North Cascades Resource Brief

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades
National Park Complex

TOP: Upper Stehekin River
BOTTOM RIGHT: Cutthroat trout

TROUTING ON LAKE CHELAN

WHERE ONE CAN TAKE A BUSHEL OF FISH IN HALF AN HOUR.

Beautiful Stehekin River Region—Kinds of Trout and Where and When They Spawn—An Expert Fisherman's Experiment—A Box of Beauties in Fifty Minutes—Icy Waters of Mountain Streams—Disappointment of a Sportsman.

The Stehekin River, which drains the most rugged and inaccessible highland region I have seen on the continent, flows into Lake Chelan through a tiny slough-cut delta, on which cottonwood trees thickly stand. The river flows through this delta for half a mile. Above that distance the water flows rapidly over a boulder-strewn bed—here forming a white-water rapid, there shooting in many branches among enormous granite boulders, occasionally forming a deep eddy, in which the clear, bubble-charged water swirls around and around, and where numberless trout lie, slowly waving their broad, forked tails.

Contact:
Hugh_Anthony@nps.gov
Reed_Glesne@nps.gov

Cutthroat Trout Restoration

The Stehekin River is the largest tributary to Lake Chelan and once supported a prolific and distinctive population of native fish species. These populations have been decimated during the past century due to overharvest by hatcheries and sport fishermen, and the introduction of invasive trout species such as the brook trout, lake trout, and rainbow trout. In the century since the publication of the *New York Times* article (at left), bull trout have been extirpated from the Chelan system, and westslope cutthroat trout populations have largely been pushed from the mainstem Stehekin River into the smaller tributary streams due to the highly competitive introduced rainbow trout.

In 2009, in consultation with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife ceased stocking sexually viable rainbow trout in Lake Chelan and began the process of reestablishing westslope cutthroat trout populations through its annual stocking program.

The U.S. Forest Service and North Cascades National Park are currently monitoring this effort through annual stream surveys aimed at documenting cutthroat trout spawning. Beginning in 2009, North Cascades National Park has conducted annual surveys on selected reaches in the lower Stehekin River. To date no cutthroat trout have been documented in the index reaches, but anecdotal evidence from local fisherfolk has indicated large cutthroat, up to 20" have been caught recently in the lower reaches of the river.

In 2011, park biologists plan to expand these efforts to document westslope cutthroat trout by conducting additional snorkel surveys within the mainstem of the Stehekin River in the spring and fall. Additionally, biologists will conduct electrofishing surveys in the autumn to collect DNA samples from newly hatched trout fry. These genetic samples will allow researchers to determine if successful spawning has occurred within the subject reaches.