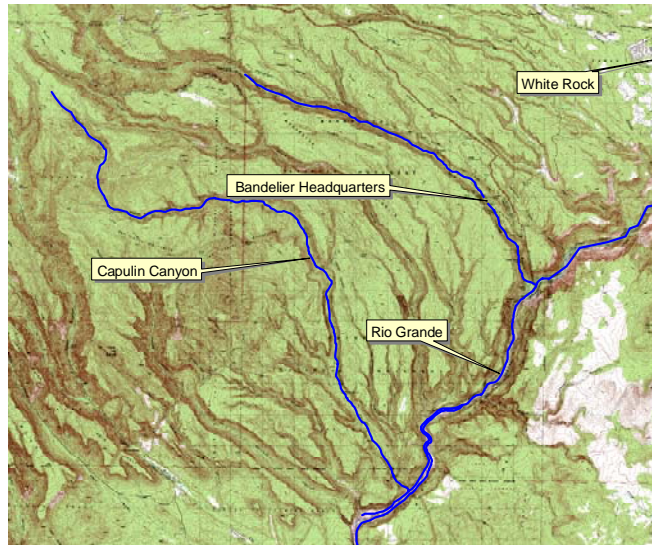


## Re-introduction of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout into Rio Capulin, Santa Fe National Forest, Dome Wilderness and Bandelier National Monument

Cooperative Effort among Santa Fe National Forest,  
Bandelier National Monument and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

The Rio Capulin is a small tributary to the Rio Grande forming on the southwest slopes of the Jemez Mountains, New Mexico (Figure 1). Approximately six miles of stream channel is within the Dome Wilderness (Santa Fe National Forest) and an additional 6.5 miles within Bandelier National Monument. Approximately 7.6 miles of perennial trout habitat exists within the system.

Figure 1. Map of the Rio Capulin Canyon and surrounding landmarks.



The historic fish community of RGCT within the Rio Capulin watershed is unknown though similar streams in New Mexico are inhabited by Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Non-native trout were introduced into the Rio Capulin beginning with brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) in 1928 and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in 1929. A wild brook trout population became established in the watershed and apparently dominated the fish community until the mid-1990s.

The Dome fire of 1996 burned throughout the Rio Capulin watershed (Figure 2). A subsequent flood and ash-flow apparently killed all fish within the drainage. After several years of terrestrial and aquatic recovery from the fire, staff from Santa Fe National Forest, Bandelier National Monument, and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish discussed the possibility of repatriating Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Subsequent sampling in 2005 confirmed that this creek was fishless and thus it posed a unique opportunity to use natural events for native fish restoration efforts.

Figure 2. Fish habitat and and post-fire regenerating vegetation within the Rio Capulin watershed.



In March 2006, staff from the cooperating agencies collected 100 Rio Grande cutthroat trout ranging in size from 3-6 inches from a neighboring stream. Fish were held overnight and backpacked in tanks and buckets to the creek the following day (Figure 3). Similar stocking events are planned for fall 2006 to increase numbers of fish within the creek. The New Mexico Game Commission amended fishing regulations for the creek to temporarily prohibit angling during the population expansion process. Such regulations will allow the population to naturally expand without any angling pressure. The expanding population will be monitored annually over the next three years to document whether the repatriated population survives, reproduces, and becomes self-sustaining. Upon documentation that the population is self-sustaining, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will ask the New Mexico Game Commission to permit angling within the Rio Capulin.

Figure 3. Project cooperators stocking. A recently stocked Rio Grande cutthroat trout looks for a new home in the Rio Capulin.

