Status of Fisheries in the Lake Fork of the Gunnison
Pre-1800’s:
Cutthroat trout present

- Only trout found in Colorado
- Distribution limited by migration barriers
- Cutthroat utilized in mid to late 1800’s for food source and populations declined
Fish Stocking History: “Be fruitful and multiply”

- 1890’s saw first propagation of trout in Colorado-black spotted trout.
- From 1890’s until 1950’s fish were stocked to replenish declining fish populations.
- Rainbow, brook and brown trout as well as cutthroats were stocked.
- Today, restoring native cutthroat trout populations is a priority.
Cutthroat Trout
“Bring Back the Natives”

- Coordinate management to protect existing populations of cutthroat trout.
- Inventory of habitat and populations.
- Conduct genetic analysis of populations.
- Evaluate waters for removal of non-native trout and re-establishment of natives.
- Utilize native cutthroat for stocking purposes in waters suitable for native trout.
Lake Fork of the Gunnison area lakes

- 18 Lake Fork area lakes are stocked with trout by Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Rainbow trout are stocked at easy-to-access lakes
  - Deer Creek Lakes
  - Lake San Cristobal
  - Mill Creek Ponds
- 13 high elevation lakes are stocked
  - Limited natural reproduction
  - Often stocked on an every other year basis
  - Historically stocked with brook, rainbow, or cutthroat trout, now with Colorado River Cutthroat Trout
  - Normally stocked by plane
Lake Fork high lakes stocked:

- Crystal Lake (accessed from Lake City Cemetery)
- Cooper Lake (near Cinamon Pass)
- Sloans Lake (upper Lake Fork)
- Upper and Lower Powderhorn Lakes
- Waterdog Lake (west of Lake City)
- Deer Lake #4
- Devils Lake
- Hidden Lake
- Independence Lake
- Larson Lake
- Snare Lake
- Thompson Lake
Lake Fork of the Gunnison area streams

- World class rainbow and brown trout fishing are found in larger streams
  - Rainbow trout are stocked in Lake Fork of the Gunnison and Cebolla Creek
- Cutthroat trout and brook trout provide great angling opportunity at high elevation small streams
Lake Fork Gunnison above Red Bridge Trout Density
1996 - 2008

![Graph showing trout density from 1996 to 2008 for Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout, including fish counts for trout over 14 inches in length. The graph includes data for each year indicated by different colors and symbols.]
Lake Fork Gunnison above Red Bridge Trout Biomass Estimates
1996 - 2008
Fisheries Issues:
Fish habitat limitations

- Limited overwintering habitat
- Cold winter water temperatures
- Limited spawning habitat
- Water quality impairment
Fisheries Issues: Whirling Disease

- *Myxobolus cerebralis*, the causative agent for whirling disease found in Colorado in 1988
- Heavily infected fish can become deformed, leading to death in small fish
- Brown trout resistant to disease
- Wild rainbow trout populations have been impacted on many larger rivers
Suspected Spread of *Myxobolus cerebralis*

Mode of spread: Transport of frozen and live fish, role of man, birds, others? rDNA sequences (18S and ITS-1) support theory of transcontinental spread.
Complete year class losses
No survival of any wild rainbow trout fingerlings in Colorado since the mid-1990’s in:

- Colorado River
- Rio Grande River
- Cache la Poudre River
- Dolores River
- Fraser River
- Gunnison River
- Frying Pan River
- Roaring Fork River
- South Platte River
- Williams Fork River
Hofer Rainbow Trout Farm in Germany
Colorado Division of Wildlife imports Hofer rainbow trout to develop specific rainbow trout broodstocks with strong resistance to *M. cerebralis*.
Wild Rainbow Trout Recovery Efforts
Gunnison River Preliminary Results

Myxospore Count (whole-head)

Hofer x Colorado River Rainbow
Colorado River Rainbow
Questions?