

Rio Grande Cutthroat Could be Endangered

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In response to a lawsuit brought by the Center for Biological Diversity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will again consider the Rio Grande cutthroat trout for protection as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The Center first petitioned to have the Rio Grande cutthroat trout protected in 1998, and despite the fact that the trout is gone from 99 percent of its historic range and threatened by multiple factors, the Fish and Wildlife Service has steadfastly refused to provide protection.

"Without the protections of the Endangered Species Act, the Rio Grande cutthroat trout may be lost forever to extinction," said Noah Greenwald, conservation biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "We have a duty to protect the Rio Grande cutthroat trout and the rivers and streams it depends on."

Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations are beset by a multitude of threats, including nonnative trout, disease, population restriction, environmental change, and habitat degradation related to livestock grazing, logging, roads and other factors. In its 2002 finding, the Fish and Wildlife Service determined a mere 13 tiny headwater streams could be considered secure from these threats. Even these populations, however, are not secure because they are isolated, and are at continued risk from invasion by nonnative trout, disturbance events like drought or fire, and climate change.

"The goal of the Endangered Species Act is to recover species like the Rio Grande cutthroat trout and the habitats they depend on, not just preserve zoo populations in tiny fractions of their range," said Greenwald.