



**Montana Fish,
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Agencies Release Updated Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Status Assessment

The Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Interagency Coordination Group—comprised of state and federal biologists from Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming—released today the 2006 status assessment for Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

The updated assessment refines a series of reports produced since 1994 that document the status of Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

"The hard work is paying off," said Mitch King, regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Denver. "The ongoing commitment among the management agencies is responsible for our better understanding of this subspecies, and that understanding serves to ensure the fish's long-term prosperity."

The Service was petitioned in 1998 to list Yellowstone cutthroat trout under the Endangered Species Act, but determined in 2006 that listing was not warranted. In its decision, however, the Service described several environmental impacts to Yellowstone cutthroat trout and indicated that a regularly updated technical assessment was needed to show a commitment among management agencies to protect and restore the native fish.

The status assessment is available on the Internet at:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/content/getItem.aspx?id=28552>

The latest assessment contains elaborate GIS and mapping information. This assessment updated population data throughout the range and provides genetic data, gathered from 4,052 miles of stream habitat, more than double the miles tested in 2001.

As expected, the assessment shows that the Yellowstone cutthroat trout tends to inhabit higher elevation mountain waters in the central core of its historic range that once

included 17,721 miles of stream and 61 lakes in portions of Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana.

Researchers, however, were pleased to learn that healthy populations remain within many lower elevation watersheds on the perimeter of its historic range. "The data continue to suggest that genetically unaltered Yellowstone cutthroat trout occupy a significant portion of the historical range," said Chris Hunter, Chief of Fisheries for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

The assessment shows that Yellowstone cutthroat trout today occupy:

- 7,527 miles, or 43 percent, of historically available stream habitat.
- 205 lakes, or more than three times as many lakes as were historically available, due to hatchery introductions into mostly fishless headwater lakes.

In addition, the assessment offers some promising information on the number and status of the Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations. It shows:

- a total of 383 separate Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations.
- population numbers range from a few fish to nearly 100,000 fish.
- conservation populations—those that show the least genetic variation—occur in 35 of the 39 historically occupied watersheds.
- 66 percent of indigenous stream populations occupy habitat that are in good to excellent condition.
- 65 percent of the habitat currently occupied by Yellowstone cutthroat trout is located within federal jurisdictions, including U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service lands, or lands under the authority of tribal governments.

The assessment concluded that significant amounts of suitable habitat could be restored and expanded to benefit Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Such restoration potential is especially important because more than half of stream-dwelling Yellowstone cutthroat trout coexist with potentially competing, or interbreeding, non-native trout, a continuing source of concern and one that officials say will be closely monitored in the future.