

# Get to Know Your Native APACHE TROUT

## A Species in Time

The Apache trout along with the native Gila trout likely represent the earliest living branch of ancestral trout with origins in the Gulf of California. During one of the earlier glacial periods, perhaps a million years ago or more, these trout ascended up the Colorado River and into the headwaters of the Gila River basin. Later, in a warmer, drier time between glacial periods, the two groups of fish were isolated from each other with those in the Salt River portion of the basin evolving into the Apache trout and those in the upper Gila and upper Verde basins becoming the Gila trout.



**HABITAT** Apache trout are generally found in small, cool, streams at higher elevations.

**SIZE** Apache trout size varies depending on available habitat. In smaller headwater streams adults are generally 6-10" in length, while in lakes they can reach 24" and weigh up to 6 lbs.

**SPAWNING SEASON** Spring — Typically beginning in April below 7000' and in May at higher elevations when water temperature is rising and runoff flows are declining.

**LIFESPAN** Apache trout typically live 4-6 years.

**DIET** Apache trout feed on aquatic and terrestrial insects and invertebrates.



*Oncorhynchus gilae apache*

**COLOR** Apache trout are typically yellowish-gold with a darker olive back and a yellowish underbelly, lending to the pioneer name "Yellowbellies." Dark bold spots occur on dorsal and tail fin; irregular spots on the body sometimes extend below the lateral line. The fins are yellow to orange. In the purest strains, two black dots on each side of the pupil give the fish a "masked bandit" look.

Apache trout have a signature yellowish underbelly.

The fins typically have a lighter colored leading edge with a white or yellowish tip.

# It's an Arizona Treasure!

## Fishing Tips For APACHE TROUT

**LAKES & STREAMS** — Using light tackle, Apache trout can be caught in either lakes or streams by a variety of methods including wet or dry flies, small lures, or natural baits. Artificial wet or dry flies with small hook sizes and darker colors often produce the best results. Any gnat, mosquito, mayfly, caddisfly or stonefly imitation will work as well as terrestrial patterns such as ants, beetles or hoppers. Those fishing with lures should try small spinners and those looking for an authentic "kid and a cane pole" experience can try worms or grasshoppers. Apache trout are wary, especially in small streams, so take your time and sneak up to promising habitat areas.

**ETIQUETTE** — Catch and release is an important way to conserve the resource and ensure angler access in the future. Barbless hooks and rubberized nets will reduce injury to the fish. Keep the fish in the water and get your hands wet before touching them.

## Fly Box

**DRY FLIES** — Royal Coachman, Adams, Royal Wulff, Parachute Adams

**WET FLIES** — Peacock Ladies, Pheasant-tail nymphs, Hares ear nymphs, zyg bugs, scuds, woolly buggers, woolly worms, streamers and mudler minnows.

**LURES** — Pather Martins, Super Dupers or Rooster Tails



## HISTORIC AND CURRENT RANGE

Apache trout are found only in the streams and stocked lakes of the White Mountains in East-Central Arizona. These fish were favorites of pioneers to the region in the late 1800s with historic photos and accounts showing early settlers harvesting hundreds of "Yellowbellies" in a single trip. Apache trout currently occupy about 170 miles of streams in this region making up approximately 25% of their historic range in the watersheds of the upper Salt and Little Colorado rivers.

Current range is about 25% of historic range.

## Threats and Current Status

Isolation in small fragmented streams and a very limited range leave the Apache trout particularly vulnerable to habitat loss from forest fires and human development, hybridization with rainbow trout, and competition from non-native species.

After being listed as one of the first "endangered" species in 1969, successful conservation work increased the range of the Apache trout from about 30 to 170 miles of streams in Arizona, and the current listing as a "threatened" species. This work continues through the efforts of Trout Unlimited, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the White Mountain Apache Tribe. If you would like to help with these conservation efforts please contact [www.tu.org](http://www.tu.org).

In 1986, the Apache trout was designated as the State Fish of Arizona.

## Fishing For Natives

The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the White Mountain Apache Tribe in eastern Arizona separately manage all the Apache trout fisheries in the state. After the initial listing as an endangered species, fishing was reintroduced in 1975 when the Apache trout was downlisted to the "threatened" category. The purest strains of Apache trout are found in the Mount Baldy Wilderness and continue to be closely monitored with limited fishing managed by the White Mountain Apache Tribe. In addition to ongoing recovery efforts to increase the wild and naturally reproducing populations, Apache trout are raised at the Williams Creek National Fish Hatchery and in Arizona's state hatcheries at Silver Creek and Tonto creek for stocking in select Arizona lakes and streams for recreational fishing.

Check your local fishing regulations —

