



Big Thompson River

FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

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General Information: The Big Thompson River below Olympus Dam is a famous trout river which historically attracted thousands of anglers each year. Fishing for brown and rainbow trout can be good to great almost year round. Fishing within the catch and release section (Waltonia bridge to Olympus Dam) will produce good numbers. As a result of the flood, and post flood construction angling below Drake will be poor in 2018.

Location: From Loveland, follow Highway 34 west to the Big Thompson Canyon approximately 10-30 miles west of Highway 287.

Fishery Management: Coldwater angling

Purchase a Fishing License: <https://cpw.state.co.us/buyapply/Pages/Fishing.aspx>

Amenities

- Limited number of access points along HWY 34 as crew continue to restore both the river and the road post flood.
- Primitive restroom available below Olympus dam.

Regulations

- From Olympus Dam (east end Estes Lake) to Waltonia Bridge requires a fly or lure for catch and release fishing.
- The rest of the Big Thompson River below Waltonia general regulations apply (4 trout).

Previous Stocking

2022/2023

Hofer Strain Rainbow Trout

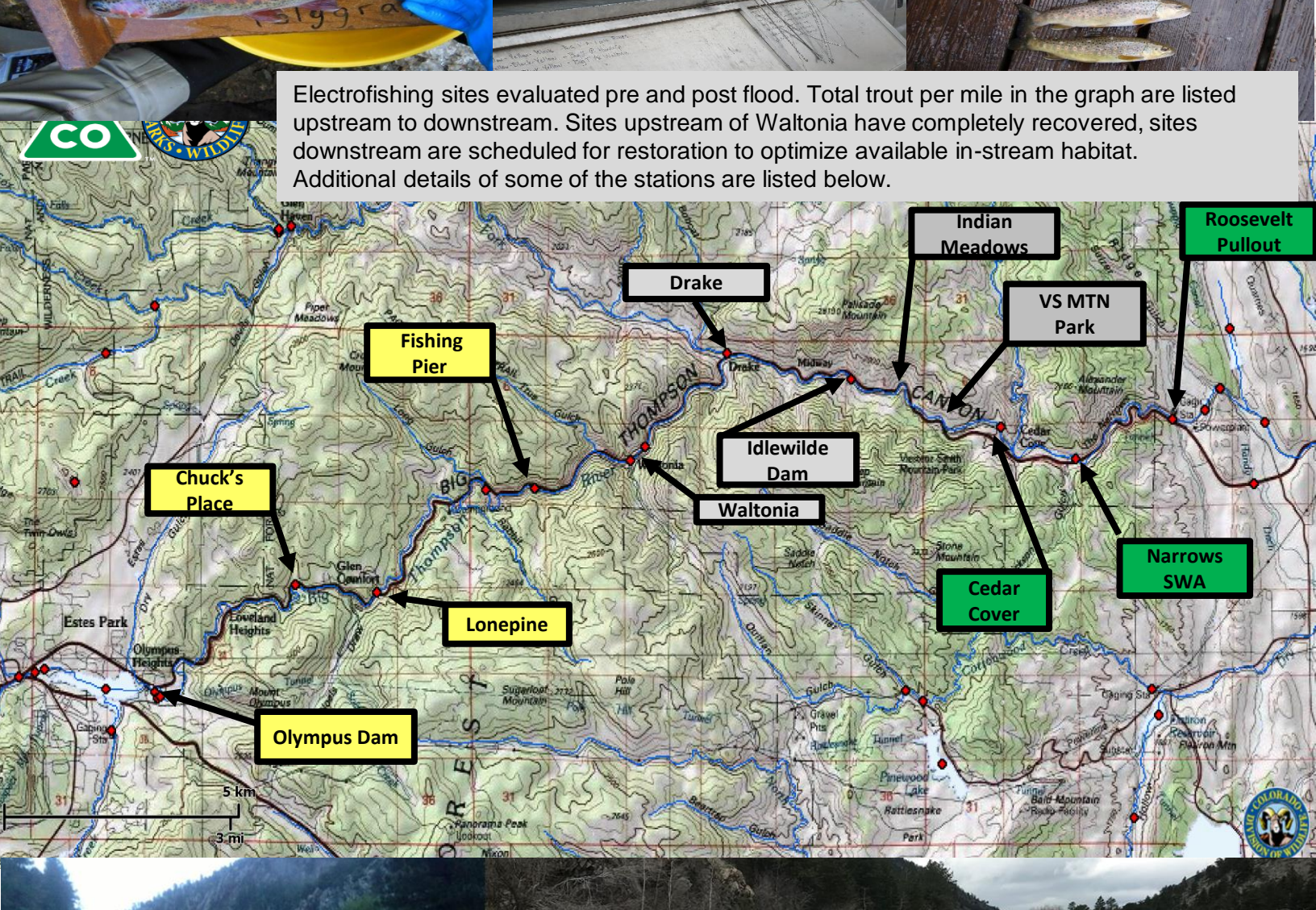
Young of year brown trout typically emerge from the nest in May while rainbows emerge during June. Stocking has focused on locations downstream of Drake. Supplemental stocking rates for Hofer rainbow trout continues to be reduced and will eventually be eliminated as natural reproduction by this species takes over.

