



Gila Trout

Gila trout have been described as “taking their colors from the New Mexican sunset”, an apt description. Their iridescent gold sides blend to a darker shade of copper on the gill covers. Small, profuse spots cover the upper half of the body and a faint, salmon-pink band is present on adults, particularly during spawning season. A yellow cutthroat mark is present on most larger fish and parr marks are commonly found on adults. Because Gila trout are often found in small streams, they rarely grow larger than 12 inches.

In New Mexico, the heart of Gila trout habitat is the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas. These areas of the Gila National Forest contain nearly the entire currently occupied habitat of the Gila trout. The Gila is a vast area of perennial rivers, steep walled canyons, rolling grasslands, dry uplands of juniper and pinyon pine, forests of ponderosa pine, aspen groves, and high mountains of spruce and fir. Gila trout inhabit coldwater mountain streams, hunting insects and hiding in fallen branches and undercut banks; finding refuge in pools fed by groundwater seeps during droughts. Gila trout typically spawn in early spring, when water temperatures are rising. They sexually mature by age 3 and live between 4 and 6 years. Gila trout are capable of hybridizing with rainbow trout which has greatly reduced the range of pure Gila trout.