

South Fork San Joaquin River
Fishery Management Guidelines

State of California
Department of Fish and Wildlife
Heritage and Wild Trout Program
Central Region



Prepared by
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Executive summary

California Fish and Game Code (Chapter 7.2, Section 1726.4 (b)) states that it is the intent of the Legislature that “the department [specifically, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Heritage and Wild Trout Program (HWTP)], in administering its existing [heritage and] wild trout program, shall maintain an inventory of all California trout streams and lakes to determine the most suitable angling regulations for each stream or lake. The department shall determine for each stream or lake whether it should be managed as a wild trout fishery, or whether its management should involve the temporary planting of native trout species to supplement wild trout populations that is consistent with this chapter.” Section 1726.4 (b) additionally states that “biological and physical inventories prepared and maintained for each stream, stream system, or lake shall include an assessment of the resource status, threats to the continued well-being of the fishery resource, the potential for fishery resource development, and recommendations, including necessary changes in the allowed take of trout, for the development of each stream or lake to its full capacity as a fishery.”

Furthermore, California Fish and Game Code (Chapter 7.2, Section 1727 (d)) requires that the CDFW “shall prepare and complete management plans for all wild trout waters not more than three years following their initial designation by the commission, and to update the management plan every five years following completion of the initial management plan.” For clarification, wild trout waters, as stated above, represent waters that have been formally designated by the California Fish and Game Commission as Heritage and/or Wild Trout Waters.

Wild Trout Waters are those that support self-sustaining trout populations, are aesthetically pleasing and environmentally productive, provide adequate catch rates in terms of numbers or size of trout, and are open to public angling. Wild Trout Waters may not be stocked with catchable-sized hatchery trout. Heritage Trout Waters are a sub-set of Wild Trout Waters that highlight wild populations of native California trout found within their historic drainages.

In an effort to comply with existing policy and mandates, the HWTP has prepared these fishery management guidelines for the South Fork San Joaquin River and Piute Creek drainages. This document is intended largely as an operations guide for internal planning purposes to communicate management direction to the public, other agencies, and trout angling organizations. These guidelines are intended to provide direction and list actions necessary to sustain the recreational fishery for the benefit and enjoyment of the angling public. However, actions associated with this guidance document are initiated independently, thus any environmental review/permits needed to implement the actions are separate from this guidance document itself.

Resource status

Area description

The designated Wild Trout section of the South Fork San Joaquin River extends from Florence Lake upstream to the boundary of Kings Canyon National Park, including all tributaries, most notably the Piute Creek drainage (Fresno County). This designation includes approximately 156 miles of perennial stream habitat. The drainage originates at an elevation of approximately 3500 meters in the Goddard Canyon of Kings Canyon National Park and flows in a north-northwest direction for approximately 20 miles before emptying into Florence Lake. Historically, portions of this watershed may have been fishless. The designated section is within the John Muir Wilderness Area, which is administered by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Sierra National Forest (Figure 1).

Land ownership/administration

Most of the South Fork San Joaquin River designated Wild Trout section is located within public lands; however, the Muir Trail Ranch, a private 200 acre parcel, is located 5.5 miles upstream from Florence Lake and is adjacent to the river. The Muir Trail Ranch has been open to the public since 1940. Backcountry accommodations can be reserved at the Muir Trail Ranch and food drops can be arranged for hiking the John Muir or Pacific Crest trails.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. Forest Service | <input type="checkbox"/> State Parks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bureau of Land Management | <input type="checkbox"/> National Parks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CDFW | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