Sportfishing Notes

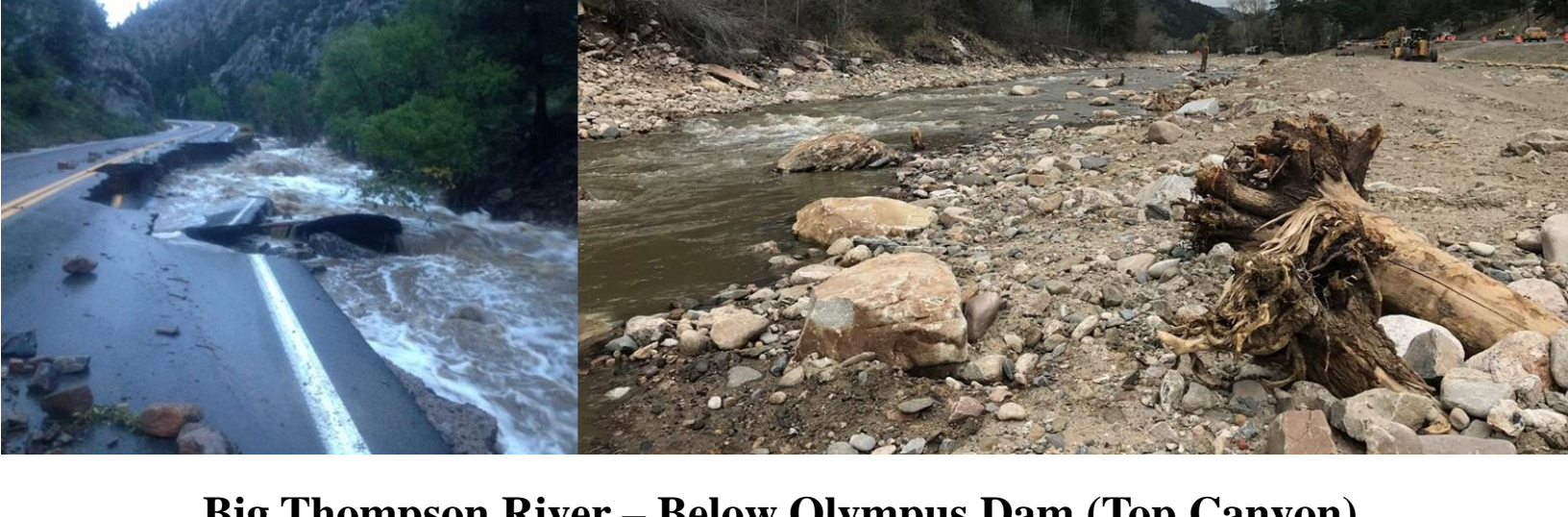
Trout

- Fishing a dry-and-dropper setup is a great initial approach for both browns and rainbows. Fishing small streamers is a good option as well.
- Nymphs: Z-wing caddis (#16), Manky caddis.
- Dry flies: Hatchmasters (#18)
- Terrestrials: beetles (#16), ants (#18)

Survey Method: 2-pass stream electrofishing.



