

# More fish, more fun



## Revitalized N.M. hatcheries see bright future

By Dan Williams

**A**fter being plagued with whirling disease and drought for a decade, New Mexico's fish hatcheries appear to be turning the corner and entering an exciting new era. Renovated raceways, a new warmwater hatchery and a new approach to raising rainbow trout have brought new fish and new hope to a system that stocks almost 16 million fish a year.

"We had some setbacks, but we've been able to recover and actually make improvements," Department Fisheries Chief Mike Sloane said. "By next year, our hatcheries will be back to near full production, an impressive feat when you consider only a few years ago four of our six hatcheries were infected with whirling disease."

The battle against whirling disease is not over; the parasite is present in several state waters. However, the Department has learned to keep it out of its hatcheries by covering raceways and carefully monitoring water sources. Instead of drawing water from rivers and streams, all hatcheries now use only spring or well water. Covers keep predators from spreading the disease into runways, and hatchery employees abide by strict contamination-prevention practices.

That's good news for trout anglers who enjoy catching the more than 1 million catchable-sized fish stocked in state waters every year. And that number will increase as the trout hatcheries put finishing touches on renovations and the new warmwater hatchery at Santa Rosa gets up to speed.



Photos: Dan Williams

**With completion of a new warmwater hatchery, the Department of Game and Fish is able to raise and stock fingerling largemouth bass, above, and trout, below, in the state's lakes and streams. The Department annually stocks 16 million fish of all sizes in state waters.**

"This is an exciting time for us," Sloane said. "We've spent about \$10 million to get our hatcheries back to the point where we meet our goals and to get a warmwater hatchery going. In the near future, the state's anglers are going to see it start to pay off."

## Sterile rainbows, more natives

There's a new type of fish swimming in New Mexico's hatcheries this year, and it's helping state biologists in their quest to restore and increase the state's populations of native Rio Grande cutthroat and Gila trout.

Triploids, sterile female rainbow trout, already are being raised at Glenwood Hatchery in southwestern New Mexico and soon will be the only type of fish raised at the Red River Hatchery in the north. The plan is to raise trout that won't interbreed with the natives and compromise the Department's ongoing efforts to maintain pure-strain native populations.

"So far they are doing tremendously," Glenwood Hatchery Manager Stan Long said of the triploids. His crews stock the fish in the Gila River drainages, home of the Gila trout, which recently was downlisted from endangered to threatened, allowing limited angling for the species for the first time since the 1960s. Long said he was impressed with how fast the triploids grow -- up to a third faster than regular rainbows.

"Because they don't reproduce, all that energy goes into growing and fending off disease," Long said. "The only drawback is the eggs are more expensive, but when you figure we can raise more fish in less time, it may be worth it." Triploid eggs are created by a patented pressure-treatment process that renders the eggs sterile by giving them three chromosomes instead of two.

Converting to triploid rainbows is a step toward making the Glenwood Hatchery the state's only producer of native Gila trout because there will be less chance of contamination. Gila trout currently are raised at the National Fish Hatchery in Mora.

The Red River Hatchery is scheduled to receive its first batch of triploid rainbow trout eggs this summer. The hatchery stocks waters statewide, including streams and



Photos: Paul King



**Covered raceways help Red River Fish Hatchery keep out predators such as birds and raccoons that can spread diseases. The hatchery is the state's largest trout producer, stocking about 1.7 million fish a year in New Mexico lakes and streams, including more than 500,000 catchable-sized 9- and 10-inch fish.**

lakes near Rio Grande cutthroat restoration projects.

### Trout for the masses

Raising trout always has been the mainstay of the state hatchery system, and after 10 years battling whirling disease, the runways are back in action. In 2008, hatchery crews stocked more than 1 million 9-inch or longer rainbow trout in state waters. That was accomplished with one hatchery, Los Ojos, shut down for disinfection, and another, Lisboa Springs, running at half-capacity.

Los Ojos will have new raceway covers and begin raising rainbow trout again this year. After it has proven to be whirling disease-free for one year, trout from the hatchery will be allowed to enter state waters. Trout grow more slowly at Los Ojos because the spring water feeding the raceways is so cold -- 48 degrees compared to the optimal trout-raising 58 degrees. Because of that, the hatchery may raise trout only to fingerling-size, and then either stock them or send them to another hatchery.

Lisboa Springs Hatchery near Pecos has

used only half its raceways since whirling disease was discovered there in 1999. Sixteen raceways that used water from the disease-infected Pecos River are being converted to spring or well water. The goal is to have them in full production next year.

"We're continually modifying the riverside raceways to keep out the raccoons, birds and other predators that spread disease," said Roddy Gallegos, the Department's assistant chief in charge of hatcheries. "Getting the riverside operation back on line will make a big difference."

Red River and Seven Springs hatcheries also underwent renovations after they were diagnosed with whirling disease. With newly covered raceways, Red River continues to be the state's top trout producer, stocking about 1.7 million rainbow trout a year, almost half of them 10-inches or larger. Seven Springs was converted to raising only native Rio Grande cutthroat trout in 2002. It stocks about 35,000 trout a year in waters statewide, including Costilla Creek, the Pecos River and high-mountain lakes.

