

Fishing Regulations

Clemson University



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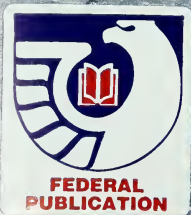
**Attention
Anglers:**

**Yellowstone
Lake Opens
June 15**

**Please complete
and return
Volunteer
Angler Reports**



**Yellowstone
National Park**



The Reason for Fishing Regulations

Protect Populations • Provide Recreation

Yellowstone National Park is managed to protect cultural and natural resources and outstanding scenery, and to provide for visitor use. The objectives of the fishing program are to:

1. Manage aquatic resources as an important part of the park ecosystem.
2. Preserve and restore native fishes and their habitats.
3. Provide recreational fishing opportunities for the enjoyment of park visitors, consistent with the first two objectives.

The Three Types of Regulations

1. **GENERAL** (page 4) Familiarize yourself with these general regulations, which include information on permits, tackle & bait restrictions, and limits.
2. **AREA SPECIFIC** (page 5) Once you know where you will be fishing, check these regulations that address specific needs for the different watersheds.
3. **SPECIES SPECIFIC** (pages 9–11) These regulations are specific to each species in the park, and include basic field identification tips.

Attention Anglers

Yellowstone fisheries are threatened by two potentially damaging exotic organisms. Whirling disease has been implicated in the decline of wild trout in the Madison River in Montana and has been found in the park. The New Zealand mud snail, which occurs in the park's major drainages, may harm aquatic insect communities. Help prevent further spread of these invaders by thoroughly cleaning mud, plants, and debris from your fishing equipment, and inspecting footwear before leaving your angling site. Drain livewells and clean fish **ONLY** near the same body of water in which they were caught. Report sightings of the tiny (less than 1/4 inch) black snails to a park ranger.

Help preserve Yellowstone for the future.

The Ecology of Fishing

In Yellowstone

- 11 native species including 3 sport fish: cutthroat trout (3 races), Arctic grayling, & mountain whitefish.
- 5 non-native 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 of which 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 a primary food for bald eagles, ospreys, pelicans, otters, and grizzly bears.

In Yellowstone, bald eagles, ospreys, pelicans, otters, grizzly bears, and other wildlife take precedence over humans in utilizing fish as food. Fishing management and regulations reflect this priority and that of maintaining fish populations that have sufficient number of spawning adults to maintain natural reproduction and genetic diversity.

Fishing in Yellowstone National Park also emphasizes the quality of recreational fishing rather than providing fish for human consumption. Anglers, in return, have the opportunity to fish for wild fish in a natural setting.

Because of the increasing number of anglers in the park, more restrictive regulations have been adopted in Yellowstone. These restrictions include season opening and closing dates, restrictive use of bait, catch-and-release only areas, and number/size limits

according to species. Some waters are closed to fishing to protect threatened and endangered species, sensitive nesting birds, and to provide scenic viewing areas for visitors seeking undisturbed wildlife.

Yellowstone National Park has implemented a fishing program using non-toxic tackle. Nationwide, more than three million waterfowl die each year from lead poisoning through ingestion. Because lead from fishing tackle concentrates in aquatic environments, tackle such as leaded split-shot sinkers, weighted jigs, and soft-weighted ribbon are prohibited. Only non-toxic alternatives to lead are allowed.



Report violators
307-344-7381

OR CONTACT THE NEAREST RANGER

General Regulations

1 Fishing Season

Open each day from 5 AM to 10 PM, beginning on the last Saturday of May through and including the first Sunday in November. Exceptions are noted in Area-Specific Regulations on the facing page.

2 Fishing Permits

- a. Anglers 12 years of age or older must be in possession of a valid Yellowstone National Park fishing permit to fish in the park. A fishing permit is valid only if signed by the permittee. A permit fee is charged for anyone 16 years of age or older. Children 11 years of age or younger may fish without a permit when supervised by an adult. The adult is responsible for the child's actions.
- b. Park rangers may check permits, inspect tackle, fish, creels, and/or other containers where fish or tackle may be stored.