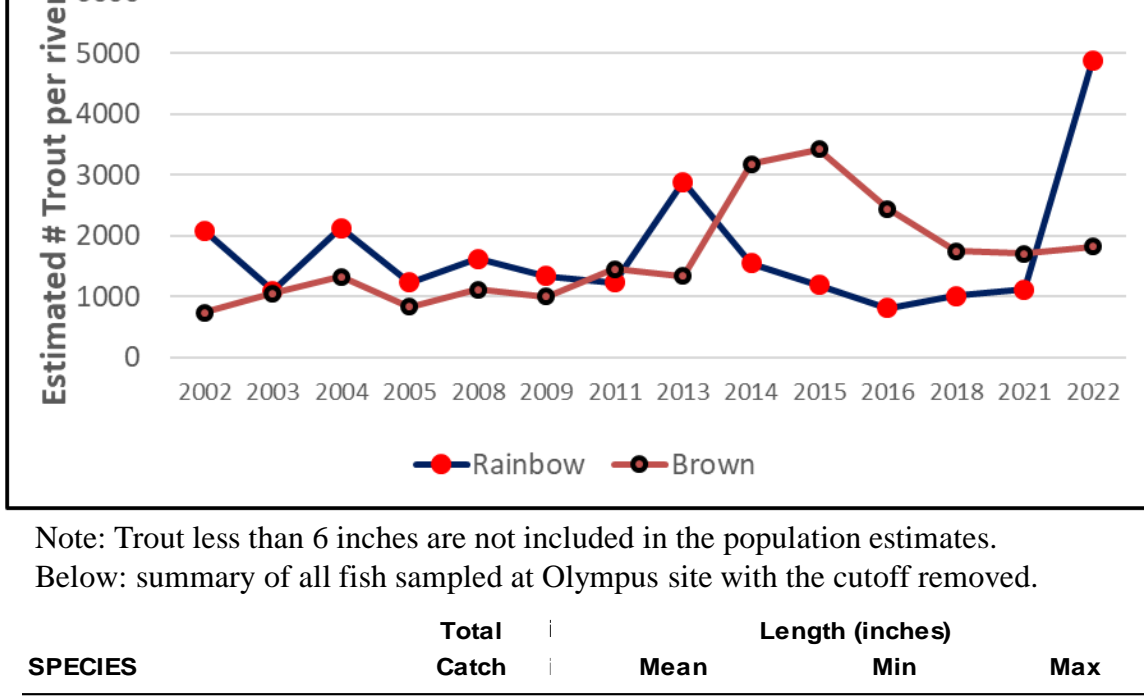
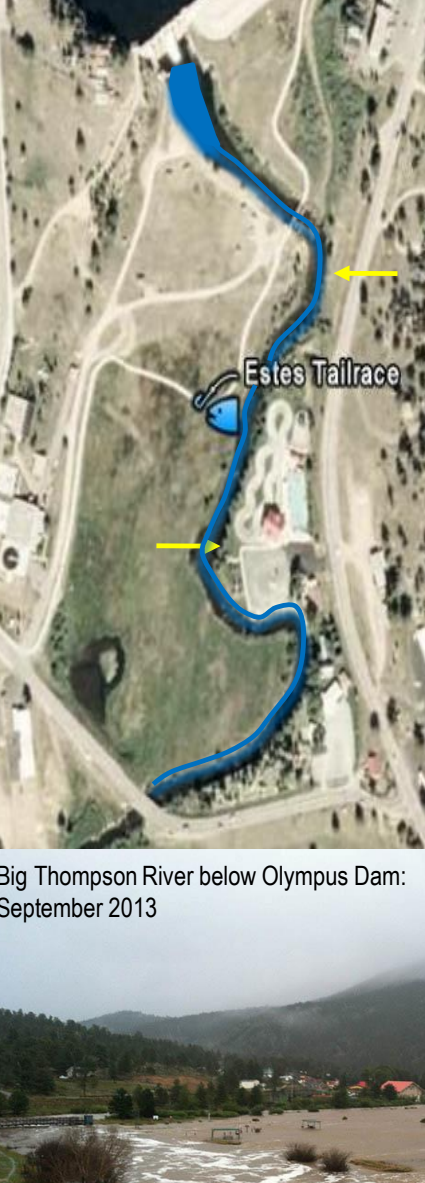
Electrofishing sites evaluated pre and post flood. Total trout per mile in the graph are listed upstream to downstream. Sites upstream of Waltonia have completely recovered, sites downstream are scheduled for restoration to optimize available in-stream habitat. Additional details of some of the stations are listed below.



Big Thompson River – Below Olympus Dam (Top Canyon)

Graph 1: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at the Olympus station. Abundance for rainbow trout surged immediately after the September 2013 flood, a likely result of displacement from Estes Lake, upstream migration, or both.

