



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 historically attracted thousands of anglers each year. Fishing for brown and rainbow trout can be good to great almost year round. Fishing within the catch and release section (Waltonia bridge to Olympus Dam) will produce good numbers. As a result of the flood, and post flood construction angling below Drake will be poor in 2018.

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

Fishery Management: Coldwater angling

Purchase a Fishing License: <https://www.co.wildlifelicense.com/start.php>

- Amenities**
- Limited number of access points along HWY 34 as crew continue to restore both the river and the road post flood.
 - Primitive restroom available below Olympus dam.
- 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 general regulations apply (4 trout).

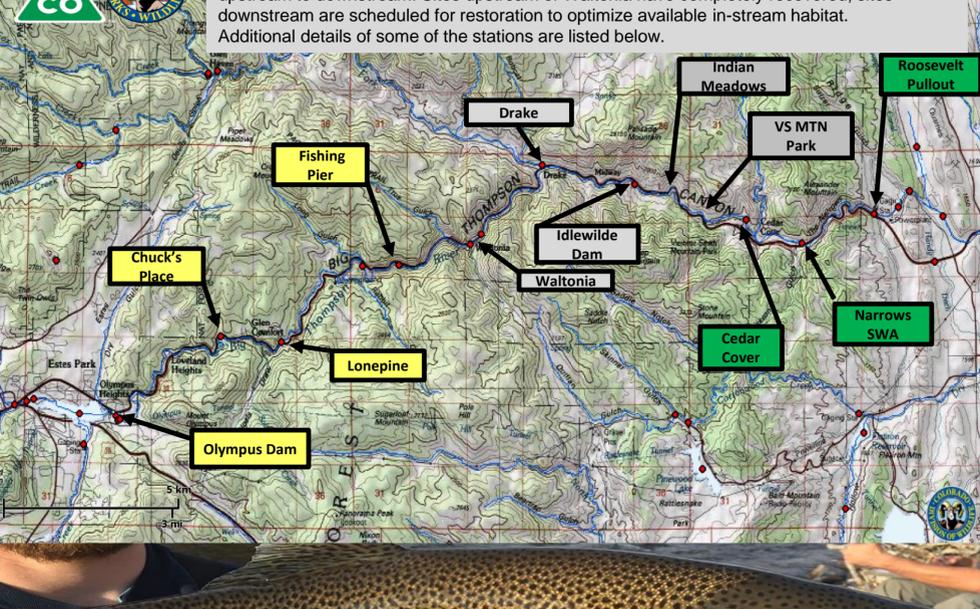
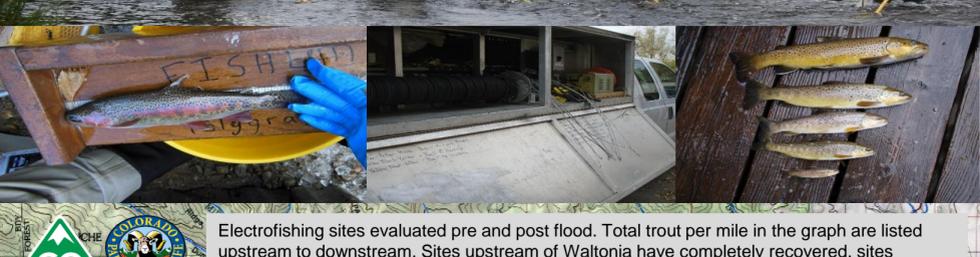
Previous Stocking

NONE: trout reproduce naturally in the Big Thompson. Minimal stocking has occurred since 1995.

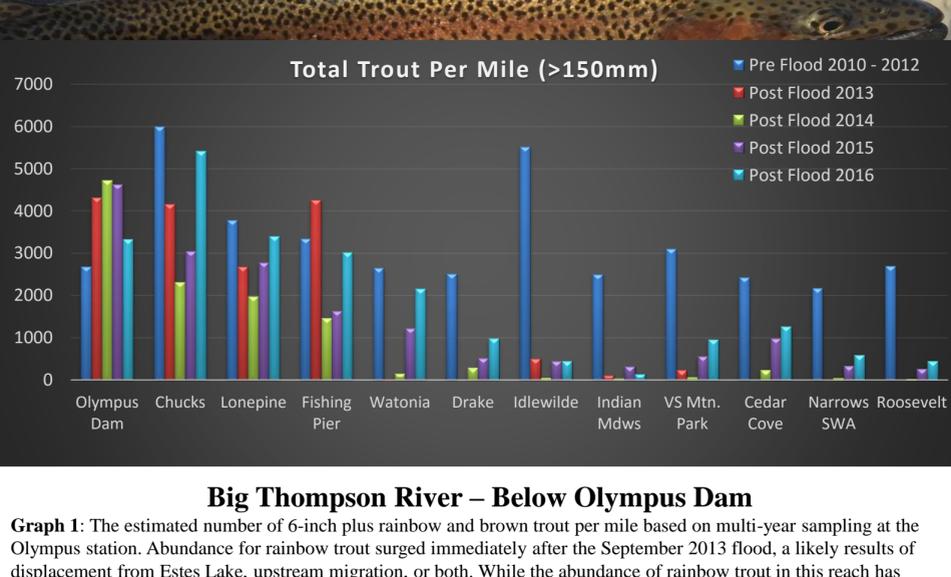
Young of year brown trout typically emerge from the nest in May while rainbows emerge during June. Solid numbers of rainbow and brown trout were identified post flood upstream of Drake. These populations will serve as the primary source to naturally repopulate sections of river as restoration work is completed in 2018.

