

GALLATIN RIVER DRAINAGE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The free-flowing Gallatin River originates at Gallatin Lake in Yellowstone National Park at an elevation of 8,834 ft. It flows north for 115 miles to Three Forks, Montana, where it joins the Madison and Jefferson Rivers to form the Missouri River. From the Park boundary, the river flows about 44 miles through the narrow Gallatin Canyon, and then enters the broad Gallatin Valley, where it flows an additional 45 miles to its mouth. Much of the Gallatin River is classified "Blue Ribbon" by FWP in recognition of its high recreational, fishery, and aesthetic values.

Many factors contribute to the popularity of the Gallatin River with anglers and other recreationists. Much of the river is surrounded by public lands, making it readily accessible to recreationists. The river is also near a rapidly growing population center and is paralleled by a main highway route to Yellowstone National Park. Above all, the natural beauty of the river and surrounding mountains attracts recreationists.

There are 33 natural lakes and reservoirs in the drainage totaling 434 surface acres. Most natural lakes are mountain lakes in the headwaters of the Gallatin River. The largest reservoir in the drainage is Hyalite Reservoir south of Bozeman. Lowland lakes in the valley bottom support urban fisheries which consist of put-and-take rainbow trout and illegally introduced warm water fish of various species. High mountain lake fisheries are either stocked on a regular basis or contain self-supporting populations of westslope cutthroat trout, brook trout, golden trout, or Arctic grayling.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Gallatin drainage is home to a variety of native fish species including; mountain whitefish, longnose dace, longnose suckers, Rocky Mountin Rocky Mountain sculpin, mountain sucker, white sucker, and westslope cutthroat trout. Several nonnative fish species are also found in the drainage and include: brown trout, brook trout, rainbow trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Most streams in the drainage are managed for nonnative self-sustaining wild trout fisheries. These trout populations are currently stable from year to year. Only one pure population of native westslope cutthroat trout exists in the drainage. Hybridized (westslope cutthroat with rainbow trout) populations exist in a few headwaters streams.

Common to many southwestern Montana rivers, fish stocking records for the Gallatin River are documented to begin in the 1920s and extended into the early 1970s when wild trout management philosophies were instituted. The primary fish stocked into the Gallatin River drainage has been rainbow trout; however, undesignated cutthroat trout were stocked between the 1930s and 1950s. Arctic grayling were stocked into the Gallatin River during the mid 1990s and early 2000s in an effort to establish self-sustaining populations. No natural reproduction was detected in the Gallatin River, and restoration efforts were terminated. Hyalite Reservoir is stocked annually with Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Fishing regulations for streams in the Gallatin drainage are covered under Central District Standard limits and seasons, with three exceptions. These provide that: 1) fishing from boats or vessels from the Yellowstone National Park boundary to the East Gallatin River is not allowed; 2) the river is open to fishing during the entire year; and 3) there is no limit on northern pike to help prevent their establishment.

Angling use on the Gallatin River is high, and over the past decade has varied from 69,254 angler days in 2001 to 93,365 angler days in 2009. During the same time period, angler use of the East Gallatin River has varied from 5,512 angler days in 2007 to 11,679 angler days in 2005, while angler use of Hyalite reservoir has varied from 8,517 angler days in 2001 to 18,511 angler days in 2009. Plowing snow on the Hyalite Reservoir road during winter was recent initiated by the USFS, and this has increased fishing pressure during the winter months.

HABITAT

The Gallatin River drains an area of 11,000 square miles, all above 4,000 ft. Most of the drainage basin above 5,000 ft is covered with coniferous forest, while the basin below 5,000 ft consists primarily of the Gallatin Valley, one of the richest agricultural regions in Montana.

Much of the upper 70 miles of the Gallatin River are surrounded by public lands within Yellowstone National Park and the Gallatin National Forest. This section, except for the uppermost 12 miles, is closely paralleled by US 191, which provides easy access to the river. Dude ranches, lodges and Forest Service campgrounds are scattered throughout the area. The steady rise in recreational and home site development and tourism is expected to have considerable impact on the canyon area in future years.

The lower 45 miles of river flow primarily through private lands within the Gallatin Valley. Access to the lower river is obtained through private lands, state fishing access sites and at bridge crossings. Bozeman, which is seven miles from the river at the closest point of contact, is the largest population center in the drainage.

