

Revised Classification and Taxonomy of Cutthroat Trout—An Update

The WDAFS Special Workshop Panel on Cutthroat Trout Taxonomy
Patrick Trotter, Peter Bisson, Brett Roper, and Luke Schultz, editors

Abstract

Until just recently, the Cutthroat Trout *Oncorhynchus clarkii* has been recognized as a single, widespread species composed of four “major” subspecies, two of which had split into 10 additional “minor” subspecies—14 subspecies in all—in a phylogeny first published by Robert J. Behnke in 1979. Here we report that the Names of Fishes Committee (a joint committee of the American Fisheries Society [AFS] and the American Association of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists) has accepted a proposed revision of Behnke’s phylogeny that we also reported on at the last Coastal Cutthroat Symposium held here in Newport in 2018. Per that proposal, the Names of Fishes Committee has formally elevated Behnke’s four “major” subspecies lineages to full species status: Coastal Cutthroat Trout *O. clarkii*; Lahontan Cutthroat Trout *O. henshawi*; Westslope Cutthroat Trout *O. lewisi*; and Rocky Mountain Cutthroat Trout *O. virginalis*. These common and scientific names appear in the 8th edition of AFS Special Publication 37, *Common and Scientific Names of Fishes from the United States, Canada, and Mexico*, published late in 2023.

However, while accepting the proposal to recognize Behnke’s four “major” subspecies lineages as full species, the Names of Fishes Committee opted not to address the 11 additional uniquely identifiable evolutionary subunits included in the proposal in addition to the 14 recognized by Behnke—25 subunits in all (or subspecies, if you prefer that term). The Committee remains silent on the use or validity of the subspecies designation as a trinomial part of a scientific name, preferring instead to rely on users to come up with a consensus-set of common names for these subunits. We discuss how this might be dealt with in future reports and publications, and we also share some thoughts regarding the new full-species status of Coastal Cutthroat Trout.