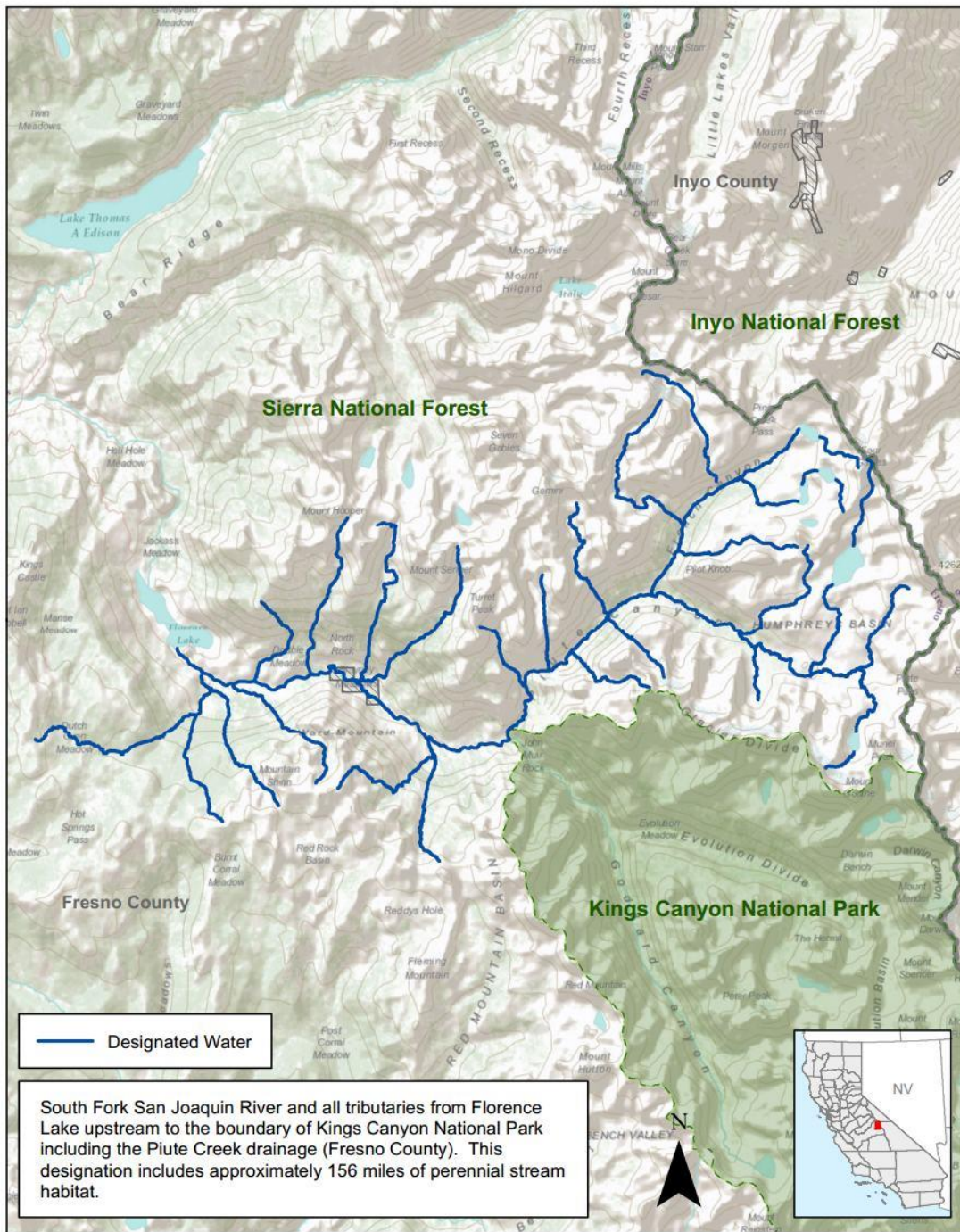
Public access

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roadside | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Remote/hike-in |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boat | |

Designations

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wild Trout Water | <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Wild and Scenic River | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wilderness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other- | |

Area maps



Fishery description

The South Fork San Joaquin River and Piute Creek watersheds offer a fast action fishery with the potential to catch trophy-sized trout (> 18 inches). The South Fork San Joaquin fishery is predominately a rainbow and brown trout fishery. A few brook trout are present and California golden trout can be found in some of the higher tributaries (Figure 2). The Piute Creek Watershed is predominately a California golden trout fishery, with a lesser number of brook trout spread throughout the main stem reach (Figure 3). Brown trout are sparse in Piute Creek and appear to be limited to the lower end, near the confluence with the South Fork San Joaquin River.

