Fishing Regulations

Yellowstone National Park



Know Your Fish

If it has a red slash— put it back.

Clean Inspect Dry

Protect Yellowstone from Aquatic Invasives

No bait No barbs No lead



How to Use These Regulations

- Fishing: The act of fishing / angling is defined as any activity using an attended single rod or line for the purpose of attempting to attract, capture, or possess any fish from waters within Yellowstone National Park. All other methods to attract, capture or possess fish are prohibited.
- Familiarize yourself with the **General Regulations**, listed on pages 4–6. They include season dates, fishing hours, permit requirements, tackle restrictions, catch and release, mandatory kill, and possession limits.
- See the regional maps on pages 8–11 to determine any **Exceptions** to general regulations in the region you will be fishing.
- Know your fish—study fish identification on pages 12–14 in order to comply with Native Trout Conservation requirements.

Stay Safe and Legal

You are responsible for following all park regulations. Consult Yellowstone's park newspaper, Backcountry Trip Planner, or rangers at visitor centers and backcountry offices to learn more.

- Stay on established trails in thermal areas for your safety and to protect these fragile areas.
- Do not discard fish carcasses or entrails along stream banks or the lake shore as they will attract bears.
- Do not feed any animals, including birds, squirrels, and coyotes.

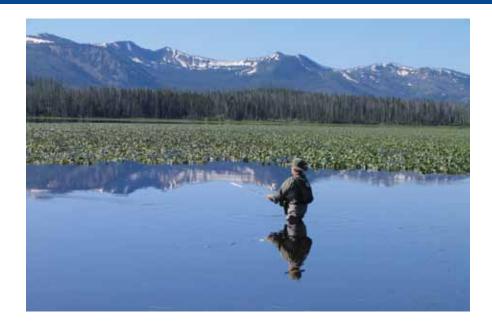


Bear Warning • Bears and other wildlife may appear in areas frequented by people—even on trails, on boardwalks, and along roads. Do not approach wildlife and remain at least 100 yards (92 meters) away from bears and wolves, and 25 yards (23 meters) away from all other wildlife.

- Be alert—watch for fresh tracks or scat.
- Make noise in areas where visibility is limited
- Carry bear spray and know how to use it.
- Avoid hiking or fishing alone. Try to stay with a group of three or more people.
- DO NOT RUN if you encounter a bear.

www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/fishing.htm

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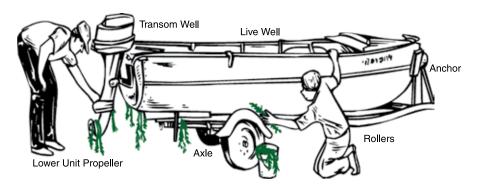
Please Remember

- Lead-free, artificial lures and flies, no bait, barbless hooks only.
- All cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, and arctic grayling must be released unharmed.
- Remove nonnative fish where they harm cutthroat trout. There is no limit on nonnatives in the Native Trout Conservation Area.
- All rainbow and brook trout in the Lamar River Drainage, including Slough and Soda Butte Creeks, must be killed.
- All lake trout in Yellowstone Lake must be killed.



Aquatic Invasive Species

STOPAquatic Invasive Species



Before you enter Yellowstone National Park and any time you move to another body of water within the park:

CLEAN • INSPECT • DRY

- 1. **REMOVE ALL** water, mud, plants, fish, tiny animals, or other foreign material from your boats, trailers, and other equipment, including waders, boots, clothing, and nets before you enter Yellowstone National Park.
- 2. DO NOT BRING BAIT into Yellowstone National Park. No natural or organic bait such as minnows, salmon eggs, worms, insects, or foodstuffs—alive or dead—are allowed. See General Regulations on pages 4–6 for details and the one exception.
- 3. **DO NOT DUMP WATER** from other sources into Yellowstone waters. Drain your boat hull and live well in a safe location (a flat, paved, dirt, or gravel area) away from all park surface waters.
- 4. **NEVER MOVE** water, fish, other animals, or plants from one stream or lake to another. It is illegal to transport live fish within the park.
- 5. **THOROUGHLY CLEAN** everything that comes in contact with water before leaving your fishing site. Ensure gear is *clean* and *dry* before fishing another stream or lake.

