

## Trout Site – Cut-bow Trout

Is the Cut-bow Hybrid a blessing or curse?  
By Bob Willis

You first get a sense that there is some question about this hybrid when you see that the name is spelled cutbow or cut-bow. There are some states that are working hard to remove these fish from traditional Cutthroat areas and other states that are stocking the fish. Anglers usually enjoy catching the fish because they fight like Rainbow and have some of the pretty coloration of the native Cutthroat. Cut-bows can get extremely large, and they are very hardy.



This is a fairly typical Cut-bow. Rainbow marking with a red slash under the mouth.

How can it be bad to have a fish that is pretty, aggressive, a great fighter, and fairly hardy in trout waters? The greatest problem is that they breed the native Cutthroat out of existence and Rainbow will breed with Cutthroat wherever both fish exist. Most of the state Wildlife Agencies recognized this problem several years ago and have taken steps to remove Rainbow and Cut-bows from some of the native Cutthroat areas. These efforts have allowed the reestablishment of native Cutthroat populations in some states. Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, and Colorado all have programs to restore a variety of native Cutthroat subspecies to their traditional ranges. In my view, the creation of Cut-bow either intentionally or unintentionally is not a good thing. I have caught lots of Cut-bows over the years from living and fishing out west and they were fun, exciting fish, but the price for having those fish around is too steep. Native Cutthroat are truly wonderful fish and all of the Cutthroat range has been reduced, and two of the subspecies are now extinct.

Where do we go from here on Cut-bow Trout? I think all of us need to totally support State Wildlife Agency efforts to restore native Cutthroat Trout to their historic ranges. We also need to encourage Wildlife Agencies to separate Rainbow populations from Cutthroat. This is not an easy task because Rainbows have been introduced throughout the west, and it will be difficult if not impossible to separate the two species. The bottom line is that there will continue to be Cut-bows and in some areas they will take over the historic Cutthroat ranges.

Cut-bows tend to be a little more aggressive than Cutthroat and jump like Rainbow. They are strong and will often make long runs. I have always done well with nymph patterns with Cut-bow, Rainbow, and Cutthroat and that is a consistent theme. I have also caught them on dry fly patterns. The nymph pattern depends upon what is in the local water, but stonefly, caddis fly, and damselfly patterns seem to be the best. Black and brown are good for stones, and caddis, with

green and brown working well for damsel nymphs. It seems that I have always caught more Cutthroat and Cut-bows on nymphs but the largest fish have hit minnow imitations.

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There are as many color variations of Cut-bows as there are subspecies of Cutthroat Trout.

There is no good answer for this dilemma, but I do know that we have to save as many of the Cutthroat subspecies as possible. They may not be as great a fighter as the Cut-bow, but they were here first and deserve to have their share of the trout territory. Cut-bows have many great characteristics, but do have one serious drawback that makes them an unwanted fish in some areas. So enjoy them where you catch them, but let's keep them away from the native Cutthroat areas. It might be possible to have Rainbow and Cut-bows together, and that could lead to exciting fishing and very pretty fish. It is hard to believe that such a pretty fish can cause problems.

Cut-bow are a kick to catch and pretty, but their existence causes problems. There is more information and fly patterns that work in the book and e-book **Trout Adventures – North America**. The book and e-book will be available from Wilderness Adventures Press sometime in 2012. This publisher specializes in fly fishing books and their e-mail is [www.wildadvpress.com](http://www.wildadvpress.com).