
Westslope Cutthroat Trout

Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi

Actinopterygii — Salmoniformes — Salmonidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Vulnerable subspecies (G4T3)
Statewide: Vulnerable (S3)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: Sensitive; Region 4: Sensitive
BLM: Rangewide/Globally imperiled (Type 2)
IDFG: Game fish

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Decline in distribution and abundance in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

Cutthroat trout were originally described by Richardson in 1836 (Nelson et al. 2004). Currently, they are placed in the *Oncorhynchus* genus in the Salmonidae family. According to Behnke (2002), Westslope cutthroat trout is 1 of 14 subspecies of cutthroat trout found in Western North America.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Westslope cutthroat trout occur along both sides of the Continental Divide from Yellowstone National Park into British Columbia and Alberta, additionally there are several disjunct populations in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia (Behnke 2002). In Idaho, they inhabit the Salmon, Clearwater, Coeur d'Alene, Clark Fork and Kootenai drainages.

POPULATION TREND

Historic abundance is unknown, however there has been substantial loss of habitat and populations from historical levels. Westslope cutthroat trout inhabit about 59% of their historical range within the U.S. In Idaho, they occupy and estimated 28,800 km (18,000 mi) of streams (~96% of historical range). Moreover, stream segments that supported Westslope cutthroat trout “slightly below” to “near” habitat capacity occupied about 50% of historical range (Shepard et al. 2003).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Westslope cutthroat trout normally require well-oxygenated water; clean, well-sorted gravels with minimal fine sediments for successful spawning; temperatures <21 C (<70 F), and a complexity of instream habitat structure such as large woody debris and overhanging banks for cover. Adfluvial Westslope cutthroat trout spend 1–4 years as juveniles in streams before moving into lakes. If other species are present in the lakes, Westslope cutthroat will use nearshore, littoral areas otherwise they will disperse throughout the lake (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). Adult fluvial fish overwinter in deeper pools. In cold higher elevation streams, growth rates are slower than warmer streams

with some fish living up to 12 years but only attaining lengths of 18–20 cm (7–8 in). Adfluvial and stocks in warmer waters reach lengths of 30–38 cm (12–15 in). Westslope cutthroat trout spawn between March and July when water temperatures are about 10 C (50 F). Maturity also depends on location ranging from 4–6 years and sizes of 10–36 cm (4–14 in). Diets are primarily aquatic invertebrates with larger fish rarely eating fish.

ISSUES

Reduction in historically occupied range, habitat loss, fragmentation of current habitat, and isolation of existing populations, and hybridization with rainbow trout and other subspecies of cutthroat trout are the principal issues facing westslope cutthroat trout (Shepard, et al., 2003).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Continue programs to (1) monitor populations; (2) sterile fish stocking program in areas where Westslope cutthroat trout and introduced hatchery fish overlap; and (3) monitoring genetic purity of westslope cutthroat trout populations. Maintain connectivity of current westslope cutthroat trout metapopulations. Details on restorative actions are available in Shepard et al. (2003).

