**General Information:** Joe Wright Reservoir (150 acres) is a coldwater impoundment near the top of Cameron Pass along Highway 14.

**Location:** Larimer County, from Fort Collins take US-287/HWY 14 north 6 miles to HWY 14/Poudre Canyon HWY. Turn left and proceed up the canyon 55 miles to the reservoir.

**Recreational Management:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife

**Fishery Management:** Coldwater angling

**Purchase a Fishing License:** [http://cpw.state.co.us/buyapply/Pages/Fishing.aspx](http://cpw.state.co.us/buyapply/Pages/Fishing.aspx)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amenities</th>
<th>Previous Stocking</th>
<th>Sportfishing Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Restrooms upstream of reservoir at Zimmerman Lake trailhead             | 2019 Cutthroat Trout  
Tiger Muskie  
Tiger Trout (Sterile Brook/ Brown Hybrid)  
2018 Cutthroat Trout  
2017 Cutthroat Trout  
Tiger Muskie  
2016 Cutthroat Trout  
Tiger Muskie  
2015 Cutthroat Trout  
Tiger Muskie  
Tiger Trout (Sterile Brook/ Brown Hybrid) | **Grayling**  
• Fishing is usually slow from ice off until when the fish are staging to spawn  
• Fish typically spawn from mid-June to mid July depending on ice conditions. **Keep in mind, the creek is closed to fishing to the Hwv, until July 31.**  
• Grayling will aggressively rise to small flies fished on the surface. Be patient, they will frequently miss their first attempt.  
| • Artificial flies and lures only                                         |                                                                                   | **Winter**  
| • Bag and possession for trout and Grayling is 4 fish. Bag limit is in aggregate meaning your combined total of trout and grayling cannot exceed 4 fish.  
• Bag and possession for Tiger Muskie is 1 fish at least 36”  
From the confluence with Joe Wright Reservoir to HWY 14, **there is no fishing in Joe Wright Creek from Jan. 1—July 31.** Bag, possession, and means of take from the reservoir apply.  
| • Non-motorized boating only                                               |                                                                                   | • Use small jigs and flies to catch cutthroat and grayling through the ice, no bait allowed.  
| • Ice fishing allowed                                                      |                                                                                   | • Fish this lake early, The ice gets prohibitively thick in the later winter months.  

* In 2004 - 50 female lake trout were planted to help control stunted grayling
Management Notes

Joe Wright is a high mountain reservoir managed for Cutthroat Trout and Arctic Grayling. It probably has the best population of grayling in the state. Grayling were originally stocked into Zimmerman Lake (now Greenback Cutthroat only), above the reservoir. At that time Joe Wright was managed for a specific type of Rainbow Trout, the Eagle Lake strain. A spawning channel was built above the reservoir to accommodate the spawning preferences of the Eagle Lake fish to get a naturally reproducing population in the reservoir.

Over time, a number of Grayling escaped Zimmerman, running downstream to Joe Wright. They found the creek and spawning channel above the reservoir to be ideal spawning habitat and their population exploded. They eventually overtook the lake and outcompeted the Rainbow Trout. The Grayling were too successful and began to overpopulate the lake. To help combat this trend, Tiger Muskie were put into the lake in limited numbers to reduce Grayling numbers. In addition, a small number of female Lake Trout were stocked in 2004 for the same reason. The Tiger Muskies grow slowly in the cold water, with the largest Tiger Muskie captured to date being around 28”. Sterile Tiger Trout (Brown Trout x Brook Trout hybrid) were introduced in 2013 with the same intent and have grown to 21”. These additions are and should continue to make some significant changes to the population structure of Grayling in the lake over the next few years. This is translating to increased mean and max length that Grayling are achieving in Joe Wright.
Standardized sampling in 2019 captured five different species: Grayling, Longnose Sucker, Cutthroat Trout, Tiger Muskie, and Tiger Trout.

Tiger Trout were first stocked in 2013 to put additional pressure on the stunted Grayling population. Growth rates for all species in Joe Wright is slow due to the limited growing season, but 20 inch Cutthroat and 25 inch Tiger Trout were sampled in 2019. Overall, a wider range of Grayling sizes and ages has been developing over the last few years. This indicates a shift away from domination by the oldest year classes and suggests that we may be breaking up the stunted condition that had persisted. Catch per unit effort for Grayling was up in 2018, but dropped back down to an average value in 2019. Based on length frequency data (figure to the right) there is a strong age class of 8-11 inch fish that dominated the catch.

This has caused a shift to more smaller individuals present in the lake. Hopefully predation pressure will thin out this year class and allow some of those fish to grow into larger sizes as they mature. Grayling approaching 18 inches were caught in the reservoir shortly after they were introduced, so we know that the potential for larger fish, that could challenge the state record has existed for this water.

Note the five age classes of Grayling in the picture to the right, with the top fish measuring 14.5”.

Don’t miss the < 1” fish in the bottom left of the picture (highlighted by the red box) which was naturally spawned in Joe Wright Creek just two months earlier.
Management Recommendations:

- Continue monitoring Grayling trends: catch per unit effort, size structure, and condition to assess population dynamics. Hopefully size of adult Grayling and maximum length continue to increase.
- Evaluate stocking of additional predators in the reservoir. CPW may back off stocking additional teeth in the reservoir over the next few years depending on what trends we see in the Grayling population.
- CPW will continue conducting the Grayling wild spawn operation to collect eggs to meet the statewide Grayling stocking requests.

Pictures from fishery sampling:

- 16.5” Tiger Trout
- 5” Tiger Trout
- 15” Cutthroat Trout
- 26.5” Tiger Muskie
Grayling Spawn

Joe Wright Reservoir is the location from which CPW takes all grayling eggs for the entire state. The operation will take up to 250,000 eggs that go to the Glenwood Hatchery to meet our request for grayling stocking around the state. The average grayling produces around 1,100 eggs.

Grayling have a massive spawning run out of Joe Wright Reservoir. They move up the river together shortly after ice off, when the flows and temperatures meet their criteria. This occurs over a short span of just a few days and for the most part, the fish all move up at once. Thousands of fish school up in the shallow stream, congre- gating together, then seeking out and defending the optimal spawning sites, typically shallow gravel bars. The males are distinctive with their large colorful dorsal fin that they use to attract females. Unlike salmon, when they are finished spawning, Grayling immediately return the lake.

CPW produced a video highlighting the spawning operation that can be seen at the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuJiflT3oDs