

A COLORADO TREASURE



A Southwest Treasure

The Rio Grande cutthroat is the native trout of the Rio Grande and its tributaries in Colorado and New Mexico. It's a beautiful, unique cutthroat trout sub-species and exciting game fish.

It belongs here, because it has adapted to our region for eons. Rio Grande cutthroat are part of our culture and angling heritage.

Take the Survey

Information from anglers is vital to protecting the Rio Grande cutthroat.



Please take a few minutes for a brief survey about Rio Grande cutthroat trout at www.tu.org/rgct

Your survey response is extremely important. It will help Trout Unlimited protect, reconnect, and restore populations of Rio Grande cutthroat trout in Colorado.



"CORONADO SETS OUT TO THE NORTH"
— OIL PAINTING BY FREDERIC REMINGTON.

A Species in Time

The Rio Grande cutthroat was the first trout to be encountered by Europeans in the West. In 1541, Francisco de Coronado's expedition to find the mythical cities of gold came across the Rio Grande cutthroat in the upper Pecos River near what is now Santa Fe, New Mexico.

All 14 cutthroat trout subspecies (two of them now extinct) share a common ancestor that branched off from the rainbow trout at the end of the Pliocene epoch around 2 million years ago. The Rio Grande cutthroat branched off from the Colorado River cutthroat into the previously unoccupied Rio Grande basin following the last glacial period around 70,000 years ago.

In 1878, *Forest and Stream* magazine reported an account of Colorado Governor Hunt taking a general from Pennsylvania fishing on Trinchera Creek near Fort Garland. The story follows that the governor heard a commotion and saw a big fish flying through the air. He found the general hoisting a three-pound Rio Grande cutthroat over his shoulder and exclaiming, "oh, I have a leg of mutton on my hook."

To this day, Trinchera Creek is a stronghold for RGCT, thanks to a partnership between Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Louis Bacon's Trinchera Blanca Foundation.



"If the philosophical, theoretical, and practical values associated with cutthroat trout were better understood, insensitivity and opposition to their restoration and protection would greatly diminish."

—Robert J. Behnke, aka "Dr. Trout"

How You Can Help

Contribute

Your tax-deductible contributions to Trout Unlimited will help directly fund projects for Rio Grande cutthroat in Colorado, including habitat restoration, streamflow improvements, and other work that makes fishing better. We invite you to be an important partner in this great cause.

To donate directly, send a check payable to *Trout Unlimited Rio Grande Basin*. Write "Rio Grande cutthroat trout" in the memo line, and include a return address to receive a receipt.

Mail to: Kevin Terry
Rio Grande Basin Project Manager
Trout Unlimited
P.O. Box 281
Del Norte, CO 81132



PHOTO: FRANK WEISSBARTH

Connect

There are many other ways for you to help your native cutthroat trout. Please contact Kevin Terry at kterry@tu.org to sign up to be an on-the-ground advocate and volunteer for Rio Grande cutthroat work.

Become a member of TU! Go to tu.org

Threats and Current Status

Today, because of a host of pressures, the Rio Grande cutthroat occupies only 10–12 percent of its historic range.

The primary threats to Rio Grande cutthroat include:

- **Nonnative trout.** Rainbow trout, an introduced species, as well as other cutthroat subspecies have the ability to hybridize with the Rio Grande cutthroat and therefore jeopardize genetic integrity at the population level. Other non-native trout, including brown trout and brook trout, threaten the Rio Grande cutthroat through competition for habitat and prey. To address the threats from non-natives, populations of Rio Grande cutthroat often require a physical separation in the form of a man-made or natural barrier. While these barriers are necessary, they can isolate populations and therefore make them more vulnerable to natural disturbances like wildfire and drought.
- **Mining and irrigation development** can have negative impacts if improperly managed. With climate change predictions and an ongoing drought in the Southwest, the challenge is to reduce these negative impacts while sustaining agriculture and the local economies.

- **Roads, logging, and grazing.** Cutthroat trout are sensitive to changes in water quality. Increased sedimentation created by roads, logging, and grazing can degrade spawning habitat. Decreases in concentrations of dissolved oxygen caused by higher stream temperatures and excessive nutrient inputs further restrict Rio Grande cutthroat distribution and reproductive success. Collaborative planning and management of these activities that account for healthy stream and riparian function is crucial to sustaining both RGCT populations and traditional resource use activities.

The Rio Grande cutthroat trout is currently a candidate for listing protection under the **Endangered Species Act** of 1973. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make a decision on whether or not to list the Rio Grande cutthroat sub-species in 2014. Trout Unlimited supports the efforts of the Range Wide Conservation team that has been working to protect, conserve, and restore populations of RGCT for over a decade.

Partners

We want to offer a special thanks to all of the great partners that have joined forces to get this important information out to anglers like you. The future of the Rio Grande cutthroat depends on collective awareness.



