

Tributaries

Westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) historically occupied greater than 99% of the streams in the Pend Oreille River Basin. Since 1996, the Kalispel Natural Resource Department (KNRD) has completed fish surveys in nearly 500 Km (310 miles) of streams within the Lower Pend Oreille River basin and WCT occupied only 35% of the stream reaches surveyed.

Impacts (i.e. hybridization and competition) from rainbow trout to WCT are relatively limited in Lower Pend Oreille tributaries. Comprehensive genetic analysis has found little introgression between WCT and hatchery rainbow trout and KNRD surveys have identified rainbow trout in 8% of surveyed streams and densities are relatively low.

Competition and displacement by brook trout appear to be the primary impacts to native WCT populations in the Pend Oreille subbasin. From 1933 to 1994, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife planted 11.2 million brook trout in Pend Oreille County streams; consequently, their distribution is widespread. WCT densities in isolated populations (i.e. no brook trout) are over 300% higher than densities where WCT coexist with brook trout. Brook trout have several life history attributes that give the species a competitive advantage over WCT.

Bull trout were historically abundant in the Pend Oreille River. It's believed that these populations had a unique life history: adults migrated downstream from Lake Pend Oreille and then upstream into Priest River and Pend Oreille River tributaries to spawn. After hatching and rearing in tributaries for a few years, sub-adult bull trout would migrate downstream out of the tributaries and then upstream in the Pend Oreille River to rear in Lake Pend Oreille. This migration pattern was eliminated for bull trout originating in Washington tributaries with the construction of Albeni Falls Dam in 1952. Brook trout also pose a threat to bull trout because hybridization between the two species results in wasted reproductive effort for threatened bull trout.

KNRD has several ongoing and completed projects with goals to protect and restore native WCT through the use of artificial and natural barriers, nonnative fish removal, and translocation of WCT into treated streams from donor streams with strong populations. These projects indirectly benefit bull trout by eliminating sources of brook trout that could potentially hybridize with bull trout.