



Cache la Poudre River

Updated June 2022

FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Kyle Battige - Aquatic Biologist (Fort Collins)

kyle.battige@state.co.us / 970-472-4396

General Information: The Upper Poudre River is a designated wild and scenic river that provides trout fishing opportunities for brown, rainbow, brook, and cutthroat trout. Public access is abundant.

Location: Larimer County. The Poudre River canyon begins NW of Fort Collins 1 mile west of Highway 287 and Highway 14 (Ted's Place). There is over 50 miles of public river from the mouth of the canyon to Rocky Mountain National Park.

Recreational Management: U.S Forest Service, CPW, City of Fort Collins

Primary Management: Coldwater angling

Purchase a Fishing License: <http://cpw.state.co.us/buyapply/Pages/Fishing.aspx>

Amenities

- Many USFS campgrounds with a variety of facilities.
- Picnic areas
- Several boat launch sites
- State Wildlife Areas
- Guided wade or float fishing available from several local guide services.
- Several cabin rental locations within the canyon.

Previous Stocking

2021

Rainbow Trout

2020

Rainbow Trout

2019

Rainbow Trout

Regulations

Confluence of N. Fork to Upper Boundary of Gateway Park;

Pingree Park Road/Bridge to W boundary of Hombre Ranch (below Rustic);

Black Hollow Creek to Upper Boundary of Big Bend C.G.

- Artificial flies and lures only.
- All trout must be returned to the water immediately.

Joe Wright Creek to Rocky Mountain National Park:

- Artificial flies and lures only.
- Bag and possession limit for trout is 2.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Due to 2021 post Cameron Peak Wildfire runoff events and extreme debris/sediment flows the Poudre River fishery has been severely impacted from Black Hollow Creek confluence (Rustic) downstream to Stove Prairie. CPW recommends fishing upstream of the Poudre River State Fish Hatchery or downstream of Stove Prairie and even further downstream at Gateway Park Natural Area.



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Management

The Poudre River is managed to provide the best coldwater angling possible. Prior to human arrival in the area, the only trout in the Poudre were cutthroat. In the late 1800's, non-native rainbow and brown trout were introduced to the river and they became reproducing wild populations. Rainbow trout out-competed cutthroat and dominated the river system.

In the 1990's, whirling disease decimated the wild-spawning rainbow trout and the river has become a brown trout dominated system. Rainbow trout are still stocked in the river, between three and ten inches, but limited natural reproduction is observed.

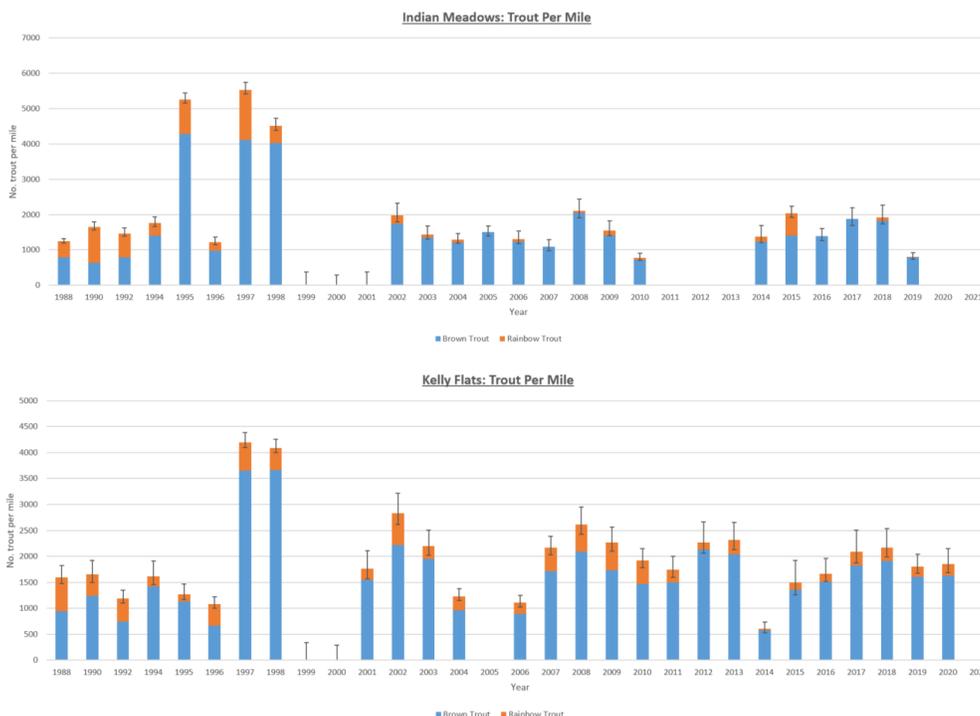
Sampling is done annually at several locations from College Ave upstream to Bliss State Wildlife Area. The river is electrofished in the fall, when water levels have dropped, to get an efficient capture.

