



# Big Thompson River

## FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

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**General Information:** The Big Thompson River below Olympus Dam is a famous trout river which attracts thousands of anglers each year. Fishing for brown and rainbow trout can be good to great almost year round. To accommodate the heavy angler usage special regulations apply in some sections (see below). Use caution while fishing, flows below Lake Estes can abruptly fluctuate.

**Location:** From Loveland, follow Highway 34 west to the Big Thompson Canyon approximately 10-30 miles west of Highway 287.

**Fishery Management:** Coldwater angling

**Annual Survey Data:** scroll down

### Amenities

- Good number of access points along HWY 34 below Lake Estes for day use and angling.
- Primitive restroom available below Olympus dam and at Forks SWA near Drake.

### Regulations

- From Olympus Dam (east end Estes Lake) to Waltonia Bridge requires a fly or lure for catch and release fishing.
- The rest of the Big Thompson River below Waltonia is open fishing (general regulations apply).
- Respect private property boundaries as posted.

### Previous Stocking

NONE: trout reproduce naturally in the Big Thompson.

Young of year brown trout typically emerge from the nest in May while rainbows emerge during June.

### Sportfishing Notes

#### Trout

- Fishing a dry-and-dropper setup is a great initial approach for both browns and rainbows. Fishing small streamers is a good option as well.
