



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
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A kokanee salmon captured by Department fisheries biologists as part of annual spawning efforts.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, OCT. 23, 2023:

Wanted: Information on Disruption of Kokanee Salmon Spawning Efforts

NAVAJO LAKE – New Mexico’s annual kokanee salmon spawning efforts were derailed when its Navajo Lake holding pens were vandalized on Friday, Oct. 20. Each fall salmon are gathered into holding pens to allow Department staff to manually spawn them prior to taking the fertilized eggs to our hatchery. The holding pen was found dragged from the lake and hundreds of salmon inside waiting for spawn were missing.

“The loss of this spawn has dramatic impacts on future kokanee fishing opportunities, as they do not sustain their populations via natural spawning,” said Kirk Patten the Department’s chief of fisheries. Kokanee salmon populations are already low and declining due to drought and warm temperatures, which makes the impacts of this vandalism even worse. Each fall during the salmon’s once-a-year spawning season, the Department attempts to artificially spawn several thousand salmon to hatch and rear the eggs in its Los Ojos Hatchery. The offspring are later stocked into coldwater lakes in northern New Mexico to provide angling opportunities for this popular fish. According to Patten, “every fish we can collect eggs from is critical to maintaining the fishery. To have someone remove these fish from our trap is a massive hit to the state’s fisheries, especially this year when populations are already low.”

Please help us find the culprits to ensure we can avoid further loss of our salmon fishing opportunities. The Department is offering a special \$2,500 reward for information leading to those involved with this incident. Reports can be made anonymously by calling our Operation Game Thief hotline at 1-800-432-4263 or online at <https://onlinesales.wildlife.state.nm.us/public/ogt>.



The kokanee salmon holding pen before it was vandalized on Navajo Lake.