

park, initially purchasing the property himself. The title was transferred to the Missoula-based Five Valleys Land Trust, with additional support coming from Lincoln, Helena's Prickly Pear Land Trust, and Lewis and Clark County. Local residents maintain the park, which officially opened in October 2017.

Reflecting on the project with the *Missoulian*, Roos observed, "People are starting to believe that Lincoln has a future that's exciting and vibrant. And for the first time, it's not connected to a boom-and-bust economy."

It would be erroneous to believe the Blackfoot's conservation successes have been effortless or inevitable. It's taken years of meetings, volunteering, lobbying, fundraising, field trips, tributary restorations, and mine cleanups; people with different values and visions getting to know each other over coffee, burgers, and beer, gradually dropping suspicions and realizing they have more commonality than differences. Now a Lincoln kid can grab her fly rod and readily wade the Blackfoot—like the young Maclean brothers did—and catch a wild cutthroat blocks from home, in a revitalized river.

Deep Creek Lakes, WY

By Don Vachini

Let there be no doubt: Wyoming's Wind River Range is home to the largest golden trout in the world. Indeed, this chain of lofty mountains, which begins just south of Grand Teton National Park and terminates near Lander, has produced the 11-pound, 4-ounce all-tackle world record and also yielded fish landed in lighter line and tippet classes, between 3 and 5 pounds.

According to Kevin Johnson, a fisheries biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in Lander,

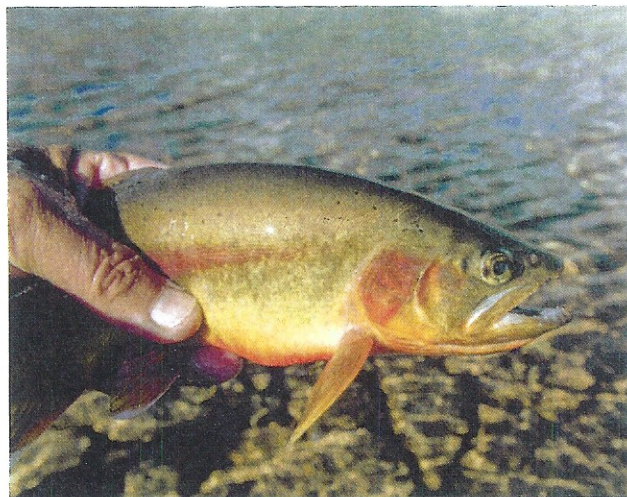


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Cowboy State *Oncorhynchus aguabonita* are managed for trophy specimens, and the Wind River mountains are highly conducive to that end, with key factors being optimum food opportunities and isolation. He says, "Most golden waters are isolated at the very head of the drainage, usually with natural barriers preventing upstream contamination by other species. Typically, these headwater basins sit 12 to 20 miles from trailheads, making for two- to three-day journeys over rugged terrain just to reach them."

For my golden pilgrimage, Johnson suggested the little-known Deep Creek Lakes, located along the southern edge of this range within the vast Popo Agie Wilderness. The three

lakes—Lower Deep Creek (10,700 feet; 55 acres), Middle

Deep Creek (10,869 feet; 65 acres), and Upper Deep Creek (10,935 feet; 75 acres)—are guarded by 13,140-foot Wind River Peak. They collect glacier melt from the eastern slope of the Continental Divide and are surrounded by snowfields, glacier-polished granite, and moderate timber. Their spillage creates Deep Creek, which feeds the Middle Fork Popo Agie River, the main stem of which becomes a Wind River tributary.

With more than 39 years of serving anglers in these wilderness lakes, Allen's Diamond 4 Ranch outfitters—(307) 332-2995, www.diamond4ranch.com—took me to the lakes. Spending the better part of a day in the saddle, we followed the North Fork Trail out of Dickinson Park, traversed swampy Sanford Park, navigated two fords of the North Fork Popo Agie River, and encountered thick stands of fir, aspen, and spruce before ascending the forested ridge above Pinto Park. A protected base camp between the twin Echo Lakes put me within a half mile of my target waters, just over the crest. Moose, elk, and black bear sightings made this land appear as primitive as when 19th-century friends and trapping partners Jim Bridger and Chief Washakie roamed it.

