



Gunnison River Below Crystal Dam

FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

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General Information: The Gunnison River in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge is a Gold Medal wild trout fishery that stretches over 40 miles from Crystal Reservoir to the town of Austin and provides many diverse wading and float fishing opportunities

Location: There are many access points in Montrose and Delta counties predominantly in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. For access information and regulations see:

<http://www.nps.gov/blca/index.htm>

<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/ggnca.html>

Primary Management: Gold Medal quality coldwater fishing for wild brown and rainbow trout

Amenities

- Popular foot trails include Warner Point, Red Rocks, Chukar, Bobcat, Duncan, Ute, and West River Trail
- Drive-to camping available in the National Park in East Portal and on the BLM along the South River Road
- Wilderness hiking camps and boating camps available in BLM wilderness area, see BLM web page for details
- Boating access is available by pack in only at Chukar trail. The float from Chukar to the North Fork includes class III and IV whitewater
- Float fishing access is available at the Gunnison Forks, Cottonwood Grove, and Orchard boat ramps off South River Rd. There is a dangerous irrigation diversion 5 miles above Austin

Regulations

- From Crystal Res Dam downstream 200 yards:
 - Fishing prohibited as posted.
- From 200 yards downstream of Crystal Res dam to Relief Ditch diversion (5 miles above Austin Bridge):
 - Artificial flies and lures only.
 - Rainbows must be returned to water immediately.
 - Limit on brown trout is 4 fish of any size

Previous Stocking

The Gunnison River is managed primarily as a wild trout water, with the exception that since 2004 whirling disease resistant rainbow trout have been stocked throughout the river to re-establish wild rainbow reproduction

Sportfishing Notes

Rainbow Trout

- Highest number of rainbows occur in the East Portal area and upstream of the North Fork
- Good flies include midges, pheasant tails, scuds, elk hair caddis, salmonflies, hoppers, and black wooly buggers
- Important hatches include BWO's, grannom caddis (April/May), salmonflies (June), and golden stones (June)

Brown Trout

- Brown trout are abundant throughout the river, Ute Park is a good spot
- Best fishing times include May, June, and October.
- Fishing is best in the evening, at night, and early morning hours
- Good flies include wooly buggers, stoneflies, and bunny leaches



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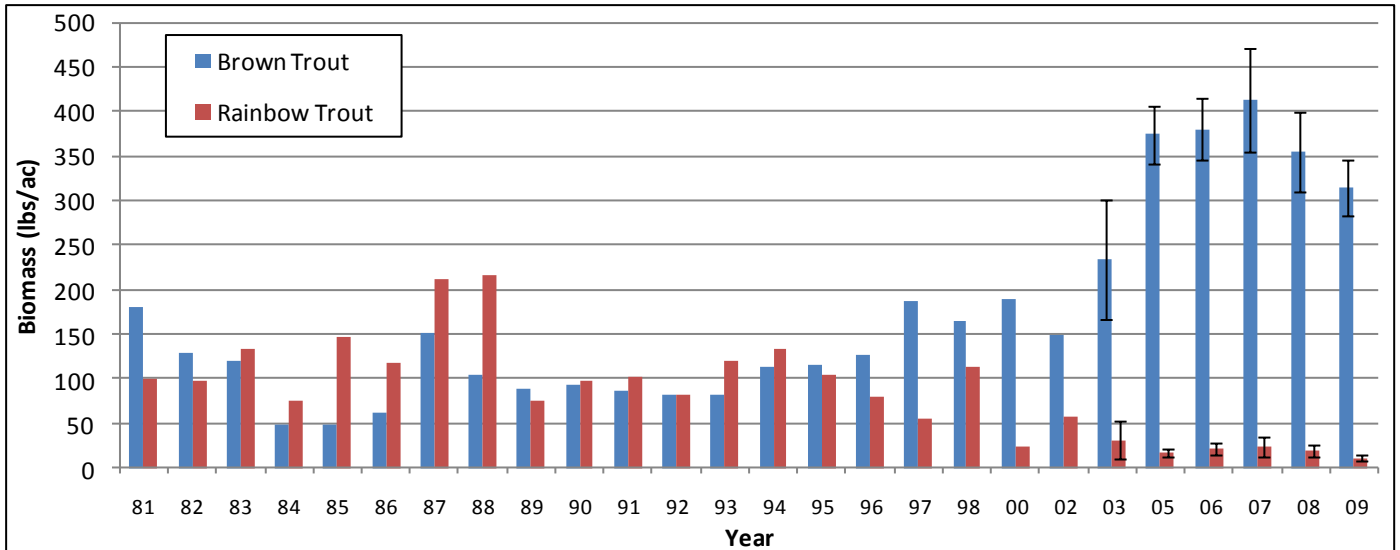


