

General Sportfishing Regulations

Sportfishing Seasons

Check for dates of open and closed seasons under “Site-Specific Regulations” in each Watershed Unit of the Fish Management Zones starting on page 26.

Catch Limits

In this Guide the word “limit” refers to the number of fish you are allowed to keep or have in your possession. As outlined below, you may not exceed the limit at any water body fished, nor possess more fish than the provincewide maximum.

Possession: A fish is considered retained (kept) when it is not immediately returned to the waters from which it was taken.



See Tips on Releasing Fish on next page.

If the fish you catch is of a legal species and legal size, immediately decide to release or keep it as part of your day’s limit. Fish kept on a stringer or a live well are considered retained and are part of your limit (see page 19 and 21 for details on releasing live or prohibited fish).

1. Before fishing in any lake or stream you must locate, within this guide, the Fish Management Zone and Watershed Unit in which it is found. Determine whether or not the lake or stream is listed under the “Lake and Stream Listings” section (see instructions under “Site-Specific Regulations” for each Watershed Unit).
2. The number of fish you are allowed to keep while fishing in one day is equal to the limit listed for each species or group of species at the lake or stream being fished, including any fish eaten or given away that day.
3. When you are fishing at any lake or stream, you may not have in your possession more fish than the limit, or fish other than those of legal size, listed for the lake or stream being fished.
4. The number of fish of each species you may possess at the end of a fishing trip, regardless of the number of days fished, is equal to a 1 day limit for the water body fished and includes fish stored at home.

USE CAUTION ON ICE

The following guidelines do not override your obligation to use caution and common sense when travelling on ice: Careful measurement of ice thickness is important – always test ice conditions. Never walk on ice that is less than 10 cm (4 in.) thick and do not drive on ice that is less than 30 cm (12 in.) thick. Beware of ice near the inlets or outlets of streams. Always be extra cautious of ice on rivers and streams. Ice can vary in thickness and in strength from area to area because of temperature, water current, springs, snow cover and time of year. Do not drive fast, or follow closely behind or park near another vehicle on the ice. Ask someone who knows the area about ice conditions and places to avoid. Use caution and stay away from aeration sites. Anglers are encouraged not to fish near aerators for their safety and to prevent lines tangling the units and damaging them. Please remove all ice fishing huts prior to spring breakup.

Provincewide maximum possession – All fish kept from any lake or stream, from any Watershed Unit, count as part of the provincewide maximum possession that must not be exceeded. **The maximum number of fish you may have, including fish at your home and fish caught under a special harvest licence, for each game fish species or group of species is listed below:**

- **Trout and Arctic Grayling** – **5 in total**, combined of:
 - 0 bull trout (native to Alberta);
 - 2 Northern Dolly Varden (stocked in Chester Lake only);
 - 1 golden trout;
 - 2 Arctic grayling;
 - 3 lake trout;
 - 5 cutthroat trout;
 - 5 rainbow trout;
 - 5 brown trout;
 - 5 brook trout.
- **Mountain Whitefish** – 5 in total.
- **Walleye and Sauger** – 3 in combined total.
- **Northern Pike** – 3 in total.
- **Yellow Perch** – 15 in total.
- **Lake Whitefish and Cisco (Tullibee)** – 10 in combined total.
- **Goldeye and Mooneye** – 10 in combined total.
- **Burbot (Ling)** – 10 in total.
- **Lake Sturgeon** – 0
- **Non-game fish** – no restriction on the numbers kept.

NOTE: The limits and size restrictions that exist at specific lakes and streams are listed in the Watershed Unit sections of each Fish Management Zone starting on page 26.

General Sportfishing Restrictions

It Is Unlawful To:

- Use a hook that is not a barbless hook (See definition on page 15).
- Use more than one line when angling into open water.
- Use more than two lines when angling into ice-covered water.
- While angling be further than 30 m from any line in the water.
- Use a line in angling equipped with more than three hooks (e.g., three hooks, or three single-hook lures, or one three-hook lure).