See Yellowstone's Aquatic Invasive Species brochure for additional details www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/fishingexotics.htm

General Regulations

Fishing

Fishing/angling is defined as any activity using an attended single rod or line for the purpose of attempting to attract, capture, or possess any fish from waters within Yellowstone National Park. All other methods to attract, capture or possess fish are prohibited.

Fishing Hours and Season Dates

The season begins the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend (usually the last weekend in May) and extends through the first Sunday in November. Exceptions are listed on pages 8–11.

Open daily from sunrise to sunset. Fishing with an artificial light is prohibited. Some areas are closed to human entry, have trail or seasonal closures, off-trail travel and daylight hour limitations, or party size recommendations. See the Bear Management Area restrictions in the Backcountry Trip Planner for specific rules and information.

Streams may be temporarily closed due to low water levels and high water temperatures to protect fish populations.

Fishing Permits

Anglers 16 years of age or older must be in possession of a valid Yellowstone National Park fishing permit to fish in the park.

Park rangers may check permits and inspect tackle, fish, creels, or other containers where fish or tackle may be stored.



Anglers 15 years of age or younger have two options:

- 1. Children 15 or younger may fish without a permit if they are fishing under the direct supervision of an adult who has a valid park fishing permit.
- 2. Children 15 or younger may obtain a free permit that must be signed by a responsible adult; with this permit, a child can fish without direct adult supervision.

With either option, the accompanying adult is responsible for the child's actions and must ensure the child complies with all fishing regulations and provisions.

Tackle, Lure, and Hook Restrictions

Each angler may use only one rod which must be attended at all times and used for angling only—intentional snagging of fish is not allowed.

Only lead-free artificial lures (e.g. spoon or spinner) or flies may be used. Leaded fishing tackle such as leaded split-shot sinkers, weighted

General Regulations



A single pointed hook is the best choice for fishing in Yellowstone. Treble hooks (3 points) can severely injure fish and are often constructed with toxic lead solder.

jigs (lead molded to a hook), and soft lead-weighted ribbon for nymph fishing are not allowed.

Hooks must have points that are barbless, or the barbs must be pinched down by pliers. Lures may have only one hook with a single, double, or treble configuration.

Each fly may have only one hook. Up to two flies may be used on a single leader (commonly referred to as "dropper," "dry and dropper," or "hopper and dropper").

Except for feathers and other natural fly-tying materials, the hook must be bare. No organic or inorganic baits are allowed. *Organic baits* include fish or fish parts, minnows, salmon eggs, worms, insects, or foodstuffs such as bread or corn. *Inorganic baits* include rubber worms and plastic "twister" tails. Scented attractants (liquid and solid baits) are illegal. Putting any substance in the water for the purpose of attracting fish (chumming) is illegal.

Exceptions

Non-toxic split-shot, sinkers, and jig heads (molded with bismuth-tin, molybdenum, or tungsten) are allowed. Lead core line and heavy (> 4 lb.) downrigger weights used to fish for deep-dwelling lake trout are permissable because they are too large to be ingested by wildlife.

Joffee Lake, near Mammoth Hot Springs, where children 11 years of age or younger may fish with worms as bait. See regulations on page 9, or inquire at the Mammoth Visitor Center. Artificial lures are not allowed on the Firehole River, Madison River, and lower Gibbon River (below Gibbon Falls), these streams are flyfishing only.

Possession Limits by Area, Stream and/or Lake

Parkwide

All native fish must be released unharmed. Natives include cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, and Arctic grayling.

Native Trout Conservation Area

No possession limit for nonnative fish, including brown, brook, rainbow, and lake trout (see pages 8–11).

- All rainbow and brook trout caught in the Lamar River drainage, including Slough and Soda Butte creeks, must be killed—it is illegal to release them alive.
- All lake trout caught from Yellowstone Lake must be killed it is illegal to release them alive.

General Regulations

Nonnative Trout Tolerance Area

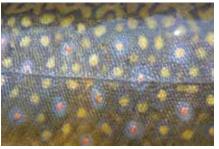
All native fish must be released unharmed. Possession limits include all fish—fresh or stored. An angler must cease fishing immediately after filling the possession limit. (See pages 8 and 10)

- Firehole River, Madison River, lower Gibbon River (downstream of Gibbon Falls)—possession of five brook trout allowed. Catch and release all rainbow and brown trout.
- Lewis River system above Lewis
 Falls, including Lewis and
 Shoshone lakes and their tributaries—possession of five combined
 brook, brown or lake trout; only
 one of which may be a brown trout.

