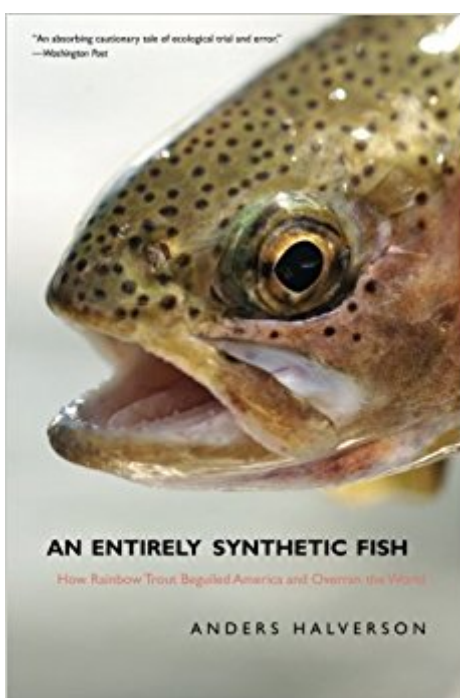


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# An Entirely Synthetic Fish: How Rainbow Trout Beguiled America And Overran The World



## Synopsis

Anders Halverson provides an exhaustively researched and grippingly rendered account of the rainbow trout and why it has become the most commonly stocked and controversial freshwater fish in the United States. Discovered in the remote waters of northern California, rainbow trout have been artificially propagated and distributed for more than 130 years by government officials eager to present Americans with an opportunity to get back to nature by going fishing. Proudly dubbed “an entirely synthetic fish” by fisheries managers, the rainbow trout has been introduced into every state and province in the United States and Canada and to every continent except Antarctica, often with devastating effects on the native fauna. Halverson examines the paradoxes and reveals a range of characters, from nineteenth-century boosters who believed rainbows could be the saviors of democracy to twenty-first-century biologists who now seek to eradicate them from waters around the globe. Ultimately, the story of the rainbow trout is the story of our relationship with the natural world—how it has changed and how it startlingly has not.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"With prose as engaging as it is thoughtful, Halverson has crafted an absorbing cautionary tale of ecological trial and error, documenting our tardy but increasing understanding of biological interdependence and its immeasurable value."—Washington Post  
"Halverson's book is a microhistory, an examination of America's involvement with a favored fish that sheds light on broader truths regarding our recent relationship with the natural world."—Chronicle

Review"Make no mistake, this book is a major event in the history of angling and ecological analysis. It needs to become the stuff of every angler's conversation and practice. And it's such a pleasure to read!"

•Gordon Wickstrom, American Angler

Halverson entertainingly introduces some of the most tangled questions in conservation biology: What is a species? What is native? What is natural? What is wild?"

•Jared Farmer, Science

"A well-paced, completely absorbing tale of how man and trout have changed the landscape of the planet."

•Ralph Cutter, California Fly Fisher

"In the same way that Michael Pollan's Omnivore's Dilemma reached beyond the realm of foodies, An Entirely Synthetic Fish is connecting with an audience far larger than trout bums. If you happen to be an angler, consider that a bonus in your enjoyment of this great book."

•Ralph Cutter, California Fly Fisher

"Intelligent, fair-minded and uncommonly readable."

•Rob Oden, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Halverson's account of the Green River project was gripping, and in fact, read a lot like a novel (I half-expected Bond to show up)."

•Tom Chandler, The Trout Underground

"Fly fishing for trout retains its image as a clean, low-impact outdoor activity. Rightly so, perhaps, but after reading Halverson's book, you will think twice about how close to nature you are when you cast that line out over a rocky pool."

•Laurence A. Marschall, Natural History

"Halverson treats the history of rainbow trout like a detective story and interviews or writes about a cast of fascinating characters . . . an excellent and entertaining read for anyone interested in the history of conservation, but especially the history of how rainbow trout became an entirely synthetic fish."

•Peter B. Moyle, The Quarterly Review of Biology

"[A] highly readable book."

•Peter B. Moyle, The Quarterly Review of Biology

"This brief book is an excellent and entertaining read for anyone interested in the history of conservation, but especially the history of how rainbow trout became an entirely synthetic fish."

•Peter B. Moyle, The Quarterly Review of Biology

"Anyone interested in life as metaphor will find here the fascinating historical story of how different people saw their highest ideals and aspirations through the lens of a single, uncommonly compelling fish. And like democracy but with perhaps more success they spread it around the world. This unusually well-written, interesting book deserves a place of honor for everyone who sees in trout more than just a fish."

