



# FISHING IN YELLOWSTONE



With its seemingly endless collection of lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds, it comes as no surprise that Yellowstone is one of the United States' best fishing destinations and has been since the park was created in 1872.

Even though it is the ancestral home to Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout, grayling, and mountain whitefish, approximately 40 percent of Yellowstone's waters were once fishless. In an effort to increase recreational opportunities and create more food for visitors, the government implemented a stocking program that ran from 1889 to 1958, adding brook, rainbow, brown, and lake trout to many of the park's waters. Though the park is now working to reverse some of the damage done by introducing these non-native species to the native cutthroat trout and grayling populations, the addition of these non-native fish has created great fishing opportunities throughout.

Paralleling the road from Madison Junction to West Yellowstone, the Madison River can be a fly fisherman's dream or nightmare. Part chalk stream and part riffle, to fish this river with its undercut banks, ever-changing bottom, tricky crosscurrents, and wary fish takes the utmost skill and patience. The non-native brown and rainbow trout aren't usually huge, but the addition of these non-native fish has drawn anglers from all over the world hoping to catch the big one on a soft hackle or flashy streamer.

Flowing into the Madison is the Firehole River, which provides one of the most unique fishing experiences in the world. Meandering past geysers and hot springs, the river's thermal-heated water creates great early- and late-season dry fly fishing for the trout that call this waterway home. Also a feeder of the Madison, the Gibbon River offers a nice mix of pocket, pool, and meadow fishing for anglers of all skill levels.

Yellowstone Lake and the Yellowstone River, which flows out of it, dominate fishing on the eastern side of the park. The lake is home to voracious lake trout, which are usually caught with spoons and heavy lures fished deep from a boat. Because of their threat to native cutthroat populations, all lake trout caught in Yellowstone Lake and its tributaries must be killed (see page 69). From Yellowstone Lake to the town of Gardiner, the Yellowstone River features a list of hatches almost as long as the river itself, making it possibly the park's most fishable river.

On the Northern Range, where the native cutthroat's populations are the strongest, the Lamar River and Soda Butte and Slough creeks are popular waters to fish after they clear from runoff in early summer all the way to late fall. Though they see some good hatches of drakes and PMDs, all these waters travel through open meadows and therefore often fish best using terrestrial patterns like grasshoppers and ants. Though less well known, the Gardner River, which runs from above Mammoth Hot Springs to the town of Gardiner, Montana, just outside the park, is a productive mountain stream, especially in the fall when migratory browns push into the river from the Yellowstone.

From Bechler (see page 41) in the south to the Yellowstone in the north, wherever you choose to cast a line it is important that you understand the park's fishing regulations. While the season runs from the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend in May to the first Sunday of November, there are other closures and rules about catch-and-release, harvest limits, tackle usage, and boating regulations that must be followed to protect you, the fisheries, wildlife, and the park's ecosystem. Also remember a current Yellowstone Fishing Permit, which can be purchased at park visitor centers and general stores as well as local fly shops, is required for any fisherman age 16 or older. For more guidelines, see attached fish regulations from the park website:

**A YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK FISHING PERMIT IS REQUIRED TO FISH IN THE PARK.** Anglers 16 years of age and older are required to purchase either a \$18 three-day permit, a \$25 seven-day permit or a \$40 season permit (PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE).

## ANGLERS 15 AND YOUNGER HAVE TWO OPTIONS

- 1 Children 15 and younger may fish without a permit if they are fishing under the direct supervision of an adult who has a valid park fishing permit, or
- 2 Children 15 and younger may obtain a free permit that must be signed by a responsible adult; with this permit, a child can fish without direct adult supervision.

Fishing permits are available at all ranger stations, visitor centers, and Yellowstone Park General Stores. Fishing permits are also available at many businesses in the Greater Yellowstone Area. **No state fishing license is required in Yellowstone National Park.**