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The Yampa River: Growing Up

by Karen Christopherson

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Maybe you haven't noticed, but the Yampa River is maturing into one of Colorado's better Rainbow Trout streams. The trout are prospering, and some state anglers are finding some large 'bows on the ends of their lines. The brown trout aren't doing bad either. These 'large trout' waters are found close to or in Steamboat Springs.

There are several reasons for the quiet growth in population and size of these trout. Among them are the vast stream improvements done to parts of the Yampa near Steamboat Springs, and the progressive adaptation into the relatively-new Stagecoach Reservoir tailwater. Although the dam was completed, and reservoir filled, by 1991, it takes many years for the habitat to become established.



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Scott Murdoch with a 23.75" Rainbow (photo courtesy Scott Murdoch)

And established it has! Just take a trip to the Stagecoach tailwater and peer into the water. As your polarized-lensed eyes adjust, you will see movement. The rainbows are enormous! How did these cousins of the Cheesman and Taylor rainbows travel this far? These cousins have also gone to school, so have your small flies, fluorocarbon leaders, and quiet presentations ready. Bring a large dose of patience too, and enjoy the surroundings. When your patience gives out, move downstream. There are public access points on State Wildlife Areas (SWAs) and town properties just a few miles away.

The Yampa tailwater below Stagecoach Reservoir



Closer to town, and within Steamboat proper, you'll find some great access. This is where many of the large-trout photos are taken. Most anglers won't disclose their secret spots, and neither will I. But suffice it to say that there are several public parks along the river. Do some of your own detective work, scouting from the ski area all the way thru Steamboat to the west end of town. You'll find the places. There's a paved trail that runs along or near the river called the 'Yampa Core Trail'. This is one good way to find access.



Scott Murdoch with a 24.5" Brown (*photo courtesy Scott Murdoch*)

Downstream from Steamboat, the Yampa is best floated. There's less public access, and the flows are a bit higher. Like Pike? You'll find them downstream. For info on floating, see another article on the Yampa River [by clicking here](#).

Resources/Other Info:



- Buy a digital fishing map for the Yampa River - includes access all the way from the headwaters of Bear River to Dinosaur Nat'l Mounment [Click here](#) for info or to purchase.



- Buy an ebook on CD: Fifty Colorado Tailwaters: A Fly Fisher's Guide [Click here](#) for info or to purchase. Includes the tailwater on the Yampa below Stagecoach Reservoir.



- [Click here](#) to buy a NEW Ebook about Trout fishing on Colorado State lands - includes a lot of info about the Yampa River and area, including the several state parks and state wildlife areas.



- [Click here](#) to buy topo maps for this area. You need map 118 for Steamboat and Stagecoach Res. Maps 122 and 119 cover the headwaters to east of Oak Creek. Map 220 covers Dinosaur Nat'l Monument
- See the website for [State Parks of Colorado - Info on Yampa River and Stagecoach State Parks](#)

Rules for the Yampa

- Catch and release for 2 areas: Stagecoach Dam downstream for 0.6 miles; and Walton Creek downstream to James Brown bridge in Steamboat
- Fishing with artificial flies and lures for 2 areas: Stagecoach Dam to Catamount Lake; and Walton Creek

- downstream to James Brown bridge in Steamboat
- State regs on rest of the river in Colorado. Except, no bag and possession limit from Hwy 394 bridge near Craig downstream to Green River for channel catfish, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye, green sunfish, bluegill, bullhead, and crappie.

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