

Kokanee Salmon



Kokanee salmon are genetically identical to sockeye salmon, but because they spend their lives entirely in fresh water, they are somewhat smaller than their ocean-going relatives. The largest kokanee salmon spawning run in Colorado occurs each fall in the Gunnison Valley, when between 50,000–80,000 kokanee leave Blue Mesa Reservoir and swim up the Gunnison and East Rivers to the Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery near Almont. Hatchery personnel assist with the spawning operation at Roaring Judy, and the Pitkin Hatchery raises about 750,000 kokanee each year. These salmon are raised to about two inches and released into several rivers and lakes throughout Colorado.

The kokanee salmon in Blue Mesa Reservoir are important for several reasons. First, salmon are a huge boost to the local economy, as the majority of anglers go to Blue Mesa to fish for kokanee, along with rainbow trout. Also, Blue Mesa provides about 60 percent of the eggs needed for stocking kokanee in 26 lakes and reservoirs around the state. Overall, kokanee production and fishing contribute an estimated \$29 million annually to the Colorado economy.



Rio Grande Cutthroat Broodstock

Three species of cutthroat trout are native to the Centennial State: Colorado River, greenback, and Rio Grande cutthroats. Rio Grande cutthroat trout were originally found in the Rio Grande drainage in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. The Pitkin Hatchery currently maintains the only Rio Grande cutthroat broodstock in Colorado.

Each spring, over a period of about eight weeks, hatchery technicians carefully strip eggs from “ripe” 3–4 year old females and fertilize them with milt (sperm) from 2–3 year old males. On average, each Rio Grande female produces about 800 eggs. These “green” eggs are treated with an iodine solution to disinfect the surface of the egg and then transferred to a State hatchery in Monte Vista. The resulting Rio Grande cutthroat trout are raised to about one inch and are ultimately stocked via backpack or dropped from an airplane into streams and lakes throughout the mountains of the Rio Grande drainage.



Pitkin State Fish Hatchery

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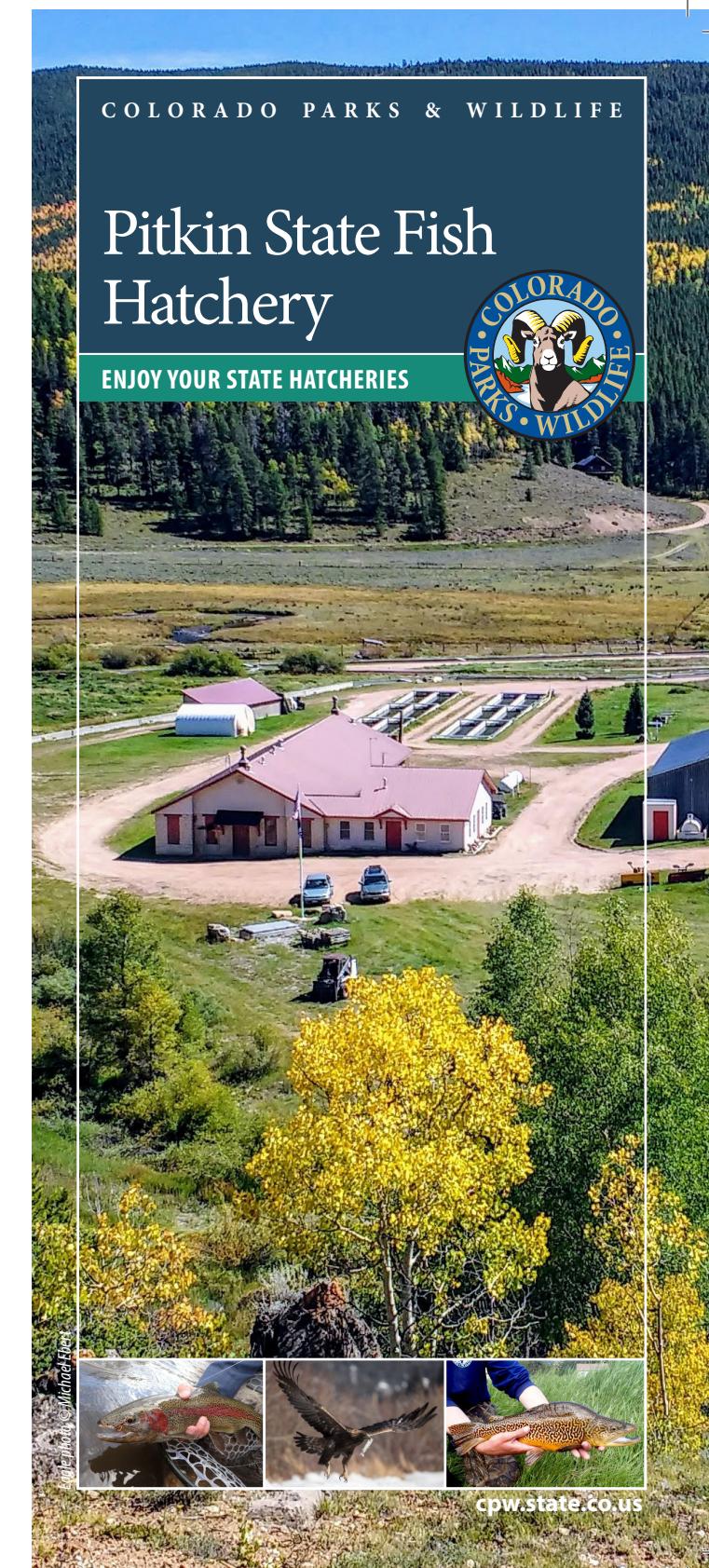
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Pitkin State Fish Hatchery

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The Pitkin Hatchery

The Pitkin Hatchery is located on the outskirts of Pitkin, Colorado, which has a year-round population of 80. Pitkin, originally called Quartzville, was renamed in honor of Colorado Governor Frederick W. Pitkin. This facility boasts the highest elevation (9,200 feet) and most snowfall (averaging 160 inches per year) of any state-run hatchery.



Circa 1892, workers remove dead fish eggs from the live ones in the original Pitkin Hatchery building.

The Pitkin Hatchery is one of the oldest hatcheries in the state, operating as a private fish hatchery in the late 19th century. Colorado Game & Fish (now Colorado Parks and Wildlife) purchased the hatchery in 1912, and the stone hatchery building currently in use was built in 1924.

Each year, the Pitkin Hatchery raises up to 150,000 ten-inch rainbow trout, 200,000 one- to three-inch rainbow trout, and 750,000 kokanee salmon fingerlings to release in lakes, reservoirs, streams and rivers throughout Colorado. Many different types of rainbow trout are raised at the facility. The Pitkin Hatchery also maintains a Rio Grande cutthroat broodstock. Additional species such as Colorado River cutthroat trout, brook trout, tiger trout, golden trout and splake are raised periodically, depending on fishery demands across the state.



Today, 19 State hatcheries 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!

Gunnison River Rainbow Trout

Each spring, Pitkin Hatchery personnel assist biologists in the spawning of Gunnison River rainbow trout at the East Portal near Montrose. The eggs are reared at the Pitkin Hatchery until they are slightly larger than one inch, at which time they are packed via mule train down Chukar Trail and disseminated throughout the Gunnison Gorge by raft. Gunnison River rainbows have shown natural resistance to whirling disease and may be stocked statewide in the near future.



Map painting © Katie Taylor