Water source(s)

- Spring Rain Snow
 Tailwater

Gradient

- Low (< 2%) Medium (2-4%) High (>4%)
 N/A

Fish species

Common name	Scientific name	Native (Y/N)	Listing status
coastal rainbow trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>	Y	none
brook trout	<i>Salvelinus fontinalis</i>	N	none
brown trout	<i>Salmo trutta</i>	N	none
golden trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss aguabonita</i>	N	none

Other aquatic species

None

Fisheries and habitat assessments

Water	Number of sections surveyed	Year(s)	Survey type	Reference data/summary report
South Fork San Joaquin River watershed	23	2008	angling	Weaver and Mehalick 2008
South Fork San Joaquin River	n/a	2008	creel survey	Weaver and Mehalick 2008

watershed				
Piute Creek	15	2009	direct observation (snorkel)	Weaver and Mehalick 2009
Piute Creek	24	2009	angling	Weaver and Mehalick 2009
Piute Creek	n/a	2009	creel survey	Weaver and Mehalick 2009
South Fork San Joaquin River	4	2010	direct observation (snorkel)	Weaver and Mehalick 2010
South Fork San Joaquin River	3	2010	angling	Weaver and Mehalick 2010
South Fork San Joaquin River	17	2011	direct observation (snorkel)	Weaver and Mehalick 2011
Sallie Keyes Lakes	1	2011	angling	Mehalick et al. 2012
Sallie Keyes Lakes	1	2012	mark-recapture	Mehalick et al. 2012
Sallie Keyes Lakes	1	2012	angler use-remote cameras	Mehalick et al. 2012

