



Timberwolf Wilderness Society

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Photo Captions

Timberwolf sues Fisheries Minister to release long-delayed action plan for threatened trout

All photographs and captions by D. W. Mayhood

SARA means Species At Risk Act

IMG_1263.jpg - Westslope cutthroat trout from a pure but introduced stock, seen here over artificial spawning gravel, Rawson Lake, 8 July 2012. This lake stock is a widespread form originating from a brood source, Job Lake. It is widely planted routinely in selected high mountain lakes along the East Slopes.

IMG_3338.jpg - This tiny tributary is critical overwintering habitat for about 25% of the Silvester Creek westslope cutthroat trout population, a SARA-protected stock, but inexplicably it is not designated critical habitat. Here it is crossed by a well access road and a pipeline right-of-way, between which about 1-2 dozen fish would have overwintered in 2017-18. At the flows shown here (13 September 2017), and the even lower flows expected in winter, these fish are effectively trapped above the pipeline because it is heavily used, illegally, as an off-highway vehicle trail, widening and shallowing the channel. This tributary must be designated and protected as critical habitat when the overdue action plan is finally released. The most recent data available indicate that the Silvester Creek population declined by 74% between 2006 and 2016, and now consists of only 81 adults.

IMG_3350 (lower valley).jpg, IMG_3358 (upper valley).jpg - The valley of Gold Creek holds substantial critical habitat for a SARA-listed population of westslope cutthroat trout, most of it unprotected under SARA. Seen here in two views from the top of Grassy Mountain's unreclaimed minesite on 11 September 2015, much of the existing designated and undesignated critical habitat will be damaged or destroyed by a proposed new open pit coal mine here: much of the lower slopes will be filled with waste rock. All of this critical habitat needs protection in the action plan, but the mine is likely to be approved without that plan being released.

IMG_3392.jpg - The last known representative of the SARA-listed Evan-Thomas Creek stock of westslope cutthroat trout, and likely the last known representative of the Kananaskis Valley stocks of that species, specimen #20150923-1517 was captured and released 23 September 2015. Angling in 2016, and intensive electrofishing in 2017, found zero cutthroat trout in this stream. This stock is now extinct, but could have been rescued had a proper action plan been implemented.

IMG_3549.jpg - This stream, the headwaters of Mockingbird Creek, receives large quantities of fine sediment-contaminated runoff from a heavily eroded, undesignated (illegal) off-highway vehicle trail. Mockingbird Creek is SARA-designated critical habitat further downstream, but this reach is not protected at present. It is expected to be designated critical habitat in new listings that must be included in the seriously late action plan. In the meantime, it's getting destroyed as critical habitat by illegal off-highway vehicle use at this site.

IMG_3577.jpg - Here, fine sediments eroded from off-highway vehicle trails are deposited thickly on potential spawning gravels. In doing so, they fill spaces among the stones, blocking oxygen and waste exchange, thereby killing trout eggs and larvae that may be buried in them. This site is within SARA-listed critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout in Johnson Creek, Ghost River drainage, 6 July 2016. Johnson Creek holds a hybrid, but nearly pure, population within an extensive network of streams holding pure protected stocks. It poses a hybridization threat to those pure stocks. As part of the action plan, the Johnson Creek stock needs to be recovered to protect the connected populations, and to increase the population size of pure populations in the Ghost drainage.

IMG_4119.jpg - Designated critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout, Girardi Creek is diverted down the Crowsnest Highway ditch during spawning season by a plugged, improperly maintained, and undersized highway culvert, 25 June 2017. This has become a serious, chronic problem, and should be remedied by work specified in the long-overdue action plan.