

THE GIANTS OF GERRARD

The ghost town of Gerrard, located at the outlet of Trout Lake, is famous because it is here, in the Lardeau River, that the largest rainbow trout in the world return each spring to spawn.

The Gerrard spawning site is of critical importance to these trout. The Lardeau River, including tributaries, is closed to trout and char angling year round to protect these fish as they move up the river to spawn (as is the Duncan River below Duncan Dam where a much smaller population of fish is known to spawn).

In the early 1940s, the Gerrard rainbow trout population began to decline and by the mid-1950s less than 150 fish were returning to spawn. Since then, careful management combined with recovery efforts, such as Kootenay Lake fertilization, have allowed the population to recover and continue its status as a world renowned resource. The Gerrard spawning population currently numbers around 1,200-1,400 fish annually and provides an excellent viewing opportunity in late April or early May.

Spawners that return to Kootenay Lake feed voraciously and are very susceptible to angling. While anglers harvest a significant

number of Gerrard rainbow trout, they release over half the trout they catch. This allows for a sufficient number of spawners to replenish the stock. Some fish live to spawn again and at least one remarkable fish lived 14 years and spawned three times. The largest sport-caught rainbow from Kootenay Lake was 16 kilograms (35.5 pounds), taken in 1976.

The Ministry of Environment recognizes the importance of these unique rainbow trout both as a sport fish and for their intrinsic value, and focuses management on conservation strategies designed

to perpetuate the trout for the benefit of future generations. The population of Gerrard rainbow trout has rebuilt from the lows of the 1950s and can now support a small fish culture program. In this way, the Gerrard strain of rainbow may be enjoyed by anglers in a range of other locations, from large lakes and reservoirs where compromised ecosystems are being restored, to small lake put-and-take fisheries.



Barrie Kovish Photo

A beautiful pair of Gerrard rainbows preparing to spawn in Lardeau River

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