UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (4:50)

APACHE TROUT (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH JEREMY VOELTZ)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there. This is Sarah Leon for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm on the phone today with Jeremy Voeltz, Fishery Biologist at the Arizona Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. Hi Jeremy, how are you today?

MR. VOELTZ: I'm going great, Sarah. How are you doing?

MS. LEON: I'm doing well. Thanks, Jeremy. Do you have some time to tell us a little about the Apache trout today?

MR. VOELTZ: Yes, I do. The Apache trout is one of two native trouts that are found in Arizona, the other being the Gila trout. It's a unique species in that you can pretty much go to any continent in the world and fish for rainbow trout, but the only place in the world where you can find Apache trout is in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona.

The Apache trout have a golden hue and they're covered with lots of tiny black spots. In fact, the early settlers referred to this species as the golden native.

MS. LEON: All right. What's interesting here is that the White Mountain Apache Tribe has had a long-standing role in restoration. As I understand, the tribe recognized the trout's populations were declining and started taking action, all before the passage of the Endangered Species Act.

So is it safe to say that without the early involvement of the White Mountain Apaches, this species might not exist today?

MR. VOELTZ: Yes, that is very true. Like you said, long before the passage of the Endangered Species Act which was passed in 1973, the White Mountain Apache Tribe recognized that their Apache trout populations were declining on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, which contains well over 50 percent of the historical range for Apache trout.

In response to these declines, in 1955 the White Mountain Apache Tribe closed most of their streams to fishing, as well as the access on the Mount Baldy Wilderness Area. These access closures, coupled with the natural barriers on several of these streams that had prevented not native trouts from accessing the headwaters of these streams, basically saved the Apache trout.

MS. LEON: All right. Who are some of the other conservation partners involved in the recovery of this species?

MR. VOELTZ: It started about in the 1960s. The Arizona Game and Fish Department began culturing Apache trout at their state fish hatcheries for stocking within its historical range, both for conservation and recovery but also for angling purposes.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department's commitment to assisting with recovery of Apache trout, in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the White Mountain Apache Tribe, as well as other agencies, continue today.

The US Forest Service is another large partner in the recovery efforts for Apache trout. They've taken steps to restore riparian habitats to better manage grazing and timber harvest on their land.

In addition, nongovernmental groups such as Trout Unlimited have provided funding and volunteers to assist with recovery activities.

Finally, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has recently committed to providing at least 10 years of funding to keep the momentum going as we proceed towards recovery of the Apache trout.

MS. LEON: Okay. It sounds like there's a ton of support backing this species' recovery. But even with the help of such a diverse group of partners, this species has been listed as threatened for decades. Jeremy, can you tell us why recovery has been such a slow process?

MR. VOELTZ: Quite simply, it's much easier to destroy than it is to rebuild. And for a species such as Apache trout that's had to deal with a variety of threats for well over 100 years, most of these threats are not easily reversed.

Plus, we've had some setbacks along the way. Our main recovery strategy is building artificial barriers and removing the nonnative species above those barriers to provide secure habitat for Apache trout. It doesn't always work, especially in the long-term. But

there's a long-term commitment to maintaining these barriers.

We're continuing to learn and refine our restoration techniques and we're continuing to make progress.

MS. LEON: All right. Rumor has it that the Apache trout could actually see a delisting proposal as early as next year, which would make this fish the first ever to be delisted.

If this is true, on a personal level, what would this mean to you, having been part of the recovery team?

MR. VOELTZ: It would be an amazing accomplishment if we'd be able to achieve our goals in getting the species back to the point where it no longer needed the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

On a personal level, I would cherish the opportunity to gather as many of the people as we could that have been working, in some cases, their entire careers on restoration of Apache trout. Many of those folks are now retired or have moved on to other things. But it would be a great joy to reunite with everyone who has played a role in the recovery and restoration of Apache trout.

MS. LEON: Okay. Great. I hope that the hard work does pay off soon. I really thank you, Jeremy, for taking the time out of your day to tell us a little bit about this species. It was a real pleasure having you on.

MR. VOELTZ: Thanks, Sarah.

MS. LEON: For the US Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.

(Music playing, whereupon, the interview was concluded.)