It is the responsibility of the angler to be able to identify fish by species. Unintentionally killed fish should be returned to the water so they can be consumed by wildlife.



All vessels require a permit.



Brook trout markings

Evidence of Species in Possession

Skin must remain attached so the fish species can be visibly identified. Gills and entrails may be removed in the field, but must be discarded only within the waters where the fish were caught.

Disposal of Fish and Entrails

Dispose of fish and/or fish entrails within the waters where the fish was caught but not within 100 feet (30.5 m)of boat ramps, docks, or backcountry campsites. Fish can also be disposed of in park trash cans.

Boating

Vessel Inspections & Permits

All vessels—including float tubes—require a boat permit and must be inspected using National Park Service procedures to ensure that they are free of aquatic invasive species before entering any park waters. See Yellowstone's Boating Regulations for details: www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/boating.htm

Bridge and Boat Dock Restrictions

No fishing from any road bridge or boat dock.

Releasing Fish



Hold the fish with wet hands, beneath the belly, behind the pectoral fins. Use forceps or small pliers to remove the hook.

For all native fish and any nonnative fish you intend to release, bring the fish in as quickly as possible. Do not play the fish to exhaustion.

Unhook the fish in quiet water such as an eddy or slow spot. Do not drag the fish across land. Use forceps or small needle-nosed pliers to quickly remove the hook.

Always make sure your hands are wet if you must handle the fish. Dry hands damage a fish's protective mucous film. Hold the fish with one hand around the tail section and the other beneath the belly, just behind the pectoral fins. Never grab or hold a fish through the gills unless it is already dead.

If you want a photo of the fish, make sure the photographer is ready before you handle the fish. Make it quick.

Never just throw a fish back into the water. If a fish becomes passive, it is probably close to exhaustion. Gently remove the hook within calm water, then lightly cradle the fish with your hands to see what it does. If it struggles to keep itself upright, hold the fish around its tail and beneath its belly with its head facing upstream into the current. Move the fish gently back and forth toward and away from the current. You should notice the gills opening and closing due to the rush of water. This is like giving a fish mouth to mouth resuscitation. When the fish has recovered it should swim away on its own.

Hooks and lures typically have barbs when purchased. With small pliers you must pinch down the barbs. Without barbs more skill is required in landing and bringing in fish but hook removal is easier and less traumatic to the fish.

Spinning lures typically have three hooks called treble hooks. With wire cutters you can snip off one of the hooks or snap one off with pliers; you also must pinch down all the barbs. Two hooks are still effective and easier to remove and less traumatic.

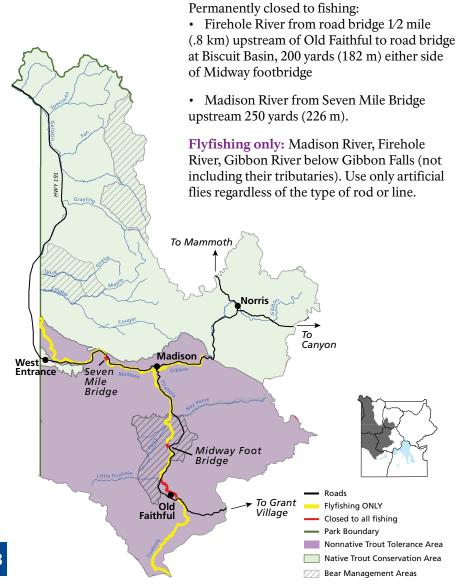
If the fish is deeply hooked, cut the line, do not pull out the hook. Most fish can survive with hooks left in.



If a stream or lake is not listed by name or as a tributary, general regulations apply. You must follow bear management and hydrothermal area restrictions listed in the Backcountry Trip Planner, which is available in backcountry offices or at www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/publications.htm.

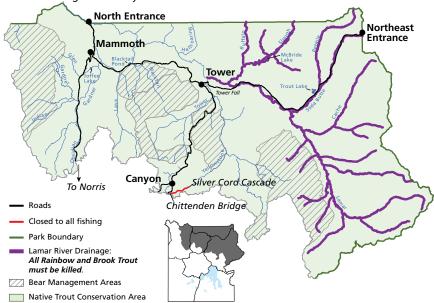
Northwest Region

Madison and Gallatin river drainages: including Firehole and Gibbon rivers and tributaries.