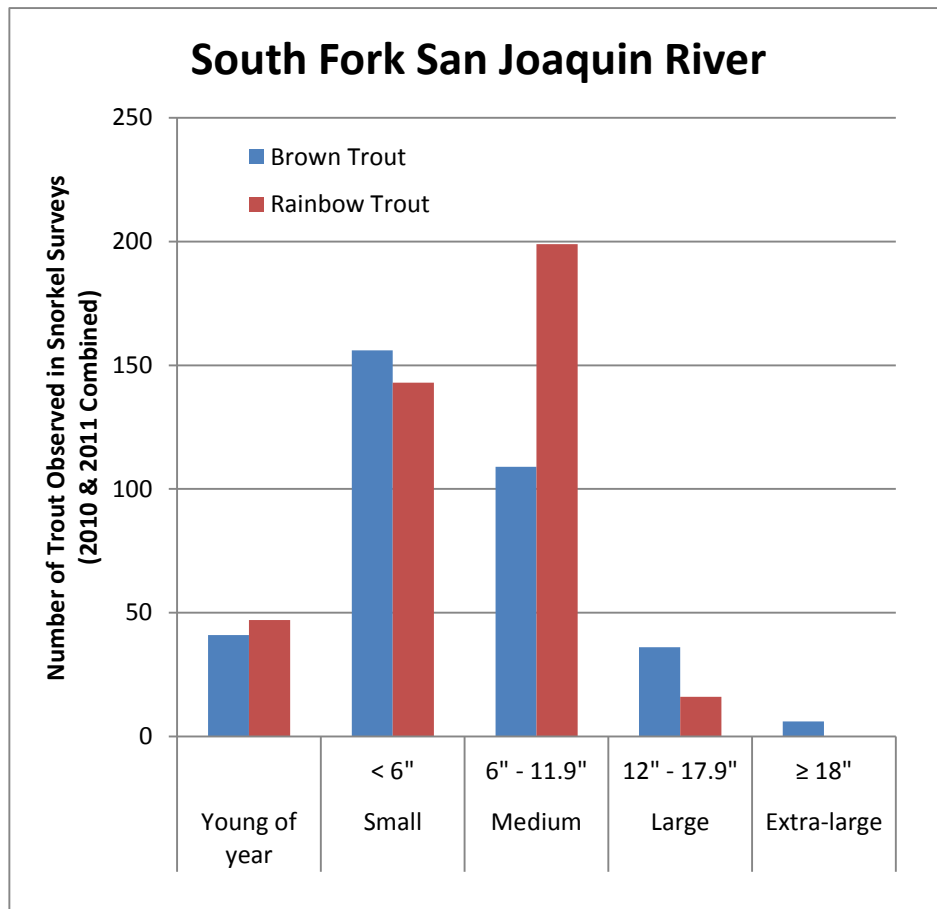


Figure 2. Rainbow and brown trout size class observed in snorkel surveys on the South Fork San Joaquin River (2010 and 2011 surveys combined).

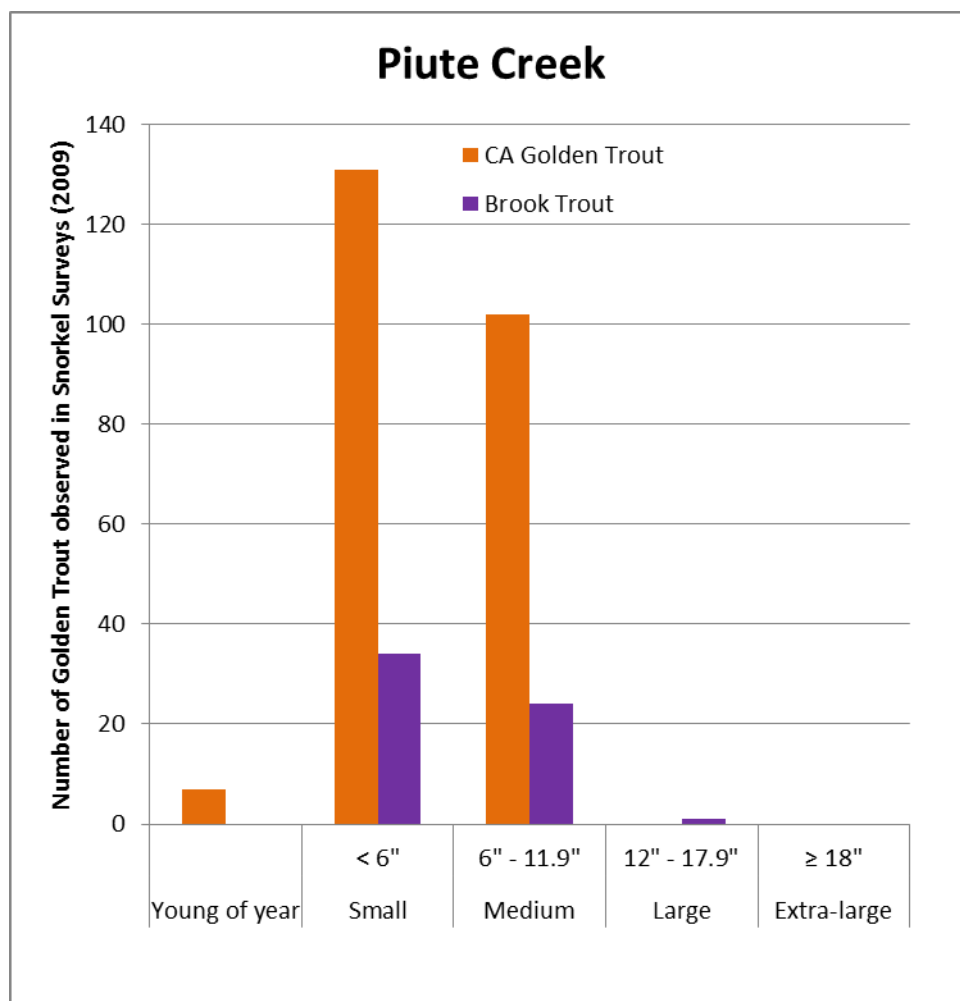


Figure 3. California golden trout and brook trout size classes observed in snorkel surveys on Piute Creek (2009).

