

Controversy surrounds Sierra stream poisoning

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

WALKER – State fisheries biologist Dave Lentz poured poison into a remote High Sierra stream and watched quietly as every rainbow and golden trout in the water turned belly up.

After the rotenone spread along 11 miles of Silver King Creek last Wednesday, other biologists poured in a neutralizing agent, making the river again habitable – and a suitable home for the rarest trout in the world.

Kneeling beside a small brass spigot that dripped the milky white toxin into a pool edged with alders, Lentz, a conservation coordinator for native trout with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, smiled and said, “Looks like everything is working as intended. The Paiute cutthroat trout belongs in this stream, not the nonnatives in here now.”

The Paiute trout is native to the Alpine County stream in the Eastern Sierra’s Carson-Iceberg Wilderness of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. But it had been squeezed out by rainbow and golden trout, which are not native to this portion of Silver King Creek.

The plan to restore the Paiute trout had been held up in federal court for more than a decade by opponents who believe that poisoning a stream is about the worst thing that could happen in a designated wilderness. They also question the safety of rotenone and worry about its possible long-term effects on wildlife and regional water supplies.

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