

The Upper Bow River Watershed: A Case Study In Impacts And Restoration

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Rising in Banff National Park, the Bow River is known as a world-class rainbow trout fishery, a source of drinking water for dozens of communities, and a recreational resource. Dams on the Cascade, Spray and Kananaskis Rivers help to meet peak energy demands in Bow River communities, especially Calgary. Despite its reputation and distinctive glacial colour, the upper Bow is one of the most manipulated waterways in the Rocky Mountains. As a pilot project for other mountain watersheds, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) commissioned a review of the status of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the upper Bow River watershed (including its entire extent within Banff National Park as well as the Cascade, Spray and Kananaskis Rivers). These native fish are found in only a small proportion of their historic range. Habitat loss due to hydroelectric dams and highway and railroad infrastructure, loss of connectivity due to dams and thousands of culverts, and competition from or hybridization with introduced non-native fish are the primary causes of native trout range retraction. The study recommends a number of further research and restoration projects both inside and outside the national park. These are being pursued by Y2Y in partnership with government agencies and other stakeholders. This presentation will highlight the study's findings and discuss restoration initiatives.