Turbulent and capricious continental winds buffet this trio of lakes, regularly depositing copious quantities of winged insects and terrestrials on their surfaces. *Gammarus* and phytoplankton contribute to a well-balanced diet for goldens.

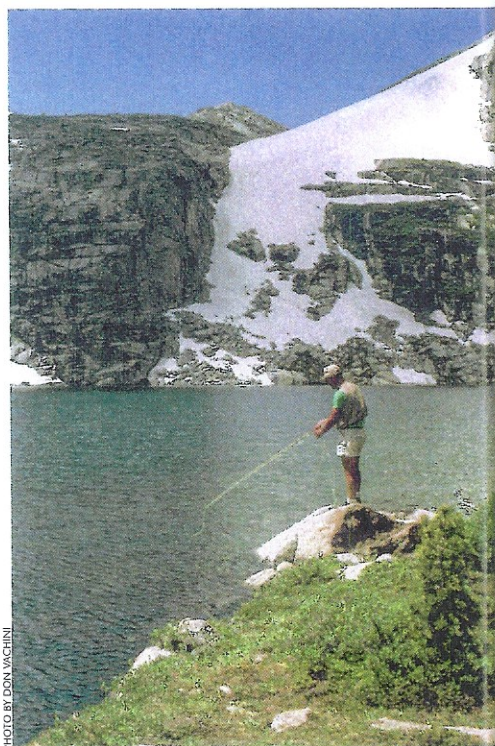


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

During early July, the well-fed, lightly pressured behemoths school to spawn in the shallow outlets, where they will occasionally rise to a size 10 to 16 Elk Hair Caddis, Parachute Adams, or Rubber Legs during the day's extremes. Red or orange egg patterns bounced through the bottom current can often provoke a midday response.

After mid-July, the trout scatter, seek the sanctuary of deeper water, and prefer to dine subsurface. Becoming somewhat difficult to tempt, they routinely cruise along steep shelves or ledges that offer protection. Meticulously probing this structure with a size 14 to 16 beadhead Caddis Pupa, Hare's Ear Nymph, Copper John, or leech pattern can stir their aggressive tendencies.

During my week-long foray, tan- and green-shaded caddisfly replicas seemed to elicit most of the responses from my challenging, 1- to 4-pound adversaries, although tediously twitching tiny orange, pink, and olive scud and midge patterns proved deadly on occasion. With strikes that often manifested as a slight tug, I had to rivet my attention on the rod tip and be ready to set the hook immediately.

A 5- or 6-weight, 10-foot outfit matched with a sinking-tip or high-density sinking line will efficiently present a range of subsurface offerings, while a floating line is a better choice when working the shallows with a dropper or indicator.

Nearby Echo, Baer, and Ice Lakes contain willing brook trout, providing an action-packed change of pace.

Topo maps of the Dickinson Park and Sweetwater Gap quadrangles will aid in route planning. From Lander, follow US Highway 287 north for 12 miles before turning left onto Trout Creek Road. Continue for 14 miles on this single-lane byway, which skirts the Wind River Indian Reservation. As the road ascends, follow numerous switchbacks to arrive at either the pack station or the Dickinson Park trailhead.

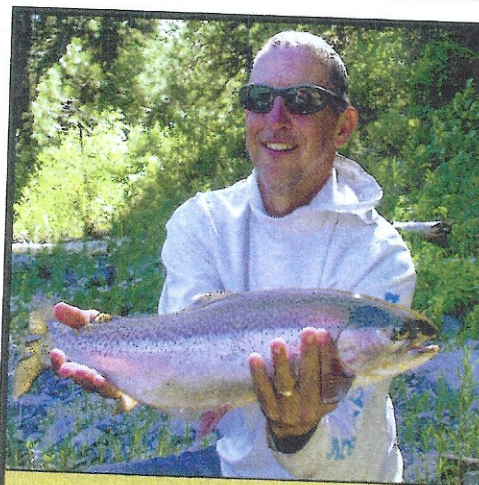
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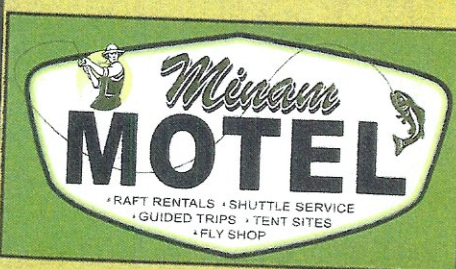
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