

When it comes to X-Stream Fishing, Deep Creek can't be beat

Deep Creek is a relatively small stream located on the west slope of the Sierra Madres in south-central Wyoming.

To the casual observer, the stream may look like just another of the numerous rivulets that flow off the mountain. However, Deep Creek is not just another pretty stream. It actually plays a critical role in helping to restore populations of native Colorado River cutthroat trout. Over a period of several years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-native brook trout that had displaced the native species were removed and native cutthroats were reintroduced.

This action and similar ones on other streams played a key role in defeating attempts by special interests to have the Colorado River cutthroat formally listed as an endangered species.

The Fishery

Colorado River cutthroat trout are the only trout species present within the instream flow segment. Mottled sculpins and mountain suckers, both native to the drainage, are also present. Brook trout may be found downstream from the instream flow reach.

Cutthroats here seldom reach more than 10 inches in length. This is a tough stream to fish

because of the dense growth of willows along portions of the stream, but there are numerous beaver ponds throughout the reach that provide good opportunities to entice a trout to your lure or fly. Native cutthroats are typically vulnerable to angling, so just about any attractor pattern, wet or dry, on a size-10 or smaller hook should work. In the event you wish to harvest trout for dinner, you may keep up to six fish, but only one may be a cutthroat trout.

How to get there

Take Wyoming Highway 71 south from Rawlins about 48 miles until you reach the Medicine Bow National Forest boundary. The pavement ends at Sage Creek, but it's a well-maintained gravel road the rest of the way to the forest boundary. There the road turns into Forest Service Road 801. Deep Creek flows under this good gravel road in another two miles. There isn't an official parking area here, but the road is wide enough you can pull over to the side and strike out from there.

Go upstream and you'll encounter only native cutthroat trout.

Go downstream and you'll find a few brookies in the mix.

The Instream Flow

Permit Number: 57 I.F.

Priority Date: Dec. 19, 1995

Quantity: Variable flow between 0.65 and 0.5 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Oct. 1 to April 30; 4.6 cfs from May 1 to June 30; and 0.5 cfs from July 1 through Sept. 30.

Location and length: The instream flow segment is about 20 miles due west from Encampment in the Sierra Madres. The segment extends 3.5 miles upstream from FS Road 801 to the confluence of the East and West Forks of Deep Creek.

Land ownership: The entire segment is located on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Rationale: The primary purpose of the filing was to maintain adequate base flows for native Colorado River cutthroat trout. The purpose of any water right is not so much to change the amount of water in the stream today as it is to protect an interest in existing flow patterns for future use. The various flow levels filed for are intended to address habitat needs for spawning in the spring, maintain growth rates in the summer and minimize winter mortality.

Status of the filing: A public hearing was held in Baggs on March 10, 1997. The state engineer approved the water right on April 18, 2006. The Board of Control has not adjudicated the water right.



The instream flow on Deep Creek offers native cutthroat trout, while the segment just downstream can be a good place to catch a brook trout. Photo by Tom Annear

Visit the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Web site at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/instreamflow> for more information about instream flow.