- Nymphs: Z-wing caddis (#16), Mangy caddis.
- Dry flies: Hatchmasters (#18)
- Terrestrials: beetles (#16), ants (#18)

### Access points include, but are not limited to:

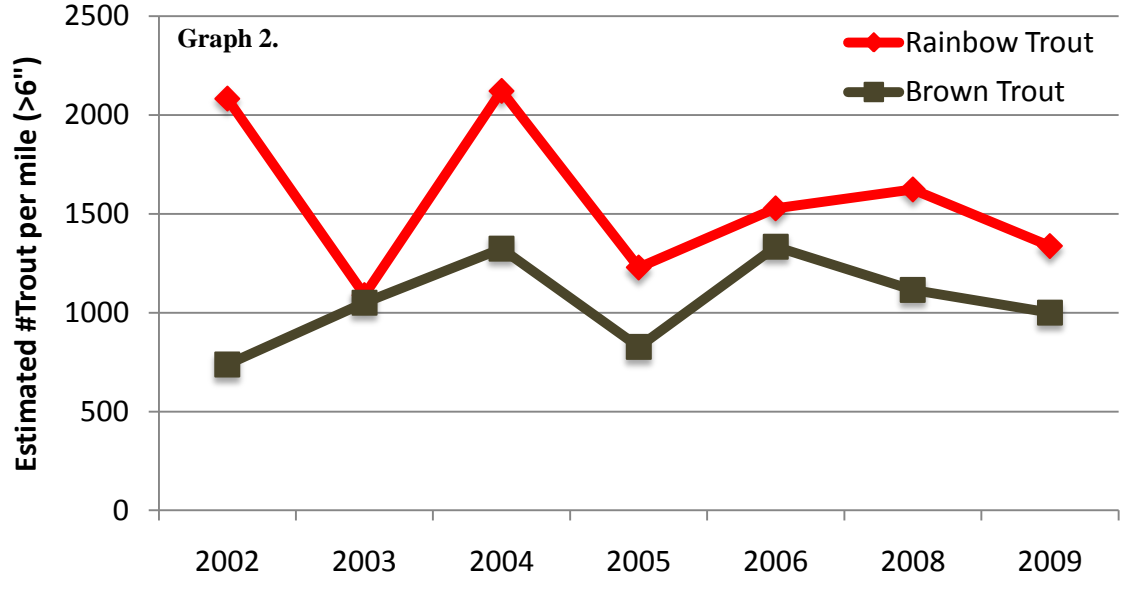
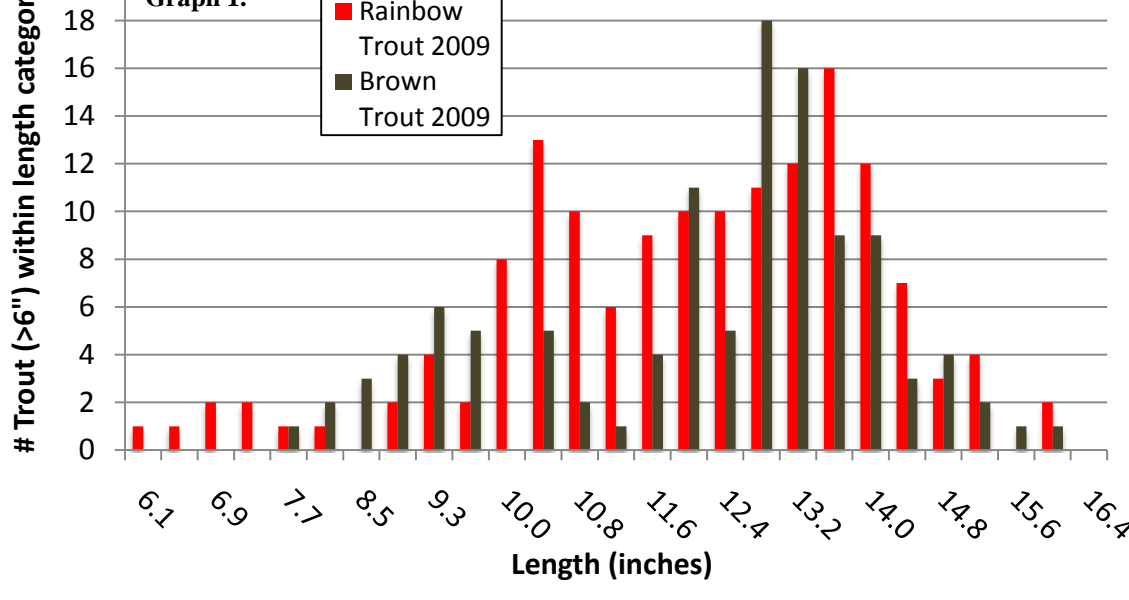
- Mall Road** - east end of Estes Lake just beyond Olympus Dam, between US 34 & US 36.
- Green Bridge** - the first bridge traveling east on US 34 (pull-off on the north side). Fishing access is also available slightly further east near the Roosevelt National Forest sign and near mile marker 66.
- Call Box** - 1/2 mile past the 2nd bridge is a call box with a large paved parking area (north of US 34).
- Big Lot Access** - near mile marker 69 is a large pullout to the north of US 34.
- Milemarker 69 & 70**. Numerous access points between milemarkers.
- Dead End Road** - this is a short road off US 34 leading downhill to where the river meanders away from the highway. At the bottom of the road is a turnaround with parking.
- Handicap Fishing Access Pier** - there is access for fishing above and below the handicap access as well.
- Waltonia Bridge** - between mile marker 73 & 74, there is a large pullout.
- Drake** - the town of Drake is about 2 miles east of Waltonia Bridge.
- Forks State Wildlife Area** - access is south of US 34 in the State Wildlife Area.
- Idylwilde Dam** - a rest area with a large stillwater section of the river.
- Narrows SWA** - follow HWY 34 about 18 miles west of Loveland and HWY 287
- Glade Park** - off Glade road 3.5 miles west of HWY 287 @ Loveland.

