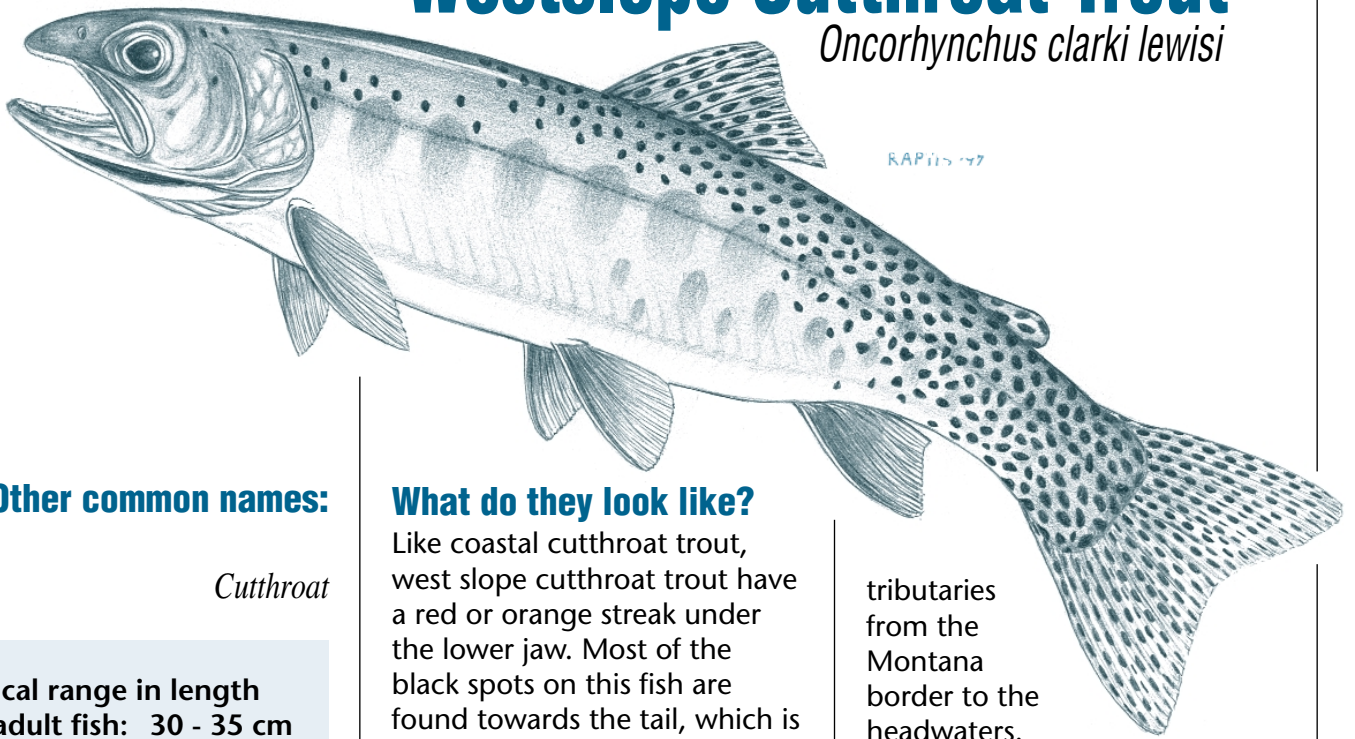


# B.C. Fish facts

## Westslope Cutthroat Trout

*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*



### Other common names:

*Cutthroat*

Typical range in length  
for adult fish: 30 - 35 cm  
Maximum length 52 cm

Typical range in weight  
for adult fish: 0.3 - 0.5 kg  
Maximum weight 2 kg  
Maximum weight: 9 kg

### What do they look like?

Like coastal cutthroat trout, west slope cutthroat trout have a red or orange streak under the lower jaw. Most of the black spots on this fish are found towards the tail, which is usually heavily spotted and yellowish in colour. They are generally silver coloured with yellowish tints, but can have very bright yellow, orange or red colours, especially males during the spawning season. Unlike rainbow trout they have small teeth at the base of the tongue. Like all salmonids, they have an adipose fin, a soft, fleshy fin on the back.

