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## **Rusty Crayfish Capture the Attention of Utah Water Users**

Vernal -- News from Colorado is capturing the attention of biologists, anglers and water managers in Utah.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) recently reported finding rusty crayfish in the Yampa River Basin.

The Yampa flows into the Green River in northeastern Utah.

In response to their discovery, the CDOW has issued an order prohibiting the removal of live crayfish from the Yampa River and any streams, lakes, canals or rivers that adjoin it.

Utah already has a similar rule for the crayfish species found in the state.

In Utah, live crayfish are on the state's prohibited list. Live crayfish cannot be collected, imported or transported anywhere without a valid Certificate of Registration from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Anglers may use crayfish as bait, but only at the same water where the anglers collected them. Crayfish caught for human consumption must be dead before they're removed from the water where they were harvested.

### **A major threat**

The rusty crayfish is an invasive species native to the Ohio River drainage. It's had negative effects on fisheries and aquatic ecosystems in the Great Lakes region, in at least 17 other states and in southern Canada.

Elizabeth Brown, invasive species coordinator for the CDOW, says the discovery of rusty crayfish in the Yampa Basin is the first time the species has been found in Colorado.

Rusty crayfish are large and aggressive. They can affect a fishery or an aquatic ecosystem two major ways:

- They consume a wide variety of forage that fish depend on. This forage includes small fish, fish eggs, vegetation and aquatic invertebrates—including many insects and other forage species that are highly desired by fish. By consuming aquatic plants and plant beds, they remove critical forage and cover needed by the fish and the invertebrates on which the fish feed.

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- Their aggressive nature will also displace native crayfish and other aquatic species from their hiding places—making them more susceptible to predation by fish. This won't affect the fish much at first because their usual prey will be easier to catch. Later, however, they'll have to deal with the rusty crayfish, which can rotate its large claws over its back to defend itself.

### Why rusty crayfish are spreading

People have moved the rusty crayfish well outside its native range.

No one has found the rusty crayfish in Utah. But Colorado's recent discovery indicates the crayfish is moving westward. Crayfish are moved several ways:

- as bait transported by anglers from one water to another or bought by anglers commercially and then introduced to a water,
- through school supply houses by teachers who raise the crayfish in class and then give them to students or release them into a nearby water,
- dumping from home aquariums,
- intentional releases by misguided anglers wanting to increase forage for their favorite fish, and
- intentional releases by commercial harvesters who want more waters in which to catch crayfish that the harvesters can later sell

### What you can do

Everyone in Utah has a responsibility to keep rusty crayfish and other invasive mussels, fish, snails, wildlife and plants from spreading into Utah's waters and wild areas. Doing so is easy. It comes down to two simple things:

- Never move any species or species parts—plant or animal—from one body of water to another body of water, or from one wild area to a different wild area.
- Make sure you **clean, drain and dry** your boat and any recreational or fishing equipment that's come in contact with the water before placing it in the water again.

This simple clean, drain and dry process is available at [www.wildlife.utah.gov/mussels/decontaminate.php](http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/mussels/decontaminate.php).

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## Catch Big Brown Trout on the Weber River

Ogden -- The temperature isn't the only thing that's heating up right now—fishing on the Weber River is heating up too.

"Fishing is better than it's been in years," says Paul Thompson.

Thompson should know. In addition to serving as the Northern Region aquatics manager for the Division of Wildlife Resources, he fishes the Weber River regularly.

"I've caught several brown trout in the 18- to 20-inch range this spring. And the mountain whitefish numbers have rebounded in reaches that were hit hard by the drought a couple of years ago," Thompson says.

In addition to catching browns and whitefish, if you fish in the Henefer, Peterson or Mountain Green areas, you might catch a nice Bonneville cutthroat trout.

"We saw numerous Bonneville cutthroat trout during electrofishing surveys we did last summer," Thompson says. "Some of the fish were up to 18 inches long. We even found a few that were over 20 inches."

Thompson has landed three Bonneville cutthroats so far this spring. The fish he caught were between 15 and 16 inches long.

You can watch a video of one of his Weber River fishing adventures at [www.youtube.com/UDWR](http://www.youtube.com/UDWR).

Fishing tips for the Weber River are available at [www.j.mp/c4d8bg](http://www.j.mp/c4d8bg) or in a DWR news release available at [www.wildlife.utah.gov/dwr/news.html](http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/dwr/news.html).

