

GILA/RIO GRANDE CHAPTER (780), TROUT UNLIMITED
105 PECAN DRIVE
LAS CRUCES, NM 88001



September 28, 2018

Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI)
Therese Thompson, Coordinator
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Final Report: WNTI SMALL GRANT PROJECT No: 2017-SG17
Gila Trout Restoration Project Informational Sign: Willow Creek New Mexico.
Project Organization: Gila/Rio Grande Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Dear Therese:

I am pleased to report the completion of the project (2017-SG17) to develop a Gila Trout informational sign installation at Willow Creek in Catron County, New Mexico. The sign content and design layout were developed through a collaborative process and advanced to the final form selected for production printing following approval by both the New Mexico Game and Fish Department and the US Forest Service. The official logos from participating organizations, and WNTI logo acknowledging funding/support were included in the design. The sign was printed in full color by Able Sign Company, Las Cruces NM and protected with a resistant coating. The project organization GRG-TU paid the full amount of the invoice for the sign by check, and requests reimbursement for the amount \$1,650 awarded in the grant. The final installation of the sign at Willow Creek was completed on September 27, 2018 (photos attached). We are confident that this sign will meet the goal of providing information about the ongoing story of Gila trout restoration in Willow Creek, and will help to raise awareness and build public support for our native Gila trout. We sincerely appreciate the support from the WNTI small grant program that has made this possible!

Please feel free to contact me for any additional information.

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Willow Creek Gila Trout Restoration Project

The Return of a New Mexico Native

Before European settlers ventured into the Gila River Basin, Willow Creek was likely home to Gila trout. Unfortunately, nonnative species, including brown trout and rainbow trout, were introduced in the early 1900s—species that compete with, prey upon and sometimes interbreed with Gila trout.

Gila trout conservation efforts began in the early 1920s with the closure of streams to angling and establishment of a Gila trout hatchery near White Creek. Despite early successes, Gila trout was listed as endangered in 1973 under the federal Endangered Species Act.

In response, conservation efforts increased and resulted in the downlisting of Gila trout in 2006 from endangered to threatened status. Downlisting allowed the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to offer—after a 50-year hiatus—regulated angling for this native trout.

Back from the Ashes

Wildfires often are destructive to the landscape and its inhabitants, but there can also be benefits. In 2012, the Whitewater-Baldy Fire burned across many Gila trout streams (see inset map) eliminating many of those populations. However, in Willow Creek post-fire debris and ash flows killed nonnative trout. This provided a unique opportunity to establish a Gila trout fishery.

About a year after the fire, Gila trout were stocked in Willow Creek and began to reproduce. In 2016, a fish barrier was built above the confluence with Gila Creek that prevents nonnative trout from swimming into Willow Creek. The success in Willow Creek has helped improve the conservation status of Gila trout and also provides anglers a special opportunity to fish for this rare trout.

Restoration and continuing improvements to the Gila trout fishery at Willow Creek are made possible by the cooperative efforts of these organizations and with the invaluable support and commitment of volunteers.



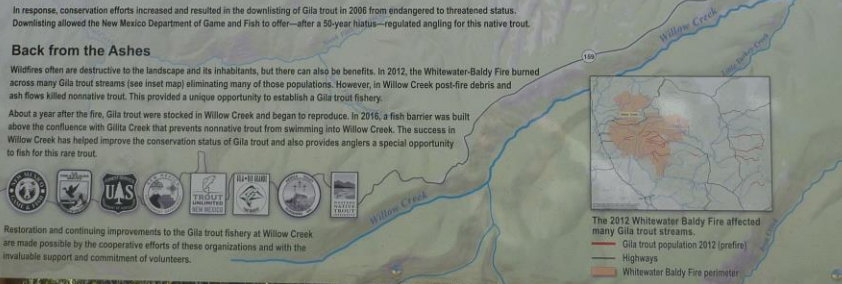
Gila trout



Volunteers assist biologists with annual fish surveys



Willow Creek fish barrier





Gila Trout



The Gila Trout is a native species of trout found in the mountainous regions of the southwestern United States. It is characterized by its distinctive coloration, which includes a mix of brown, tan, and white spots and streaks. This coloration helps the fish blend into its rocky, stream habitat. The Gila Trout is a popular sport fish and is also valued for its role in the local ecosystem.

Willow Creek Gila Trout Restoration Project

The Return of a Native Species

Since the 1950s, the Gila Trout has been extirpated from its native range in the Willow Creek watershed. The restoration project aims to reintroduce the Gila Trout to its historic habitat and restore the ecosystem. The project involves habitat improvement, such as installing log structures and riparian zone revegetation, to create suitable spawning and nursery habitats for the Gila Trout. The project also includes monitoring and evaluation to assess the success of the restoration efforts.



Back from the Ashes

The Willow Creek watershed was severely impacted by a wildfire in 2003. The restoration project is a key component of the watershed recovery plan, aimed at restoring the natural resources and ecosystem services that were lost. The project is a collaborative effort involving the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and local stakeholders. The project is expected to be completed by 2025.



Map

The map shows the location of the Willow Creek watershed in the southwestern United States. The watershed is bounded by the Gila Mountains to the north and the Colorado Plateau to the south. The map also shows the location of the restoration project area within the watershed.