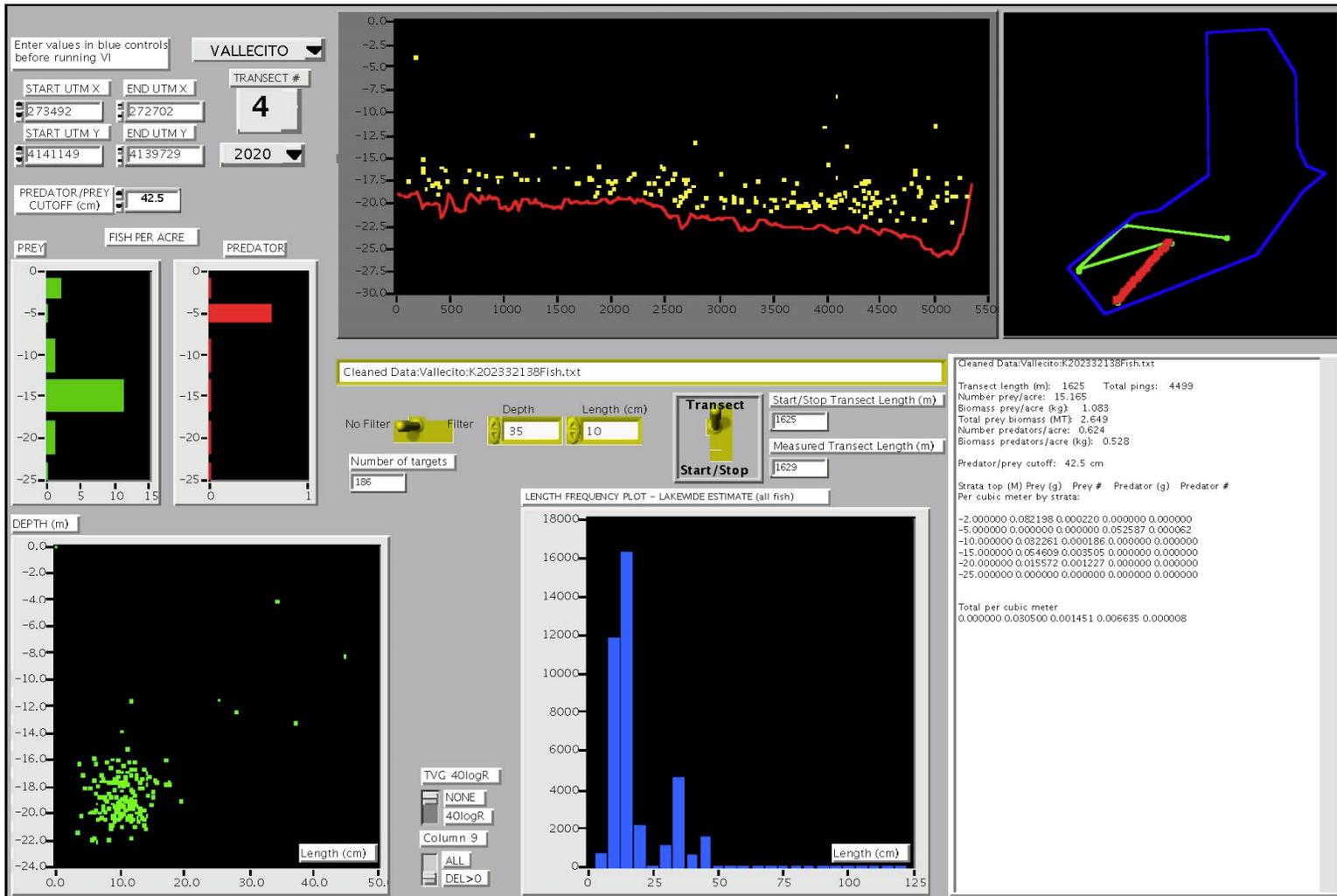
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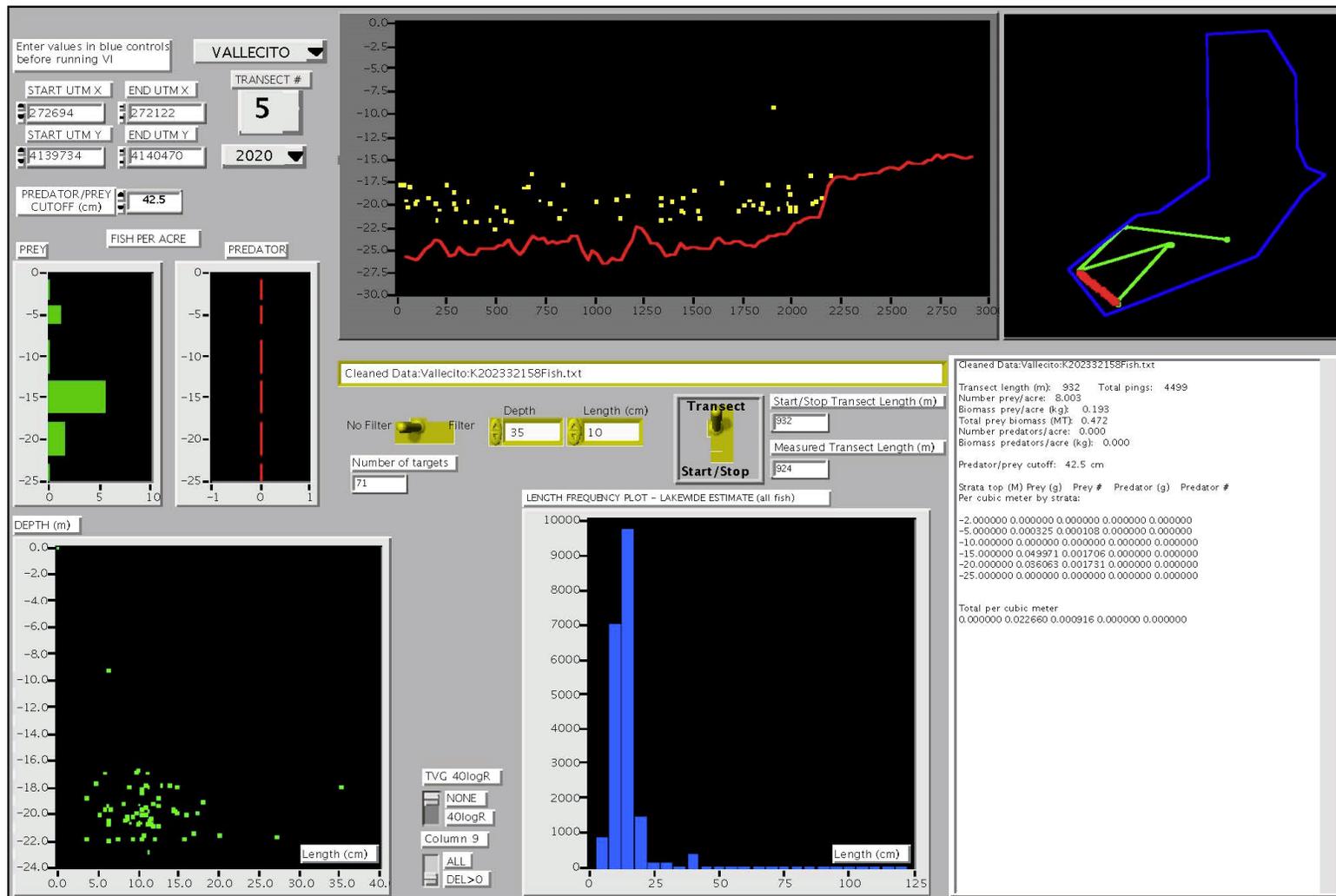
Individual transect output files from the HydroAcoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Vallecito Reservoir surveyed on August 20, 2020.





