

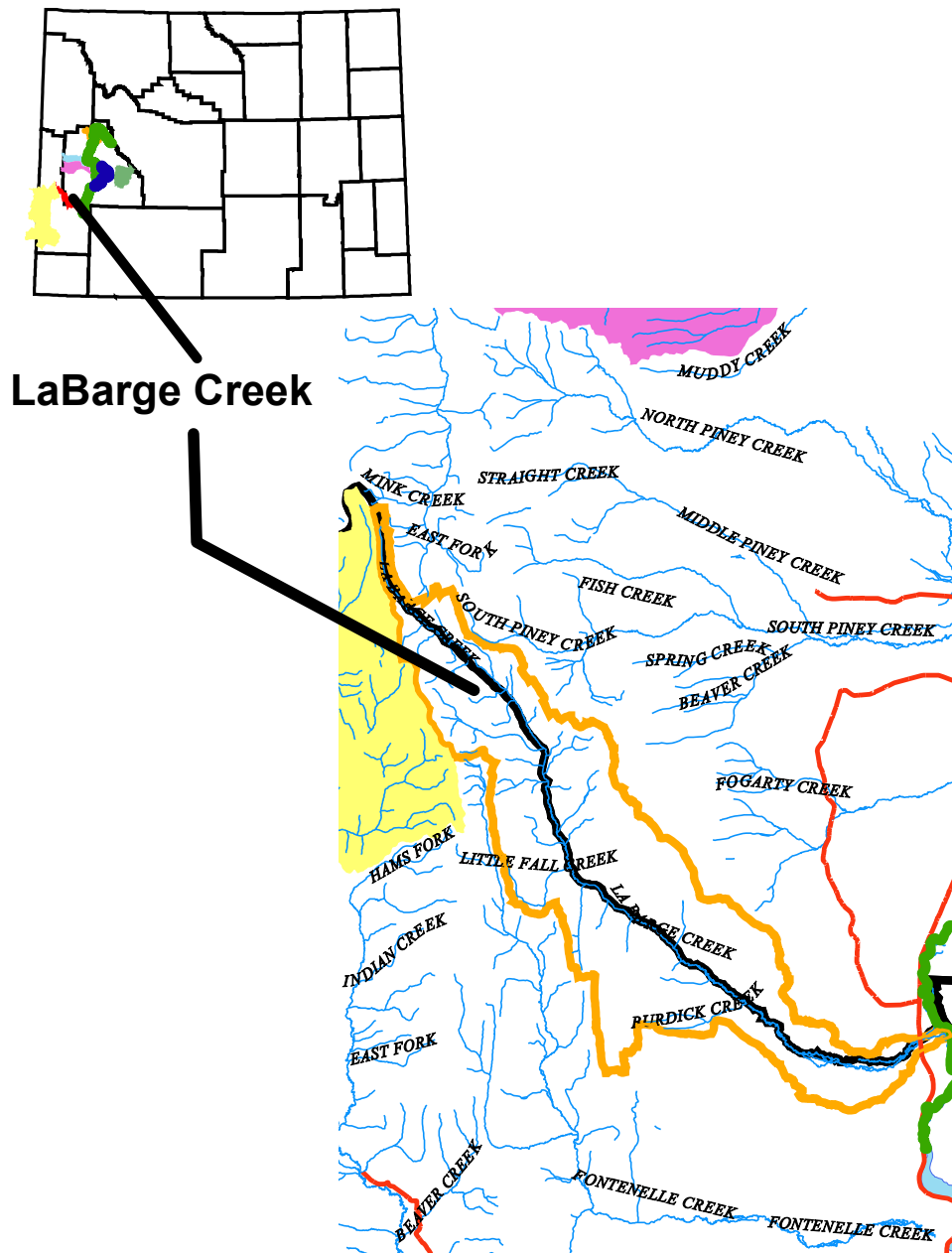
Pinedale Region Aquatic Habitat Priorities

