California Trout is There for the Fish

California Golden Trout, the official state fish, is one of three species of brilliantly colored trout native to the upper Kern River Basin; the others are the Little Kern golden trout and Kern river rainbow trout. California golden trout evolved in streams of the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains, at elevations above 7,500 feet. The Kern Plateau is broad and flat, with wide meadows and meandering streams. The streams are small, shallow, and have only limited vegetation along the edges. The exposed nature of these streams is the result of intensive grazing of livestock in the fragile landscape, which began in the 1860s. The streams bottoms are mostly volcanic sand and gravel with some cobble. The water is clear and cold, although summer temperatures can fluctuate from about 37 to 68°F.

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Oncorhynchus mykiss aguabonita

California Trout was instrumental in retiring Grazing allotments that provided the means to scientifically assess whether grazing was detrimental to California Trout in 1995 and then collaborating Working first to develop a watershed management plan in 1965, there were about 2,460 to 15,600 golden trout in Great basin management plan was issued for California golden trout in the upper reaches of the south Fork Kern River by constructing barriers and then applying the poison rotenone to kill all unwanted fish above barriers. Despite these and other efforts, most populations of California golden trout are hybridized and are under continual threat from brown trout invasions. Management actions are needed to address threats to California golden trout which include hybridization in with rainbow trout, competition, and degradation of their streams from livestock grazing, which continues even in the Golden Trout Wilderness Area. Conservation Recommendations: Management measures should include, (1) repair or replacement of barriers, (2) eradication of all rainbow and brown trout populations that threaten California golden trout, (3) elimination of grazing, and (4) management of recreation to reduce impacts on the trout. The most urgently needed management measure is the repair or replacement of deteriorating fish barriers to exclude brown trout and rainbow trout from the South Fork Kern River.

California Golden Trout are endemic to South Fork Kern River and to Golden Trout Creek. They have been introduced into many other lakes and creeks in and outside of California, including the Cottonwood Lakes not far from the headwaters of Golden Trout Creek and into the headwaters of South Fork Kern River, such as Mulkey Creek. The Cottonwood Lakes have been a source of golden trout eggs for stocking other waters and are still used for stocking in the Inyo National Forest. As a result of widespread stocking in California, golden trout are now found in more than 200 high mountain lakes and streams outside of their native range. Many of these populations have hybridized with coastal rainbow trout. Golden trout are also widely distributed in lakes and streams of the Rocky Mountains, but most populations there are also hybridized with both rainbow and cutthroat trout.

ABUNDANCE: When the first major California Department of Fish and Game habitat management plan was issued in 1965, there were about 2,460 to 15,600 golden trout in Great basin management plan was issued for California golden trout in the upper reaches of the south Fork Kern River by constructing barriers and then applying the poison rotenone to kill all unwanted fish above barriers. Despite these and other efforts, most populations of California golden trout are hybridized and are under continual threat from brown trout invasions. Management actions are needed to address threats to California golden trout which include hybridization in with rainbow trout, competition, and degradation of their streams from livestock grazing, which continues even in the Golden Trout Wilderness Area. Conservation Recommendations: Management measures should include, (1) repair or replacement of barriers, (2) eradication of all rainbow and brown trout populations that threaten California golden trout, (3) elimination of grazing, and (4) management of recreation to reduce impacts on the trout. The most urgently needed management measure is the repair or replacement of deteriorating fish barriers to exclude brown trout and rainbow trout from the South Fork Kern River.

California golden trout are confined to a few small tributaries of the headwaters of South Fork Kern river, such as Mulkey Creek. The Cottonwood Lakes have been a source of golden trout eggs for stocking other waters and are still used for stocking in the Inyo National Forest. As a result of widespread stocking in California, golden trout are now found in more than 200 high mountain lakes and streams outside of their native range. Many of these populations have hybridized with coastal rainbow trout. Golden trout are also widely distributed in lakes and streams of the Rocky Mountains, but most populations there are also hybridized with both rainbow and cutthroat trout.

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