

Willow Creek Gila Trout Project

Restoration Efforts to Re-establish New Mexico's Native Gila Trout.



*Gila trout (19 inches) captured
at Willow Creek, October 2014.*

The Whitewater Baldy Fire in 2012 had a negative impact on the fish community in Willow Creek. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Gila National Forest, have monitored Gila trout and other fish in Willow Creek since the fire. Early surveys in spring 2013 found only two brown trout, and later surveys found no trout.

To re-establish Gila trout in Willow Creek:

- 3,000 five-inch Gila trout and 250 ten-inch Gila trout were stocked in fall 2013.
- 50 retired Gila trout broodstock (18 inches) were stocked in May 2014.

In early June 2014, another fish survey of Willow Creek was completed—from its confluence with Gilita Creek, through most of the private property, to the forks. Surveys on private property were conducted only after landowner permission was obtained. Little Turkey Creek was also surveyed from its confluence to its headwaters.

- Thirty-one Gila trout (approximately 4–16 inches) and two brown trout (13½ and 15½ inches) were captured in Willow Creek. Most fish, including brown trout, were captured on the Gila National Forest below the private property. Fish native to Willow Creek, including Sonora sucker, desert sucker and speckled dace, were also captured. One Gila trout was captured in Little Turkey Creek.

In mid-October 2014, similar reaches of Willow and Little Turkey creeks were surveyed again.

- Fifty-one Gila trout (approximately 3–19 inches) were captured in Willow Creek and 18 Gila trout (approximately 3–5 inches) in Little Turkey Creek. Sonora sucker, desert sucker and speckled dace were also captured.
- Fish sizes indicate Gila trout successfully spawned in Willow Creek last spring, and habitat conditions have improved since the fire (e.g. undercut banks and large pools, a result of debris piles, are now forming). No brown trout were captured during the survey, indicating the species may have been extirpated from Willow Creek.
- Successful spawns last spring indicate Gila trout in Willow Creek are re-establishing. Lack of nonnative trout, such as brown trout, has reduced competition and will likely aid re-establishment.

- On 14 November 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked 1,510 four-inch and 180 eleven-inch Gila trout at Willow Creek. Smaller fish were stocked in the Willow Creek Campground, above the private property, and just above the Gilita Creek confluence. Larger fish were stocked at the campground area and above the Gilita Creek confluence.
- The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Gila National Forest will continue to monitor fish in Willow Creek. The Department is considering construction of a fish barrier to ensure non-native fishes do not invade areas where Gila trout are located. Construction of a fish barrier would require NEPA analysis, including public input, and the Department will continue to communicate and coordinate with the public as the planning process develops.



Young-of-year Gila trout caught in Willow Creek, October 2014.



Gila trout (14 inches) caught in Willow Creek, October 2014.



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

Conserving New Mexico's Wildlife for Future Generations

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