•Carl Safina, author of Song for the Blue Ocean, Eye of the Albatross, and The View From Lazy Point

"A fascinating story of man's urge to cultivate and disseminate a beautiful coldwater fish at times to the detriment of native species but also the joy of anglers who would not otherwise have the opportunity to catch a trout. A gripping blend of early American history, discussions on taxonomy, and questions of how best to preserve wildness and the indigenous in a world where the human

relationship to Nature is complex and always changing." — James Prosek, author of *Trout of the World*"This book rewards readers in two equally significant ways. First, it entertains us with stories of intrinsic interest and even mind-stretching improbability. Second, it invites us to be smarter and more congenial citizens, more inclined to think productively about our environmental challenges and dilemmas, and more prepared to rise above faction and return to regarding the public good." — Patricia Nelson Limerick, Faculty Director of Center for the American West, and author of *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* and *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West*"This is a small book that could influence big fishery issues. I found new insights into some of the problems and I am quite familiar with most of them." — Peter Moyle, University of California, Davis"The historical research, personal interviews, and putting it together has produced an outstanding piece of work." — Robert Behnke, Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University, and author of *Trout and Salmon of North America*

Anders Halverson is a journalist with a Ph.D. in aquatic ecology from Yale University. He lives in Boulder, CO.

One has to have keen interest in the topic to get through the book as it's highly research based with page after page of footnotes and bibliography. This is a strong positive. As others have said, the writing and delivery is superb and will likely change your outlook on trout permanently. If nothing else, the next time you catch a nice rainbow, you might say "hey, check out this fish--it's mostly a rainbow."The writer seems to be a true academic researcher, and offers his opinion infrequently. If there's a bias it's hard to detect, however it's quite apparent that, although generally well meaning at least at the mid and lower levels, our state fish and game departments are still controlled by political appointees.

In *An Entirely Synthetic Fish*, Halverson recounts 150 years of well intentioned but fundamentally misguided management of our nation's waterways. Although a fisherman since childhood, he writes as a journalist, following, catching, and even breeding rainbow trout in an admirable quest to understand them. He distills esoteric ecological science with great skill and grace. Anecdotes from Halverson's own life add wonderful color to his account.*An Entirely Synthetic Fish* is as much a history of Westward expansion as it is a narrative about the most popular freshwater sport fish in America and the world. As Patricia Nelson

Limerick notes in her introduction, Halverson's book is neither highly opinionated nor partisan. Rather, it is a concise and erudite summary of a quandary that still confronts the keepers of America's lakes and rivers. I would recommend this book to anyone who lives in the American West. *An Entirely Synthetic Fish* has helped me to understand my identity as a Coloradan and outdoorsman, as well as our nation's environmental and political heritage.

Can't emphasize enough how well written this book is. I grew up in the northern Sierra Nevada's in the 60s and 70s, and I love trout fishing. This book is a great read. I was impressed with how much history was woven throughout the book. It is very descriptive, and you can really picture what it must have been like when they came upon the indigenous people drying fish along the McCloud. Having been there many times, this book totally changed my perspective on the area, on fishing in general, and on the other species trying to survive in and around almost every little lake and stream in the Northern Sierra's. As a kid, I loved all the fish, but I had no understanding of the cost to other wildlife. Whether you like to fish, or just have a general appreciation for nature and wildlife, read this book. It is very informative, it isn't trying to sell anything, just a great presentation of information that is enjoyable and interesting to read.

Human impact on trout and the world has never been more relevant than today and reading the history, the backstory of political activity that caused rainbow trout to dominate is a good example of how not to behave. Fun read.

I realize I am kind of a fish nerd, but this is one of the best books I have ever read. Halverson does an incredible job outlining the environmental, cultural, and social impacts of stocking non-native species. I truly could not put the book down, and have read it multiple times. I have never looked at a Rainbow Trout the same again. If you are a fisherman/woman, or simply someone interested in environmental studies, this is the book for you.

*An Entirely Synthetic Fish* is a good, quick read about how the rainbow trout became the symbol of sport fishing; and about how our attempts to improve our environment can lead to unexpected and unfavorable results. Halvorsen does a very entertaining job of telling us how well meaning managers have made huge mistakes in their efforts to improve the environment. He also demonstrates well how the data often seems to support the agendas of those collecting the data. The book, however,

also makes us think about what is really "wild." Is a naturally breeding, but introduced species really "natural." But if it is not, what should we do, or should we do anything other than cast a line and enjoy the fight.

The book is both a good read and provides, in some detail, a history and the resulting consequences of our attempts to manipulate nature in the form of a manufactured replacement fish for the fresh water fisheries we destroy or attempt to improve. The author is careful to provide the historic context under which decisions were made and to provide excellent notes and a bibliography. The latter contains much hard to find information and is likely worth the book price by itself. This book should be read by every thoughtful environmentally-concerned freshwater fisherman.

This book turns many of the concepts of wild and native fish on their ear. The insights into fisheries management and the history of the rainbow trout are fascinating. It is a must read for all who interact, either recreationally or professionally, with fish and rivers.

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