A list of points from which you can access the river is available in the same news release and at [www.j.mp/ahD0LX](http://www.j.mp/ahD0LX).

### Time to catch some fish!

If you want to get in on the action, Thompson provides the following tackle tips. He also provides information about river conditions:

### Flies and lures

Nymphs – Thompson prefers to use two nymphs in tandem. Hares ears and pheasant tails (including flashback and copper johns) are his favorite nymphs this time of year. He places the nymphs about 18 inches apart. A bead head is the type of nymph he usually places on the top of his line. Depending on how deep the water is and how fast it's flowing, you may want to add some split shot about 8 inches above the bead head fly.

Streamers – Brown trout are extremely aggressive in the Weber this time of year. Darker colors (black, olive or brown) are good colors to try.

Lures – Jigs, spinners, and crank baits also work well, especially in the spring. These lures will often entice strikes from some of the larger brown trout.

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## River conditions

Even though the Weber has been generally low and clear this spring, conditions can change on a daily basis. As the snow melts, the water level rises. The rising water level can cloud the water. And that can make it difficult for the fish to see your fly, lure or bait.

The irrigation season, which begins in mid-April, can change the water level too.

Fortunately, the Weber is a long river. If the water is off color in the first area you visit, you can often find clear water by moving upstream. A good place to find consistently clear water is the stretch between Echo and Rockport reservoirs.

And even if the water is cloudy, you can still catch fish. You just need to change your tactics. For example, if you're fly fishing, switch to streamers or larger nymphs that are in the same patterns as the streamers.

These bigger flies are easier for the fish to see.

## Lots of places to fish

In addition to using the right techniques, you also need to find a place to fish. Fortunately, the Weber River provides lots of choices!

Much of the Weber River flows over land that's privately owned. For years, DWR biologists have worked with private landowners, municipalities and non-governmental organizations to get anglers access to the river. And they've found a lot of success.

DWR Blue Ribbon Fisheries Biologist Paul Burnett lists access points to the river, starting at the bottom of the river and moving upstream:

- One example of the cooperative effort mentioned above is the lower Weber River near Ogden. The DWR and its partners have developed a non-motorized pathway—which also provides access for fishing—along the stretch that flows from Riverdale to where the Weber and Ogden rivers join. This stretch is about 5 miles long.
- Access points from the Adam's Ave. toll bridge upstream to the mouth of Weber Canyon are limited because of the alignment of I-84. However, you can access the river at the Lower Weber River Diversion and then fish upstream and downstream from there. You can also access the river at the rest area on eastbound I-84.
- It's difficult to find public access as the river flows through the Morgan Valley. However, you can fish through the town of Morgan and upstream through the Morgan County fairgrounds property.
- Just upstream from Round Valley, several access points are available along the stretch between Taggart and Devil's Slide. (Much of the river through the canyon is within the I-84 right-of-way and is open to the public to wade in or raft on.)

For example, if you exit I-84 at Exit 108 (the exit to Taggart) you'll find several access points just off the frontage road.

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You can also access the river at the Devil's Slide pullout on I-84 and by exiting I-84 at Exit 111 (the exit to Croydon).

You can wade the river upstream from Croydon. A deep channel in the river can make this walk dangerous, though.

NOTE: One thing you don't want to do is park your vehicle on I-84 and then walk to the river. Parking on I-84 is illegal; you might get a ticket.

- Several access points also await you if you want to fish the portion of the river that flows through the Henefer Valley. Much of this section is within the I-84 right-of-way and is open to the public.

The DWR owns an angler access area at Exit 112 (the first exit to Henefer). From the angler access area, you can fish for about one mile upstream to the I-84 bridge. (One you reach the bridge, you must have written permission from landowners to fish farther upstream.)

The frontage road along I-84 also provides some access points for anglers. You'll know you've found one when you see a wooden fence crossover built by the DWR.

The Coalville area also offers several access points. Just look for the fence crossovers, and you'll know you've found one.

If you want to fish upstream from Rockport Reservoir, you must have written permission from landowners.

For more information, call the DWR's Northern Region office at (801) 476-2740. Updated fishing reports for the Weber River are available at [www.wildlife.utah.gov/fishing/reports.php](http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/fishing/reports.php).

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