

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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THREE TROUT COME OFF ENDANGERED LIST

A major event, nine years in the making, was recorded quietly in the Federal Register on July 16 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took three species of trout native to California, Nevada, and Arizona off the endangered species list.

These are the first "endangered" species to be officially downgraded. Others such as the American alligator have been proposed formally for downgrading and are now in the formal process of being considered. The official process takes months to complete because public comment is sought and considered fully before final action is taken. The leopard and the eastern timber wolf are also under review for downgrading, but no formal proposal has been made on these species yet. The three trout species were proposed for downgrading in April 1975.

"This is the name of the game," said Keith M. Schreiner, head of Federal endangered species programs. "It's why we're in business. It's taken nine years since the passage of the first endangered species law in 1966 to reach this point. We believe it ushers in a new era in wildlife conservation work, and we are proud of all the people who had a hand in this effort.

"All three species of trout have been rescued from the brink of extinction through cooperative Federal, State, and private efforts," Schreiner said.

"They are not yet home free," Schreiner said, "but we are confident that their situation has improved to the point where we can downgrade them to the 'threatened' status, which means they are in no immediate danger but still require some protection."

(more)

The fish downgraded by this action are the Lahontan cutthroat trout, the Paiute cutthroat trout, and the Arizona trout. They were listed originally as "endangered" under the Endangered Species Protection Act of 1969. Evidence on hand at that time showed that they were in trouble because of the destruction and drastic modification of the rivers they inhabited and also because of crossbreeding with species of trout introduced into those waters by man.

Since that time all three species have been cultured extensively and reintroduced successfully into areas where they were wiped out. Efforts at eliminating the non-native trout with which they were crossbreeding are succeeding. Today none are in imminent danger of extinction throughout all, or even a significant portion of their ranges.

Attempts at rebuilding viable populations of these trout have been so successful that most streams with suitable habitat have reached their carrying capacities. The Fish and Wildlife Service believes that this situation represents a case where populations can benefit from sport fishing when used as a management tool.

The current situation for each of these three trout shows the following:

Lahontan cutthroat trout:

This fish has been reintroduced into several streams throughout the Lahontan Basin, its original range. It has been reestablished in the two remnant lakes in the Lahontan Basin, Pyramid and Walker Lakes, Nevada. Moreover, the California Department of Fish and Game has transplanted the trout successfully into the Yuba River drainage. These are all strong, viable populations at the present time.

The Lahontan National Fish Hatchery in Gardnerville, Nevada, has developed cultural techniques which now produce one million Lahontan cutthroat trout annually. California and Nevada State hatcheries also are producing pure stock of Lahontan cutthroat.

These efforts should result in additional healthy, self-sustaining populations and a broadening of the present range of this species. Restoration plans also include the removal of brook, rainbow, and Lahontan cutthroat trout hybrids, an effort that has been successful in several streams.

This fish formerly occupied most streams of the Truckee, Carson, and Walker River drainages in western Nevada and east central California. Today it occupies much the same area but is less abundant in the headwaters than it formerly was.

Water diversions within its native range continue to be a threat. This problem is especially evident in Pyramid Lake. The lower water levels there and the siltation of the mouth of the Truckee River at its entry into the lake has eliminated much of the spawning run of the species in this area.

The non-native trout within the range of this species still present a threat to the cutthroat's continued existence. The brook trout is a strong

competitor for food and space with it. Although the State is making efforts to remove rainbow trout from Lahontan cutthroat habitat, crossbreeding is still occurring between the two species and remains a cause for concern.

Paiute cutthroat trout:

The removal of the introduced eastern brook trout, a serious competitor of the Paiute cutthroat, has permitted an increase of the Paiute cutthroat in Yosemite National Park. The Paiute has also crossbred with rainbow trout in some streams. In these streams the removal of rainbow trout and hybrids has resulted in good populations of pure stock of Paiute cutthroat.

A successful transplant of pure Paiute cutthroat stock into Cottonwood Creek in California has resulted in a healthy self-sustaining population with good densities in this stream. There are no known threats to the species in this stream.

Most of the streams in which the Paiute cutthroat trout occur flow through land which is owned or controlled by the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service. Both of these agencies are obliged to operate to conserve the trout by the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Livestock grazing practices and recreation developments could possibly pose threats to this species within its range in California. Crossbreeding with rainbow trout has reduced the pure stock of Paiute cutthroat in some areas and it remains a cause for concern.

Arizona trout:

At present good populations of pure stock of Arizona trout exist in several headwater streams of the White River and headwaters of a tributary to the Black River in east central Arizona.

The hatcheries of the Arizona Department of Game and Fish have cultured the Arizona trout and stocked them into waters they formerly inhabited. Stream renovation projects also are planned for tributaries of the upper Salt River which will provide additional habitat and extend this trout's distribution.

Within its native range, logging operations have declined but continue to pose a threat to this fish. Erosion, siltation, and increased temperatures connected with logging processes can, and have in the past, reduce the populations of Arizona trout in certain areas. Moreover, the possible introduction of rainbow trout into other streams by well-meaning individuals presents a continuing threat to this species.

Although the downgrading of these three species of trout to the "threatened" species category will allow regulated sport fishing of them in their native waters, Federal protection will otherwise remain in force until the fish are returned to an overall healthy balance in the wild. The listing of the three species became effective on July 16.

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