FLY SHOP PARTNERS

Conejos River Anglers
(719) 376-5660 www.conejosriveranglers.com

Duranglers Flies and Supplies
(970) 385-4081 www.duranglers.com

Ramble House and Creede Outfitters
(719) 658-2482 www.ramblehouse.net

Rio Grande Anglers
(719) 658-2955 www.riograndeangler.com

Wolf Creek Anglers
(719) 873-1414 www.wolfcreekanglers.com

OTHER PARTNERS

San Luis Valley Chapter Trout Unlimited

RGCT Range-Wide Conservation Team
Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
National Park Service • Bureau of Land Management
United States Forest Service • United States Fish and Wildlife Service • Taos Pueblo • Mescalero Apache Tribe • Jicarilla Apache Nation

This brochure was funded by the small grants program of the Western Native Trout Initiative. To learn more, or to find out how to help the cause, please visit www.wnti.org.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has an extensive program that offers anglers the opportunity to fish for Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Over 80 recreational populations have been established in high mountain lakes and streams throughout the Rio Grande Basin of Colorado. These populations are intended to provide opportunities for anglers to catch RGCT. CPW maintains these populations through stocking by plane, pack animals, and vehicles.

Some favorite recreational populations are listed below. Some of these lakes and streams have other species of trout too. You can find a complete list as well as information on the management of the species by searching for "cutthroat trout" at cpw.state.co.us.

- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| S | <input type="checkbox"/> Archuleta Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> Pole Creek |
| A | <input type="checkbox"/> Adams Fork Conejos River | <input type="checkbox"/> Prospect Creek |
| M | <input type="checkbox"/> Conejos River, Middle Fork | <input type="checkbox"/> Rio Grande above Rio Grande Res |
| R | <input type="checkbox"/> Conejos River, North Fork | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Saguache Creek |
| E | <input type="checkbox"/> Conejos River, South Fork | <input type="checkbox"/> South Fork Saguache Creek |
| S | <input type="checkbox"/> Hanson Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> Squaw Creek |
| T | <input type="checkbox"/> Lost Trail Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> Treasure Creek |
| R | <input type="checkbox"/> West Lost Trail Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> Ute Creek |
| S | <input type="checkbox"/> Weminuche Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> Weminuche Creek |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Alberta Park Reservoir | <input type="checkbox"/> Lost Lake |
| A | <input type="checkbox"/> Bear Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Lake |
| K | <input type="checkbox"/> Beaver Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Lake (Conejos Basin) | <input type="checkbox"/> Big Ruby Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Cliff Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Little Ruby Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Como Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Little Sand Creek Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> North Crestone Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Sand Creek Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> South Crestone Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Sand Creek Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Deadman Lakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Spruce Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Glacier Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Spruce Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Goose Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Green Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Trout Lake |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Ute Lakes |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> Kerr Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Ute Lakes |
| L | <input type="checkbox"/> La Jara Reservoir | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Willow Creek Lake |

Don't forget! Check Colorado state fishing regulations and practice proper catch-and-release methods

BAMBOO ROD PHOTO COURTESY OF R.L. WINSTON ROD CO.

LIFESPAN Rio Grande cutthroat typically live 5-8 years.

DIET Rio Grande cutthroat primarily feed on aquatic and terrestrial insects, although at larger sizes they can be piscivorous, eating small fish.

Oncorhynchus Clarki virginalis

RIO GRANDE CUTTHROAT TROUT

COLOR Rio Grande cutthroat display a variety of colorations including bright crimson red and orange on the belly. The sides of the fish are golden yellow trending to a greenish hue on the back. They have large spots concentrated near the tail.

SIZE Rio Grande cutthroat size is variable, and based on the available habitat.

In small headwater streams adults are generally 6-10" in length.

In larger streams and rivers, adults can reach sizes of 14-15".

In lakes they can reach lengths of over 20" and weights up to 5 lbs.