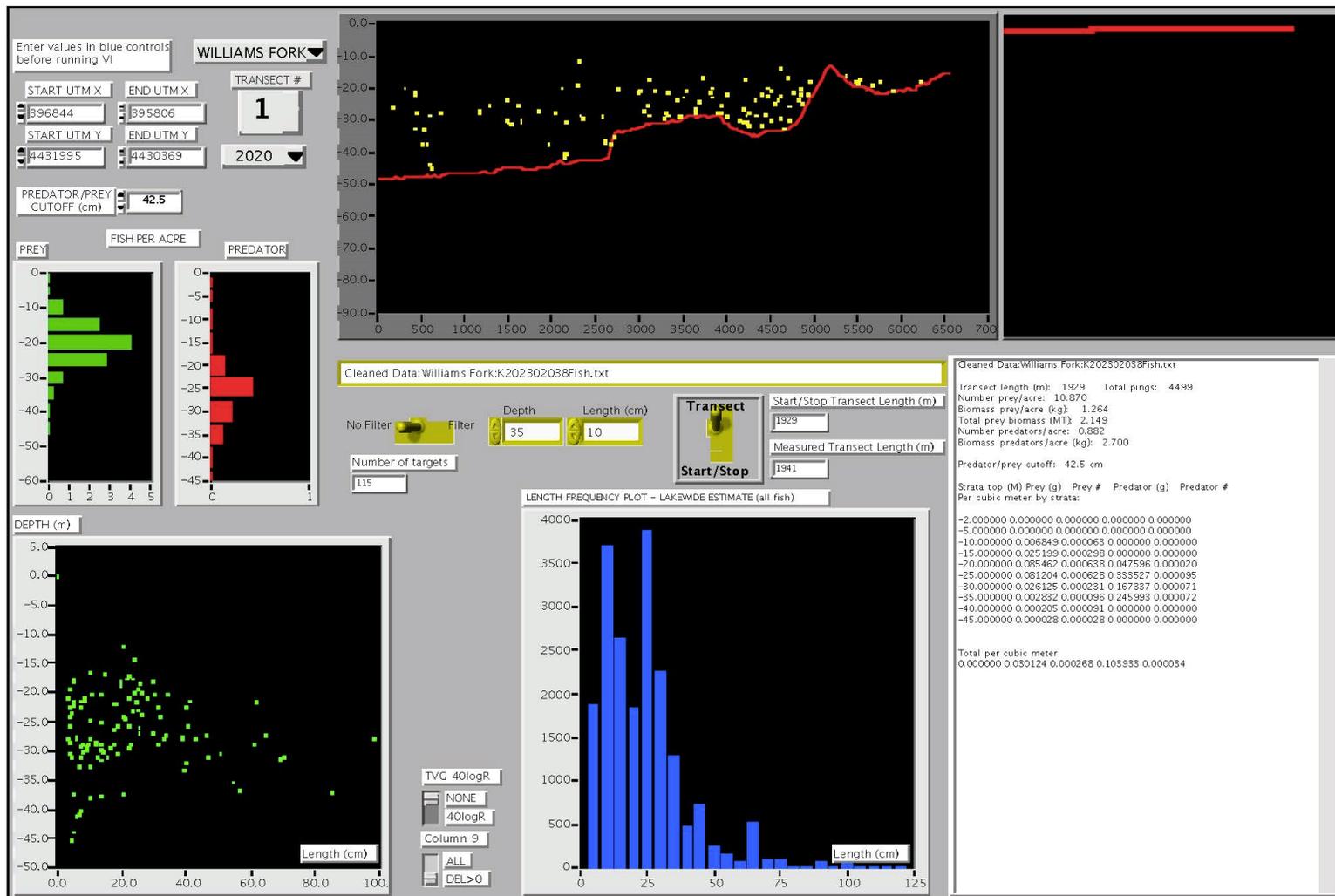


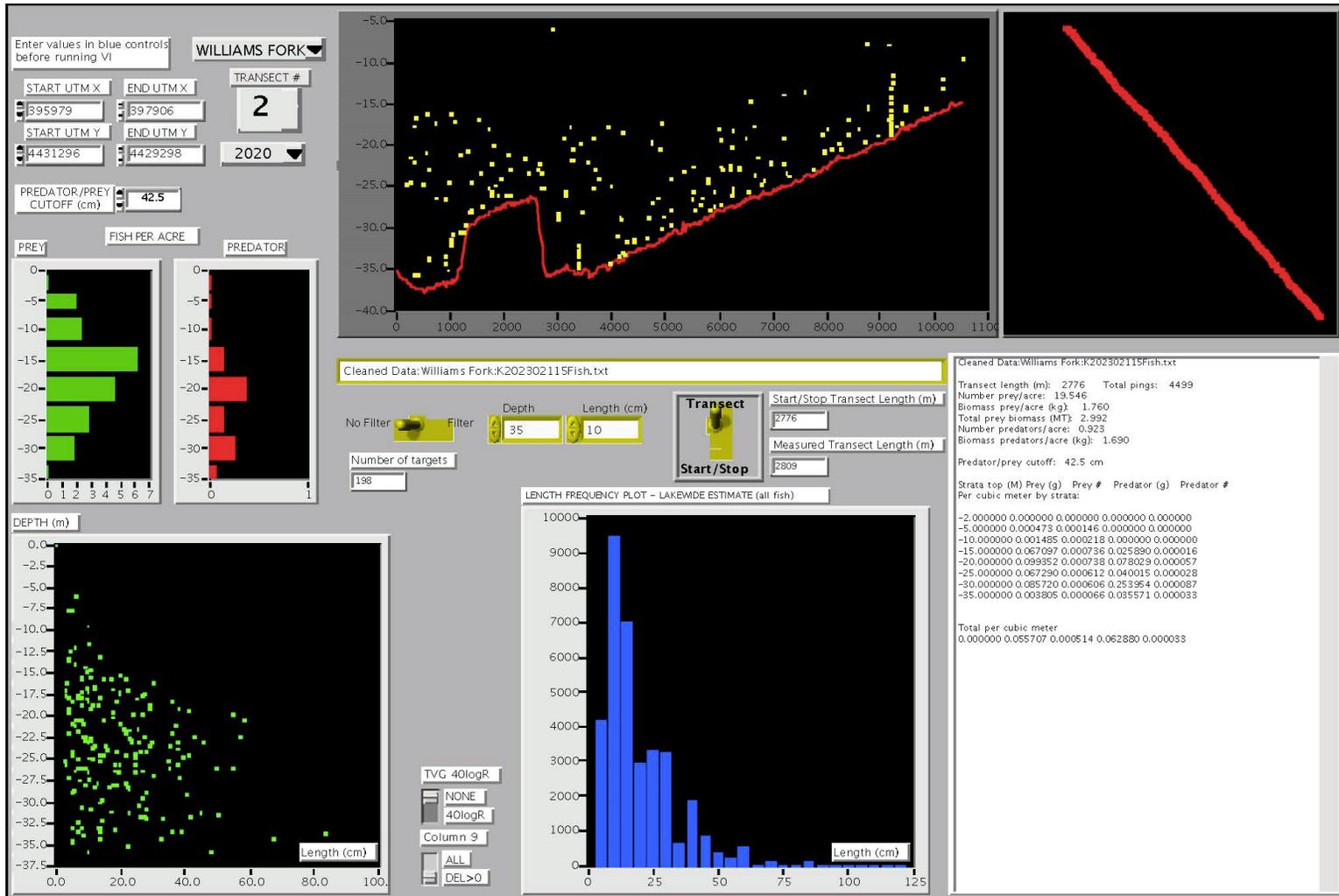




# Appendix E

Individual transect output files from the HydroAcoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Williams Fork Reservoir surveyed on August 17, 2020.





# Appendix F

Individual transect output files from the HydroAcoustic Kit (InterpretFish\_2020.vi) for Wolford Mountain Reservoir surveyed on September 15, 2020.