3 Tackle & Bait Restrictions

- a. Each angler may use only one rod or line that must be attended at all times.
- b. Only artificial lures and flies may be used. (One exception: See Area-Specific Regulations, 4e, on the facing page.) No natural or organic bait such as salmon eggs, worms, insects, or foodstuffs is allowed. Scented attractants are illegal.
- c. Lures may have only one hook with a single, double, or treble configuration. No fish snagging is allowed.

- d. Flies may have only one hook with a single point. Up to two flies may be used on a single leader.
- e. Leaded fishing tackle such as leaded split-shot sinkers, weighted jigs (lead molded to a hook), and soft lead-weighted ribbon for nymph fishing are not allowed.

4 Size & Possession Limits

- a. Size and possession limits vary by species and area. The maximum number of fish an angler can keep is five fish per day; at least three must be brook trout. Exceptions are lake trout from Yellowstone or Heart Lake, or brook trout from Pocket Lake. An angler must cease fishing immediately after filling the possession limit except on Yellowstone Lake (see Area-Specific Regulations, 1e). Possession limits include all fish—fresh, stored, or preserved.
- b. Fish that do not meet the specified size restrictions must be returned carefully and immediately to the waters from which they were taken. Unintentionally killed fish should also be returned to the water so they can be consumed by wildlife. It is the responsibility of the angler to be able to measure fish lengths and to identify fish by species.

5 General Closures

No fishing from any road bridge or boat dock.

Permits Required for Boats & Float Tubes

All types of vessels require a boat permit. Obtain permits in person at the following locations: South Entrance, Lewis Lake Campground, Grant Village Backcountry Office, Bridge Bay Marina, and Lake Ranger Station. **Float tubes are classified as vessels and they are not allowed on any river or stream in Yellowstone except the Lewis River between Lewis and Shoshone lakes.** Non-motorized permits only may be obtained at Mammoth, Canyon, or Old Faithful backcountry offices, Northeast Entrance, the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce/Public Lands Desk, and the Bechler Ranger Station. Fees are charged for all boat permits.

Area-Specific Regulations

1 Yellowstone Lake & Tributaries

- a. Fishing season on Yellowstone Lake opens June 15.
- b. Streams flowing into Yellowstone Lake (its tributaries) and areas within 100 yards of streams' outlets open July 15.
- c. Clear and Cub creeks open August 11 due to bear activity.
- d. Areas permanently closed to fishing:
 - i. Pelican Creek from its outlet to a point two miles upstream (to protect wildlife).
 - ii. The shoreline of Yellowstone Lake from West Thumb Geyser basin to Little Thumb Creek (to protect fragile thermal resources).
 - iii. Bridge Bay Marina/Harbor & Grant Village Marina/Harbor and their connecting channels into Yellowstone Lake.
- e. *All lake trout caught in Yellowstone Lake, its tributaries, and the Yellowstone River must be killed. If you do not want to keep the fish, puncture the air bladder (see drawing page 11) and drop it into water as deep as possible.*

2 Yellowstone River & Tributaries between Chittenden Bridge (near Canyon) and Yellowstone Lake

- a. Fishing season opens July 15.
- b. This area is **catch and release only**.
- c. Areas permanently closed to fishing include:
 - i. Fishing Bridge and an area one mile downstream (toward Canyon) and one-quarter upstream (toward Yellowstone Lake) from the bridge.
 - ii. The Yellowstone River and its tributaries through Hayden Valley: from the confluence of Alum Creek upstream (toward Yellowstone Lake) to Sulphur Caldron.
 - iii. The Yellowstone River for 100 yards up- and downstream of LeHardys Rapids.
 - iv. The entire west channel of the Yellowstone River near the road at Nez Perce Ford.

3 Madison & Firehole Rivers, Gibbon River below Gibbon Falls

- a. These rivers (not including the tributaries) are restricted to fly-fishing only (use only artificial flies regardless of the type of rod or line).
- b. Anglers may keep two brown trout **under 13"** in these rivers and the Firehole's tributaries.
- c. Catch and release only for rainbow trout and native species on these rivers and the Firehole's tributaries.
- d. Closures: The Firehole River from the road bridge one-half mile upstream of Old Faithful to the road bridge at Biscuit Basin (two and one-half miles downstream of Old Faithful); the Madison River from Seven Mile Bridge upstream 250 yards.

