

**Alberta Conservation Association**  
**2023/24 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Native Trout Recovery Evaluation

**Fisheries Program Manager:** Peter Aku

**Project Leader:** Nikita Lebedynski

**Primary ACA Staff on Project:** Troy Furukawa, David Jackson, Nikita Lebedynski, Ariel Schlereth, and Scott Seward

**Partnerships**

Alberta Native Trout Collaborative  
Canadian Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk  
Government of Alberta

**Key Findings**

- We surveyed 51 sites across five Wildhay River sub-watersheds: Pinto Creek, Jarvis Creek, South Wildhay River, Middle Wildhay River, and Lower Wildhay River.
- We captured 183 fish consisting of seven species: bull trout, burbot, Iowa darter, rainbow trout, spoonhead sculpin, white sucker, and yellow perch.
- Athabasca rainbow trout were the most abundant and widely distributed fish species caught in four of five sub-watersheds surveyed in 2023.

**Details**

Athabasca rainbow trout and bull trout are listed under the *Species at Risk Act*, which identifies many anthropogenic threats to native trout in the province. Alberta's Native Trout Collaborative is a group of government and non-government organizations tasked with assessing native trout populations and promoting recovery of at-risk populations. Through this collaborative, the Wildhay River watershed was identified as a priority for native trout population assessment. Field work was divided evenly between the summers of 2022 and 2023.

In 2023, we sampled five sub-watersheds in the Wildhay River system using backpack electrofishing gear: Pinto Creek, Jarvis Creek, South Wildhay River, Middle Wildhay River, and Lower Wildhay River. We selected sample sites from points placed along second- to fifth-order streams using a spatially balanced design. Ten sites and five alternate sites were selected for each sub-watershed. Dry or inaccessible sites were considered non-response and an alternate site was used. Sites were 300 m in length, and we counted all captured fish by species and measured weight (g) and fork length (FL; mm).

From July 24 to August 25, 2023, we surveyed 51 sites and captured 183 fish at 19 sites across all sub-watersheds. Rainbow trout were the most abundant (n=168) and widely distributed species captured in all sub-watersheds except Jarvis Creek. Rainbow trout ranged from 44–259 mm FL and 1–206 g. Bull trout (n=3) were captured at three sites across two sub-watersheds, Middle and Lower Wildhay River. Bull trout ranged from 63–255 mm FL and 63–161 g. Other species captured were burbot (n=7), Iowa darter (n=1), spoonhead sculpin (n=2), white sucker (n=1), and yellow perch (n=1).

This is the second and final year of the project; a detailed project report of both years will be available in April 2024. Project results will provide up-to-date information on the population status of native Athabasca rainbow trout and bull trout in the Wildhay River watershed and help prioritize recovery efforts in the watershed.

## Photos



Photo 1. Rainbow trout resting in a stream after being released. Photo: Nikita Lebedynski



Photo 2. Alberta Conservation Association staff, Scott Seward and Nikita Lebedynski, backpack electrofishing a stream in the South Wildhay River sub-watershed. Photo: Ariel Schlereth





Photo 3. Alberta Conservation Association staff, Ariel Schlereth and Scott Seward, processing captured fish in the Wildhay River watershed. Photo: Nikita Lebedynski