

Curecanti

National Recreation Area
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Fishing

The fishery of the Gunnison area has been changed by the three dams of the Wayne N. Aspinall Unit which form the reservoirs of Curecanti. Where once the fish of the Gunnison River fed upon the aquatic insects of the area, new fish species, which make their home in the reservoirs, feed upon plankton, small microscopic plants and animals. Federal and state fish hatcheries stock over three million fish in the reservoirs each year. Their efforts help to keep the fishing enjoyable at Curecanti.

Five Species of Fish



Rainbow Trout - Identifying marks are black spots on a light body and a red stripe along the sides of the fish.

Rainbow Trout

The colorful rainbow trout, named for the pink stripe along its side, is the most often caught fish of Curecanti. Rainbow trout, introduced into the Gunnison River in the 1880's, are stocked quite heavily and can be caught in the river areas or in the reservoirs. River and shore fishing can be very productive, but in the late summer when waters are warm, the fish seek cooler areas. Then, trolling at slow speeds works best.



Lake Trout (Mackinaw) - This fish has a white spotting pattern on a dark background. Veriform markings over the back and head. Unlike other trout, they have a deeply indented tail fin.

Lake Trout or Mackinaw

The deep subsurface canyons of Blue Mesa Reservoir provide excellent habitat for the big lake trout or mackinaw. The "mac" can reach tremendous sizes - one monster weighed over thirty-eight pounds! To catch one of these "big ones", you must fish deep and in cold water (45-50°F).



Brown Trout - The spotting pattern is composed of black spots and also red-orange spots surrounded by light blue.

Brown Trout or German Trout

Recognized by its dark brown color and red spots, the brown trout is another large fish species which can be found in all three of the reservoirs. Some of the largest fish taken from Morrow Point and Crystal Reservoirs are brown trout.



Brook Trout - The pectoral, pelvic and anal fins are often orange, edged with black and white. The body is dark with red spots surrounded by blue and white spots.

Brook Trout

Brook trout live in most of the streams which feed the reservoirs of the recreation area. Curecanti Creek, which feeds into Morrow Point Reservoir, can be one of the best spots for catching the "brookies".

Kokanee Salmon

The reservoirs have also provided a home for the kokanee salmon. The kokanee travel in schools, feeding on the animal plankton, or zooplankton of the reservoirs. So if you get a strike while trolling, but are unable to bring the fish in, make another slower pass through the same area and you should be able to land the silver colored fish. The salmon are stocked from the Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery



Kokanee Salmon - At the end of their third summer, females develop a red-gray-white pattern while males develop a hook jaw and turn brick red.

north of Gunnison. When they are ready to spawn at the end of their third or fourth summer, they travel upriver to return to the hatchery. At this time, they no longer feed, and after they reproduce, they die. In order to insure that a sufficient number of eggs are collected and fertilized, the snagging of kokanee salmon is only allowed during November and December. Between August 1 and October 31, all salmon caught east of the Lake City Bridge must be released.

Kokanee Salmon and Lake Trout in Blue Mesa

Blue Mesa Reservoir provides excellent angling opportunities and supplies a large number of the eggs needed to supply hatcheries and sustain Kokanee populations in Blue Mesa, other reservoirs and lakes in the state. Research indicates that a large Lake Trout population in Blue Mesa Reservoir is decreasing Kokanee Salmon fishing and egg production. For more information about this current issue, please visit the [Colorado State University, College of Natural Resources](#) website.

Whirling Disease

Whirling Disease is a parasitic infection affecting primarily rainbow trout populations. Detailed information about this disease is available from the [Colorado Division of Wildlife](#).

Bag and Possession Limits

On the **Gunnison River** (in Curecanti NRA) and **Blue Mesa Reservoir** the limits are:

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Possession Limit
Total fish of the following species including: Rainbow Trout Brown Trout Cutthroat Trout	4	8
Brook Trout 8 inches or less	10	10
Kokanee Salmon (angling)	10	10
Kokanee Salmon (east of Lake City Bridge, Aug. 1 to Oct. 31)	0	0
Kokanee Salmon (snagging, Nov. 1 to Dec. 31)	10	10
Yellow Perch	20	20
Crayfish	no limit	no limit

In addition, on **Blue Mesa Reservoir** only:

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Possession Limit
Total fish of the following species including: Lake Trout (Mackinaw)	8	8

On **Morrow Point or Crystal Reservoirs** the limits are inclusive of your daily bag limit caught in other reservoirs:

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Possession Limit
Total fish of the following species including: Rainbow Trout Brown Trout Cutthroat Trout Lake Trout (Mackinaw) Brook Trout	4	8
Kokanee Salmon (angling)	10	10
Kokanee Salmon (snagging, Sep. 1 to Dec. 31)	10	10
Yellow Perch	20	20

East Portal - (from the closure below Crystal Dam to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park boundary, Gold Medal Water Regulations apply - **artificial flies and lures only (no bait)** :

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Possession Limit
Rainbow Trout	catch and release only	
Brown Trout	4	4
Brown Trout may be - 1 over 16" and 3 under 12" or 4 no greater than 12"		
-all Brown Trout between 12" and 16" must be returned to the water immediately		

Please consult the [Colorado Division of Wildlife 2002 Fishing Brochure](#) for details.

Rules and Regulations

- Colorado State fishing regulations apply within Curecanti National Recreation Area.
- A valid Colorado fishing license is required for all people 16 years of age and over. Licenses may be purchased at the Elk Creek and Lake Fork Marinas or at sporting goods stores in the area.
- Persons under the age of 16 with a valid fishing license are entitled to the full daily bag limit. Persons under the age of 16 without a valid fishing license are only entitled to half the daily limit.
- In order to keep the fish populations healthy, please observe the posted limits.
- All fish that are not kept as part of your daily bag limit must be returned to the water immediately.
- Check the fishing statutes for any special regulations which may be in effect regarding special limits, closures, seasons, baits, and any other restrictions. Special regulations close some creeks in the area during the rainbow trout spawn.
- Pets must be kept on a leash, no longer than six feet, at all times.
- Motor vehicles are restricted to authorized roads and below high water mark.
- Open fires are allowed only below the reservoir's high water mark. Driftwood may be collected and used as a fuel source. No other firewood gathering is permitted.