The narrow canyon reach of the upper Gallatin generally exhibits good water quality and quantity. Stream habitat in the upper drainage is in good condition although the Taylors Fork contributes enough sediment after rain storms to muddy the mainstem Gallatin well downstream. Once the Gallatin leaves the canyon it begins to suffer from dewatering for irrigation and habitat concerns such as bed and bank manipulations. Low water levels, sedimentation, and high water temperature limit the trout population in the lower river. This trend is also found in the East Gallatin River drainage, with generally fish-friendly conditions in the upper tributary streams and conditions worsening in the lower river.

FISHING ACCESS

There are no FWP FASs from the Yellowstone National Park Boundary to the mouth of the Gallatin Canyon; however, public land (mostly federal) and access provided from U.S. Highway 191 provide ample opportunity for anglers to access the Gallatin River within the Canyon Reach. In the lower Gallatin River, eight FWP Fishing Access Sites provide angler access between the Canyon and the confluence with the Madison and Jefferson Rivers near Three Forks. The East Gallatin River has one FWP Fishing Access site.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Hyalite Reservoir and other Gallatin River tributaries south of Bozeman Montana provide municipal water for the City of Bozeman. Expansion of the human population in Bozeman and the surrounding area has caused concern over the ability of existing sources (primarily Hyalite Reservoir) to satisfy municipal demand of water. Possible impacts include the development of additional water storage (a new reservoir; potentially in Sourdough Creek) for municipal use.

The Gallatin River drainage is also home to several conservation populations of westslope cutthroat trout providing opportunities to conserve this native species in the drainage. Management for nonnative trout (brown and rainbow trout) will continue to be emphasized in the mainstem river while opportunities for cutthroat conservation will be pursued in some tributary streams. The goal of cutthroat conservation work is to secure populations in habitat that is free from the threats of nonnative species and much of this work will be done upstream of natural and man-made fish barriers. A cutthroat trout population is considered secure when it has a minimum population size of 2,500 fish, occupies at least 5-6 miles of stream and is free from the threats of competition and hybridization from introduced species. The long-term goal of cutthroat conservation in the Gallatin is to have 20% of the historically occupied habitat restored to cutthroat trout.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIRECTION FOR GALLATIN RIVER DRAINAGE

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Gallatin River and	56.1 miles in	Rainbow trout,	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler
Tributaries (YNP	mainstem	Brown trout			harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth.
to Shed's Bridge					
FAS)		Mountain	Wild	General	Continue to maintain population. Initiate research and
		whitefish			monitoring to better understand population size and trend
Gallatin River and	32.7 miles in	Rainbow trout,	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler
Tributaries	mainstem	Brown trout			harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth.
(Shed's Bridge					
FAS to		Mountain	Wild	General	Continue to maintain population. Initiate research and
Confluence with		whitefish			monitoring to better understand population size and trend
Missouri River)					

Habitat needs and activities: Improve instream-flow conditions, investigate alternatives to improve spawning and rearing habitat (tributaries), maintain form and function of river channel by preventing degradation from bank stabilization, continue to allow stream access to floodplain, allow natural channel migration, and maintain healthy riparian plant community.

East Gallatin	25.6 miles in	Rainbow trout,	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler
River and	mainstem	Brown trout			harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth.
Tributaries					
(Headwaters to		Mountain	Wild	General	Continue to maintain population. Initiate research and
Thompson Spring		whitefish			monitoring to better understand population size and trend
Creek)					
East Gallatin	18.6 miles in	Rainbow trout,	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler
River and	mainstem	Brown trout			harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth.
Tributaries					
(Thompson		Mountain	Wild	General	Continue to maintain population. Initiate research and
Spring Creek to		whitefish			monitoring to better understand population size and trend
Mouth)					

Habitat needs and activities: Improve instream-flow conditions, investigate alternatives to improve spawning and rearing habitat (tributaries), maintain form and function of river channel by preventing degradation from bank stabilization, continue to allow stream access to floodplain, allow natural channel migration, and maintain healthy riparian plant community.

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Hyalite Reservoir	158 acres	Yellowstone	Wild/	Put-Grow-Take	Continue to manage stocking and harvest to maintain present
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Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
		cutthroat trout	Hatchery		sizes and numbers.
		Arctic grayling	Wild	Special Regulations	Assess possibility for limited and unique harvest opportunity for Arctic grayling.
		Brook trout	Wild	General	Continue to monitor population trends