

# Meiss Lake

## Poison brook and golden trout to introduce Lahontan cutthroat?

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A controversial proposal to poison brook and golden trout in the Meiss Lake area and introduce the native Lahontan cutthroat trout is due for a final decision by the end of July, according to a just-released U.S. Forest Service report.

The draft environmental report on the proposal concludes only minor impacts would result from the project despite concerns over water quality and the loss of brook trout fishing.

Waters to be poisoned include the headwaters of the Upper Truckee River, Meiss Lake and the Four Lakes, located 14 miles south of Lake Tahoe on the border of El Dorado and Alpine counties. Roughly four to six miles of stream and 37 surface acres of lake would be affected.

If the plan is OK'd, the initial fish kill would take place in late September or October of this year and be repeated in 1985 and possibly again in 1986. Only after all the brook and golden trout are eliminated would Lahontans be stocked, said Steve Widowski, a Forest Service wildlife biologist. Each annual treatment would last from four to 10 days.

The estimated cost of the project, which would include the use of California Department of Fish and Game personnel, would be between \$20,000 and \$32,000.

The Lahontan cutthroat, a native to Eastern California and Northern Nevada, has been eliminated from much of its range including the Lake Tahoe Basin and is now considered a threatened species.

Heavy commercial fishing, the building of reservoirs, water diversions and the introduction of non-native trout have led to the Lahontan's decline, say wildlife officials.

Once the principal species in Lake Tahoe, the Lahontan cutthroat was unable to compete with the rainbow, brown and mackinaw trout introduced into the lake by man.

In the smaller lakes and streams, competition from the non-native brook trout wiped out the Lahontan.

Today, only two miles of Pole Creek north of Squaw Valley and the 700-acre Independence Lake still support Lahontans in the Truckee River system.

The Lahontan project is the result of a Forest Service policy to re-establish threatened species in their native habitat.

The issue is of concern to some local fisherman, most of whom prefer the brook trout over the cutthroat.

"A lot of people are concerned about it," said Jack Martin, a fishing expert with the Outdoorsman in South Lake Tahoe. "I think it's stupid myself but I suppose they know what they're doing."

Martin said perhaps 15 or 20 people have complained to him about the project. Martin said the reason is the brook trout tastes better and is easier to catch than the cutthroat.

However, since few fisherman use the headwaters of the Upper Truckee and Meiss Lake, Martin predicted the loss of brook trout there would not be that big an issue.

The poisoning of fish in the Meiss country would result in a brook trout population drop of 6 percent in lakes and 12 percent in streams in the Tahoe Basin, according to the Forest Service environmental report. Golden trout populations in the basin would drop by 25 percent.

Along with the loss of brook and golden trout, the major concern over the

project is what effect the poison would have on water quality for downstream users.

Rotenone, a poison derived from the roots of a tropical plant, was originally used by primitive peoples to stun and kill fish. Dilute mixtures of the poison would be used to kill the trout while potassium permanganate would be used to detoxify the waters afterward.

Because the poison would only be used in small doses, no effect on people using the water downstream is anticipated, states the report. Although no water quality standards would be exceeded downstream, a bad taste and smell from the poisons could result, says the report.

People would be warned by signs and through the media to avoid contact with the poisoned water in the project area.

The rotenone would be shipped and used in small containers to prevent large spills and officials would be on hand 24 hours a day if necessary to monitor the project.

Officials estimate it would take three to five years to re-establish the cutthroat in the Meiss country waters.

The area would remain open to fishermen, campers and others during that time.

One of the problems yet to be resolved is what to do with the estimated 750 to 1,300 pounds of dead fish.

The alternatives are to bury the fish nearby which could affect water quality or fly them out of the basin aboard helicopters which could cost an additional \$6,000 to \$8,000.

The final decision on the Lahontan project rests with William Morgan, supervisor of the Forest Service's Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

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