Northeast Region

Yellowstone and Lamar rivers and tributaries between North Park Boundary and Chittenden Bridge near Canyon.



- Lamar River drainage including Slough Creek and Soda Butte
 Creek—all nonnative fish, including rainbow trout and brook trout,
 must be killed.
- Agate and Cottonwood creeks, and portions of the Yellowstone River within 100 yards of these creeks, open to fishing July 15 to protect spawning cutthroat trout.
- Blacktail Pond area is closed to public use and travel, including angling, until July 3 to protect nesting birds and sensitive vegetation.

Permanently closed to fishing:

• Trout Lake inlet stream is permanently closed to fishing to protect spawning cutthroat trout.

 Yellowstone River, from Chittenden Bridge near Canyon downstream through the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone to a point directly below Silver Cord Cascade, is permanently closed to fishing to ensure angler safety.

Where to Take Young Anglers

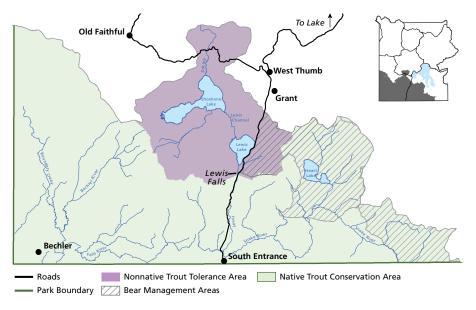
Mammoth: Blacktail Deer Creek, Indian Creek near the campground, Gardner River picnic area between the North Entrance and Mammoth, Joffe Lake, Lava Creek picnic area.

 Children 11 years of age or younger may fish with worms as bait in Joffe Lake only.

Northeast area: Pebble Creek near campground, Trout Lake.

Southwest Region

Snake and Lewis rivers and tributaries; Heart Lake; Lewis and Shoshone lakes; Falls and Bechler rivers and tributaries.



 Waters above Lewis Falls, including Lewis and Shoshone lakes and the Lewis Channel—possession limit of five nonnative fish in combination, only one of which can be a brown trout.

Heart Lake opens July 1

 Do not discard lake trout carcasses along the lake shore as they will likely attract bears.

Southeast Region

Yellowstone River upstream of Chittenden Bridge near Canyon, Yellowstone Lake and its tributaries, Middle Creek of the North Fork Shoshone River.

Yellowstone Lake opens June 15.

Streams flowing into Yellowstone Lake tributaries, and areas within 100 yards (91 m) of each stream's outlet open July 15. Access to many areas is restricted by Bear Management Area Closures, see the Yellowstone Backcountry Trip Planner for details.

Permanently closed to fishing:

 The shoreline of Yellowstone Lake from West Thumb Geyser Basin to Little Thumb Creek to protect fragile thermal resources.

- Bridge Bay Marina/Harbor and Grant Village Marina/Harbor and their channels to the lake.
- Pelican Creek from its mouth to a point two miles (3.2 km) upstream.

Yellowstone River opens July 15.

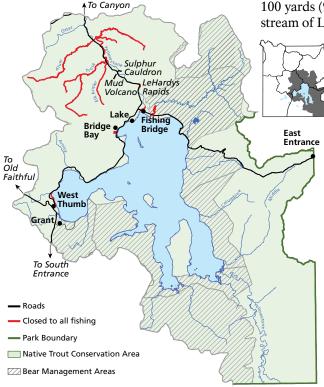
Permanently closed to fishing:

- Fishing Bridge and an area one mile (1.6 km) downstream (toward Canyon) and 1/4 mile (.4 km) upstream (toward Yellowstone Lake) from the bridge.
 - The Yellowstone River 100 yards (91 m) up- and downstream of LeHardy Rapids.
 - The Yellowstone River and its tributaries in Hayden Valley from the confluence of Alum Creek upstream to Sulphur Cauldron.

Where to Take Young Anglers

Lake Village: Along Gull Point Drive or at Sand Point.

Grant: Riddle Lake, Aster Creek near Lewis Falls, Lewis Lake shoreline.

