



Upper Arkansas River

FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

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General Information: The upper Arkansas River offers excellent fishing for brown and rainbow trout from Leadville through Canon City. Anglers enjoy plentiful access (65% of this reach is open to the public) and with up to 5000 trout per mile anglers catch rates are high for both walk/wade and float anglers.

Location: Lake, Chaffee, and Fremont Counties. See page 2 for map. For further information go to <http://www.parks.state.co.us/Parks/ArkansasHeadwaters/ParkActivities/Fishing> or http://www.nowthisiscolorado.com/activities/Fishing06/central_map.cfm

Recreational Management: Wildlife (719-530-5520), AHRA (719-539-7289).

Fishery Management: Coldwater angling for brown and rainbow trout.

Amenities and General Info.

- Over 70 miles of public access for walk/wade anglers (detailed maps available from several private sources)
- Numerous boat access points, facilities, and amenities managed by AHRA (see link above)
- Guided wade or float fishing available (see AHRA Fishing Outfitters List from above link)

Previous Stocking

The Arkansas River is predominantly a wild brown trout fishery, however rainbow trout have been historically stocked to increase species diversity and angling opportunity. A whirling disease resistant rainbow strain has been stocked since 2009 in an attempt to establish a self-sustained rainbow trout population.

Regulations

- Statewide bag and possession limits apply for most of river except as follows
- From US Hwy 24 overpass below Leadville downstream to near Two Bit Gulch (5.8 miles)
 - * Artificial flies and lures only
 - * Bag and possession limit for trout one fish 12 inches or shorter
- From Stockyard Bridge (Chaffee Co Rd 102) below Salida downstream to Badger Creek (7.5 miles)
 - * Artificial flies and lures only
 - * All rainbow trout must be returned to the water immediately
 - * Limit on brown trout is four fish of any size

Sportfishing Notes

Brown Trout

- Most common species representing 75 to 85% of the trout community
- Average 12-13 inches with good numbers to 16 inches and an occasional fish taken over 20 inches

Rainbow Trout

- Represent 15-25% of the trout community
- Grow well in the Arkansas with a higher proportion reaching lengths over 16 and 20 inches. Most average 13-14 inches

