

Non-native or Invasive?

Have you heard the words “non-native” or “invasive” before? People often use both words to describe animals that do not belong in a certain place, but these two words have very different meanings. Fisheries Biologist Andrew Nikirk, who works in Sheridan, tells us more about what scientists mean when they use these words:

A non-native species is an animal or plant that was not originally from the place where it lives now. Non-native species are brought to a new place either by accident or on purpose. The good news is that they do not always cause problems in the new place, and can even be helpful. An example of a Wyoming non-native species is a brown trout. Brown trout were not originally found in Wyoming but they have been put into many lakes, streams and ponds on purpose for fishing. These brown trout are able to be caught by people who fish and do not cause harm to the habitat where they are introduced by Game and Fish.

An invasive species is a plant or animal that is not originally from the place where it lives now and is usually brought to the new place by accident. Invasive species are harmful. Invasive species cause problems in the place where they are introduced by eating too many native plants and animals or taking over the habitat so that native plants and animals cannot survive well anymore. Game and Fish works hard to keep harmful invasive species out of Wyoming. The department also tries to get rid of invasive species that have already made their way into the state like brook stickleback and cheatgrass.



Fish biologist Andrew Nikirk holds brown trout during a field project.

What about setting a pet free in the wild?

When pets grow too large or become hard to take care of, some people think letting them loose in the wild to live is the kind thing to do. That’s not the case. Most pets will not survive in the wild and those that do survive can cause problems. Because you might not know if a plant or animal will be invasive and harmful to the wild, you should never move a plant or animal from one place to another or let an unwanted pet loose. Not only is it against the law to let pets go into the wild, pets like goldfish may grow much larger when released into the wild, compete with native fish for habitat and spread diseases.

Don’t Let It Loose is a Game and Fish program that helps protect native species in Wyoming. To learn more about the program and what you should do with unwanted pets, visit our website: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Fishing-and-Boating/Aquatic-Invasive-Species-Prevention/Don-t-Let-it-Loose/More-Information>