

Wildlife

Saving Bull Trout in Sun Creek

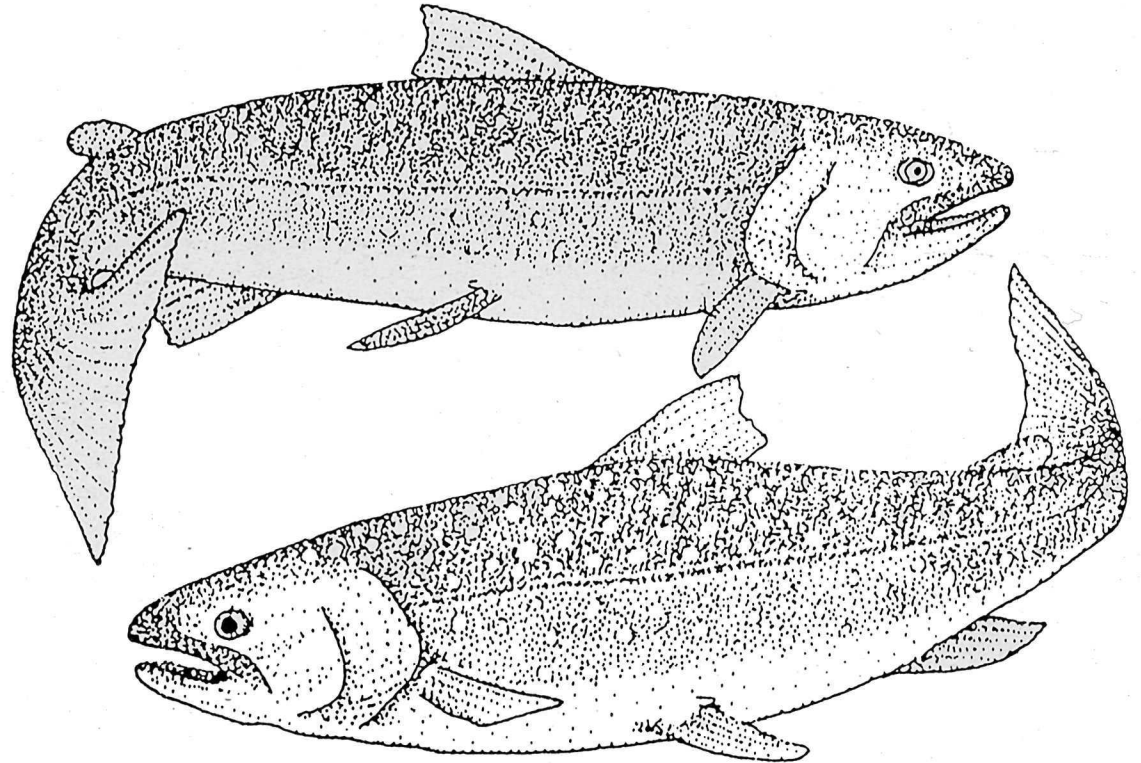
By Mark Buktenica, Aquatic Biologist

Salvelinus confluentus, or bull trout, were once found in most major river systems in the Pacific Northwest. Bull trout distribution has significantly declined over the past 30 years and many local extinctions have occurred. Bull trout have been listed as a Category 2 Species (candidate species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Oregon's Klamath River Basin represents the southern limit of present day bull trout distribution. The Klamath populations are now expressly restricted to cold, headwater streams. Habitat degradation and introduction of non-native fish species are believed to be the primary causes for their decline.

Prior to early introductions of non-native fish, bull trout were probably the only fish species present in Sun Creek, a high elevation stream in Crater Lake National Park. Repeated stocking of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) in Sun Creek between 1928 and 1971 has created unnatural competition and hybridization that has reduced the distribution of bull trout.

A recent survey of Sun Creek was made in 1989.



Sun Creek was surveyed from its headwaters to the park boundary. Bull trout, brook trout, and hybrids from the two species were collected. (No rainbow trout were found, and they may no longer exist in the stream.)

Bull trout were found only in a 1.9 km section of the stream and the total number of adult bull trout was estimated at 130 fish. Such a low population density is alarming because it suggests that local extinction could occur within a few years.

The NPS is developing a bull trout management

program. Its goals are to remove the non-native brook trout from Sun Creek, build a barrier to prevent re-invasion, and re-establish a self-sustaining population of bull trout in Sun Creek within the park. Fishing for bull trout in Crater Lake National Park and throughout south central Oregon is prohibited by state law. Through carefully planned action, the bull trout habitat may be restored and the fish may recover from the brink of a local extinction.