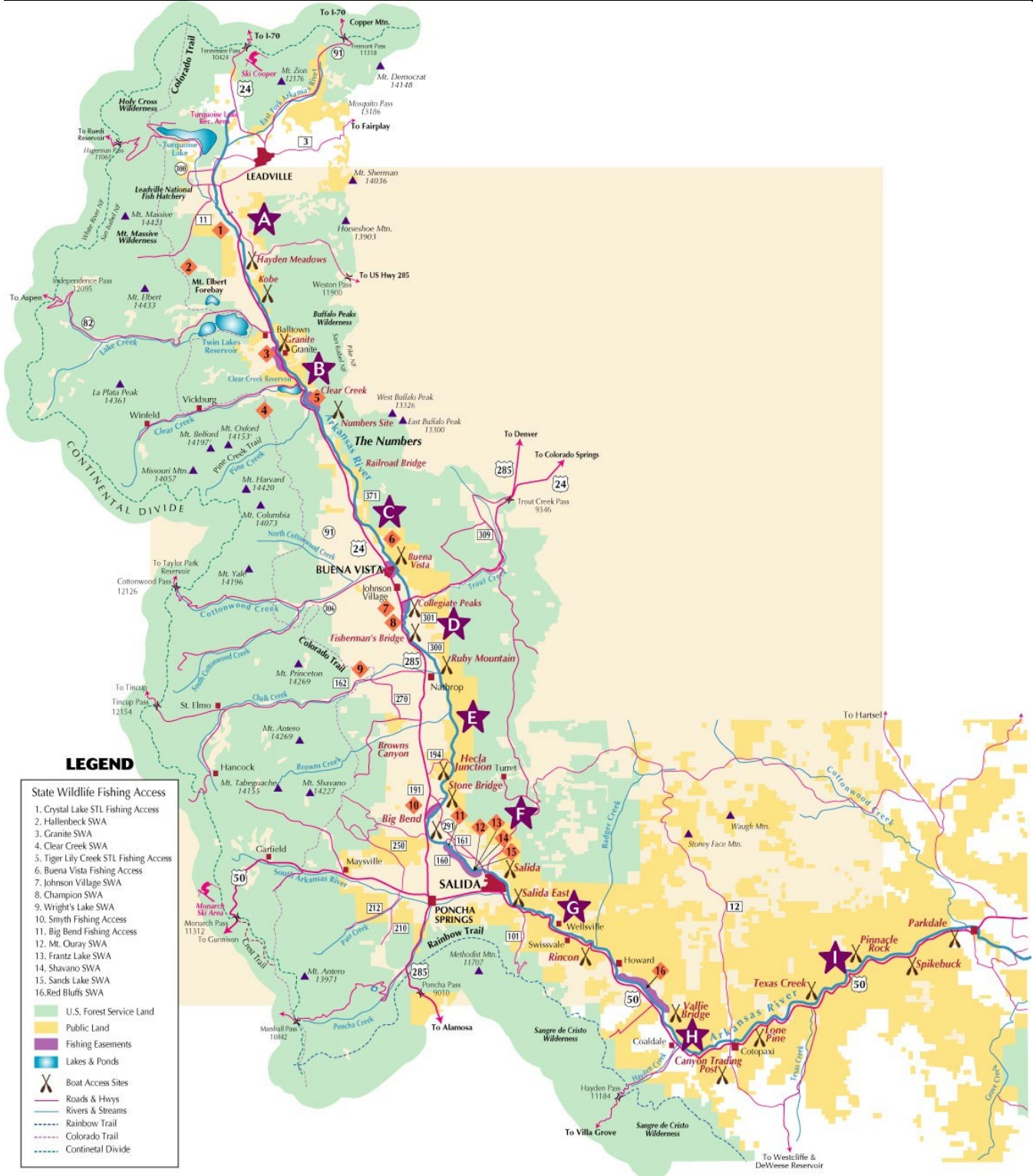
Popular Insect Hatches

- BWO (mid-March to mid-May)
- Mother's Day caddis (mid-April to mid-May)
- Stoneflies, mayflies, hoppers (summer through fall)
- Midges (all winter)



Upper Arkansas River MAP AND ACCESS INFORMATION

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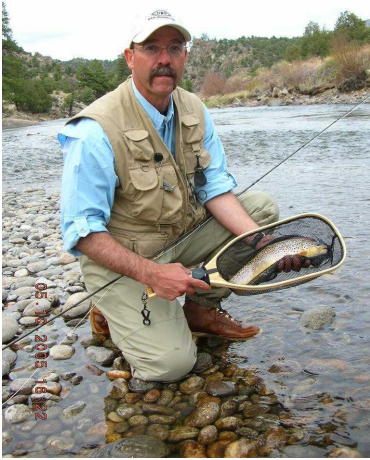




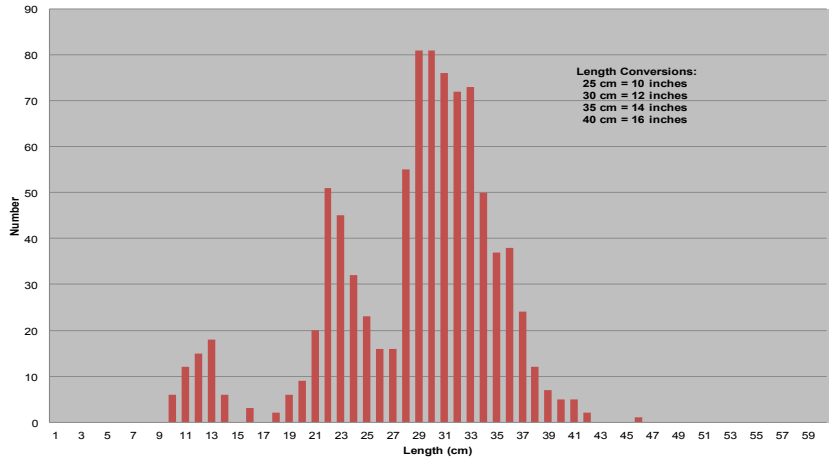
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2011 RIVER SURVEY DATA