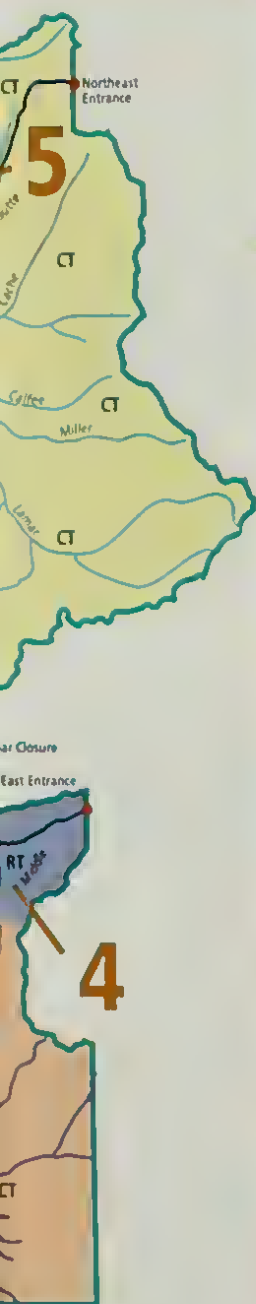
4 Other Areas

- a. Closure: The Yellowstone River, from Chittenden Bridge downstream through the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone to a point directly below Silver Cord Cascade.
- b. Agate and Cottonwood creeks, and portions of the Yellowstone River within 100 yards of these creeks, open to fishing July 15.
- c. Trout, Shrimp, and Buck lakes, and connecting waters, open to fishing June 15. The stream that drains into Trout Lake opens to fishing July 15 (depending on spawning activity).
- d. Bechler River: catch and release only for rainbow trout and native species.
- e. Gardner River, Obsidian, Indian, and Panther creeks, and Joffe Lake: Children 11 years of age or younger may fish with worms as bait.
- f. Sylvan and Eleanor lakes open to fishing July 15. Boats and float tubes are prohibited.
- g. The Lewis River below Lewis Falls: catch and release only for brown trout and native species.
- h. Heart Lake opens to fishing July 1 due to bear activity. No size or possession limit on lake trout caught in Heart Lake.
- i. Richard's Pond, Fawn Lake, and Blacktail Ponds: daily limit is five brook trout under 13".
- j. Pocket Lake: all brook trout must be kept and not released.
- k. All waters in the park not mentioned on this page are regulated by the general fishing regulations and the species regulations.