The Poudre River is broken into different regulation areas. Some areas are managed with a restrictive regulation of artificial flies and lures, catch and release only regulation (page 1). Other reaches fall under general statewide bag and possession limits with no size or tackle restriction.

Standardized sampling stations were developed to evaluate differences between those regulations. The populations of trout between stations has been variable over the years, but there is not a consistent pattern based on regulations, the catch and release reaches do not always have more trout or larger trout than the general regulation reaches. The two figures below show population estimates for Indian Meadows (restrictive regulation reach) and Kelly Flats (statewide regulation reach). The populations are variable through time, but do not show a strong pattern for one reach having more fish on average than another.



Poudre River



Overall, The Poudre River can be a harsh environment for trout. There are a number of variables, both environmental and biological that fish must endure. For example, low water levels during both the summer and winter provide different challenges for trout. During winter time periods, temperatures and water levels get very low creating extreme ice conditions in the river. Certain reaches lack adequate deep pool holding habitat and trout are forced to live in an over widened and shallow channel for the minimal amount of water in the river. In addition, the overall gradient and canyon environment result in relatively low productivity and slow growth for trout.



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CURRENT CONDITIONS:

The figure and pictures on this page provide an update on the Poudre River fishery post debris and sediment flows in July 2021. The debris and sediment flow from Black Hollow Creek, in particular, had a dramatic impact on the Poudre River fishery. The heavy sediment loads prevented fish from being able to exchange oxygen from the water and suffocated them. Impacts from this event killed fish for greater than 60 river miles downstream with a total loss of the fishery, all fish were killed or displaced, for nearly 20 river miles downstream of the Black Hollow Creek confluence, which is just upstream of Rustic. The graph below illustrates these impacts with the black dotted line representing the Black Hollow Creek confluence. No fish were captured from Rustic downstream until Stove Prairie. Negative impacts and reductions in trout abundance were observed over 40 river miles downstream at Lyons Park.

CPW has started the process of rebuilding the fishery. The management plan is to stock whirling disease resistant strains of rainbow trout in an attempt to establish their populations prior to brown trout naturally migrating back to these impacted reaches and increasing in abundance. The goal will be to build currently impacted reaches that are void of fish into rainbow trout strongholds and have the reaches that were not at all impacted or less impacted remain brown trout dominated reaches, thus providing more diverse fishing opportunities.

CPW will continue annual monitoring to evaluate the Poudre River fishery and manage it adaptively. The rebuilding process will take many years, possibly decades, to complete and additional negative impacts from the post Cameron Peak Wildfire runoff events are possible. For the time being, anglers are encouraged to fish upstream of Rustic or downstream of Stove Prairie, areas that were less impacted and still have trout present. For more information see the CPW press release from June 2021 (<https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/News-Release-Details.aspx?NewsID=3528>).



Poudre River: Trout Population Estimates