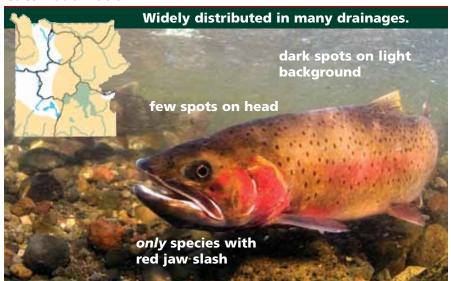


Fish Identification—Native

Each individual angler must be able to correctly identify various fish species and comply with appropriate rules and regulations.

ALL NATIVE FISH ARE CATCH-AND-RELEASE ONLY

Cutthroat Trout



Cutthrout Trout subspecies

Two subspecies of cutthroat trout are found in Yellowstone: the west-slope cutthroat and the Yellowstone cutthroat (which has both large- and finespotted varieties). All fish with a red slash are considered cutthroat.

If it has a red slash, put it back.



Westslope cutthroat trout (Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi).



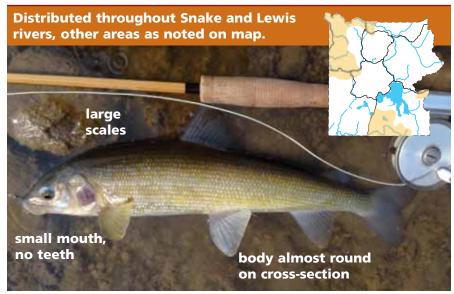
Yellowstone cutthroat trout (finespotted Snake River form; Oncorhynchus clarkii behnkei).



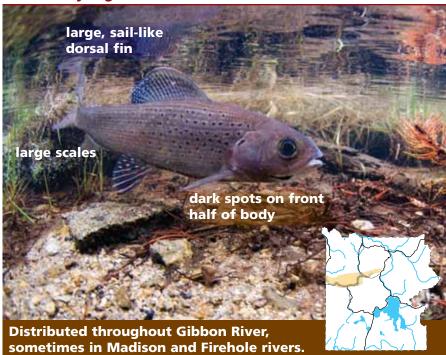
Yellowstone cutthroat trout (large-spotted form; Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri).

Fish Identification—Native

Mountain Whitefish

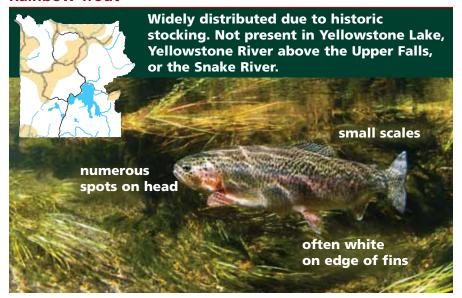


Arctic Grayling



Fish Identification—Nonnative

Rainbow Trout



A Note about Hybridized (genetically impure) Cutthroat Trout

In cutthroat trout waters where rainbow trout have been introduced, either by intentional, historic stocking or by invasion from a downstream source, the result has been a serious degradation of the cutthroat trout population through interbreeding of the two species. Presently, hybridized cutthroat trout exist throughout the Bechler, Falls, Gallatin, Gardner, and Lamar rivers, and the Yellowstone River below the Upper Falls.



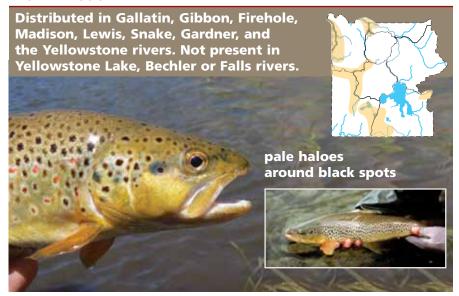


Cutthroat/rainbow trout hybrids will have characteristics (coloration and spotting patterns) that are consistent with the two species, making identification often difficult. In all cases, hybridized cutthroat trout that have any indication of a red/orange jaw slash are fully protected by catchand-release regulation.

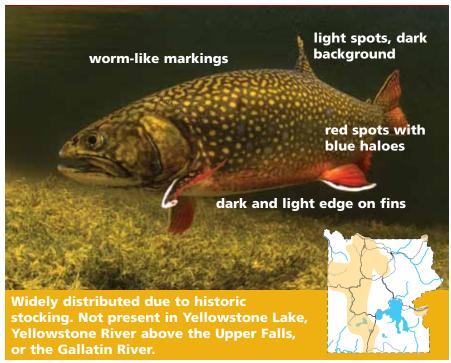
If it has a red slash, put it back.