Gear: Electrofish 2 pass, 12/2022
Station: Olympus
Length: 600 ft (between arrows)
Est. # Trout (6"+) per mile: 6,698



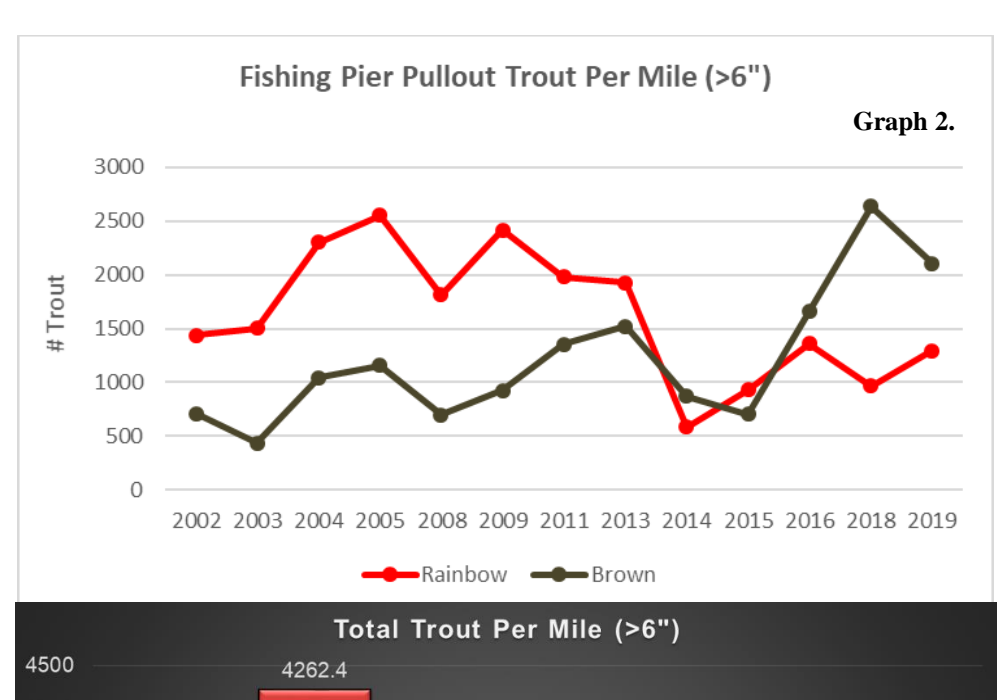
Note: Trout less than 6 inches are not included in the population estimates. Below: summary of all fish sampled at Olympus site with the cutoff removed.

SPECIES	Total Catch	Mean Length (inches)	Length (inches)	
			Min	Max
LONGNOSE SUCKER	2	12.50	11.97	13.03
LONGNOSE DACE	20	3.72	2.40	4.84
BROWN TROUT	245	9.04	1.61	16.46
TIGER TROUT	3	9.55	9.45	9.65
MOTTLED SCULPIN	3	3.31	3.15	3.46
RAINBOW TROUT	645	7.09	2.17	15.91
RAINBOW X CUTTHROAT	147	7.57	2.80	13.54

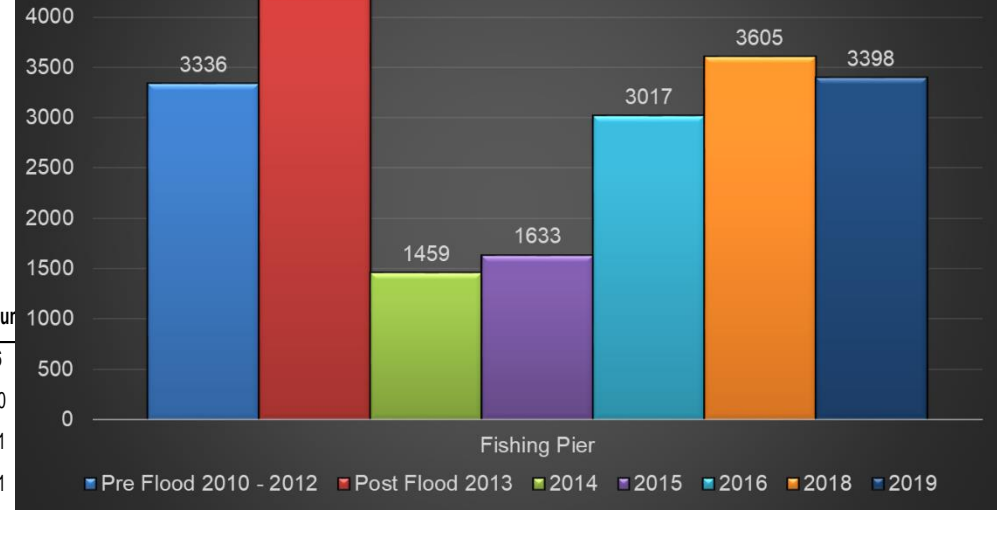


Big Thompson River – Fishing Pier (Upper Canyon)

