



Golden Trout – Very rarely seen or caught on the Bighorns, the Golden trout is an introduced species from California. Golden trout are spring spawners. Like other mountain lake trout species, they are opportunistic feeders, surviving off a variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates.



Splake - A cross between brook trout and lake trout, splake are used in high mountain lakes to help control over-abundant brook, grayling or sucker populations. Splake grow larger than brook trout but are generally easier to catch than lake trout. Their markings are intermediate between the brook and lake trout.



Grayling - Tributaries of the Missouri River in Montana are the original range of grayling. Grayling have been reared in hatcheries in several western states and released into likely waters. In Wyoming, their introduction has been moderately successful. Grayling are best recognized by the large, bright colored dorsal fin. This fin is larger on grayling than on other similar

fish. Lakes or streams with clear, cold water, and gravel bottoms support grayling, and they do well in waters containing cutthroat trout. If brown, rainbow, or brook trout are present, grayling may gradually disappear because they eat the same food as trout. Due to their small mouth, smaller lures and flies are most effective when fishing for grayling.



Mountain Whitefish - Usually occurring in deep swift areas of larger streams, whitefish spawn in the fall, have longer scales than trout and small mouths. They feed primarily on insects.



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With sincere appreciation for the technical advice of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department in the production of this document

Updated 8/08

Fishing the Bighorns



Fishing on the Bighorn National Forest means trout fishing. The Bighorn National Forest has trout fishing in streams, lakes and reservoirs. Rainbow, Yellowstone cutthroat (native), eastern brook, brown, lake trout, and golden trout, as well as whitefish, splake (lake trout & brook trout), and grayling are found in streams and mountain lakes on the Forest. Bass, crappie, catfish, and other warm water species inhabit lakes at lower elevations, generally off-Forest. Most lakes and streams are open to year-round fishing, however access may be denied to some waters due to closure of big game winter ranges, or depth of snow, etc. Check with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department for their current fishing orders or inquire locally for licensing regulations. Game & Fish also tracks which trout species are in a particular lake.

Marked Fish: If you catch a fish that is tagged, please send the tag data to Wyoming Game & Fish Department, 5400 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82006, stating when and where caught, length, and weight. This will aid in fisheries management.

Cold water fish (fish that inhabit cold, clear waters of high elevation areas):



Cutthroat Trout - The cutthroat is Wyoming's only native trout species; so called because of the blood-red marking on the lower jaw. Liking clear and cold waters, the cutthroat is being crowded out of its range by the effects of civilization on the waters, and by other species of trout that have been introduced into its home waters. With proper management though, the cutthroat can still produce excellent fishing. Several varieties or strains of the native cutthroat exist in Wyoming. On the Bighorn National Forest, the Snake River and Yellowstone (*Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri*, pictured above) varieties are used in fisheries management. These two strains have distinctive spotting patterns. The Snake River strain has numerous small, dark spots, while the Yellowstone have fewer, larger spots. The spotting pattern is only one way to tell these strains apart. Cutthroat trout spawn in the spring and summer, from April into August, depending on water temperature. Laid in nests, called redds, the eggs are covered with a few inches of gravel.



Rainbow Trout – Native to waters west of the continental divide, the rainbow has been

introduced into many states. The largest percentage of trout caught in Wyoming are rainbow. The rainbow is easy to raise in hatcheries and is easily caught. More rainbow are raised and planted in Wyoming waters than any other trout. It's fighting ability makes it popular with anglers and it's name comes from the brilliant reddish "rainbow" streak found on the sides of this trout. This streak of colors varies according to the season and the water in which the rainbow lives. Rainbow spawn in the spring, the exact time depending on altitude and water temperature.



Brown Trout - The brown trout was imported from Europe in 1883, and is now scattered over much of the United States. Brown trout have greater tolerance to altered stream and lake conditions, which may include slightly warmer and muddier waters. Usually hard to catch, browns prefer lower stretches of larger streams. Fall or winter is the usual spawning time and the eggs hatch in the spring. Browns have light colored spots which are often surrounded by a "halo", and flat tails.



Brook Trout - Northeastern United States, the Great Lakes, and parts of Canada were the native range of the brook trout. Small mountain streams of Wyoming abound with brook trout, comprising a large percentage of

the state trout catch. In many small, cold streams the brook trout does not grow very large. Brook trout mature at an early age and often the small fish are mature adults. Depending on water conditions, brook trout spawn from September to December, and their eggs hatch in the spring. White edging followed by a black line on the leading edge of the lower fins is a common mark of the brook trout. Black vermiculations, or "wormy" markings on top of the back extending into the tail also distinguish the brook trout. The tail is either flat or very slightly forked (unlike lake trout).



Lake Trout - Mackinaw is another name for lake trout, Wyoming's largest trout. It's preference for deep lakes (30 to 150 feet) limits its range in Wyoming waters. Mackinaw spawn in the late fall in lake shoal areas. They may be taken with light tackle in the spring and fall on these shoal areas. Deep trolling in the summer is a common angling method for mackinaw. Dusky gray color, darker above than below, and sides are mottled with gray spots. Leading edges of the pectoral, ventral, and anal fins are whitish, but have no black borders as do the brook trout. Usually there are spots on the tail and the tail is forked.