

Westslope Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus Clarkii Lewisii*)

by Christine

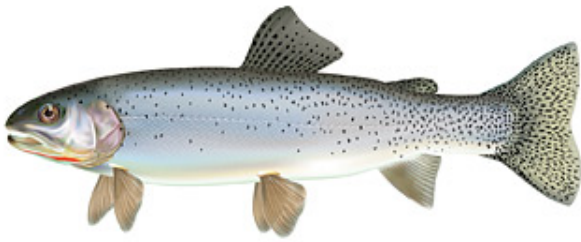


Photo: <https://albertaregulations.ca/fishingregs/helpful-info.html>



Adult westslope cutthroat trout, Alberta population
(Photo by Fisheries and Oceans Canada)

The Westslope Cutthroat Trout is an Alberta Native Species! It calls the cold, clear, moving headwaters of the mountain and upper foothill regions on the southeastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains home. Here, overhanging vegetation provides shade and safety from predators as do stream banks, wood debris and boulders. Midges, flies, mayflies, craneflies, caddisflies, stoneflies and zooplankton serve as a rich diet.

These silver to yellow-green fish are identifiable by the orange-red folds of skin on the lower jaw. Small dark spots run along the upper back side increasing in number on the tail fins. The size of the waterway they are in helps determine growth, up to 16 inches in length.

The females' underbelly turns orange-red to attract a male between May and July. She prepares a nest by using her tail to sweep aside bottom gravel, forming a depression in which she will lay her eggs. After her mate fertilizes the eggs she sweeps a protective layer of gravel over them. They hatch in 6 to 7 weeks, but take 4 years to mature into breeding adults. In their natural habitat they will live up to 20 years!

This threatened native species is an invaluable indicator of ecosystem health! However the healthy riparian areas they live in are susceptible to degradation from the clearing of forests; hydrologic changes caused by water usage, pollutants and sedimentation; environmental disturbances removing corridor connections, the introduction of invasive species and a warming climate. Their habitat range has drastically decreased due to human activity and they are at risk of hybridization!

Learn more by checking out this educational link:

<https://www.ghostwatershed.ca/GWAS/ewExternalFiles/WSCT-Complete.pdf>

Additional resources:

<https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/what-we-do/resource-centre/featured-species/fishes/westslope-cutthroat-trout.html>

<https://westernnativetrout.org/what-are-western-native-trout-and-char/westslope-cutthroat-trout/>