Figure 1. Trout biomass estimates for fish over six inches from the Ute Park section of the Gunnison River 1983-2009. In 2009 there was an estimated 315 ± 31 lbs. per acre of brown trout and 11 ± 4 lbs. per acre of rainbow trout. The density estimate was 7,210 ± 705 fish per mile for brown trout and 105 ± 34 fish per mile for rainbows.

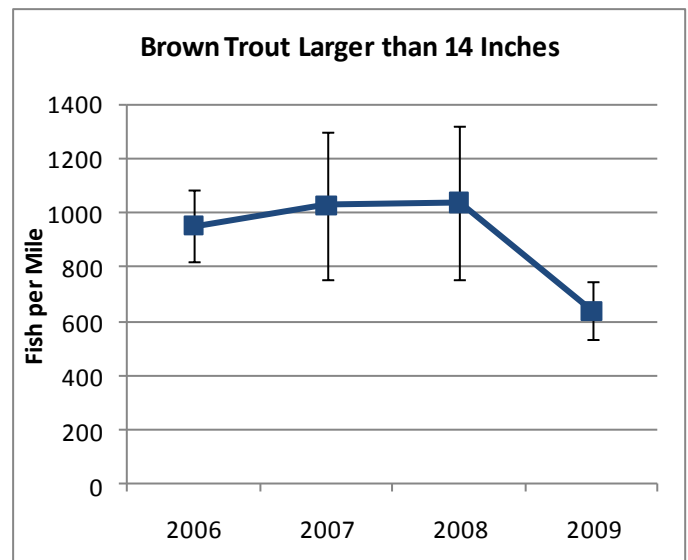
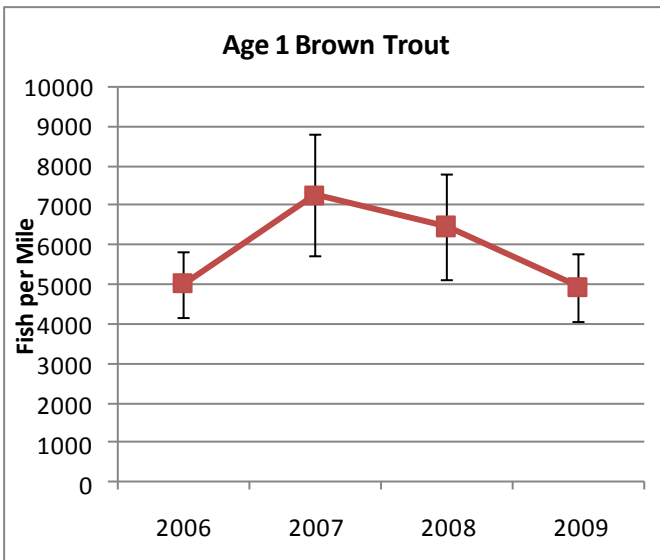


Figure 2. Density estimates for age 1 and quality sized brown trout from the Ute Park section of the Gunnison River 2006-2009. Habitat quality and quantity for brown trout was reduced the last two years due to high flows.