- 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), Mandy caddis.
 - Dry flies: Hatchmasters (#18)
 - Terrestrials: beetles (#16), ants (#18)

Survey Method: 2-pass stream electrofishing.



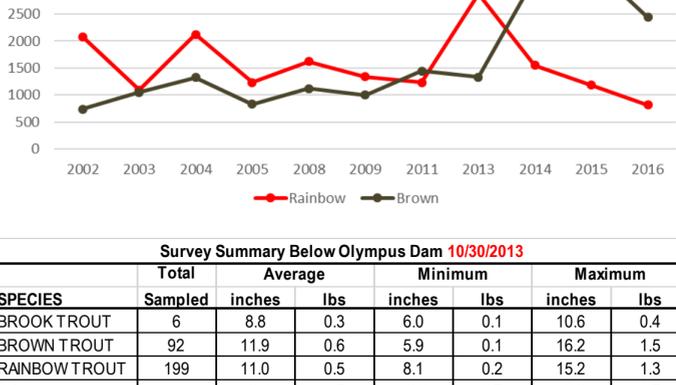
Electrofishing sites evaluated pre and post flood. Total trout per mile in the graph are listed upstream to downstream. Sites upstream of Waltonia have completely recovered, sites downstream are scheduled for restoration to optimize available in-stream habitat. Additional details of some of the stations are listed below.



Big Thompson River – Below Olympus Dam

Graph 1: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at the Olympus station. Abundance for rainbow trout surged immediately after the September 2013 flood, a likely result of displacement from Estes Lake, upstream migration, or both. While the abundance of rainbow trout in this reach has declined the total abundance has increased post flood. A vast, vegetated flood-plain below the dam absorbed the flood waters and remained essentially unaltered.

Gear: Electrofish 2 pass, 10/2016
 Station: Olympus
 Length: 550 ft (between arrows)
 Est. # Trout (6"+) per mile: 3,254



Survey Summary Below Olympus Dam 10/30/2013

SPECIES	Total		Average		Minimum		Maximum	
	Sampled	inches	lbs	inches	lbs	inches	lbs	
BROOK TROUT	6	8.8	0.3	6.0	0.1	10.6	0.4	
BROWN TROUT	92	11.9	0.6	5.9	0.1	16.2	1.5	
RAINBOW TROUT	199	11.0	0.5	8.1	0.2	15.2	1.3	
SPLAKE	1	12.9	0.7	12.9	0.7	12.9	0.7	

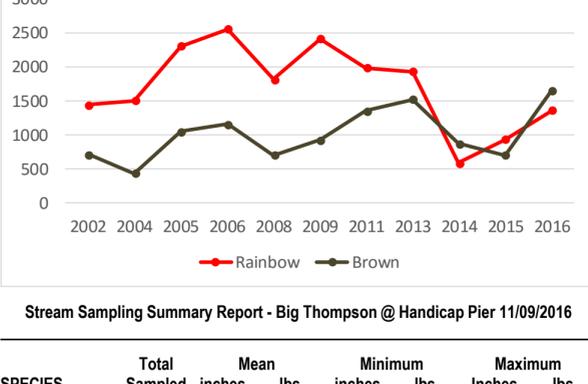
Survey Summary Below Olympus Dam 09/22/2016

SPECIES	Total		Average		Minimum		Maximum	
	Sampled	inches	lbs	inches	lbs	inches	lbs	
BROWN TROUT	240	10.5	0.5	3.0	0.1	16.2	1.4	
RAINBOW TROUT	77	10.7	0.5	8.1	0.2	14.7	1.0	
TIGER TROUT	7	9.2	0.3	7.6	0.7	10.0	0.4	



Big Thompson River – Fishing Pier

Graph 2: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based on multi-year sampling at the Fishing Pier pullout – HWY 34 Mile Marker 72. The standard survey completed a few weeks post flood (2013) revealed virtually no change in trout abundance. However numbers of trout substantially declined 2014-2015, a likely result of poor reproduction/recruitment and a decreased forage base. The 2016 survey suggested the population of trout in this section has rebounded to levels measured pre-flood. Provided construction disturbances are minimal I expect trout abundance to remain stable or slightly increase. Whirling disease overtook this site for 2016, an alarming phenomena that is occurring at multiple location. Whirling disease may play a role in the decline.

