

CONSERVE AND PROTECT: ARIZONA'S FISH

Leave fish stocking to the professionals to avoid legal, economic and biological consequences.

Moving fish from one water to another might seem like a harmless activity. Perhaps the fish appeared trapped in an isolated pool that was drying up, and you were helping them by moving them to the nearest water source, or you thought you'd stock some fish for you to take your kids or grandkids to enjoy fishing. Whatever the reason, every time someone moves fish from one water to another, there are consequences — biological, economic and legal. Often these consequences are unintended and unknown, but they occur nonetheless.

These effects can extend far beyond the waterbody where fish were first illegally introduced. Once fish gain access to one water, they can move on their own to other waters that are connected by streams, rivers, canals or any other type of water-to-water connection and can establish new populations. The negative effects of an illegal introduction of fish can be felt a long way from where they were originally introduced.

Illegal fish introductions can have drastic economic consequences as well. For example, when illegally introduced

fish reduce or eliminate sportfish populations, this reduces the quality of or eliminates the fishing opportunity that the population provided. The reduction in quality or loss of a sport-fishery also can hurt local businesses that depend on anglers coming to that water to fish and recreate.

Furthermore, responding to and treating illegal fish introductions is expensive. States within the Colorado River Basin have spent over \$100 million doing so. This is an average of \$2 million annually. This is money that states would much rather spend on stocking sportfish or activities to enhance fishing opportunities.

Remember, while moving fish from one water to another might seem harmless, the consequences, whether intended or not, can have legal, biological and economic implications. If you see anyone illegally stocking or moving fish, report it to Operation Game Thief at 800-352-0700.

— Zach Beard, Statewide Native Aquatics Program manager

Only professionals like the Arizona Game and Fish biologist shown here can legally stock or move fish into other bodies of water.

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