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- Use a lure in angling with more than three hooks as part of it.
- Use a hook with more than three points on a common shaft (see Important Definitions, page 15).
- Release live fish or live fish eggs into any waters except back to the waters from which they were caught.
- Possess live CRAYFISH.
- Possess live BAIT FISH.
- Possess live GAME FISH – unless the fish have been lawfully caught by angling and are within 5 metres of the waters from which they were caught.
- Use live fish for bait.
- Set out or use bait to attract fish unless it is attached to a hook used in angling.
- Use scented lures or scented weights where bait bans are in effect.
- Fish by snagging.
- Possess fish taken by snagging.
- Possess a snagging device (such as a gaff or gaff hook) while angling.

- Use gaffs, gaff hooks or spring-loaded hooks (spring-loaded hooks incorporate a device that snags/traps/holds the fish).
- Use snares, firearms, or any device to attract, stun or kill fish by causing an explosion or electrical current in the water.
- Use lights to sportfish unless the light is attached to a hook or line used in angling. This includes visible lights that are emitted by underwater cameras.
- Clean fish for transport home in a manner that is not authorized (see Cleaning and Transporting Fish, page 21).

Additional Restrictions:

- The edible flesh of legally kept game fish must not be wasted, destroyed, spoiled or abandoned (this does not apply to burbot).
- Fish must not be removed from, or disturbed in, any facility or structure designed to capture, hold or facilitate the passage of fish. **Fishing is prohibited by any method within 25 yards (22.86 m) downstream of the lower entrance of any fishway, canal, obstacle or leap. Weirs and dams are considered obstacles.**
NOTE: Fishways, fish ladders, impoundment nets, fish traps and other similar structures are set up to assist in the management or the study of fisheries, or to allow the passage of fish.
- Angling is not permitted through the ice: a) into beaver ponds or b) into flowing waters in Zone 1 (Eastern Slopes Zone).

Important points:

- Tributaries to a lake have the same regulations as the outlet stream from the lake, unless stated differently in site-specific regulations.
- Stream regulations do not apply to a lake or reservoir unless stated differently in site-specific regulations.
- The same regulations apply to beaver ponds as apply to the streams in which the ponds are found.

Gill Nets

Anglers should be aware that while angling you may encounter gill nets in some Alberta lakes. Gill nets can be lawfully set by licenced users such as commercial fishermen, First Nations people, Métis and researchers. All nets must be visibly marked at each end with a one (1) metre stake or spar buoy bearing the applicable licence number. Anglers should respect these nets and keep a safe distance to prevent entanglement with angling gear. If the nets are not marked, or the presence of a net seems suspicious, please call your local Fish and Wildlife Division office (see page 24) or the Report A Poacher line at 1-800-642-3800.

Buying and Selling Fish

The illegal trafficking of fish threatens our fish populations and is a serious offence. Report illegal activities (see Report A Poacher on page 10).

NOTE: Fish taken by sportfishing cannot be sold, bought, traded or bartered. Similarly, fish harvested under the authority of a Domestic, Indian Domestic or Métis Domestic Licence cannot be sold, bought, traded or bartered. Fish can be purchased from a licenced commercial fisherman (but cannot be exported from Alberta) or retailer. If you purchase fish in this manner be sure to get a sales receipt and carry that receipt with the fish as proof of purchase. Go to srd.alberta.ca/FishWildlife/FisheriesManagement.

Releasing Live Fish

Sportfishing is so popular that many waters cannot produce enough fish to satisfy harvest demands. Releasing fish is part of the solution (see Tips on Releasing Fish on this page). If the fish you catch is of a legal species and legal size, immediately decide to release it or keep it as part of your day's limit. A fish is considered retained (kept) when it is not immediately returned to the waters from which it was taken.

TIPS ON RELEASING FISH

If a fish is handled carefully and gently, it will have an excellent chance of survival. The most important factor related to fish mortality is damage caused by the hook penetrating the gill and stomach regions. Fish hooked in the lip or mouth have a better chance of survival. Avoiding methods that result in deeply hooked fish is the best way to reduce hooking mortality. "Still fishing" with bait, where the line is not actively attended, usually results in more deeply hooked fish. Attending the line to set the hook immediately at the time of the strike may reduce the occurrence of deeply hooked fish. Fish have a reduced chance of survival if they are caught in deep water (>7 m or 23 feet).

