

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Service Determines the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout Does Not Warrant Protection Under the Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it has completed a status review of the Bonneville cutthroat trout, a fish found primarily in Utah and parts of Wyoming, Idaho and Nevada in the Bonneville Basin, and has determined it does not warrant listing as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.

Based on a thorough review of all available information and peer review comments, the Service concluded that viable, self-sustaining Bonneville cutthroat trout populations are well distributed throughout its historic range and are being restored or protected in all currently occupied watersheds.

“On-the-ground restoration and enhancement activities conducted by our Federal, State, and Tribal partners have become the cornerstone for Bonneville cutthroat trout conservation,” said Steve Guertin, the Service’s director for the Mountain-Prairie Region. “Because state wildlife and land management agencies have made these conservation actions fundamental components of agency planning, we expect continued improvements in the status and habitat of this native fish well into the future.”

In 2001, the Service determined that the Bonneville cutthroat trout was not warranted for listing because it was neither endangered nor likely to become endangered with the foreseeable future. This latest status review was undertaken after the Service voluntarily withdrew that finding to take into consideration a new policy that allows the Service to determine whether a species is in danger of extinction throughout a significant portion of its range when it is not in danger of extinction throughout all of its current range.

The Service took into consideration previously submitted information as well as new information, most significantly a recent report describing the current rangewide status of Bonneville cutthroat trout in the United States. This rangewide status report was provided by the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout Conservation Team which includes biologists from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Nevada Division of Wildlife, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Service acknowledges that populations of Bonneville cutthroat trout have been greatly reduced over the last 200 years, with much loss occurring in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, recent surveys show that the numbers of Bonneville cutthroat trout populations have increased in the last three decades and the subspecies remains widely distributed throughout a large geographic area.

At least 153 Bonneville cutthroat trout populations collectively occupy about 2,061 miles of stream habitat in 21 watersheds in Utah, Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming. These populations qualify as conservation populations under standards developed by the States which are consistent with the Service's assessment of best available science. Of the 153 conservation populations, 46 percent are considered core populations. Conservation populations have at least 90 percent cutthroat trout genes and core populations have at least 99 percent cutthroat trout genes.

The Service assessed potential threats to the Bonneville cutthroat trout including land use activities such as non-angling recreation, livestock grazing and timber harvest. While the presence of these activities may directly affect Bonneville cutthroat trout habitat in specific locations, studies indicate that 80 percent of the habitat is in excellent, good, or fair condition and provides quality habitat for the persistence of the subspecies throughout its current range.

Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming have angling restrictions to protect the trout populations. Many of Nevada's Bonneville cutthroat trout populations occur in remote areas which provide protection from heavy fishing pressure. All four States have developed management activities to protect trout populations from whirling disease. Stocking of non-native fish no longer occurs in Bonneville cutthroat trout waters and 60 percent of the trout populations are isolated from non-native fish by natural or constructed barriers.

Oil and gas development has accelerated over the last several years in Utah and Wyoming. Such activities could affect Bonneville cutthroat trout populations; however, relatively little overlap exists between oil and gas development sites and Bonneville cutthroat trout populations. Bonneville cutthroat trout populations typically occur at higher elevations where minimal oil and gas activity exists.

Despite the potential for increased risk to Bonneville cutthroat trout populations resulting from future climate change, the Service found no scientific and commercial information indicating that climate change is currently a significant threat to Bonneville cutthroat trout populations nor will become so within the foreseeable future.

Bonneville cutthroat trout populations are found in all four geographic regions of the Bonneville Basin including: the Bear River drainage (north slope Uinta Mountains, Smith's Fork, Thomas Fork, Cub, Logan, Little Bear and others), northern Bonneville drainages (Ogden, Weber, Jordan, Provo and Spanish Fork rivers), western Bonneville drainages (Deep Creek mountains, Wheeler Peak, Snake Valley) and southern Bonneville drainages (Sevier, Beaver and Virgin rivers).

The Bonneville cutthroat trout is one of 14 subspecies of cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarki* native to interior regions of western North America. Cutthroat trout owe their common name to the distinctive red or orange slash that occurs just below both sides of the lower jaw.

Bonneville cutthroat trout generally have large, evenly distributed spots, more evenly distributed on the sides of the body than the Yellowstone subspecies. However, there is a degree of intra-basin variation in physical characteristics. Bonneville cutthroat trout are generally considered dull in color compared to other cutthroat subspecies but still may exhibit bright red, orange and yellow colors.

A notice of the finding on the petition to list the Bonneville cutthroat trout was published today in the *Federal Register*. More information on the species can be found at <http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/fish/bct/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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