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War on Trout: Destructive Activities Cripple Native Trout Populations

Human-caused threats to bull trout and cutthroat trout in the Oldman watershed combined with snail's pace recovery action by the provincial and federal governments has led to severe limits on population recovery. A new review of overlapping human impacts throughout this watershed shows virtually every creek and river home to native trout has been negatively impacted or is threatened by logging, off-highway vehicle use, stream crossings, oil and gas development, coal mining, overharvesting, roads, dam operations or combinations of these. (See map below)

Alberta Wilderness Association and Timberwolf Wilderness Society recommend and request:

- An immediate moratorium on clear cut logging in westslope cutthroat and bull trout habitat
- A federal habitat protection order declared for westslope cutthroat trout
- Enforced human access restrictions surrounding all critical habitat waterways

“Scientific disturbance thresholds have long been surpassed for these sensitive native trout species and yet timber harvest and other developments continue to be approved in the same watersheds,” says Brittany Verbeek, AWA Conservation Specialist. “We are fed up with a lack of urgency by regulators that means there are no safe havens for native trout populations.”

A federal recovery strategy for westslope cutthroat trout finalized in March of 2014 fails to explicitly include riparian habitat surrounding streams and other elements of trout habitat that are critical to its recovery including riparian habitat surrounding streams. Worse still, protection of the designated critical habitat is not enforceable under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) until a habitat protection order is issued.

“To date the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has failed to declare either a critical habitat protection order, or a formal habitat protection statement, within 180 days of publication of the recovery strategy for the Alberta population of Westslope Cutthroat Trout,” says Dave Mayhood, freshwater ecologist, “Either one or the other is required under SARA.” Other provisions under SARA and the federal Fisheries Act are not sufficient to effectively protect trout habitat and successfully recover populations.

Remnant populations of native trout remain only in short, isolated headwater reaches of the East Slopes; just a small fraction remains of their historic abundance and distribution. Currently, bull trout are classified as “Threatened” under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. They are also currently under review to be added to the federal Species at Risk registry, after the *Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada* (COSEWIC) assessed them as “Threatened” in 2012. Westslope cutthroat trout are listed as “Threatened” under both SARA and Alberta's *Wildlife Act*.

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NEWS RELEASE



Threats to Bull Trout and Cutthroat Trout in the Oldman Watershed

