



Western Native Trout Initiative

Western Native Trout in Peril

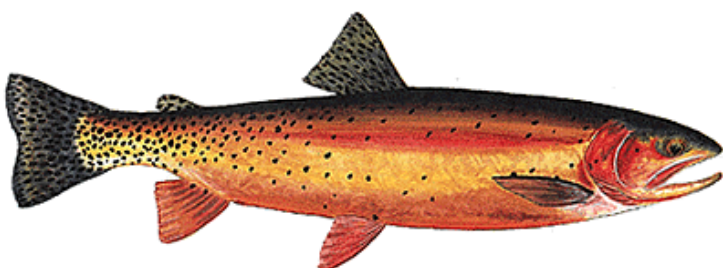
Most of the native trout populations across the American west have declined during the last 100 to 150 years, due largely to habitat alteration and the introduction of non-native species. Currently four native trout species have been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act, six species are listed as threatened, and one species is listed as endangered.

Most actions associated with trout conservation are modest in cost but even key projects and simple solutions go unimplemented due to lack of funds. Traditionally the recovery and conservation of native western trout species has been addressed in a fragmented approach through various recovery plans, conservation agreements, state management plans, or other documents. Furthermore, few state management agencies have sufficient staff to adequately address native trout conservation, despite the mounting losses of what many regard as icons of the American west.

A New Approach

A new effort has been put in place to help stop, and hopefully reverse the declines of western native trout. There are several reasons why this West-wide approach is needed: (1) declines are occurring in almost every watershed in which western trout occur; (2) the threats to this array of species are similar; (3) cooperative conservation approaches are more cost effective; and (4) watersheds occupied by western native trout often span federal, state, tribal, or local jurisdictions. Experts agree that the best approach is to pool the strengths of the many agencies and organizations involved in conservation actions in order to maximize impact.

Twelve western state fisheries agencies and four federal agencies come together in 2005 and began to collectively address protecting and restoring native western trout. Working in conjunction with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, this group formed a partnership called the Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI). This new initiative incorporates the best aspects of other joint ventures that are successfully restoring waterfowl, sage-grouse, and Eastern brook trout. WNTI is one of the original pilot joint ventures (also known as “fish habitat partnerships”) under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP).



WNTI Conservation Goals

The Western Native Trout Initiative is a non-regulatory, science-based, cooperative conservation effort that will speed the implementation of conservation actions for western native trout. This is a daunting task that will require considerable organization, cooperation and funding to be successful. To that end, the immediate goals of the WNTI are to:

- Complete a status Assessment for each of the native western trout species and sub-species;
- Integrate individual species management strategies, latest science, and management needs into a West-wide strategic plan;
- Develop and implement partnerships using this collaborative conservation strategy; and
- Develop cost share programs for implementation of WNTI priorities, projects and local partnerships.

Both the scale of restoring and protecting native trout species and the need for funding are large. To begin WNTI development and implementation, funding was secured through the Multi-state Grant Program of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for three years, and WNTI has received ~\$180,000 for on-the-ground habitat projects in 2006. Through species management and conservation, WNTI will help ensure western trout continue to provide multiple benefits to the American public.

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