## Big Thompson River – Below Olympus Dam

**Graph 1:** Length frequency histogram for rainbow and brown trout collected within a 572 ft. section of the Big Thompson River below Olympus dam. This site is located within the habitat improvement section and is open year round to catch and release angling (artificial flies and lures). In total, 149 rainbow and 112 brown trout measuring greater than 6 inches were collected during the 2009 survey. Numbers have decreased since 2008 when 188 rainbows and 125 browns were sampled. Trout measuring less than 6-inches were recorded but not included in the analysis because of poor capture probability.

**Graph 2:** The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at the Olympus station. Abundance for both rainbow and brown trout has slightly decreased at this site since 2006. Although the estimates are well within the 10-year average, the slight downward trend is worth noting. Variation in annual estimates is impacted by a variety of variables including angling techniques. Again, the slight downward trend is not extremely alarming, however anglers are encouraged to practice safe fish handling techniques to ensure maximal survival. For more information visit: <http://wildlife.state.co.us/Fishing/Resources/Tips/ReleasingFishSafely/>

Gear: Electrofish 2 pass, 11/09  
Station: Olympus  
Length: 572 ft (between arrows)  
X Width: 33.8 ft.  
Est. # Trout (6"+) per mile: 2,338



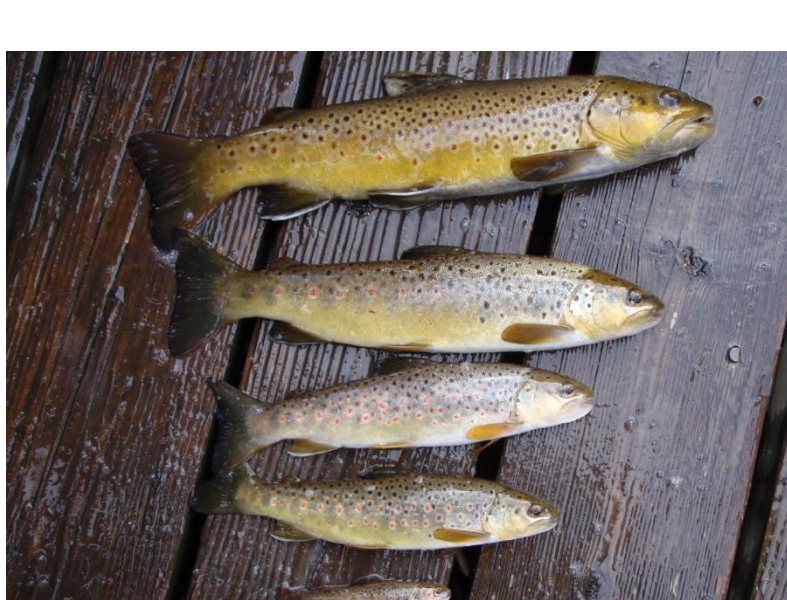
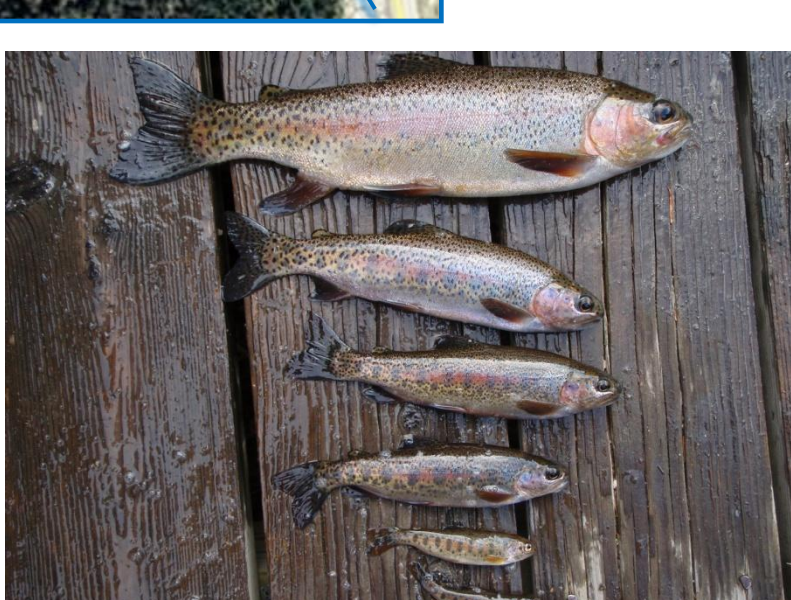
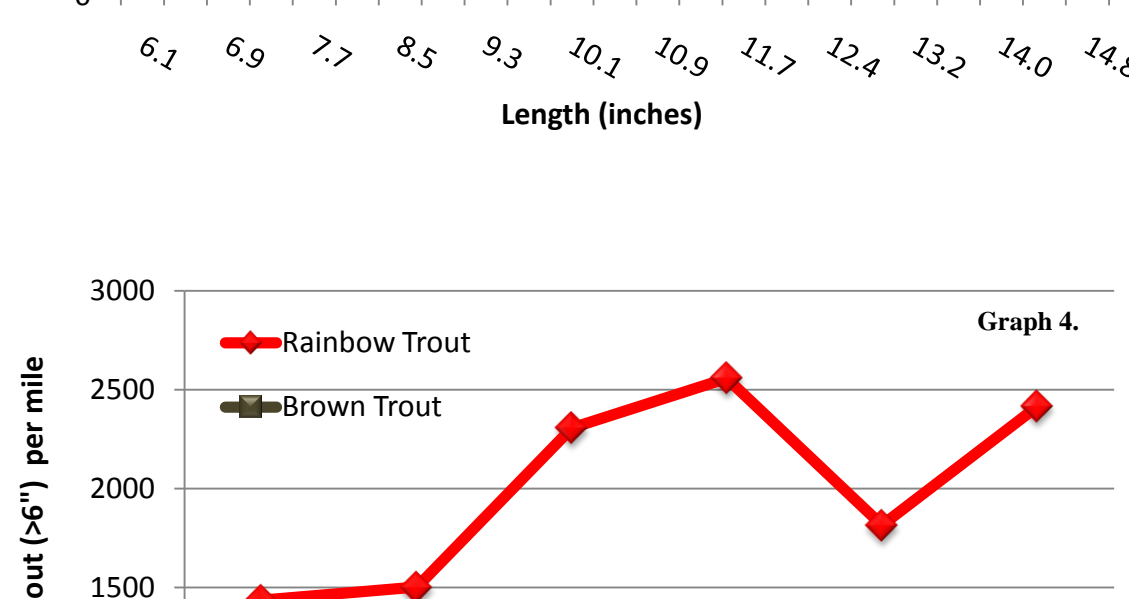
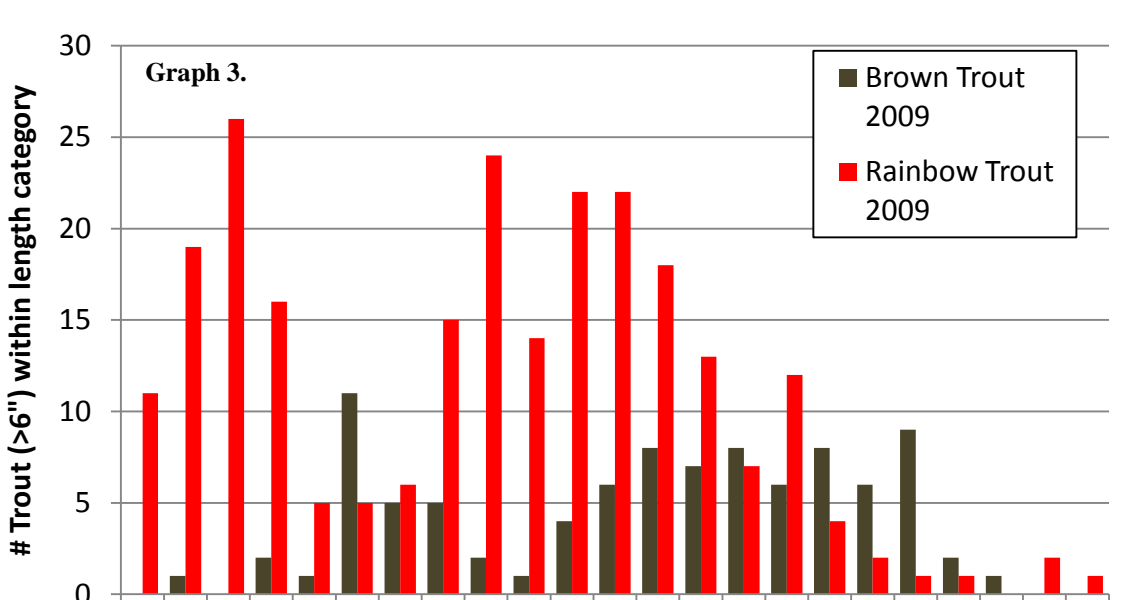
**Image Left:** An "average" sized brown trout collected from the Olympus station in 2009. Average length for all brown trout sampled at Olympus was 10.7 inches (range 3.0-16.0) and 9.3 inches for rainbow trout (range 2.8-15.9). The average length of rainbows fell from 11.7 inches (2008), however an extremely strong year class of age-0 (young of year) rainbows drove down the mean length. The average length of brown trout collected in 2008 was 11.3 inches, similar to the 2009 results.