Region: Pinedale
Watershed Name: LaBarge

Priority: 1
HUC: 1404010111

Contributors: Roadifer, Remmick, Sexauer, Cavalli

The LaBarge watershed, specifically from the ESFS boundary upstream, is the Pinedale Region's highest priority for the Fish Division. Implementation of a multiple year plan to restore native Colorado Cutthroat trout in this watershed has been initiated. LaBarge Creek drains the central portion of the east slope of the Wyoming Range. This watershed serves as the regional boundary between the Pinedale and Green River regional management areas. Implementation of a multiple year plan to restore native CRC in this watershed was initiated in 2000.



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LAND STATUS: 100% Public (to Forest boundary)

SPECIES THAT COULD BENEFIT FROM ACTIVITY IN THIS WATERSHED:

Initial restoration efforts in this watershed are focused on the native Colorado Cutthroat trout. Long-term watershed restoration efforts will provide benefits to assemblages of both native aquatic and native terrestrial wildlife species through the enhancement of watershed health and function by improving management and addressing identified vegetative succession concerns.

CURRENT HABITAT CONDITIONS/LIMITING FACTORS:

The trout population in this watershed is currently most limited by competition and hybridization with nonnative salmonid species (brook and rainbow trout). Less than optimal habitat conditions, resulting from a combination of vegetative succession and past and present human impacts (roads, grazing, timbering and, fire suppression, etc.) could limit population recovery to desirable levels. Restoration of healthy and diverse plant communities, particularly aspen and riparian, would optimize trout habitat over the long-term while providing benefits to numerous other wildlife species.

Trout cover in the free flowing reaches of most waters was low (less than 10%) except the LaBarge Meadows area and upper Spring Creek No. 2 (22%). Much of the LaBarge Creek channel is relatively straight below the meadows and has few beaver ponds. An increase in beaver activity in LaBarge Creek would increase trout habitat for all life stages. More ponds and increased meandering are needed to slow water velocities which may, in the future, allow more trout to reside in the reaches below the LaBarge Meadows. The aquatic and riparian habitats are stressed in the LaBarge Creek and along most of the tributary streams.

Sedimentation and lack of juvenile trout habitat are two distinct yet interrelated problems on LaBarge Creek immediately below LaBarge Meadows and downstream. Sediment monitoring in the drainage indicates streams are embedded, limiting successful trout spawning, rearing and also may be affecting the quality of pools necessary for adult fish overwintering in LaBarge Creek. The largest contributor to sediment problems on LaBarge Creek has been identified as the road paralleling the creek on public lands. Other sediment contributions come from natural sources, recreational use, and grazing practices. The relatively straight channel and moderate to high gradient creates high water velocities and reduces backwater areas and pools. The road and past land management practices have contributed to the straight channel. Backwater and pool areas are necessary for all life stages of trout and clean gravel interstitial spaces provides juvenile fish cover. An increase in beaver activity in LaBarge Creek and a reduction in sediment inputs will increase trout habitat for all life stages and increase stream carrying capacity.

Similar concerns and issues have been identified in the LaBarge Drainage Basin management plan for tributaries.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS/AGREEMENTS

Restoration of the vegetative communities in this watershed is most limited by the ability to control livestock grazing to provide for rest of vegetation treatments and proper follow up management following treatments. Readily available alternative locations to alleviate grazing pressure/demands in this watershed would provide greater opportunities for vegetation treatment/enhancement projects.

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CURRENT ACTIVITIES/PROPOSED PROJECTS

In 2000 Fisheries Management personnel began to aggressively pursue efforts to restore CRC to LaBarge Creek and its tributaries. Goals include assuring the long-term prosperity of CRC by establishing a self-sustaining meta-population, and to maintain areas which currently support self-sustaining CRC populations and manage other areas for increased abundance. The Forest Service has agreed, in principle, to this plan through the Tri-State CRC Conservation Agreement and Strategy.