Angler survey data

Year	Water	Number of forms analyzed	Total effort reported (hours)	Number of trout reported caught	Average catch per unit effort (fish/hour)
2011	South Fork San Joaquin River	9	37.0	103	3.1
2011	Piute Creek	2	6.0	5	0.9
2011	Senger Creek	4	12.5	52	3.4
2011	Sallie Keyes Lake	6	16.5	85	4.6

2012	Sallie Keyes Lake	1	2	8	4.0
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Angling regulations

Angling regulations for the South Fork San Joaquin and Piute Creek drainages fall under the Sierra District regulations Section 7.00 (b) (6): all other streams except those listed by name in the Special Regulations – last Saturday in April through November 15 – 5 per day bag limit, 10 in possession. Section 7.00 (b) (8) (B) In the Sierra District South of Interstate 80 also applies to this fishery, where up to 10 brook trout per day less than 10 inches total length may be taken and possessed in addition to the other daily bag and possession limits specified for the Sierra District. This allowance does not include Red Lake in Alpine County or Kirman, Lane or Roosevelt Lakes in Mono County.

Known stressors

The Wild Trout reach of the South Fork San Joaquin and Piute Creek drainages is located within federal wilderness, which is a highly protective land use designation. Although hiking and backpacking are very popular activities in this area, particularly with the John Muir and Pacific Crest trails paralleling the South Fork San Joaquin River for about two miles within the designated reach, angling pressure is thought to be low. Aquatic, riparian and upland habitats appear to be pristine throughout the designated reach, with the exception of an unimproved road for intermittent motorized vehicle use from Florence Lake to the Muir Trail Ranch. No other stressors are known to exist.

Management

Management goals and objectives

- Fast action (catch rates \geq 2 fish/hour)
- Trophy (trout \geq 18 inches)
- Heritage trout
- Other

Monitoring

Water	Date range (month/year)	Survey type	Survey interval
South Fork San Joaquin	2010	Hook-and-Line	10 Years
Piute Creek	2009	Hook-and-Line	10 Years

Angling regulations

Current angling regulations for the South Fork San Joaquin and Piute Creek drainages fall under the Sierra District general regulations. CDFW will monitor the South Fork San Joaquin fishery along with angler satisfaction/preferences to determine if the Sierra District general regulations are adequate in maintaining the proposed management goals, or if a special fishing regulation is warranted. Regulations will be used in an adaptive manner to optimize angler opportunities, while adhering to the management goals and objectives set forth in these guidelines.

Addressing stressors

No stressors are known to exist.

Adaptive strategies

This guidance document provides background information and management direction for wild trout resources in the South Fork San Joaquin and Piute Creek drainages. These management recommendations are based on existing conditions and should be used in accordance with updated information over time. Long-term monitoring of the fishery and associated angler preferences should play a critical role in future management prescriptions. Any changes to the prescribed management goals and objectives should be based on updated quantifiable data, stakeholder input, HWTP Policy (Bloom and Weaver 2008), the Strategic Plan for Trout Management (Hopelain and Pert 2003), and collaborative (CDFG Headquarter and Regional) HWTP review.

Acknowledgments

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References

Bloom, R. and J. Weaver. 2008. The California Heritage and Wild Trout Program Handbook (Draft). State of California Natural Resources Agency. Department of Fish and Wildlife. Heritage and Wild Trout Program. Rancho Cordova, CA.

Hopelain, J.S. and E. Pert. 2003. Strategic plan for trout management. State of California Resources Agency. Sacramento, CA.