

FAQ: Red Rock Lakes Wilderness Pipeline Project Lawsuit By Wilderness Watch

Why is maintaining wilderness character in the Red Rocks Lakes Wilderness important?

- Congress designated the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness in 1976, and ordered that it be protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act. The Wilderness Act requires the USFWS to preserve the area's wilderness character, and to allow the area to be "untrammeled" (unmanipulated) by modern civilization. In designated Wilderness, we exercise our humility and restraint to allow Nature (not the USFWS) to call the shots.
- The USFWS proposal would dig a mile-long trench, construct a pipeline, build other structures and installations, construct temporary roads, demolish beaver dams, and otherwise damage the area's wild character. These and other plans would damage the wild character of the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness in many ways. Treating Upper Red Rock Lake like one would in controlling an aquarium (as the USFWS proposes) dramatically harms its wild character and isn't a real solution anyway.
- The USFWS proposal violates the Wilderness Act in clear ways that even the USFWS well acknowledges. For example, the agency's internal guidance for managers on how to operate in Wilderness areas has this to say:

We influence wilderness character with every decision about refuge management activities and refuge uses, including public use and enjoyment of wilderness. Maintaining wilderness character requires an attitude of humility and restraint. In wilderness, we do not adjust nature to suit people, but adjust human use and influences so as not to alter natural processes. We strengthen wilderness character with every decision to forego actions that have physical impact or would detract from the idea of wilderness as a place set apart, a place where human uses, convenience, and expediency do not dominate. We preserve wilderness character by our compliance with wilderness legislation and regulation, but also by imposing limits on ourselves.
- Another reason for protecting wilderness character at the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness is that such a bad proposal here could set a dangerous precedent for similar development, manipulation, and construction in other Wildernesses administered by the USFWS, and indeed for the entire National Wilderness Preservation System.

Does Wilderness Watch want the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to just let the adfluvial Arctic grayling become extirpated from Red Rock Lakes Wilderness?

- No, of course not. But the USFWS proposal will significantly damage the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness without addressing the real problems that cause grayling decline. Grayling have evolved with winter in the Centennial Valley, and it makes little sense to primarily focus on making *winter* easier for grayling rather than more aggressively addressing actual human-caused harms that have contributed to grayling decline. It's like giving a patient some aspirin for the pain caused by a brain tumor; it never solves the root cause of the headaches.
- We also see contradiction in the USFWS refusing to provide Endangered Species Act protections to stream-dwelling grayling in the Big Hole, for example, in part by pointing

to the unthreatened presence of the Arctic grayling at Red Rock Lakes. If these Arctic grayling are in fact threatened with extirpation, then why is USFWS not using all the regulatory tools at its disposal to mitigate grayling habitat damage? Instead, the agency's focus on artificially manufacturing better habitat out of Upper Red Rock Lake seems like a tactic to avoid tough action to truly mitigate impacts from fishing, grazing, dams, and other human activities.

Is the decline of grayling at Red Rock Lakes the cause of grayling decline in the Big Hole River?

- No, they are separate populations. The grayling at Red Rock Lakes are an adfluvial population, meaning they reside in lakes and travel to tributary streams only to spawn; the grayling in the Big Hole are fluvial, meaning they reside in rivers and streams. Grayling in the Big Hole are certainly in trouble, but there the USFWS and other agencies are also facing legal action for improperly declining protections under the Endangered Species Act.

What are other solutions for Red Rock Lakes besides what the USFWS is proposing?

- USFWS needs to deal with root causes of what is causing harm to the grayling. Livestock grazing and agriculture in the watershed, for example, tend to wash nutrients into Upper Red Rock Lake, which makes the lake less hospitable for the grayling to survive over winter. The USFWS should further restrict livestock grazing within the watershed of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and monitor the decrease in nutrients flowing into Upper Red Rock Lake, and how the grayling respond.
- One former Refuge manager believes that the loosening of spring sport fishing rules in the watershed has harmed grayling habitat for spawning, and that fishing activities may have led to grayling decline. The USFWS should work with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to at least temporarily halt sport fishing in the watershed and study the results.
- Some dams, such as the Lima Dam, have been built in the watershed in the Centennial Valley. The USFWS should examine whether removing these dams would aid the grayling population.

Can't the Wilderness Act be by-passed if it saves a species from extinction?

- First, the adfluvial grayling population is not in danger of extinction, or even of extirpation, in Montana. Although the population in Upper Red Rock Lake has declined, adfluvial grayling are stocked extensively in lakes elsewhere around Montana and the West.
- Secondly, while Wilderness Watch supports the recovery of endangered and threatened species, work to save those species must follow all other laws, including the Wilderness Act.
- Third, the Wilderness Act embodies our best legal effort toward an ethic of treating nature with respect and valuing its inherent integrity without our dominance. Viewing Wilderness areas as environments that we can manipulate in exchange for our failures to save habitat elsewhere demonstrates an abdication of this ethic. Wildernesses have evolved their own native ecosystems over the millennia, and these protected areas are not

the appropriate places to be intensively manufacturing environmental conditions just to benefit fisheries or to make up for our damage to fisheries elsewhere.

- One of the major reasons to protect the integrity of Wilderness is that we can't know what the unforeseen consequences of our intrusive actions in nature will be. What passes for "conservation" is always evolving, and that will be just as true decades from now as it is between now and decades ago. In Red Rock Lakes, for example, we did extensive damage to grayling in the name of what used to be "conservation"—building dams, re-routing streams, moving and stocking and hatching fish all in different environments, and so forth. Even in the USFWS's work toward approving the pipeline project we're challenging here, the agency installed powered diffusers on the lake that did not have the effects the agency predicted. To make another permanent, Wilderness-manipulating installation and justify it based on the same modeling effort that already proved unreliable for the diffusers demonstrates the exact kind of hubris intervening with nature that the Wilderness Act requires us to restrain.
- Finally, the USFWS needs to try options that don't degrade the Wilderness first before considering the current proposal that would harm the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness.

Why shouldn't we meddle in the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness if it can save the grayling?

- The USFWS proposal would violate both the Wilderness Act and the USFWS's own wilderness policies.
- Wildernesses also provide a natural scientific control value, to help scientists understand how unmanipulated ecosystems react as opposed to the heavily manipulated ecosystems outside of Wilderness. How can we know what the natural grayling ecosystem here is supposed to look like, and how can we test the effects of our manipulations, if we're constantly manipulating everywhere including inside the control area?