Rock Lake and Glenwood were the only state trout hatcheries not infected with whirling disease. Rock Lake raises catchable-sized rainbow trout and hatches walleye eggs that are harvested from state waters. Glenwood will continue raising triploid rainbow trout in addition to its possible new role as the state's Gila trout hatchery.

### Warmwater success

Completed in 2007, the state's first warmwater hatchery now can supply state waters with home-grown bass, walleye, catfish and bluegills raised in 11 one-acre ponds. In 2008, the hatchery raised and stocked 70,000 largemouth bass and 109,000 catfish. This year, the hatchery harvested and stocked its first walleyes and tiger muskies.

"The numbers of fish coming out of the warmwater hatchery are only going to get larger as we learn more about the process, which can vary from hatchery to hatchery," Gallegos said. "Right now, it's looking very promising."



Photo: Dan Williams

**Fisheries biologist Marc Wethington tosses a batch of trout into the San Juan River this spring. The Department of Game and Fish raises and stocks more than 1 million trout that are 9 inches or larger into state waters every year.**

# New Mexico's fish hatcheries

The Department of Game and Fish operates six fish hatcheries around the state. Some recently have undergone renovations to address whirling disease and to upgrade facilities. Visitors are welcome during business hours.

## Los Ojos

- **Location:** Village of Los Ojos, about 15 miles south of Chama.
- **History:** Formerly called Parkview Hatchery, it was built in 1932.
- **Production:** Catchable-sized rainbow trout, but may be converted to a fingerling-rearing facility. Capable of raising three million trout fingerlings per year to be stocked in waters statewide.
- **Current status:** Shut down for cleaning and disinfecting after discovery of whirling disease. Expected to be back in full production later this year.
- **Information:** (575) 588-7307, losojos.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Greg Friday.



Photo: Dan Williams



Photo: Lisboa Springs Hatchery

## Lisboa Springs

- **Location:** About 25 miles east of Santa Fe and one mile north of Pecos.
- **History:** Built in 1921, it is the state's oldest hatchery.
- **Production:** About 136,000 catchable-sized rainbow trout a year.
- **Current status:** Now operating at 50 percent capacity, with production limited to raceways fed by spring water. Discovery of whirling disease forced the shutdown of Pecos River-fed raceways.
- **Information:** (505) 757-6360, lisboasprings.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Eloy Trujillo.

## Red River

- **Location:** About 20 miles north of Taos.
- **History:** Built in 1941.
- **Production:** About 1.7 million rainbow trout a year, including more than 500,000 catchable 9- and 10-inch fish for stocking statewide. It is the state's largest-production hatchery and currently is being converted to raising triploid (sterile) trout to be stocked in waters where interbreeding with native fish is not desired.
- **Current status:** Recently renovated with fully covered raceways and disinfected following discovery of whirling disease. Now operating at full capacity.
- **Information:** (575) 586-0222, redriver.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Dan Arevalo.



Photo: Paul King

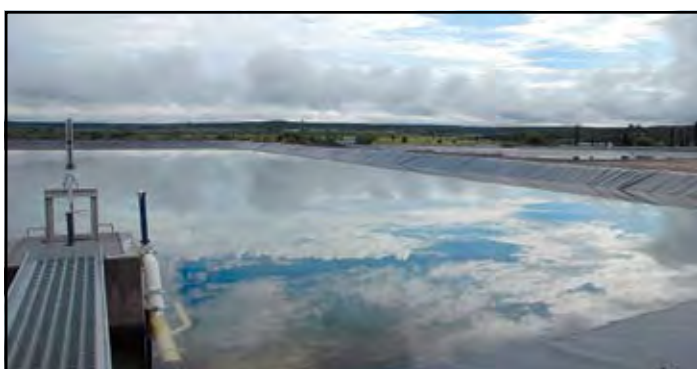


Photo: Dan Williams

## Rock Lake

- **Location:** About 2 miles south of Santa Rosa.
- **History:** Built in 1964.
- **Production:** The state's primary catchable trout-rearing station produces 300,000 trout a year for stocking statewide. The warm-water hatchery component also raises bass, walleye, catfish, bluegills and tiger muskies.
- **Current status:** Full production of trout, walleye, bass and catfish. Production of bluegills and tiger muskies is expected this summer and fall.
- **Information:** (575) 472-3690, rocklake.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Leonard Rice.

## Seven Springs

- **Location:** About 22 miles north of Jemez Springs and 4 miles north of Fenton Lake in the Jemez Mountains.
- **History:** Built in 1936.
- **Production:** Responsible for production and distribution of native Rio Grande cutthroat trout, New Mexico's State Fish. The hatchery has raised more than 72,000 trout for stocking since 2002.
- **Current status:** Operating at full capacity following treatment for whirling disease.
- **Information:** (575) 829-3740, sevensprings.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Tony Jacobson.



Photo: Marty Frentzel



Photo: Adam Havard

## Glenwood

- **Location:** About 45 miles north of Silver City and 35 miles south of Reserve.
- **History:** Built in 1938.
- **Production:** Raises only female triploid (sterile) rainbow trout, to be stocked in waters where interbreeding with native fish is not desired. The hatchery eventually will be New Mexico's rearing facility for native Gila trout.
- **Current status:** Operating at full capacity.
- **Information:** (575) 539-2461, glenwood.hatchery@state.nm.us.
- **Manager:** Stan Long.