Graph 2: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at the Fishing Pier Pullout – HWY 34 Mile Marker 72. The standard survey completed a few weeks post flood (2013) revealed virtually no change in trout abundance. However the number of trout declined 2014-2015, a likely result of poor reproduction and a decreased forage base. The 2019 survey suggested the population of trout in this section has rebounded to levels measured pre-flood. I expect trout abundance to remain stable or slightly increase. Brown trout overtook rainbows at this site for 2016, but the data suggests a balancing act is occurring. This section of river will fish well in 2020. Note fish less than 6 inches are not included in the population estimates and rainbow/cutthroat abundance is combined.

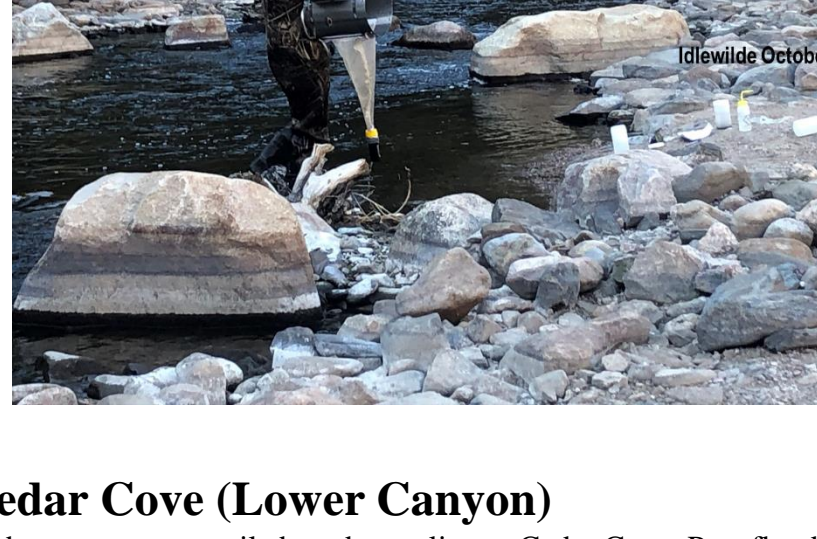
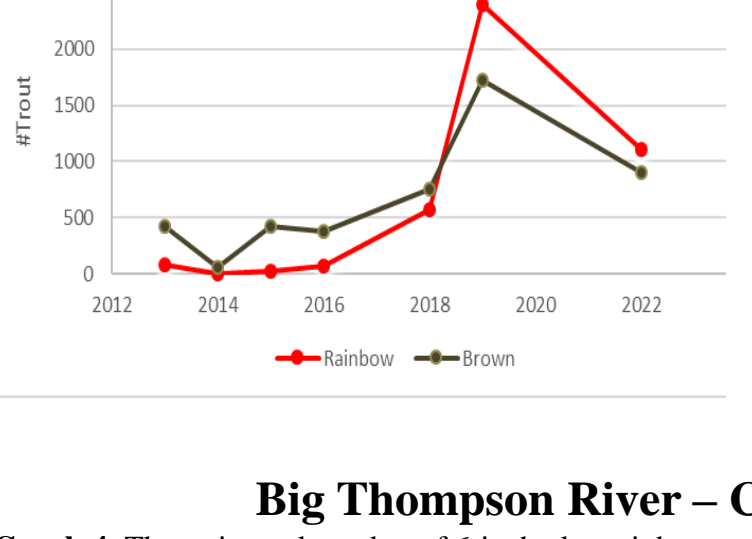


SPECIES	Total Catch	Mean Length (inches)	Maximum Length (inches)	
			Minimum	Maximum
LONGNOSE DACE	8	4.42	2.60	4.96
BROWN TROUT	141	8.35	2.95	12.40
RAINBOW TROUT	56	7.80	2.32	18.31
RAINBOW X CUTTHROAT	26	9.17	6.30	10.71