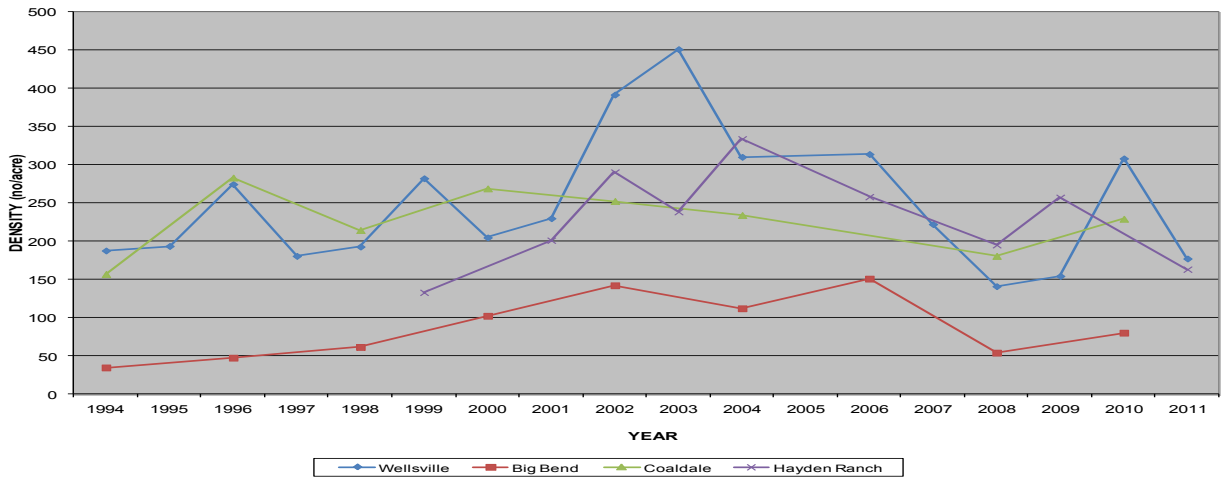
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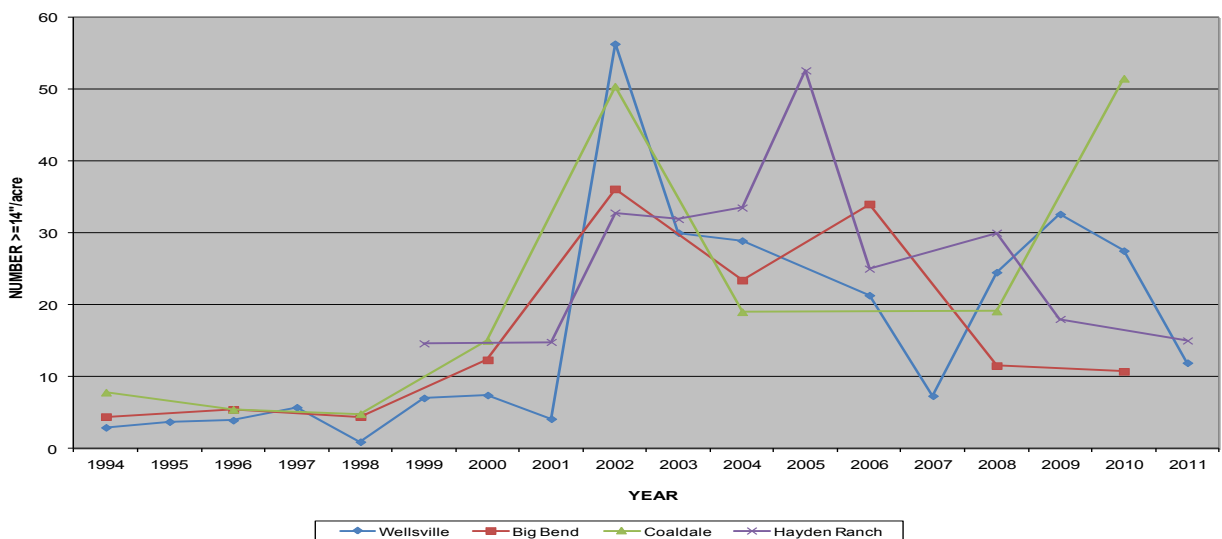
ARKANSAS RIVER BROWN TROUT LENGTH FREQUENCY AT WELLSVILLE, 2011



