

THE EAST FORK SPECIMEN CREEK WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT RESTORATION PROJECT: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE SMOKEY

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Initiation of the East Fork Specimen Creek (EFSC) westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*; WCT) restoration project in 2005 marked the beginning of a renewed effort to actively restore native fish in Yellowstone National Park. That summer an interdisciplinary team was assembled to begin a NEPA compliance process and within 12 months an EA and FONSI were complete. Project implementation began immediately with chemical removal of nonnative fish in High Lake, a 7-ac isolated headwater lake, in August 2006. Unfortunately, the construction of a fish barrier on EFSC, planned for completion in 2007, was delayed by a natural wildfire that destroyed all previous work and left an unsafe worksite. Rotenone treatment of High Lake was successful and we began efforts to restock the lake with genetically-pure WCT (from multiple sources) that year. In 2008 we again stocked High Lake with WCT and undertook a vigorous effort to complete the EFSC fish barrier. Because of its remoteness, 93 mule loads and five helicopter sling loads were required to move supplies and tools to the site. Contracted log crafting specialists, Montana Conservation Corps crews, and park staff collaborated to bring the barrier to successful completion. Immediately afterwards two piscicide treatments were conducted on EFSC from High Lake downstream to the fish barrier (12 km). Additional treatments of this reach are planned for 2009 and WCT reintroduction efforts will begin as soon as complete removal of non-native fish is verified.