Fish Identification—Nonnative

Brown Trout



Brook Trout



Fish Identification—Nonnative

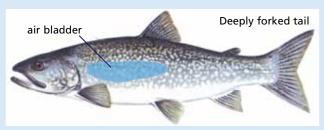
Lake Trout



All lake trout MUST BE KILLED in Yellowstone Lake

If you do not want to keep the fish, puncture the air bladder and drop it into water as deep as possible. In the backcountry, dispose of fish entrails and remains in fast moving or deep water. Do not discard trout carcasses along streams as they will attract bears.





Frequently Asked Questions

How many anglers come to Yellowstone each year?

About 50,000 of the park's three million visitors fish while they are in Yellowstone.

Why can't we fish from Fishing Bridge?

Fishing Bridge, situated over a cutthroat trout spawning area, was once a popular place to fish. Declining numbers of cutthroat trout caused park officials to close the bridge to fishing to protect the spawning fish. Now the bridge is a popular place to observe and photograph fish.

Why are barbless hooks required?

Many fish have been injured or deformed by barbed hooks, especially in the park's popular streams, such as the Yellowstone River and Soda Butte Creek. Barbless hooks reduce hook injuries and the time you need to handle the fish, and improve the overall condition of trout in heavily-fished waters of the park.

Why is fishing lead-free in Yellowstone?

Lead is a severe environmental contaminant and a toxic substance that has no known beneficial biological function. Wildlife, such as loons, waterfowl, cranes, and shorebirds, are vulnerable to lead poisoning. Of particular concern in Yellowstone are the alarmingly low populations of trumpeter swans and loons. To minimize the effects of lead on these species, Yellowstone National Park bans most lead tackle.



How do anglers help Yellowstone?

Fly fishing is a major industry in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and park anglers spend millions here annually. Angler groups have supported management actions, such as catchand-release of native species and closing the Fishing Bridge to fishing, and have helped fund research on aquatic systems. In addition, anglers help by:

- correctly identifying fish and selectively removing nonnative trout in waters where they are causing harm
- removing nonnative rainbow trout from the Lamar River drainage, one of the last strongholds for native cutthroat trout.
- removing lake trout, a nonnative fish that preys on an important population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Yellowstone Lake
- taking actions to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (see page 3)
- filling out and returning the Volunteer Angler Report card (see page 18)

Volunteer Anglers



Yellowstone Volunteer Flyfishing Program

Since 2002, anglers have been directly assisting Yellowstone's fisheries staff. Using catch-and-release angling to capture fish, they gather biological information on fish populations located throughout the park. Their projects have included:

- determining the range of hybridized Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the Lamar River and its major tributaries
- documenting the Pebble Creek and Beula Lake fisheries
- documenting the status and movement patterns of grayling originating in Grebe and Wolf lakes of the Gibbon River system
- documenting the status and genetic uniqueness of westslope cutthroat trout in Grayling Creek

Through this program, volunteer anglers experience many fisheries issues first hand, and their biological data increases understanding of the park's fisheries.

The Volunteer Angler Report— Your Chance to Contribute

Since 1973, anglers have been providing valuable fishery information to Yellowstone National Park managers by filling out the Volunteer Angler Report (VAR) card, which is issued with each fishing permit. Managers use this information to estimate angling pressure, landing and creel rates, sizes of fish landed, and angler satisfaction. For many park waters, these reports are the only data available.

Help us manage your park's fisheries by completing and returning your VAR card, whether or not you actually fished or caught fish. To obtain a summary of the data, indicate so in the comment section and include your email or postal address.

When filling out the Volunteer Angler Report, you can use your rod to quickly estimate the length of your fish. Just measure and mark (with tape or nail polish) various lengths on your rod. Remember, the less time the fish is handled out of the water the better chance it has of recovering

Angler Etiquette

Yellowstone hosts tens of thousands of anglers each year in a very short time, most in the summer months. For your own enjoyment, the enjoyment of those around you, and the protection of our aquatice resources, please remember to be courteous and observe the following behavior.

- Use established trails and avoid sensitive wetland vegetation such as bogs and seeps. Heavy trail use in these areas causes erosion and loss of habitat essential to many of Yellowstone's wildlife.
- Anglers must stay on established trails in thermal areas and must not cross these areas or approach thermal features.
- Avoid using the streambed as a pathway. Your footsteps can damage aquatic habitats and kill eggs and fry in the gravel.
- Do not overfish a good fishing area. Fish for a while, and then move on.