ARKANSAS RIVER BROWN TROUT DENSITY, 1994-2011



ARKANSAS RIVER BROWN TROUT (>=14"/acre), 1994-2011





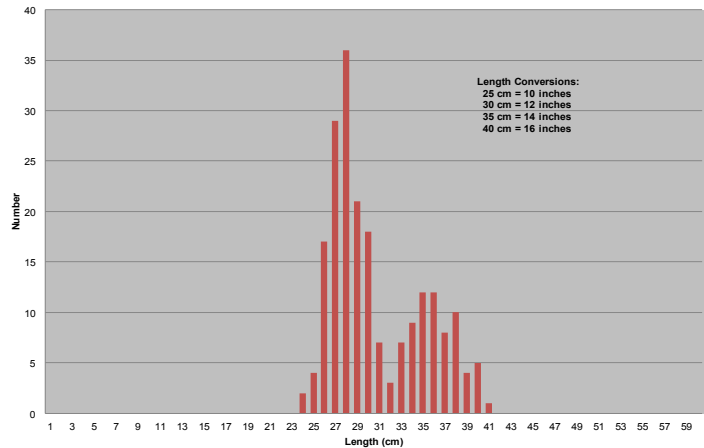
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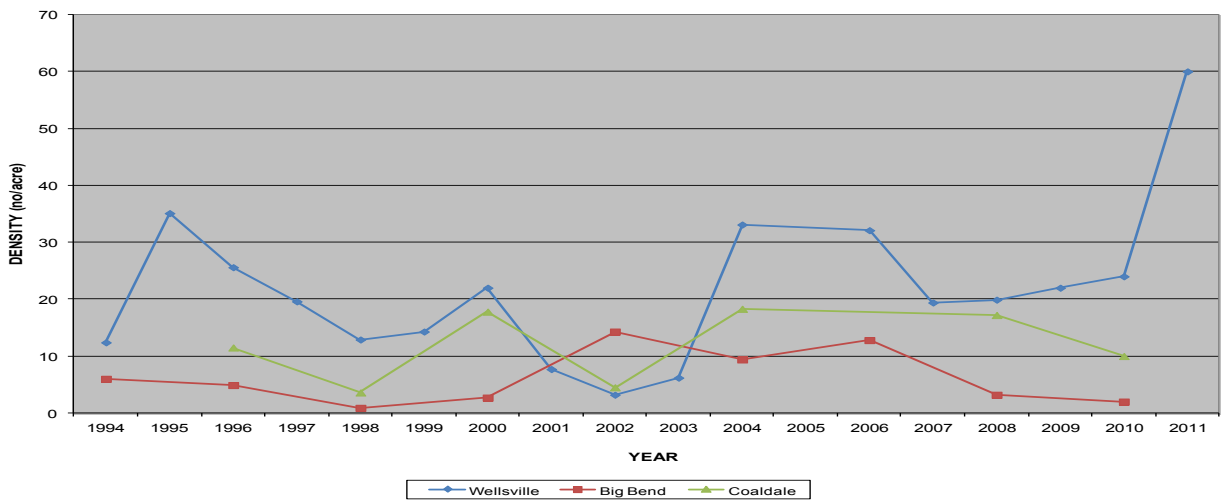
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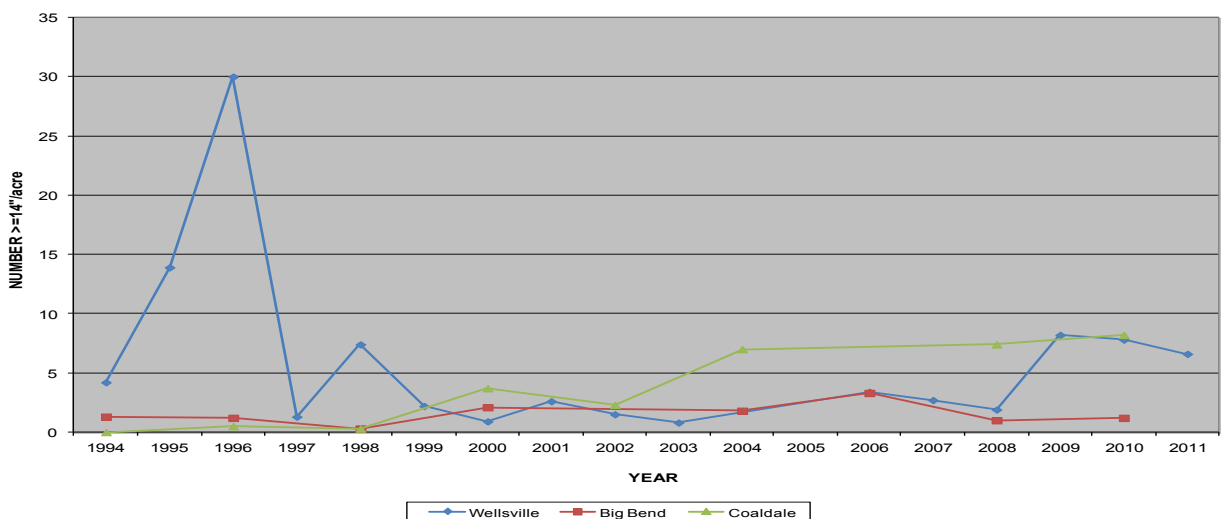
ARKANSAS RIVER RAINBOW TROUT LENGTH FREQUENCY AT WELLSVILLE, 2011



