

Steelhead Trout — Mayuwartaq

KAL'UMIUWAT MAYURWARTARSURTAARTUT. – KARLUK PEOPLE ALWAYS FISH FOR STEELHEAD TROUT.



Photo: Man holding steelhead trout, Karluk River, ca. 1960. Nekeferoff Collection, AM580:415.

There are two varieties of trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in southern Alaska—rainbow trout and steelhead trout. These closely related fish use Alaska's waters differently. Rainbow trout spend their entire life in freshwater. In contrast, steelhead trout are anadromous. Young steelhead leave freshwater to feed in the ocean. They spend up to three years in marine waters before returning to their natal streams. Unlike salmon, however, not all steelhead die after spawning. A portion of spawners, particularly female fish, return to the ocean and can propagate again in future years.

Although rainbow trout occur in streams as far west as Kuskokwim Bay, steelhead populations are confined to the Gulf of Alaska. On Kodiak, steelhead can be found in the streams of southwestern Kodiak Island and Afognak Island. They are particularly plentiful in the Karluk and Ayakulik Rivers. Fish start returning to area streams in August and overwinter in freshwater before spawning in April and May. Steelhead prefer areas with flowing rather than still water and people report harvesting them in the Karluk River near the portage to Larsen Bay. Elders also note that there is good steelhead fishing in the Sturgeon River.

Because they overwinter in area streams, steelhead are a source of fresh fish in the lean winter months when other resources are absent or hard to harvest. Elders report spearfishing for steelhead through the ice. In warmer weather, Alutiiq ancestors may have harvested steelhead with a hook and line. A carved bone hook found at an ancestral site on the Karluk River may be an example of a trout fishing technique.