## Big Thompson River – Handicap Fishing Pier

**Graph 3:** Length frequency histogram for rainbow and brown trout collected within a 542 ft. section of the Big Thompson River at the handicap access ramp/fishing pier. This site is open year round to catch and release angling (artificial flies and lures). A total of 246 rainbow and 93 brown trout >6" were collected during the 2009 survey. Compared with 2008, abundance and biomass increased while the proportion of each species collected remained virtually unchanged. For example, rainbow trout comprised 73.1% of all trout sampled in 2008 compared with 72.6% of trout species collected in 2009 at this site.

**Graph 4:** The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at this station. Abundance of both rainbow and brown trout at this site has increased at this site relative to 2008.

Gear: Electrofish 2 pass, 11/09  
Station: Handicap Ramp  
Length: 542 ft (between arrows)  
X Width: 29.8 ft.  
Est. # Trout (6"+) per mile: 3,339



The photos above are a few of the rainbow and brown trout sampled at the Handicap Ramp on the Big Thompson River. Several year classes were sampled including age-0 trout or fish that hatched during the Spring of 2009. Rainbow trout sampled at this site ranged from 2.6 to 14.8 inches. Brown trout ranged 3.7 to 14.0 inches in length. All fish sampled were released unharmed.

## Big Thompson River – Glade Park

**Graph 5:** Length frequency histogram for brown trout collected 12/2008 vs. browns collected 11/2009 within a 480 ft. section of the Big Thompson River at Glade Park. This site was rehabilitated in late December of 2008 to increase holding habitat for trout. In 2008, 213 brown trout measuring greater than 6 inches were collected. Re-sampling in 2009 post-construction, we collected 269 brown trout >6". More importantly, biomass of brown trout increased from 213 lbs/acre (2008) to 269 lbs/acre (2009) indicating the rehabilitation project was very successful. Less than 10 rainbow trout were collected at this site during either year of sampling. To diversify the trout community at Glade Park, sub-adult rainbow trout resistant to whirling disease will be introduced during the summer of 2010. No stocking will occur in the Big Thompson upstream of Glade Park. Trout measuring less than 6-inches were recorded but not included in the analysis because of poor capture probability. This site is open to public fishing.

Gear: Electrofish 2 pass, 11/09  
Station: Glade  
Length: 480 ft (between arrows)  
X Width: 28.6 ft.  
Est. # Trout (6"+) per mile: 3,020

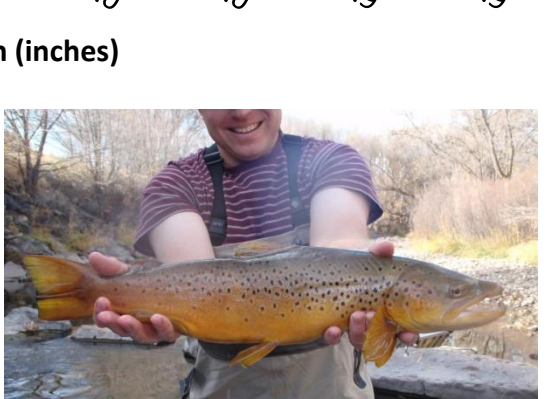
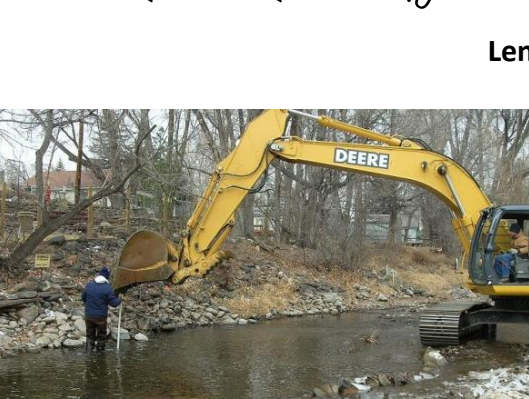
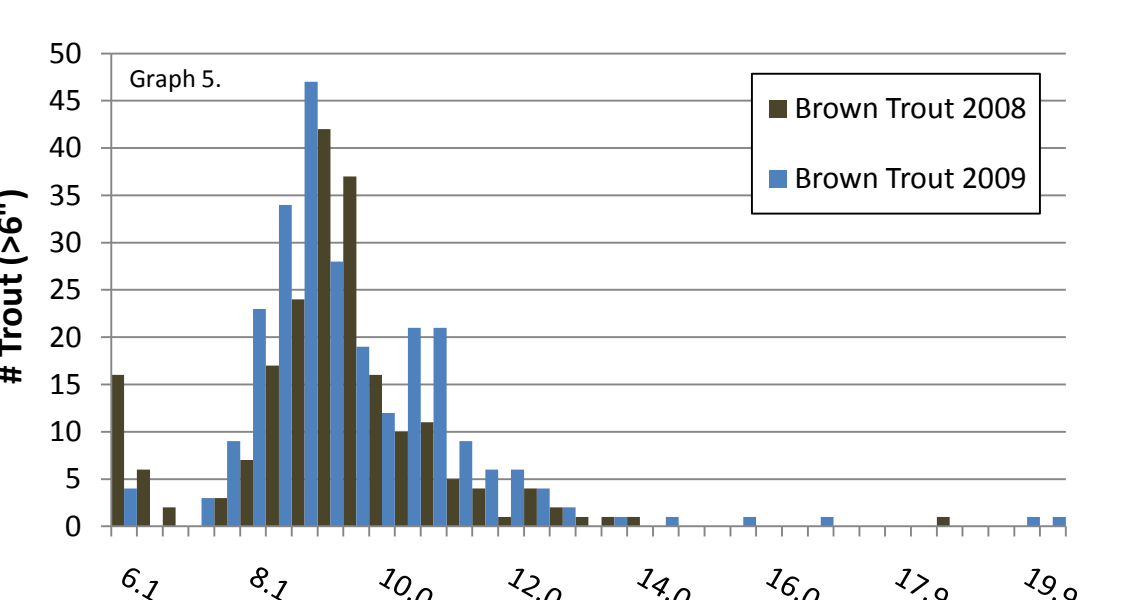


Image (above left): in-stream habitat restoration work at Glade Park during December, 2008. Image (right): a male brown trout measuring 19.9 inches collected at Glade Park during the 2009 survey.