Sportfishing Notes

Rainbow Trout

- Highest number of rainbows occur in the East Portal area and upstream of the North Fork
- Good flies include midges, pheasant tails, scuds, elk hair caddis, salmonflies, hoppers, and black wooly buggers
- Important hatches include BWO’s, grannom caddis (April/May), salmonflies (June), and golden stones (June)

Brown Trout

- Brown trout are abundant throughout the river, Ute Park is a good spot
- Best fishing times include May, June, September and October.
- Fishing is best in the evening, at night, and early morning hours
- Good flies include wooly buggers, stoneflies, and bunny leaches

General Information: The Gunnison River in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge is a Gold Medal wild trout fishery that stretches over 40 miles from Crystal Reservoir to the town of Austin and provides many diverse wading and float fishing opportunities

Location: There are many access points in Montrose and Delta counties predominantly in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. For access information and regulations see:

http://www.nps.gov/blca/index.htm

Primary Management: Gold Medal quality coldwater fishing for wild brown and rainbow trout

Amenities

- Popular foot trails include Warner Point, Red Rocks, Chukar, Bobcat, Duncan, Ute, and West River Trail
- Drive-to camping available in the National Park in East Portal and on the BLM along the South River Road
- Wilderness hiking camps and boating camps available in BLM wilderness area, see BLM web page for details
- Boating access is available by pack in only at Chukar trail. The float from Chukar to the North Fork includes class III and IV whitewater
- Float fishing access is available at the Gunnison Forks, Cottonwood Grove, and Orchard boat ramps off South River Road.

Regulations

- From Crystal Res Dam downstream 200 yards:
  - Fishing prohibited as posted.
- From 200 yards downstream of Crystal Res dam to Relief Ditch diversion (5 miles above Austin Bridge):
  - Artificial flies and lures only.
  - Rainbows must be returned to water immediately.
  - Limit on brown trout is 4 fish of any size

Previous Stocking

The Gunnison River is managed primarily as a wild trout water, with the exception that since 2004 whirling disease resistant rainbow trout have been stocked throughout the river to re-establish wild rainbow reproduction. These fish are stocked as 2” long fry.
**Figure 1.** Trout population estimates for fish over six inches from the Ute Park section of the Gunnison River 1983-2014. In 2014 there was an estimated $5223 \pm 1047$ fish per mile of brown trout and $173 \pm 65$ fish per mile of rainbow trout. 2014 saw a decrease in the numbers of brown trout from previous years, likely due to the high spring runoff. 2010 was a low flow year and had high numbers of brown trout.

**Figure 2.** Number of brown trout in each length class sampled in Ute Park during a low flow year (2010; blue) and a high flow year (2014; red). In high flow years, the numbers of 1 year old brown trout are far lower than in low flow years. Also, thanks to the cold water lasting longer in high flow years, the 1 year old brown trout are much smaller (3-6 inches) than in low flow, warm water years where they are larger at 6-9 inches. The reduced number and size of 1 year old brown trout in high flow years results in good survival of rainbow trout fry, which is important for returning the rainbow trout following whirling disease.
Figure 3. Panel a: Number of 1 year old brown trout estimated per mile decline as average spring flow in cfs increases. Panel b: Average number of rainbow trout fry per mile decline as the number of 1 year old brown trout per mile increases. These two figures show that high spring flows benefit rainbow trout fry survival by decreasing the number of 1 year old brown trout present in the system. High spring flows are likely a key to restoring the rainbow trout population in the Gunnison River.

Management Summary

The trout fishery of the Gunnison River in the Gorge continues to be one of the highest quality Gold Medal fisheries in Colorado and anywhere in the west with 5 to 10 thousand trout per mile over 6 inches long. The fishery is still dominated by brown trout which, despite successful rainbow trout reproduction, are limiting the recovery of rainbow trout through competition and predation. In high flow years, rainbow trout fry survival is increased due to a decline in the number of brown trout in the system, which should result in good rainbow trout survival to adult sizes. Once rainbow trout reach 1 year of age, they do very well in the Gunnison River.

The East Portal section downstream of Crystal dam is the one area in the river where rainbow trout have recovered to represent nearly half of the fish in the river. These rainbow trout have developed a resistance to whirling disease, and are good at competing with brown trout. Currently, CPW is collecting eggs from these fish each spring and stocking the fry that hatch from them from the Chuckar to Ute Trail access points in the Gunnison Gorge. Particularly in high flow years, we hope that this will help to restore the wild rainbow trout population which when added to the wild brown trout population will increase the quality of the angling in the Gunnison River.

The 2016 fishing forecast for the Gunnison River is good, and anglers should expect to catch good numbers of rainbow and brown trout from 12 to 20 inches, with the possibility of larger fish. For rainbow trout fishing, focus on the East Portal, and the area between the Smith and North Fork Gunnison River confluences.