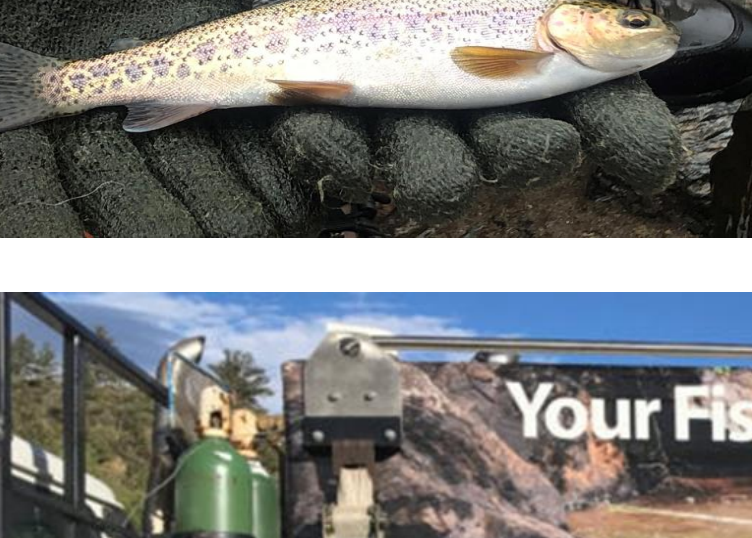
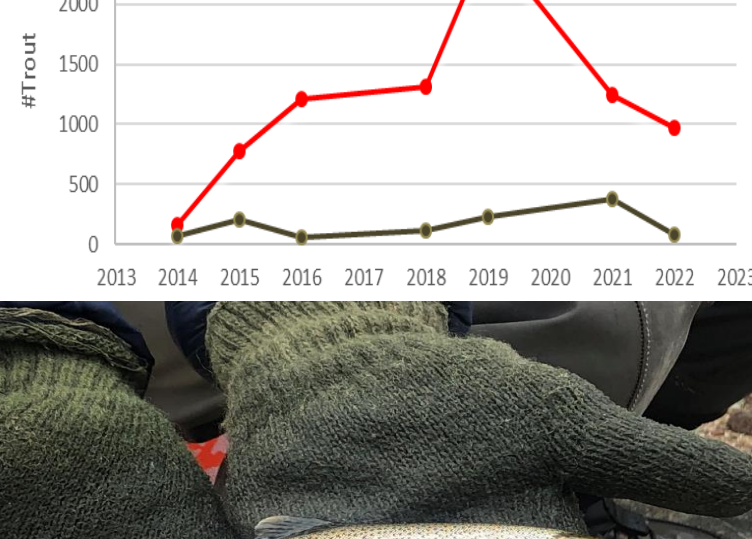
Big Thompson River – Decommissioned Idlewild Dam (Mid-Canyon)

Graph 3: Removal of this dam will benefit trout in the Big Thompson; the dam was a complete barrier to fish passage. The barrier has traditionally blocked reproductive migration to the upper canyon. A collaborative restoration project between CPW, CDOT, and The City of Loveland and its flood repair contractors. A collaborative overhauled this section of river. As a result this section of river now contains significantly more trout relative to emergency road construction finished in 2013.



Big Thompson River – Cedar Cove (Lower Canyon)

Graph 4: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on sampling at Cedar Cove. Post flood work temporarily channelized the river, removing habitat complexity. Trout restoration work has been completed, whirling disease resistant rainbow trout produced at the CPW Rifle Falls hatchery were stocked, and trout populations have responded well. Further investigation is scheduled at this site.



No resource was spared to restore the Big Thompson River. Once CDOT crews completed Colorado's largest stream restoration project in 2018, a process that took 5 years of planning and construction, CPW's hatchery section delivered has delivered whirling disease resistant rainbow trout for annual stocking. These fish are stocked at approximately 4.5 inches and were not included in the population estimates until they reach at least 6 inches. After recruiting into the 6 inch plus category, these trout will eventually reproduce and serve as the backbone for future quality angling. The entire section of the Big Thompson from the Dam Store to the base of Olympus Dam has recovered or rebounded to some degree following the construction process. CPW welcomes you to sample for yourself the new and improved Big Thompson Canyon!