Walking in stream beds can damage delicate aquatic habitats.

- Do not encroach on another angler's space and keep out of sight of other anglers, if possible.
- During late July and August, when water temperatures can be high, do most of your fishing early and late in the day. Allow fish to rest during the heat of the day.

Illegal Actions Which Cause Ecosystem Degradation

- Possessing a native cutthroat trout, or any other native fish.
- Releasing a nonnative fish alive within a mandatory kill area.
- Transporting/moving any live fish, water, sediment (mud), fish eggs, fish parts, or other aquatic animals or plants within the park whether intentional or not.
- Bringing into the park any aquatic invasive species, water, mud, plants, or bait (worms, minnows, leeches, salamanders, etc.), live or dead, with one exception. (See pages 4–6.)

If you witness a violation please report it immediately to a law enforcement ranger, or call 307-344-7381 and press "zero" to immediately reach park dispatch.

Yellowstone's Fishery



Early park managers transplanted fish to stock the park's fishless waters.



When Yellowstone became a national park, more than 40 percent of its waters were barren of fish—including Shoshone Lake, Lewis Lake, and the Firehole River above Firehole Falls. Early park managers transplanted fish into new locations, produced more fish in hatcheries, and introduced nonnative species. By the mid-20th century, more than 310 million fish had been stocked in the park.



Fishing is a long-standing tradition in Yellowstone's waters.

The ranges and densities of the park's native fish species have been substantially altered during the past century, mostly because of introduced nonnative fish. Nonnative trout are important to the angler experience in Yellowstone, but they contribute to the decline in the park's native cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling by competing for food and habitat, preying on native fish, and degrading the genetic integrity of native fish by mating with them and creating hybrids.

- 11 native species including 3 sport fish: cutthroat trout (2 subspecies), fluvial Arctic grayling, and mountain whitefish.
- 5 nonnative species: brook trout, brown trout, lake trout, rainbow trout, lake chub.
- More than 220 lakes comprise approximately 107,000 surface acres in Yellowstone; 94 percent can be attributed to Yellowstone, Shoshone, Lewis, and Heart lakes.

- 1,000 streams make up more than 2,650 miles of running water.
- Cutthroat trout are an important food for bald eagles, ospreys, pelicans, otters, and grizzly bears.



Yellowstone's Fishery

Combating hybridization

Nonnative rainbow trout interbreed with native cutthroat trout, producing hybrids. Once this happens, a cutthroat population can be restored to genetic purity only if all fish are removed from a stream and genetically pure cutthroat are reintroduced. To reduce hybridization in the park's cutthroat trout waters, anglers are encouraged to harvest nonnative trout in the Native Trout Conservation Area.

Protecting the food supply

In Yellowstone, bald eagles, ospreys, pelicans, otters, grizzly bears, and other wildlife take precedence over humans in utilizing fish as food. Fish management and regulations reflect this priority. For example, some waters are closed to fishing to protect threatened and endangered species, and sensitive nesting birds. Regulations ban lead tackle because the lead concentrates in aquatic environments, posing a risk of lead poisoning to waterfowl that might ingest it. Only non-toxic alternatives to lead are allowed. (See regulations on pages 4–6, for one exception.)





Preserving native cutthroat trout

Cutthroat trout are the sole, native trout of Yellowstone National Park and were the dominant fish species here prior to Euroamerican settlement. Angling for cutthroat trout is an important part of the parks cultural history.

Because cutthroat trout inhabit relatively shallow waters, many animals depend on them as a food source, especially during spring when the cutthroat are spawning in small inlets and tributary streams. In many cases, nonnative fish cannot serve as a substitute for cutthroat trout because they occupy different habitats. For example, lake trout live deep in Yellowstone Lake and are not generally accessible to the park's native fish-eating animals.

Preserving cutthroat trout will help to preserve all of the important animals that depend upon them as a food source, will ensure that visitors can continue to see them spawning near Fishing Bridge, LeHardy Rapids, and other places, and that future generations will be able to experience them by angling in the many pristine, remote waters the park has to offer.

If you have questions about information in this guide, please contact:

Visitor Services Office P.O. Box 168 Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190 307-344-2107

For more information about Yellowstone fisheries, go to: www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/fishing.htm

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