**Species-specific regulations
listed on pages 9–11**

6





ZONE	DRAINAGE NAME	BOUNDARY	SPECIES	SPECIAL REGULATIONS
1	Yellowstone Lake & Tributaries	Lake outlet near Fishing Bridge	Cutthroat & Lake trout (CT, LT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yellowstone Lake opens June 15 Catch & release only: cutthroat Kill all lake trout Sylvan and Eleanor lakes open July 15; boats and float tubes prohibited Yellowstone Lake tributaries open July 15 Clear and Cub creeks open August 11 Closed to fishing: Grant and Bridge Bay marinas; West Thumb Geyser Basin; mouth of Pelican Creek (two miles); road bridges or boat docks
2	Yellowstone River & Tributaries—Hayden Valley Stretch	Fishing Bridge to Chittenden Bridge <i>NOTE: Does not include Cascade Lake or Cascade Creek</i>	Cutthroat (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yellowstone River from Fishing Bridge closure to Chittenden Bridge opens July 15 Catch & release only: all species Closed to fishing: Fishing Bridge, LeHardys Rapids (100 yards up and downstream), side channel of Nez Perce Ford, Hayden Valley
3	Yellowstone River & Tributaries—Below Canyon Lamar River & Tributaries	Includes Cache, Calfee, Slough, Agate, Tower, Cottonwood, and Blacktail Deer creeks	Cutthroat Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Rainbow Trout (CT, MW, RT); Brown Trout (BN) below Knowles Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agate & Cottonwood creeks open July 15 Blacktail Ponds subject to seasonal closure; keep five brook trout under 13" Catch & release: all native species
4	Middle Creek	East Entrance	Cutthroat, Brown, Brook, Rainbow trout (CT, BN, BK, RT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
5	Trout, Shrimp, and Buck Lakes		Cutthroat & Rainbow trout (CT, RT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lakes and connecting waters open June 15 Inlet to Trout Lake opens July 15
6	Gardner River & Tributaries	Includes Obsidian, Indian, and Panther creeks; Joffe, Fawn, and Sportsman lakes. <i>NOTE: Does not include Lava Creek.</i>	Cutthroat Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Brown, Brook, and Rainbow trout (CT, MW, BN, BK, RT) below Osprey Falls; Brook Trout above Osprey Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children 11 years or younger may fish with worms as bait in this area Catch and release: all native species Fawn Lake: keep five brook trout under 13"
7	Gallatin River/Grayling Creek	Includes Fan, Specimen, Gneiss, Maple, and Cougar creeks	Mountain Whitefish; Cutthroat, Rainbow, Brown, Brook trout (MW, CT, RT, BN, BK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richard's Pond: keep five brook trout under 13"
8	Upper Gibbon River	Above Gibbon Falls; includes Grebe & Wolf lakes; Cascade Lake and Cascade Creek	Grayling; Brook, Brown, and Rainbow trout (GY, BK, BN, RT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catch & release only: all native species
9	Madison, Lower Gibbon, Firehole Rivers	Below Gibbon Falls	Grayling; Mountain Whitefish; Brown, Brook, and Rainbow trout (GY, MW, BN, BK, RT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fly fishing only: Use only artificial flies, regardless of type of rod (restriction does not apply to tributaries) Catch & release only: rainbow trout and all native species Keep 2 brown trout under 13"; restriction applies to tributaries Closed to fishing: Firehole River from the road bridge 1/2 mile upstream of Old Faithful to the road bridge at Biscuit Basin; Madison River from Seven Mile Bridge upstream 250 yards
10	Bechler River	Bechler River drainage	Cutthroat, Rainbow, Brook trout (CT, RT, BK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catch & release only: Bechler River for rainbow trout and all native species
11	Shoshone, Lewis, Heart, Pocket Lakes and Snake River	Snake River drainage	Mountain Whitefish; Cutthroat; Brown, Brook, and Lake trout (MW, CT, BN, BK, LK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart Lake opens July 1 due to bear activity Catch & release only: Lewis River below Lewis Falls for brown trout and all native species Heart Lake: No size or possession limit for lake trout Pocket Lake: Keep all brook trout

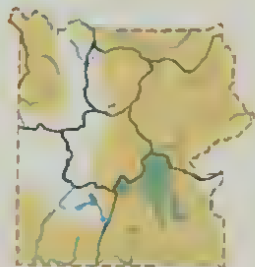
Species Regulations and Descriptions

The fishing map on the reverse side indicates known locations of fish species within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. This map is provided as an aid to anglers fishing for particular species and does not imply a legal basis for species distribution. *It is the angler's responsibility to be able to distinguish one fish species from another.*

NATIVES

Cutthroat Trout—CT

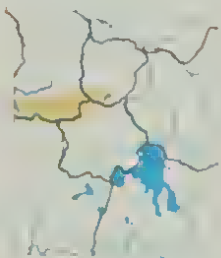
Parkwide: **CATCH & RELEASE ONLY**



Three Subspecies:
Yellowstone, Westslope, Snake
All fish with red slash
are considered cutthroat.

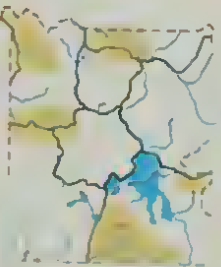
Grayling—GY

Parkwide: **CATCH & RELEASE ONLY**



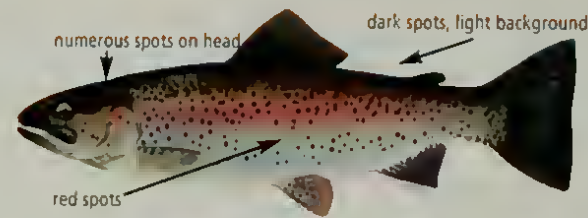
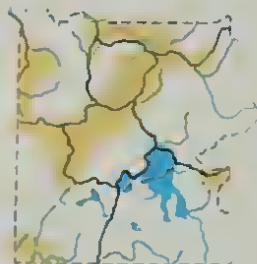
Mountain Whitefish—MW