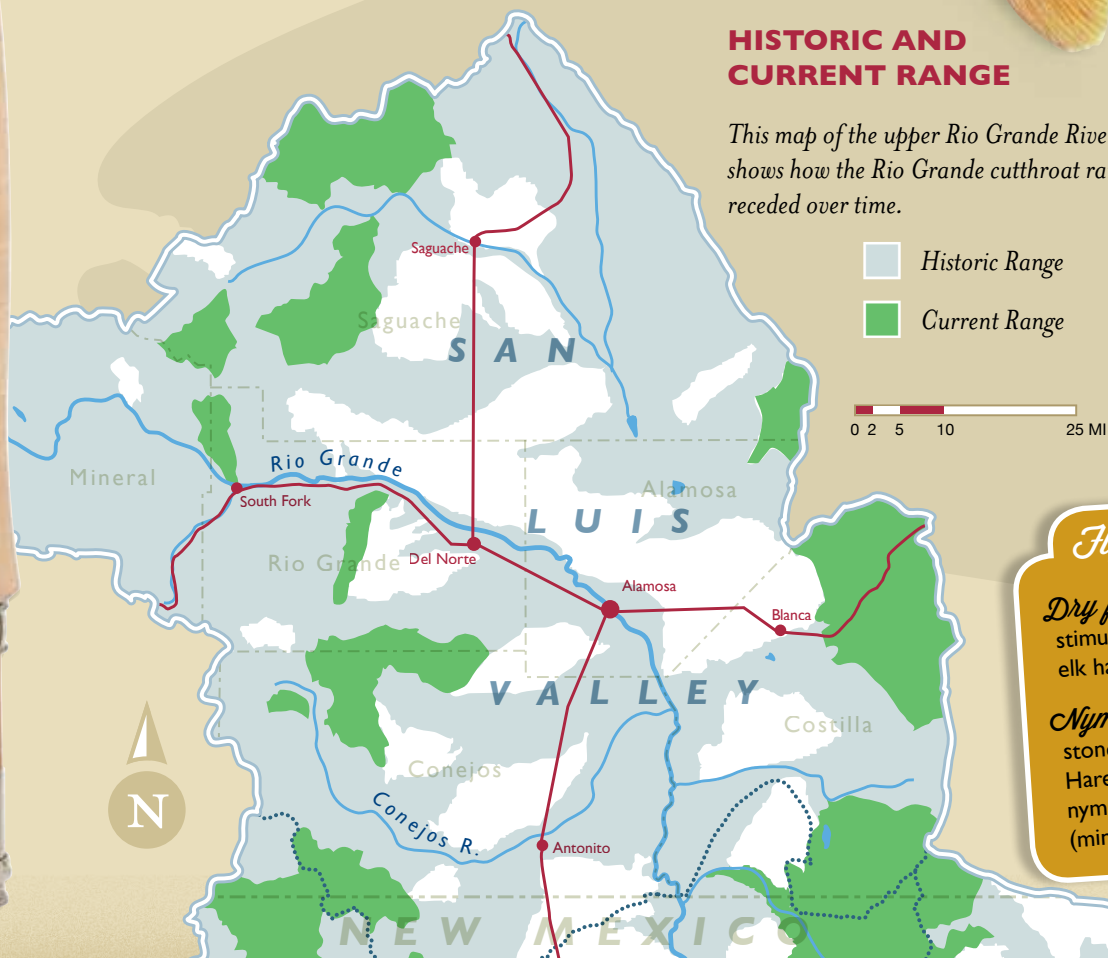
SPAWNING SEASON

Rio Grande cutthroat spawn in the spring following runoff, when water temperatures approach 50° F. This takes place from March through July across their range.



ILLUSTRATION © JOSEPH R. TOMELLERI

Larger spots near the tail are often club-shaped.



HISTORIC AND CURRENT RANGE

This map of the upper Rio Grande River Basin shows how the Rio Grande cutthroat range has receded over time.

Historic Range
Current Range

0 2 5 10 25 MI

Fishing Tactics:

Streams— Stealth, stealth, stealth! Take your time to sneak up to good habitat and scan the water. You can often see your quarry before you cast. Light (2-3wt) fly rods that are 6-8 ft. long are perfect for high country streams that are tight and overgrown. Approach from downstream, keep a low profile, and always pay attention to your shadow.

Lakes— Fishing for Rio Grande cutthroat in lakes can be challenging. However, it can often be the most rewarding, especially if you are after larger fish. There are lakes in Colorado that have 20+ inch RGCT. If feasible, a personal watercraft like a float tube or small boat is nice to have. Dry fly fishing is usually better in low light conditions around dawn and dusk. When the fish are not rising, fish nymph patterns deep, or strip woolly buggers and streamers around structure. A 9 foot 5-6 weight fly rod is a good choice for lake fishing.

Fly Box

Dry flies — Parachute Adams, Yellow Sallys, stimulators, Royal Wulff, hoppers, ants, beetles, elk hair caddis, Griffith's Gnats and other midges

Nymphs — Prince Nymphs, Copper Johns, stonefly nymphs, caddis (larvae & pupae), Hare's Ears, damsel fly nymphs, Chironomidae nymphs & emergers, Woolly Buggers, streamers (minnows, crayfish, frog, salamander) etc.

Fishing Tips

For RIO GRANDE CUTTHROAT

Connecting Ecology and Fishing:

Rio Grande cutthroat trout inhabit high elevation streams and lakes. These ecosystems are generally low in algae and plant productivity. In streams, organic material like leaves and wood from riparian vegetation are very important energy sources to the system.

Aquatic insects that use this material as food are commonly referred to as shredders. There are shredders in the stonefly, caddis, and mayfly families. Terrestrial insects like ants, beetles, and grasshoppers are also significant to the RGCT diet in headwater streams. The season for feeding and growth is short in the high country. Therefore, these fish are opportunistic, and often the fly choice is not as important as presentation and stealth.

High country lakes that hold Rio Grande cutthroat differ ecologically from the streams. They often have more algae and plant growth, and host other aquatic insects. Chironomidae midges are common in these lakes as well as caddis and mayflies. Dragonflies and damselflies are likely residents if there are aquatic plants present. Other possible prey items include snails, frogs, scuds, salamanders, and even small trout or minnows.