

**From Northern Calif Council of FFI in October**

**Report on Cutthroat in Pyramid Lake & Truckee River**

Our **Nevada Conservation VP, Tom Smith**, has been following some new changes for Pyramid Lake & spawning Lahontan Cutthroat Trout in the newly available lower Truckee River in Nevada. We are very lucky to have both the new Pilot Peak strain of CT now in Pyramid Lake, but we also now have the availability to have these fish use the lower 40+ miles of the Truckee to spawn in, which was blocked by a new dam 20 miles below Reno in 1905. The article below is one that covers the details of these new changes for the Truckee River and Pyramid Lake, and will hopefully excite you into making a visit to this wonderful fishery just north of Reno, Nevada.

Tom Smith has a note of interest: *“Something that has been forgotten by most is that the diversion of water from the Truckee River back in 1905 not only lowered the lake level at Pyramid, it completely dried up a sister lake, Winnemucca Lake. That lake is now a dried salt and sage brush flat that is just over the mountain range from Pyramid Lake on the way to Gerlach. It also contained the famous Cutthroat Trout. The Truckee River split just past Nixon, Nevada, and formed both lakes.”* Google Earth Link:

<https://earth.google.com/web/search/Winnemucca+Lake,+Nevada/>

Here's the article:

## **Return of the Lahontan Cutthroat**

by Mark Warren, Retired Chief of Fisheries, Nevada Dept. of Wildlife

The Truckee River is 121 miles in length, originating from the California side of Lake Tahoe and terminating at Pyramid Lake, located within a Paiute Indian Reservation. Along its route, it passes through Truckee, California, then turns west and flows down into Nevada and through Reno/Sparks



before journeying on to Wadsworth - 30 miles east of Reno. Here it takes a turn north and heads into Pyramid Lake.

In 1905 the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) built a dam 20 miles downstream of Reno/Sparks to divert water to a storage reservoir (Lahontan Reservoir). Lahontan Reservoir, which holds 290,000-acre feet of water, also receives water from a sister river, the Carson River. It was the dream of the Bureau of Reclamation to use this stored water to open up the area around Fallon, Nevada (60 miles east of Reno) for agriculture, and enticing people to move to the area and start farming, which they did. The downside was that with the

diversion of water out of the Truckee River, Pyramid Lake dropped 100 feet in elevation over the next forty years. As a result of this drop, the Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) were not able to navigate the delta that formed at the river terminus and they disappeared in the early 1940's. Years later the Nevada Department of Wildlife reintroduced cutthroat back into the lake where they have been thriving ever since, but supported through stocking.

Trying different strains of cutthroat, the US Fish & Wildlife Service (US FWS) experimented with a fish from a stream in Eastern Nevada, in the Pilot Peak area. This strain appeared to be linked to the original Pyramid Lake strain. A few of these fish were moved to the Lahontan Federal Hatchery just outside of Gardnerville, Nevada, spawned and the progeny stocked back into Pyramid Lake. These "Pilot Peak" fish as they are called, proved to adapt very successful and have reached sizes of up to 26 pounds in the last several years.

Hoping to allow the cutthroat access to the Truckee River and spawning ability, the US FWS and the BOR constructed a fish ladder at Derby Dam in 2001. Once the fish moved upstream and spawned, there was a chance of

a wrong turn at Derby Dam on their return to Pyramid, ending up in the Truckee Canal and eventually Lahontan Reservoir. Therefore, the fish ladder was not utilized until a screened diversion was built on the Truckee



Canal. In 2020 the fish screen was built at a cost of 34 million dollars.

It is the nation's largest horizontal fish screen. In the past several years a few of the cutthroat were observed spawning in the Truckee River below Wadsworth, Nevada, several

miles upstream from Pyramid Lake. With the new fish screen in operation, large cutthroat trout, many over 10 pounds, will be able to spawn 50 miles or more upstream of the lake.