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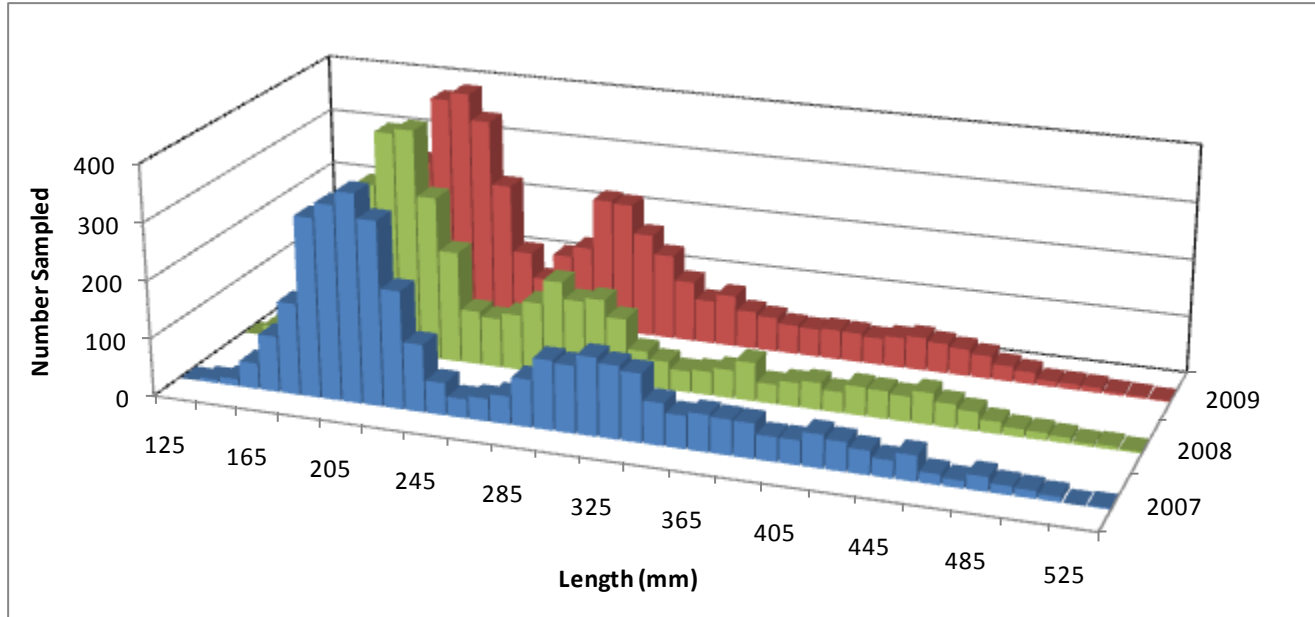


Figure 3. Length frequency histogram for brown trout sampled in the Ute Park reach of the Gunnison Gorge 2007-2009. In 2009 there were fewer age 1 and quality sized brown trout and the overall brown trout population was down about 16% from 2008.

Management Summary

The trout fishery of the Gunnison River in the Gorge continues to be one of the highest quality Gold Medal fisheries in Colorado and anywhere in the west. During the drought years from 2002-2006, low flows created ample habitat for all life stages of brown trout. As a result of these optimal conditions and reduced competition from rainbows, brown numbers increased to historical highs from 2005-2007. Recently, the high flows of 2007 and 2008 have impacted the number of brown trout in the river. The large spring flows experienced in May of 2007 and 2008 were large enough to not only impact fry recruitment but decrease the number of adult fish as well.

Rainbow trout numbers have been severely impacted by whirling disease and are reduced from the historic highs of the mid 1980's. The good news is that the introduction of whirling disease resistant strain rainbows into the Gunnison has returned wild recruitment of rainbows to the river. In 2009 in the Ute Park reach, there were four age classes of wild rainbow trout, which is a large improvement from just a few years ago. While rainbow biomass has not yet significantly increased in this reach, having some wild recruitment is a big first step in restoring the rainbow fishery. Other sections of the river (East Portal and The Forks) with lower brown trout numbers and different temperature regimes have seen a much larger increase in rainbow numbers and the density in some areas is equal to that of browns.

In 2010 anglers can expect another excellent year of fishing, although there will be fewer quality browns. The recent decline in brown trout numbers is not necessarily a bad thing with respect to our management objective of restoring rainbow numbers.