

YELLOWSTONE FISHERIES, THEN AND NOW ^{AFS}

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Yellowstone National Park was created by the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872, and for several years was the only wildland under active federal management. It was deemed appropriate and necessary for early visitors to fish and hunt for subsistence, as there were almost no visitor services. Early Park superintendents noted the vast fishless waters of the Park, and immediately asked the U.S. Fish Commission to “see that all waters are stocked so that the pleasure seeker can enjoy fine fishing within a few rods of any hotel or camp.” The

first fishes from outside the Park were planted 1889-1890. So important were fisheries during this early period of the Park that the harvest-oriented, fish management program accounted for over 310 million fish being planted in Yellowstone between 1881 and 1955. In addition, between 1903 and 1953, some 818 million eggs were collected from Yellowstone trout and shipped throughout the country. Largely due to the activities in Yellowstone and the popularity of its fisheries, recreational angling became a long-term, accepted use of national parks throughout the country. In Yellowstone National Park, fisheries management, as we understand that term today, began with the U.S. Army and was assumed by the National Park Service in 1916. Fish stocking, data gathering, and other monitoring activities began with the U.S. Fish Commission in 1889, was conducted by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service until 1996, and has been the responsibility of the National Park Service since 1996. The indiscriminant stocking of nonnative fishes throughout Yellowstone, 40 percent of which was once fishless, has had profound ecological consequences. Most serious were the displacement of intolerant natives such as westslope cutthroat trout and grayling, hybridization of Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout with nonnative rainbow trout, and, most recently, competition and predation of Yellowstone cutthroat trout by nonnative lake trout. Management policies of the National Park Service since inception of the agency in 1916 have drastically changed due to insight of ecologists and the Leopold Report of 1963. As a primary goal, natural biotic associations will be maintained or, where necessary, restored to a pre-European condition. An internal conflict exists in the National Park Service mandate that states the people will “use and enjoy”, and also “protect and preserve” our pristine, natural systems. Fisheries management efforts at Yellowstone are currently focused on preservation of native species, while allowing for use of these fisheries by visiting anglers through a complete catch-and-release regulation. Along with native fish preservation, our Aquatics Section activities include native fish restoration, stream and lake inventory and monitoring, and, a new emphasis on aquatic ecosystem health including water quality and macroinvertebrate monitoring of lakes and streams to serve as an early warning for advancing aquatic, invasive exotic species.