

Sam Potter / [TightLine Fly Fishing](#)

Authorized Guide with the National Park Service for the Upper Current River and the National Forest Service for Mill Creek, Spring Creek, Little Piney and the Eleven Point River.

Is it a Wild Trout or a Hatchery Trout?

Can you tell the difference between a wild trout, one that has lived its entire life in a stream, and a hatchery fish? Hatchery fish will take on the coloration of a stream born fish after it has been in the river a long time, but there are some clues to look for that will help make the decision. Stream born trout will usually be slim, shaped like a torpedo. They have an orange spot on the tip of the dorsal fin, white tipped pectoral fins and anal fin AND, this one is important, perfectly shaped fins, especially the pectoral fin. A hatchery fish will have a rounder shape, washed out color, the nose may be bald from rubbing on the cement in the concrete holding bins, and the pectoral fins will be rounded off on the edges. Which, from what I have read and been told, will remain that way for the life of the fish. When you hook a wild trout, they go crazy and will fight twice as hard as a hatchery fish. Wild rainbow trout, after a hard battle, will lay pretty clam as you release the hook, because they will use up almost all the energy they have trying to get free. Hatchery rainbows will fight a little while, then let you reel them in and squirm around like a night crawler while you take the hook out.

This is a **male** wild trout in spawning colors.

This is a **female** wild trout



Notice the lack of spots below the lateral line on both of these fish. This is a characteristic of the McCloud strain.

Hatchery Trout



Notice the pale colors and heavy spots below the lateral line. This is a hatchery fish. It's hard to tell from the above photo but the pectoral fins are rounded off from being raised in concrete runways. Check out the close up of the pectoral fin below.

Wild trout pectoral fins, triangular shape, pointed



Hatchery trout pectoral fins look like this.