### Where do they live?

As their name suggests they are found along the west slopes of the Rocky Mountains. In British Columbia, westslope cutthroat can be found in the upper Kootenay River and its

tributaries from the Montana border to the headwaters.

They are also present in the Flathead River drainage system in the southeast corner of the province and in the upper Columbia River tributaries, upstream of Kinbasket Reservoir. A few isolated populations also exist in the Kootenays and Okanagan, and in North-Central Washington. The young spend their early life in gravelly spawning streams, while adults can be found in lakes, as well as streams and rivers. They can occur in mountain lakes and streams above 2,400 metres in elevation.

## What do they eat?

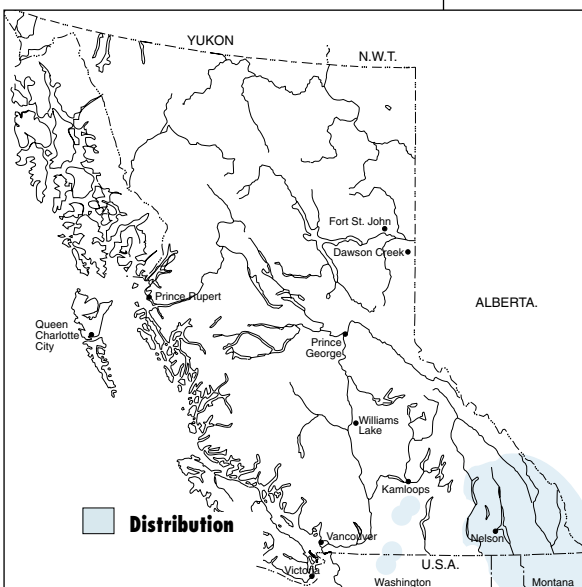
This fish feeds mainly on invertebrates such as aquatic insect larvae. Grasshoppers are also a favourite food during August and September. The westslope cutthroat is not a predator of other fish.

## What is their life cycle like?

Adults may have one of three different lifestyles: migrating between lakes and streams, fluvial migrating between main rivers and smaller streams, fluvial or stream resident. These fish spawn in the spring (May through June) about three to five weeks after the ice breaks up. Eggs are laid and fertilized in a 'redd', a gravel nest built by the female. In six or seven weeks, the eggs hatch and after another week or so the fry leave the nest and are free-swimming.

## How are they doing?

The westslope cutthroat trout is a blue-listed species, which means it is considered vulnerable in British Columbia. The range of this fish has been



greatly reduced. Competition with non-native fish species is one factor in the shrinkage of its distribution. It has been eliminated in some areas where brook trout have been introduced and it also hybridizes readily with introduced rainbow trout. Over-harvesting and habitat damage are other factors that affect the health of some populations.

## How you can help:

- Cutthroat trout are very susceptible to over-fishing, so the use of a barbless hook and practicing catch and release are recommended.
- It is important to obey angling regulations and habitat protection bylaws, guidelines and regulations, since they were designed to protect the fish and their habitat. You should also Observe, Record and Report violations of the regulations by phoning 1-800-663-9453.
- They are also highly vulnerable to human activities which alter stream flow, increase stream sedimentation, reduce cover or raise water temperature. If you own property bordering a stream, try to protect the streamside vegetation which provides shade and

prevents the bank from eroding.

- Form a group of water stewards and volunteer to monitor local water quality.
- Be aware that what you dump into your septic tank or roadside storm drain may find its way into streams or lakes. Help keep water quality high by using detergents and soaps minimally and do not dump harsh chemicals, such as bleach, paint thinners or antifreeze, into drains.

## No Kidding!

- Westslope cutthroat trout can attain lengths of over 50 cm in some of the larger, more productive rivers in the East Kootenays.
- One well-known tagged fish has been caught and released four times in 12 months from the same pool on the St. Mary River.

