

Your Lands, Your Wildlife

Cutthroat Trout

DEGRADED FOREST STREAMS IMPACT PRIZED TROUT, DRINKING WATER

For generations, anglers have fished the high mountain streams of the Rocky Mountain national forests hoping to get a bite from a cutthroat trout. Cutthroat trout were one of the first trout species recorded by Europeans in North America and the first trout species encountered by the Lewis and Clark expedition. There are over a dozen subspecies of cutthroat trout, three of which exist in the southern Rocky Mountains. One of them, the Colorado River cutthroat trout, historically occupied portions of the Colorado River drainage in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, including major streams and rivers. These same rivers are loved by countless outdoor enthusiasts for canoeing, kayaking and rafting adventures.

Cutthroat trout rely on the cold, clear high mountain streams of the Rocky Mountain national forests for their survival. Unfortunately, poorly planned logging, road-building, mining, and oil and gas projects can damage fragile trout streams and sensitive riparian ecosystems. Consequently, Colorado River cutthroat occupy less than 14 percent of their historic range, and are limited to isolated headwater streams of the Green and upper Colorado rivers in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

The clear, cold waterways that provide habitat for cutthroat trout also provide clean sources of drinking water. Since cutthroat trout are more sensitive to water quality conditions than most other species of fish, they serve as bellwethers for assessing the harmful effects of logging, road-building, mining and energy development on water quality. If we see declines in the health of trout populations, we have good reason to believe that our water quality is being compromised. Given the fact that approximately 3,400 towns and cities, and 60 million Americans depend on National Forest System watersheds for their public water supplies, we should strive to ensure the health of native trout populations in the face of development pressures on our public lands.



Quick Cutthroat Trout Facts

- Cutthroat trout species derive their name from a red streak across its lower jaw.
- Rio Grande cutthroat trout is the state fish of New Mexico. There are only 13 core populations in the world.
- Westslope cutthroat trout is the state fish of Montana, yet inhabits only 3 percent of its former range in the state.
- Poorly planned energy, logging, mining and grazing projects, as well as habitat fragmentation, have wreaked havoc on cutthroat trout populations.
- In Montana, Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico alone, anglers spent nearly \$1.7 billion in 2006 on fishing-related expenditures.

The Your Lands, Your Wildlife campaign supports balanced, science-based wildlife conservation measures on public lands. Healthy cutthroat trout and other fish and wildlife populations on public lands indicate overall land health, leading to unparalleled recreation opportunities, outstanding water quality, clean air and countless other natural, social and economic benefits for all Americans.