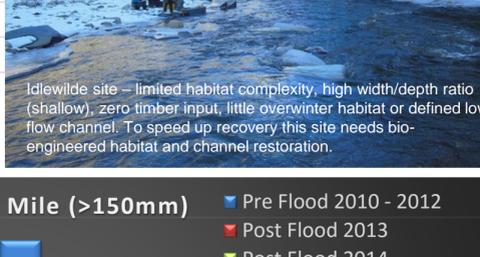
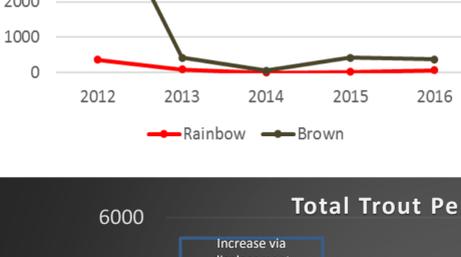


Stream Sampling Summary Report - Big Thompson @ Handicap Pier 11/09/2016

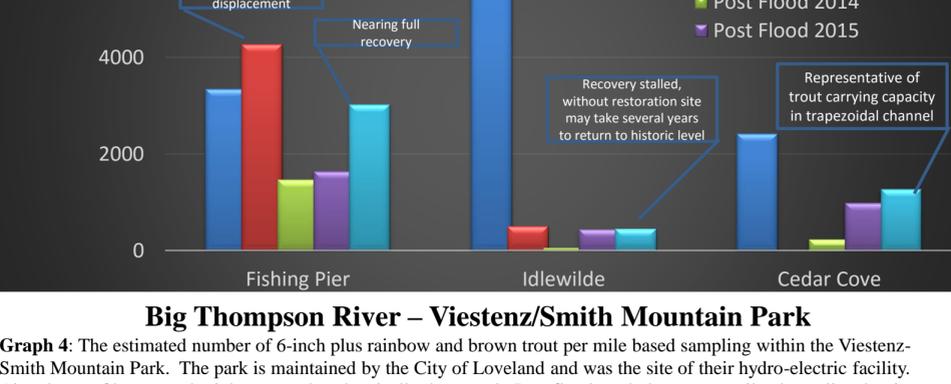
SPECIES	Total	Mean	Minimum	Maximum			
	Sampled	inches	lbs	inches	lbs		
BROWN TROUT	288	8.8	0.24	3.0	0.14	17.6	2.84
RAINBOW TROUT	151	8.9	0.30	3.0	0.27	17.7	2.65

Big Thompson River – Decommissioned Idlewild Dam

Graph 3: Removal of this dam will eventually benefit trout in the Big Thompson; the dam was a complete barrier to fish passage. The barrier had traditionally blocked reproduction in the upper canyon. In addition, the dam backed up water causing fine sediment deposition which often harbors parasites that which cause whirling disease spores which often leads suppressed populations of rainbow trout.

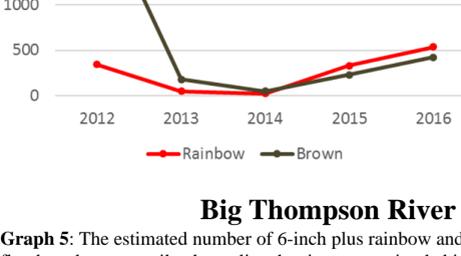


Idlewild site – limited habitat complexity, high width/depth ratio (shallow), zero timber input, little overwinter habitat or defined low flow channel. To speed up recovery this site needs bio-engineered habitat and channel restoration.



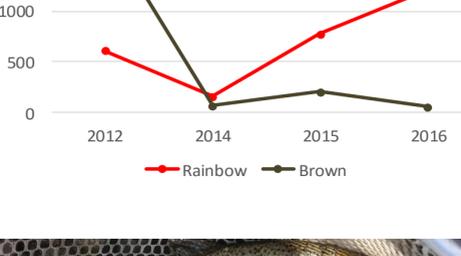
Big Thompson River – Viestenz/Smith Mountain Park

Graph 4: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based sampling within the Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park. The park is maintained by the City of Loveland and was the site of their hydro-electric facility. Abundance of brown and rainbow trout has drastically decreased. Post flood work that temporarily channelized the river, removed large boulders, and relocated all woody debris has left this site incapable of sustaining large numbers of trout. Restoration work has been completed, CPW will monitor the success and likely increase in trout abundance.



Big Thompson River – Cedar Cove (Private)

Graph 5: The estimated number of 6-inch plus rainbow and brown trout per mile based sampling at Cedar Cove. Post flood work temporarily channelized the river, removing habitat complexity. Restoration work has been completed, CPW will monitor the success and likely increase in trout abundance. A small number of an experimental strain of rainbow trout were stocked at this location providing insight this strain may be a tool to give the rainbows an advantage to re-establish. A spike in abundance at this station was evident – estimates exceed pre-flood numbers. Compared to results at other site and the stocking influence this site likely represents the maximal sustainable trout abundance in a channelized section of river.



Channelization reversed, replanted, a multistage channel design.

The Hofer rainbow trout strain has strong resistance to the Whirling Disease parasite.