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The rainbow's end: Removing fish to save a fishery

By KRIS MILLGATE news@postregister.com 6 hrs ago



Idaho Department of Fish and Game is removing 3,000 rainbow trout from the South Fork of the Snake River by shocking fish for faster netting.

Courtesy Kris Millgate / www.tightlinemedia.com

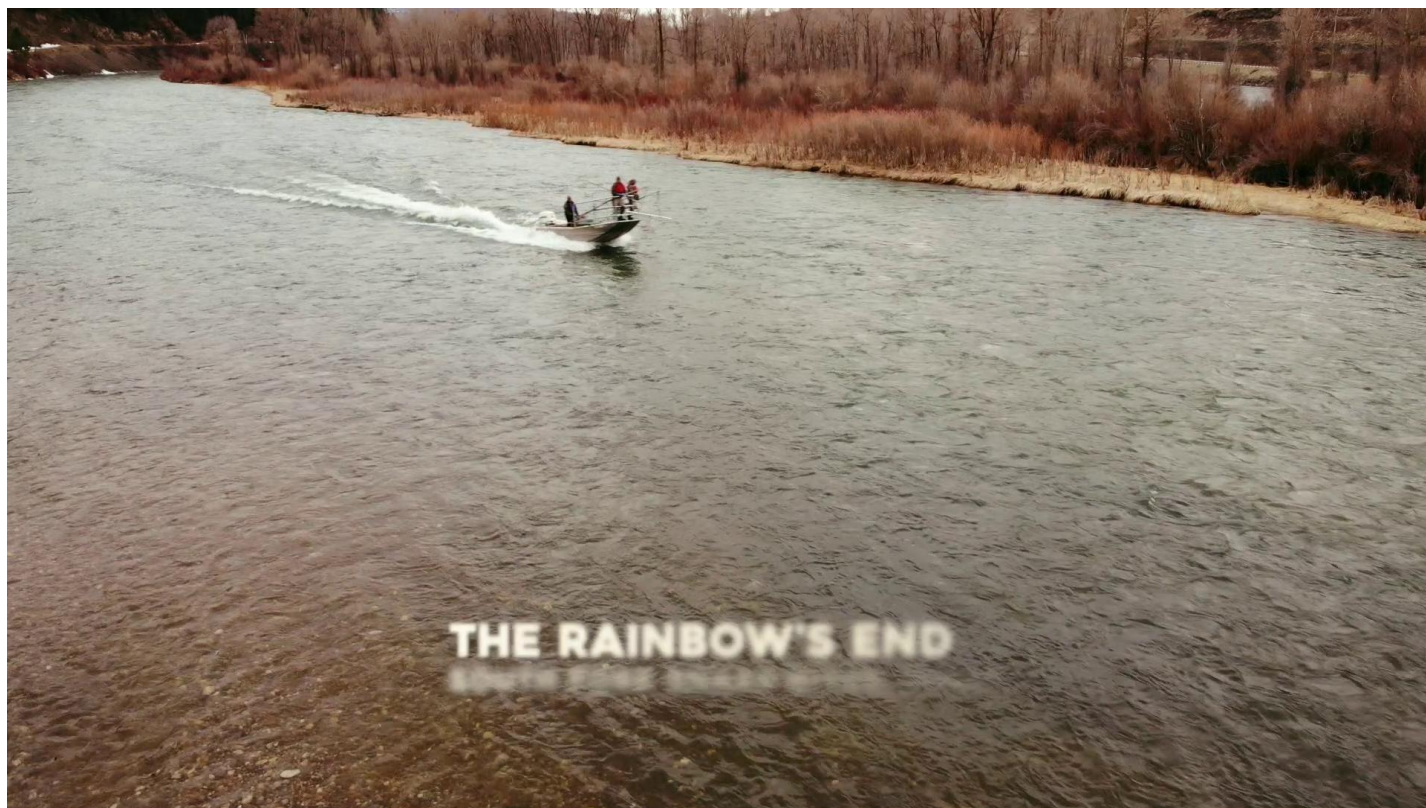
The corridor smells of gasoline. It invades noses like the sound of the rumbling generator invades ears. The loud motor electrifies probes dangling in the river off the front of a jet boat. The three men on board aren't fishing, but they're certainly catching.

"During spawning season, rainbows congregate in shallow water," says Patrick Kennedy, Idaho Department of Fish and Game fisheries biologist. "So our catch rates should be higher."

Idaho Department of Fish and Game is removing 3,000 rainbow trout from the South Fork of the Snake River to help the declining population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The 'bows, introduced decades ago, have doubled their population since 2002. They're outnumbering cutthroat and

crossbred with them. Both types of trout are wild, but only one is native.

“The South Fork is important for native Yellowstone cutthroat trout,” Kennedy says. “It’s a stronghold for them.”



Electricity running through the water shocks fish into belly-up mode for a few seconds. Netters scoop the rainbows and leave the rest to recover. The rest include whitefish, browns and cutthroat. The department wants to keep the native fishery off endangered species radar so there’s no bag limit on rainbows and some are also worth money. Removing 3,000 by month’s end is the newest tactic in the department’s efforts. It’s an aggressive move many anglers agree with, but not unanimously.

“The line of reasoning is tough for me,” says Jeff Olsen, angler, “I was never on board with data that said the cutthroat population was in danger of decline or disappearing. This system of removing, I just don’t believe in it.”

All rainbows removed are scanned for money tags worth \$50 to \$1,000. Tagged fish go back in the South Fork. Tagless fish go to Becker Pond in Idaho Falls, five minutes from Jimmy’s All Seasons Angler. Shop owner Jimmy Gabettas keeps South Fork rainbows, but some of his customers don’t.



Netted rainbows are scanned for a tag worth \$50 to \$1,000. Tagged fish go back in the river. Tagless fish go to Becker Pond in Idaho Falls.

Courtesy Kris Millgate / www.tightlinemedia.com

“People recognize they need to do their part and rainbows need to be controlled,” Gabettas says. “But there are still people who are going to let them go because they like rainbows.”

The vigorous fight of a rainbow makes more memories than the slow jerk of a cutthroat, but beyond memories there’s the money factor. The lure of recreational dollars sinks if one of Idaho’s prominent trout fisheries tanks. That’s what the department is trying to avoid regardless of angler sentiment.

“Anglers really like rainbow trout,” Kennedy says. “It’s hard to see them go. It’s hard to remove them, kill them and eat them. I can understand where that could be a concern, but I think the threat still exists to the native species.”

Outdoor journalist Kris Millgate is based in Idaho Falls where she runs trail and chases trout. Sometimes she even catches them when she doesn’t have a camera, or a kid, on her back. Her first book ‘My Place Among Men’ publishes in August. See more of her work at www.tightlinemedia.com

See the video

Read this article online to see a video of the fish netting operation in action.