

The Poudre
Headwaters Project:
Restoring Greenback
Cutthroat Trout



The Poudre Headwaters Project



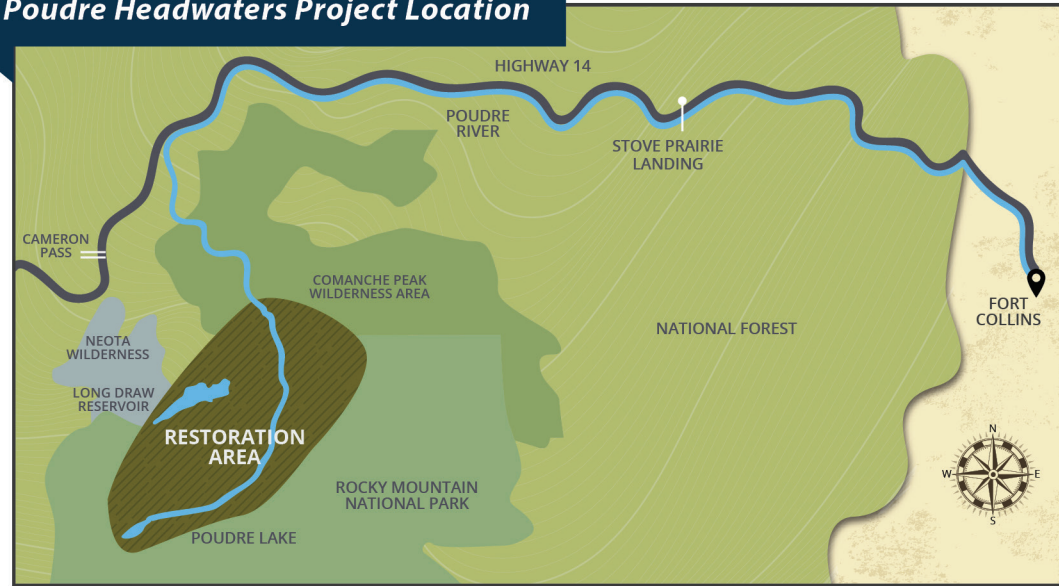
Greenback cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii stomias*) once inhabited high alpine streams throughout the South Platte Basin, including the Cache la Poudre Watershed. The product of 20,000 years of evolution, the greenback was reduced to a single population discovered about 10 years ago. Historically, human activities (logging, mining, and water diversion) as well as stressors, such as competition from non-native trout, invasive species, and stream fragmentation, impacted the greenback's habitat and very existence.

Once thought extinct, the greenback is now benefiting from significant recovery efforts by federal and state agencies and conservation groups such as Trout Unlimited.

An important part of our Colorado heritage, the greenback was designated the official state fish in 1994 and is now listed as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act. Currently found in only a few small streams and lakes in the Front Range of Colorado, it will be restored and conserved in the upper reaches of the Cache la Poudre Watershed for current and future generations to enjoy.

The U.S. Forest Service finalized an agreement in 2017 with the Water Supply and Storage Company, a Northern Colorado irrigation company, for the company's continued use of Long Draw Reservoir in the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. The agreement establishes a large-scale native trout recovery program for the Cache la Poudre River headwaters within the National Forest, including the Neota and Comanche Peak Wilderness Areas and Rocky Mountain National

Poudre Headwaters Project Location



Park. The agreement provides \$1.25 million from the Water Supply and Storage Company for restoration activities. Colorado Trout Unlimited serves as the trustee, and the U.S. Forest Service is the lead agency for project implementation.

In scientific terms, the planned sanctuary is referred to as a metapopulation or a regional group of connected populations of a species. The Poudre Headwaters Project will restore greenbacks to connected tributaries to buffer against catastrophe like wildfires and floods that may wipe out fish from any one tributary.

Completion of the project is expected to take more than 10 years. When completed it will provide a native greenback sanctuary. This sanctuary will be the largest such restored native greenback trout population in Colorado spanning more than 40 miles of connected streams and multiple lakes, including Long Draw Reservoir. The restoration project is a highly

collaborative effort among the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain National Park, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State University, the Water Supply and Storage Company, and Colorado Trout Unlimited.

Young greenbacks require food, space, and protection from non-native predators

and competitors, like brook trout, which outcompete greenbacks. Removal of brook trout is a key factor for recovery success. To establish the metapopulation for greenbacks, fish barriers will be installed in the Grand Ditch and in the mainstem Cache la Poudre River below its confluence with La Poudre Pass Creek. Within the watershed, temporary barriers also will be placed to enable fishery biologists to complete restoration of the greenback habitat one section at a time within the basin. Using temporary barriers, biologists will remove non-native fish from the upstream areas. Once the areas are confirmed free of non-native trout, they will

Like the thrill of climbing a trail to the Continental Divide in Rocky Mountain National Park, fishing for greenbacks in the headwaters of the Cache la Poudre will provide a unique experience commensurate with Colorado's outdoor heritage.

be restocked with native greenbacks which then may thrive unthreatened by competitors.



Rocky Mountain Flycasters, a Northern Colorado chapter of Trout Unlimited, is a proud and active participant in this greenback restoration effort. You can be, too.

To learn how you can participate,
www.rmftu.org

For a summary of the research that determined non-native trout impacts on greenbacks, please refer to *Helping to Restore Colorado's Native Trout* by Dr. Kurt Fausch, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University. This short article describes the negative effects on native cutthroat trout when non-native brook trout invade western stream habitats and may be found at www.rmftu.org/php



Produced in 2024