

## Regulations Can and Do Improve The Quality of Fishing Experiences

From time to time, all anglers question the necessity of introducing increasingly detailed regulations. In making their decisions, regional fisheries managers balance conservation needs with the goal of maintaining as many angling opportunities as possible. An example of this is the effort to restore the cutthroat trout fishery in the East Kootenay. New management regimes have proven so successful that several rivers now merit an international reputation for westslope cutthroat trout.

Prior to the 1980s, anglers could fish most



rivers and streams in the region twelve months of the year. The daily limit for trout and char was eight with a possession limit of 24. The use of bait was allowed, and there were no size or gear restrictions and no closures to protect over-wintering or spawning fish.

Two-year rotating closures on the St. Mary and Wigwam rivers in the early 1980s initiated a management experiment and proved that these systems could produce more and

bigger fish. Since then, a number of conservation regulations have been introduced and refined to improve the size and catch rate of these uniquely spotted trout.

To further improve fishing opportunities, other measures were introduced selectively over the years: single hooks; bait bans; spawning closures; fly-fishing-only; and, catch-and-release strategies. By the early 1990s, fishing success for these naturally-recruiting stocks improved so dramatically that similar regimes were introduced on other Kootenay streams.

Wigwam River creel surveys indicate that catch rates have more than doubled in the past ten years. Fish size also increased, from an average of 26 cm in the early 1980s to 34 cm in the 1990s, with larger cutthroat ranging up to 50 cm.

Recently introduced catch-and-release restrictions have proven beneficial to the Wigwam River bull trout as well. In response to these and other measures, the number of spawning redds of these trans-boundary fish increased dramatically. Today, the gains made in this river have once again afforded a modest harvest for these very large char.

Over the years, detailed management decisions have resulted in more fish for more anglers in the Kootenays. Among the challenges for the future will be how to carefully manage fishing pressure to maintain a quality fishing experience for all anglers.



### Angling For East Kootenay Cutthroat

During the June 15 - October 31 season, cutthroat trout display a decided penchant for dry flies presented hard to river banks with 4 - 6 weight fly rods and floating fly line. The Elk River, with its easy access from Highway 3 which parallels its course for 65 kilometers (40 miles), reaches peak activity in August and September. Larger flies that represent terrestrial insects such as grasshoppers find greatest favour with anglers.

Kootenay watersheds have successive hatches of mixed varieties. Accordingly, exact imitation is seldom required. Large deerhair presentations suggesting grasshoppers, stoneflies, nymphs and caddis flies matched with #10 - #18 size hooks should provide the angler with enough magic to charm these colourful trout.