Parkwide: **CATCH & RELEASE ONLY**



NON-NATIVES

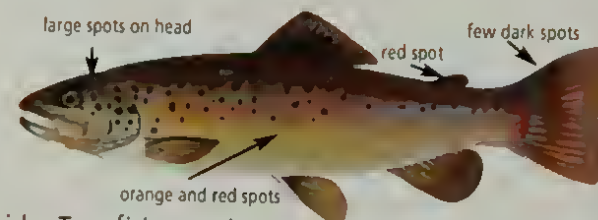
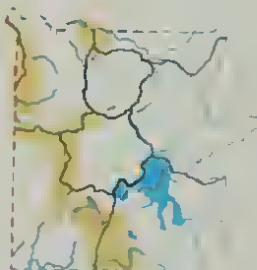
Rainbow Trout—RT



Parkwide: Two fish any size
EXCEPT

1. Madison River, Firehole River and its tributaries, and the Gibbon River **BELOW** Gibbon Falls:
CATCH AND RELEASE ONLY
2. Bechler River: **CATCH AND RELEASE ONLY**

Brown Trout—BN



Parkwide: Two fish any size
EXCEPT

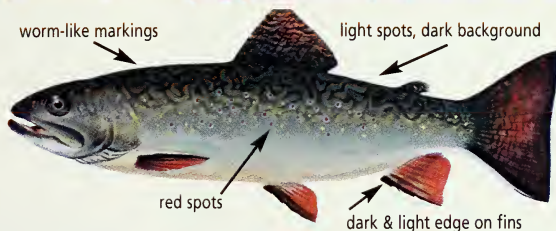
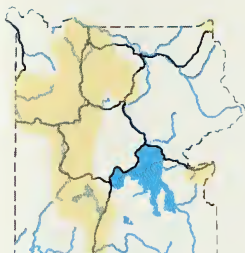
1. Madison River, Firehole River and its tributaries, and the Gibbon River **BELOW** Gibbon Falls:
TWO FISH UNDER 13"
2. Lewis River proper below Lewis Falls:
CATCH AND RELEASE ONLY

To ensure that a released fish has the best chance for survival:

1. Play fish as rapidly as possible; do not play to total exhaustion.
2. Keep fish in water as much as possible when handling and removing hook.
3. Remove hook gently—do not squeeze fish or put fingers in gills. The use of barbless hooks is encouraged to make release easier.
4. If deeply hooked, cut line—do not pull out hook. Most fish survive with hooks left in them.
5. Release fish only after its equilibrium is maintained. If necessary, gently hold fish upright, facing upstream.
6. Release fish in quiet water, close to the area where it was hooked.

NON-NATIVES

Brook Trout—BK

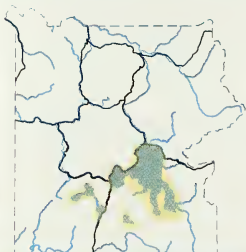


Parkwide: Five fish any size

EXCEPT

1. Richard's Pond, Fawn Lake, Blacktail Ponds: **FIVE FISH ALL UNDER 13"**
2. All brook trout caught in Pocket Lake must be **KEPT AND NOT RELEASED**. No daily limit.

Lake Trout—LT

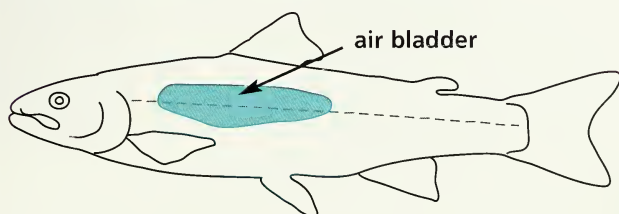


Parkwide: Two fish any size

EXCEPT

1. Yellowstone Lake, its tributaries, and the Yellowstone River: **All lake trout caught must be killed**. If you do not want to keep the fish, puncture the air bladder and drop it into water as deep as possible.
2. Heart Lake: no size or possession limit.

Non-native lake trout have been discovered in Yellowstone Lake. They pose a great threat to the future of the lake's native cutthroat trout. **ALL** lake trout caught in Yellowstone Lake, its tributaries, and the Yellowstone River must be killed. If you do not want to keep the fish, puncture the air bladder and drop it into water as deep as possible.