ARKANSAS RIVER RAINBOW TROUT DENSITY, 1994-2011



ARKANSAS RIVER RAINBOW TROUT (>=14"/acre), 1994-2011





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2012 FISHING FORECAST

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The Arkansas River has become a very popular fishery in recent years for both walk/wade and float anglers and according to the latest DOW Angler Survey – it is the most popular fishing water in Colorado. Trout catch rates should be excellent in 2012 averaging well over one fish/hour with 40-60 fish days possible for seasoned anglers.

Brown trout are the most prevalent species found and are caught most often by anglers, averaging 12-13” long with good numbers to 16 inches and an occasional fish taken over 20 inches. They sustain themselves through natural reproduction. Brown trout numbers have fluctuated in recent years. Traditionally, the Arkansas River has one of the highest trout densities of any river in Colorado (4500 brown trout/mile just below Salida in 2010). The Big Bend reach above Salida has fewer brown trout (1500/mile in 2010) but on average they are longer and fatter than their downriver cousins. The Hayden Flats area below Leadville has developed into a very good fishery since mining pollution cleanup (1000 brown trout/mile in 2011). The valley is wide and less steep in this area producing some excellent, meandering fly fishing water. Don’t forget the Canon City reach of the Arkansas River, which boasts more fish over 18” than any other place on the river!

Rainbow trout have become more prevalent since 2008 (15-23% of the trout catch at Wellsville) and their density and biomass has improved in recent years. The diversity in the fishery is welcomed by most anglers. Rainbow trout grow well in the Arkansas with a higher proportion reaching lengths over 16 and 20 inches. Most average 13-14 inches. They must be stocked to create a fishery because of whirling disease impacts. A six inch Hofer/Colorado River rainbow trout cross was stocked for the first time in 2009 in an attempt to increase survival. Larger fish will be less vulnerable to brown trout predation. This hybrid demonstrates both whirling disease resistance and wildness, characteristics needed to survive in the Arkansas River. The goal is to establish a self-sustained rainbow trout fishery offering anglers the opportunity to catch both wild brown and rainbow trout on a consistent basis.



