

Native Fish Policy of Montana Trout Unlimited

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Montana's Native Fish

Montana's waters hold 93 species of fish, including 56 that are native, two that might be native and 35 that have been introduced by humans. Native fish are those fish species that are indigenous to the state's waters. These include species that are managed as sport fish or labeled "non-game" fish by state fishery managers. Wild fish are populations of both native and introduced species that reproduce in the wild.

For the purposes of this policy, populations of a species that is native to Montana but which exists in an area where it historically did not occur will be considered introduced. The only exception will be in those cases where a scientifically defensible native fish restoration project requires the introduction of a fish into historically barren water that is within the species' range (such as above a barrier falls in a drainage where the species is native).

Montana Trout Unlimited is most concerned with the conservation of native species in the trout family (salmonidae), including the trouts, char, grayling and whitefish. Species in the salmonid family native to Montana are:

- Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) – a trout native to the upper Columbia basin and to the upper Missouri basin above the Musselshell drainage.
- Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*) – a trout native to the Yellowstone basin, including and above the Tongue River drainage.

- Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) – a char native to the upper Columbia basin and Oldman River drainage (St. Mary, Belly and Waterton Rivers).
- Interior redband trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki gairdineri*) – a trout native to the Kootenai River drainage.
- Lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) – a char native to the Old Man River drainage, Waterton Lakes, Twin Lake (Big Hole River drainage) and Elk Lake (Red Rock River drainage).
- Arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) – native to the upper Missouri basin including and above the Sun River.
- Mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*) – Native to coldwater habitats on both sides of the Continental Divide in the western half of Montana
- Pygmy whitefish (*Prosopium clupeaformis*) – Native to lakes in Northwest Montana.

The cutthroats, grayling, bull trout and interior redband trout occupy just a small fraction of their historical range.

Native fish populations have been harmed by habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, harvest, pollution, dewatering, and disease and by threats such as genetic introgression, predation and competition posed by introduced and non-native fish.

Montana Trout Unlimited's Native Fish Policy

1. The conservation of Montana's native fish is a priority of Montana Trout Unlimited and its 13 chapters. Montana Trout Unlimited believes native fish of all species are important components of the state's aquatic

communities. Native fish have important cultural, recreational, scientific, economic and bequest values.

2. Montana Trout Unlimited endeavors to ensure Montana's native fishes, especially those species in the trout family (Salmonidae), persist over time in both numbers and geographic scope so that they can be enjoyed by future generations for sporting, scientific, cultural, economic and esthetic purposes.

3. Montana Trout Unlimited's native fish policy complies with Trout Unlimited national's Wild Salmonid Policy (Trout Unlimited, as amended, 1998)

4. Montana Trout Unlimited supports federal, state and private efforts that conserve and restore Montana's native fish.

5. Montana Trout Unlimited makes it a priority to support and promote native fish conservation that preserves genetic and life history diversity.

6. Montana Trout Unlimited believes all native salmonid populations that currently exist within their historical range should be conserved. Further, Montana Trout Unlimited believes that the number of viable populations of native cutthroats, grayling, bull trout and interior redband trout in Montana should be increased within their historical ranges.

7. Montana Trout Unlimited believes species viability is only a short-term goal for native fish restoration, and that Montana should eventually re-establish populations that can sustain sport fishing and limited harvest.

8. Montana Trout Unlimited supports restoration of native fish populations within their historical ranges when it is done in a fashion that balances the statewide need to protect the Montana's highest quality non-native wild trout fisheries.

9. Montana Trout Unlimited supports native fish conservation projects only if the aim is to protect, increase or create self-sustaining wild populations. Montana Trout Unlimited does not consider put and take programs for native fish as restoration.

10. Montana Trout Unlimited will not support land-uses or fishery management that jeopardizes populations of rare “non-game” native fish.

11. Montana Trout Unlimited will not support fishery management that jeopardizes important populations of the state’s native cool-and warm-water game species.

12. Montana Trout Unlimited believes conservation of the state’s native amphibians, mollusks and other invertebrates and vertebrates is important, and as such will examine all proposals for native fish restoration to ensure they have minimal impacts on other native fauna.

13. Montana Trout Unlimited opposes the stocking of any species, native or non-native, in waters where they could pose significant harm to indigenous fish or amphibian species

14. Montana Trout Unlimited supports scientifically defensible projects that require removal of non-native species from state waters. To this end, Montana Trout Unlimited supports the use of angling, electrofishing and trapping as well as the judicious application of piscicides that remove non-native fish and set the stage for reintroduction of native species.

15. Before supporting the use of piscicides, Montana Trout Unlimited will examine individual projects for scientific soundness and make a determination as to whether the use of chemicals is the only reasonable alternative.

16. Montana Trout Unlimited supports using locally adapted native fish or eggs from local populations as the most desirable sources for reintroduction efforts. When fish or eggs from local populations are not

available, Montana TU supports the “near neighbor” concept as the next available source. When local or “near neighbor” genetic material is not available for native fish restoration, Montana TU will decide whether to support reintroduction projects on a case by case basis.

17. Montana Trout Unlimited will ensure that the native fish restoration projects it supports, especially those using piscicides, comply with all applicable federal and state statutes including but not limited to the Montana and federal environmental policy acts, state and federal water quality statutes, the Endangered Species Act and the Wilderness Act.