

Lakes ships. I checked bird sightings against the illustrated bird book kept on the dinner table. I listened carefully to my father's instructions: always pee downhill, when the tractor goes into gear – hang on for dear life, head for cover when the wind picks up and the poplar leaves turn to the silver side, and plant trees, plant trees, plant trees. Many moonlit nights I rode the tractor with my father while he ploughed and “our” fox ran in the furrow ahead of the light searching for mice.

I have always struggled with city life, feeling much more comfortable with the vast expanses of earth, sky, water, and mountains. It took many years for the seeds that were sown in my youth to germinate, sprout, and grow. And just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village of family, friends, and community working together to nurture, encourage, and support a sense of responsibility to this world.

My children, Niklas and Tasha, 18 and 21, ask in despair, what can we do to make a positive difference in this world? Why bother, given the seemingly insurmountable challenges of global warming and pollution and clear-cutting and oil sands development and ... ? I smile and turn up the volume on the CD player. Jack Johnson's mellow voice fills the room, the city, the province, the world:

*I can change the world
with my own two hands
make it a better place
with my own two hands
make it a kinder place
with my own two hands.*

I remind them that when the Tibet's spiritual, the Dalai Lama, was asked how he managed to hike the long, treacherous route through the mountains during his escape from China to India, he replied, “One step at a time.”

I look forward to offering my own two hands to the work that needs to be done to ensure that Alberta's wilderness areas are preserved and protected. I am grateful that my journey has led me back home, one step at a time.



The westslope cutthroat trout prefers cold, clean moving water with various forms of cover. Body colour ranges from silver to yellowish-green, with red on the front and sides of the head. The orange-red slashes beneath the jaw distinguish the cutthroat from the rainbow trout. PHOTO: C. OLSON

Westslope Cutthroat Trout Assessed as “Threatened”

In 2006 the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessed the status of the westslope cutthroat trout, found in Canada only in B.C. and Alberta, and recommended that it be listed under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) as “threatened.” The recommendation was made because native populations of this fish have been reduced by almost 80 percent by habitat loss, overharvesting, and introduction of non-native fish species.

COSEWIC recommends that a wildlife species be listed as “threatened” when that species is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors threatening it. COSEWIC's assessment is then submitted to the federal Minister of the Environment, who must decide whether to add the species to the SARA list. If it is added, a recovery strategy must be completed within two years and the provincial and federal governments then have responsibilities in the species' recovery and protection.

In Alberta, the westslope cutthroat (one of 14 subspecies of cutthroat trout) is found in the Bow and Oldman drainages, and possibly the headwaters of the Milk River. Although poaching is still a problem with respect to these fish, the major factors in the species' decline are ongoing habitat destruction from resource development and motorized recreation, and the continuing failure to address hybridization and competition with exotic species. The vast majority of Alberta populations are now extensively hybridized with rainbow trout, which have been widely introduced to places where they are non-native.

As part of the decision-making process, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is conducting consultations on whether the westslope cutthroat trout (Alberta populations) should be added to the SARA list. The consultation document states that “all available information suggests that many populations are lower relative to historic levels and numerous local extinctions have occurred.” The document further clarifies the source of the problem: “Habitat degradation and loss due to timber extraction, mining and hydroelectric developments have been directly responsible for loss of habitat and decline of several populations.” For example, the proposed Petro-Canada Sullivan field project will impact numerous south Eastern Slopes streams that are either the last known refuges of pure native populations, or the streams where major recovery efforts will have to be implemented to restore this fish to secure status in this province.

AWA is urging Fisheries and Oceans Canada to list all populations of genetically pure westslope cutthroat in their native habitats in Alberta as “endangered” under SARA. Unless protection and recovery plans are implemented in the near future, this subspecies will be extirpated from this province. If the westslope cutthroat trout is listed, there is great hope that these fish can recover. They are a resilient species, but they cannot compete with the cumulative impacts of industry, recreation, and lack of management and enforcement by Alberta Fish and Wildlife.

— David Mayhood & Christyann Olson