



## Wildlife Viewing

Rifle Falls Hatchery provides abundant wildlife viewing opportunities. Limestone cliffs are home to a nesting pair of golden eagles. The nest can be observed from the visitor center with the aid of binoculars. Bald eagles also frequent the area in wintertime. Other bird species that use the hatchery grounds and surrounding area include: wild turkey, belted kingfisher, American dipper and great blue heron. Mammals also inhabit the grounds. Seasonal and permanent residents include: mule deer, beaver, muskrat, ermine, pine marten and marmot.



Photo © Vic Schendel

CPW operates 19 hatcheries that breed, hatch, rear and stock over 90 million fish per year. Many of the fish produced are to enhance angling opportunities, while others serve a critical role in native species recovery efforts. Colorado fish hatcheries support our angling pastime, which annually contributes 1.9 billion dollars to our state's economy!



Photo © Dustin Daskocil

## Location

The Rifle Falls Hatchery is located 14 miles north of Rifle on Hwy. 325. Visitor parking is in the lot on the west side of the road. Nestled below 300-foot-tall limestone cliffs, the property is bounded by the city of Rifle Mountain Park to the north and by Rifle Falls State Park to the south. The bobcat hiking trail connects Rifle Falls State Park and the State Fish Hatchery. Two ponds directly above the falls (not visible from the highway) are open to public fishing. If you have a four-wheel-drive, high-clearance vehicle, you can continue beyond the hatchery to the White River National Forest and Flat Tops Wilderness area.

## Rifle Falls State Fish Hatchery

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COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

# Rifle Falls State Fish Hatchery

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## Rifle Falls State Fish Hatchery

In its early days, Rifle Falls State Fish Hatchery laid claim to the title of World's Largest Trout Farm. Completed in 1954, it was built in three years for a cost of \$1.1 million, which included land acquisition, water rights, materials and equipment. In its first year of production, the Rifle Falls Unit stocked 3.5 million trout. The facility underwent several renovations at the end of last century, most notably the switch from creek water to spring water and the addition of an isolation unit for rearing native cutthroats.



## Fish Production

While initially designed to run on surface water from East Rifle Creek, the advent of whirling disease necessitated the switch to spring water collection. Today, trout production is supported by 11 million gallons per day of spring water supplied by underground collector lines. The spring water provides optimal temperature (55 degrees F) and superior water quality for rearing trout. Before reaching the fish, the collected spring water is enriched with liquid oxygen and passed through a gas exchange column, which reduces the excess nitrogen. Rainbows can reach catchable size in about 10 months.

## Mission

Rifle Falls is one of 19 state hatcheries that exist to provide angling opportunities for kids, seniors, veterans and the general public, as well as contribute to native species conservation. Studies have shown that fishing contributes nearly two billion dollars in economic activity in the state of Colorado.

In addition to stocking fish, the staff at Rifle Falls routinely engages in public outreach and education. Visitor records show that at least 10,000 people visit the hatchery each year. Thousands more K-12 students are given a close-up view of aquaculture during guided group tours. Special events known as kids' fishing days are usually preceded by stocking catchable trout.

Rifle Falls also contributes to native species conservation efforts by raising Colorado River cutthroat trout. These unique fish are transported to high mountain lakes by airplane in the brief period of alpine summer between Independence Day and Labor Day.



## Stocking Area

There is a strong chance that if you have caught a rainbow trout along the I-70 corridor from Utah to Denver, it started its life at the Rifle Falls Hatchery. Over 800,000 catchable rainbows and close to four million fingerling rainbows are stocked each year from the Rifle Falls Unit (RIF) statewide. Major reservoirs that receive fish from RIF include: Granby, Stagecoach, Dillon, Miramonte, Pueblo and Lake John.

Major rivers stocked with whirling-disease-resistant fingerlings include the Colorado, Gunnison, Yampa, White and Roaring Fork. The staff of full-time technicians drives a fleet of CDL vehicles over 40,000 miles per year to meet stocking schedule goals. In addition to stocking lakes and rivers, RIF supplies other hatcheries with fingerlings that eventually are stocked as catchables in waters along the front range.

## Trout Species

Rifle Falls produces several varieties of rainbow trout, including whirling-disease-resistant rainbow trout. Rainbows inhabit the indoor and outdoor production areas year-round. Brown trout fingerlings are reared in the winter months and are stocked in various lakes around the state. Native cutthroat fry are reared in the Rifle Isolation Unit for aerial stocking of high altitude lakes. Every year, somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 2-inch cutthroat fry are stocked by plane. Cutthroat eggs are spawned at Durango and Glenwood Springs units and then hatched at Rifle Isolation Unit and stocked in late summer.