

# Paiute cutthroat trout return to native waters



A Paiute cutthroat trout is caught and measured. Photo/USFWS

**By Kathryn Reed**

Two years after an Alpine County creek was chemically treated, native Paiute cutthroat trout have returned to those waters.

That was the whole purpose of treating Silver King Creek and its tributaries from Llewellyn Falls downstream to Silver King Canyon. The lower reaches of Tamarack Creek, Tamarack Lake Creek and Coyote Valley Creek were also treated.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S Forest Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife used rotenone, a fish toxicant, to kill off the nonnative fish that had been stocked there since the early 1990s.

This summer the agencies restocked Silver King Creek with 86 native Paiute cutthroat trout. This is the only place in the world where this fish is a native.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife website, the Paiute was listed as endangered on March 11, 1967, and reclassified

as threatened on July 16, 1975.

Ultimately, the plan is to put fish back in their historic range below Llewelyn Falls.

The irony is the transplanted fish are likely descendants of fish that originally came from Silver King Creek. It was in 1946 that the Eastern Sierra Packers Association and the U.S. Forest Service took 401 fish from Silver King Creek to North Fork Cottonwood Creek.

It is Cottonwood Creek where the fish came from this summer.

“We have a long-term dataset showing a substantial decline in the population in Upper Fish Valley,” said USFWS biologist Chad Mellison said in a press release. “The team decided we needed to augment this population with other donor populations including North Fork Cottonwood Creek. Secondly, we needed to conduct population assessments in North Fork Cottonwood Creek to determine if the population there was viable enough to support transplantation to Silver King Creek.”

Mellison has been working on the project for 16 years.