There is year round insect action on the Arkansas River for the fly fishing enthusiast! The most famous hatch on the Arkansas River is the Mother’s Day caddis fly hatch. It begins in mid-April near Canon City and progresses upriver as water temperatures warm to about 54°F. Stoneflies and mayflies hatch throughout the summer and fall along with good hopper action. Midges are the winter mainstay and from mid-March to mid-May baetis mayflies are abundant, arguably rivaling the caddis hatch in fishing popularity. Regardless of season, a two fly setup is recommended such as a dry/dropper combination. You can imitate two insect life stages or different species with this setup and cover more water. The top fly often acts as an attractor or strike indicator for the trailer fly and double hookups can occur!

Lure fishermen do very well with Panther Martins and small plugs that imitate fingerling trout and bait anglers find ample success with natural baits such as night crawlers. Bait angling is particularly effective during runoff when most fish are close to the bank where the current is less. Bait angling is allowed most places on the Arkansas River except for a five mile stretch in Hayden Flats below Leadville and a 7.5 mile stretch below Salida from Stockyard Bridge to Badger Creek.

One last tip is worth mentioning. The more you know about the life history, habits, and habitat preferences of the species you’re fishing for the more successful you can be. For example, as water temperature warms in early spring fish will move out of deeper, winter pool habitat into the head of 3-5’ deep runs. Upstream riffles produce a lot of food that trout are keying into. The best runs have boulders scattered throughout them where fish can rest and hide outside of the current but where food drifts closely by.



Upper Arkansas River MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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Brown trout density and biomass has fluctuated in recent years at Wellsville and the number of brown trout over 14 inches has declined. Rainbow trout on the other hand have become more prevalent and with stocking of Hofer crosses (whirling disease resistant) they should become self sustained. Trout composition may be changing but total trout density (237/acre) is near the long term mean (231/acre) at Wellsville. The trout community is naturally adjusting to this newcomer and will eventually reach equilibrium.

The 2008 and 2009 fishery studies reinforced how water flow and other factors can impact the fish population. No one single variable was responsible for decreased fry production in 2006 and 2007, for example, rather a number of factors combined to cumulatively limit the fish population. Heavy metals and/or fish disease (e.g. high whirling disease spore loading) may not independently kill fish but combined they may decrease fish health and fitness impacting egg production and quality, ultimately affecting fry production. Elevated stress can impact the fish population throughout its life, from egg through adult on a year round basis. If the fish population encumbers too much stress; growth, reproduction, and ultimately survival will be compromised.

Water flow is the single most important habitat variable affecting fisheries in the Arkansas River, whether by itself or in combination with other factors. Regardless of life stage, the importance of managing flow year round to protect and enhance the fish population is critical. Flows are generally too high throughout the year impacting every life stage of fish. Low flows in 2002 created optimum feeding conditions and trout grew extremely well during the spring and summer seasons. The extended fishery benefit (five years) of one season without augmentation (2002) is striking, clearly



demonstrating how critical low flow years are to the trout fishery. This type of water year is extremely rare and manipulating spring runoff to create it is impractical. However, managing flows to benefit fisheries outside of runoff and the summer augmentation season is practical and is being earnestly pursued. Much effort has been expended to improve cooperation with water entities, resulting in better managed fishery flows on a year round basis thus maximizing biotic potential in the Arkansas River.

Natural Resource Damages (NRD) for mining pollution in the Leadville area were settled between resource agencies and mining companies in 2007. This settlement is significant and should result in enhancement of the upper Arkansas River fishery. Efforts to restore aquatic habitat in the Elevenmile reach (California Gulch to Two Bit Gulch) and elsewhere

has began, primarily focusing on instream and riparian habitat improvement and securing more public access. Nonpoint metal cleanup will continue through EPA and NRD Restoration efforts. EPA has concluded efforts to remediate fluvial tailings deposits in the Elevenmile Reach of the Arkansas River.