Releasing Fish to Live Another Day



Catch and release fishing provides anglers with excellent sport fishing while protecting native fish species from overharvest.

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 while pointing it against 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.

- 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.
 - If you must handle the fish, *always* make sure your hands are wet. (Fish have a protective mucous film sensitive to dry human hands.)
 - The best way to hold a fish (with wet hands) is one hand around the tail section and the other beneath the belly just behind the pectoral fins. **Never, ever** 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
- Hooks and lures typically have barbs. With small pliers you can 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 and perhaps yourself.
 - 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 some pliers. Two hooks are still very effective and, once again, easier to remove and less traumatic.
 - 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.

Early Management

When Yellowstone became a national park, almost 40 percent of Yellowstone's 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 non-native species. By the mid 20th century, more than 310 million fish had been stocked in Yellowstone. Stocking no longer occurs. About 40 lakes have fish; the remainder were either not planted or have reverted to their original fishless condition.

Status of Native Fish

The ranges and densities of the park's 12 native fish species have been substantially altered during the past century due to exploitation, introduction of exotic species, and natural factors. Non-native species in the park include rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout, lake trout, and lake chub.

Despite changes in species composition and distribution, large-scale habitat degradation—such as water diversions or water pollution—has not occurred in the park.

Management Today

Fishing has been a major visitor activity in Yellowstone National Park for more than 100 years. Because of this history, fishing continues

to be allowed and can complement the park's primary purpose to preserve natural environments and native species.

Yellowstone's native fish are carefully managed. For about 30 years, until 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided assistance in the park with aquatic research and monitoring programs. Current park fisheries managers still follow the same objectives: to manage aquatic resources as an important part of the park ecosystem, preserve and restore native fishes and their habitats, and provide anglers with the opportunity to fish for wild fish in a natural setting.

Fish As Food

Fish and other aquatic inhabitants provide important food for grizzly and black bears, bald eagles, river otters, mink, ospreys, pelicans, loons, grebes, mergansers, diving ducks, terns, gulls, kingfishers, and herons.

Riparian Problems

Small scale habitat degradation does occur due to fishing in riparian (streamside) areas. Heavy trail use in these areas causes erosion and loss of habitat essential to many of Yellowstone's wildlife. Anglers can help by using established trails and avoiding sensitive wetland vegetation such as bogs and seeps. Anglers must stay on trails in thermal areas and must not cross these areas or approach thermal features.

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 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 Volunteer Angler Report 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 e-mail or postal address.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many anglers come to Yellowstone each year?

About 75,000 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 fish.

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. (Terminal tackle

must be lead-free; sinkers used to fish for deep-dwelling lake trout are permissible because they are too large to be ingested.)

How do anglers help Yellowstone?

Fly fishing is a major industry in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and park anglers spend more than \$4 million annually. Angler groups have supported management actions, such as closing the Fishing Bridge to fishing, and have helped fund research on aquatic systems. In addition, anglers help by:

- removing lake trout, a very predacious fish, from Yellowstone Lake, which threatens an important population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout
- preventing the spread of exotic organisms by cleaning boots, waders, and other equipment with a bleach solution before entering Yellowstone National Park or when traveling from one body of water to another within the park
- filling out and returning the Volunteer Angler Report card (see previous page)

For More Information

Visit Yellowstone's official web site: www.nps.gov/yelli

If you would like to learn more about the history of fishing, angling techniques, or Yellowstone's aquatic resources, these and other items are sold by the Yellowstone Association in visitor centers:

Bud Lilly's Guide to Fly Fishing the New West 2000 Bud Lilly and Paul Schullery. Frank Amato Publications/Portland, OR

The Yellowstone Fly Fishing Guide 1970 Craig Mathews and Clayton Molinero. Lyons/NY

Fishing Yellowstone National Park 1998 Richard Parks. Falcon/Helena, MT

Yellowstone Fishes 1998 John Varley and Paul Schullery. Stackpole/Harrisburg, PA

Photos: Cover (Gardner River), © Sandra Nykerk; Osprey, NPS/Williams; Angler with net, © DenverBryan.com



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

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