- Retrieve your catch quickly.
- Release fish immediately (with care).
- Avoid squeezing the fish.
- Keep your fingers out of the gills.
- Keep the fish in water as much as possible.
- Remove the hook carefully.
- Leave deeply swallowed hooks in the fish.
(Side-cutters can be used to cut the hook instead of the line).
- Help revive the fish by holding it in the water.
- Do not fizz – it reduces survival.
- Fish for walleye and perch in relatively shallow water.

For more information, obtain a copy of the pamphlet "Handle and Release Fish with Care" from your nearest Fish and Wildlife Division district office.

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Never Cull Fish

“Culling” is staying within the catch limit for a species by releasing fish from a stringer or other holding device when a larger fish is caught. Fish that have been held on a stringer or in a tub usually die if released because of stress and because of damage to their gills, fins and scales.

Releasing Prohibited Fish

You must immediately release every fish that cannot be legally kept because of species, catch limit, size limit or other regulation, without exception, even if the fish is injured or dead. When the fish is alive, you must release it in a manner that causes the least harm to the fish.

Examples of prohibited fish are:

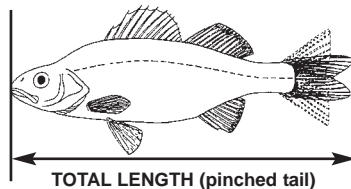
- a species for which the limit is 0.
- a fish smaller than the minimum-size limit.
- a fish larger than the maximum-size limit.
- a fish the size of which is protected by a slot-size limit.
- a fish that has been snagged.
- a fish caught after you have already kept your limit.

Measuring Fish Length

Length – the total length (maximum) of a fish is measured from the tip of the nose or jaw to the tip of the tail fin, with the tail pinched.

NOTE: Anglers should only determine if a fish is longer than or shorter than the specified legal length. It is best to immediately release fish that

are close to legal length rather than subjecting the fish to extra handling for the taking of a more accurate measurement. Flexible tape measures may be used provided only the straight-line length of the fish is measured without including the curvature of the body in the length of the fish. Lay the fish on the measuring device. If you lay the measuring device overtop of the curvature of the body, you will get an inaccurate measurement. It's a good idea to have a fish measuring device.



Cleaning and Transporting Fish

Fish caught in Alberta:

- ▶ Fish cleaned for storage at other than your permanent residence, or for transport to your permanent residence must not be skinned, cut or packed in a manner that:
 - the species cannot be identified,
 - the number of fish cannot be determined, or
 - the total length of every fish subject to a size limit cannot be determined.
- ▶ 2 pieces of fish of 1 species are considered to be 1 fish.

Tips:

- Carry a cooler and ice for storing whole fish for transport to your permanent residence.
- Leave the head, tail and skin attached to fish subject to size limits for accurate length measurements. Internal organs and gills can be removed to preserve quality.
- Fish that are not subject to size limits may be filleted, but enough skin must be left on each fillet for species identification purposes.
- Never transport fish in a solid frozen block.

REMEMBER: When cleaning fish away from your permanent residence, DO NOT REMOVE evidence of species and, if size limits apply, evidence of length as described above, unless the fish are to be consumed immediately.

Fish caught outside of Alberta:

When travelling within Alberta and transporting fish that were taken

elsewhere, you must be able to support your claim that those fish were caught outside of Alberta.

Fish caught by someone else:

If you are transporting fish caught by someone else, you must have a bill of lading signed by the angler who caught the fish. This letter must provide the following information:

- the licence number, name and signature of the individual who caught the fish,
- the number and species of the fish,
- the location from which you started and the location to which you are travelling, and
- the date on which the fish are being transported.

GAFF AND GAFF HOOKS

It is illegal to possess a gaff or a gaff hook while angling in Alberta. Fish that have been landed with the use of these types of gear usually die. Anglers are required to release fish that are not of legal size as stated in size-limit regulations for many species. If a fish is handled carefully and gently, it will have an excellent chance of survival. It is important that anglers handle fish in a manner that causes the least harm to the fish.

Fishing with Bait

Bait – the definition of bait (see page 15) includes, but is not restricted to: corn, cheese, marshmallows, meat, maggots, meal worms, earthworms, wax worms, gammarus shrimp, leeches, terrestrial insects, the larvae, pupae or adults of aquatic insects (e.g., stonefly, mayfly, caddis fly), bait fish, parts of fish, fish eggs, scented baits, power baits and all additives that scent or flavour artificial baits and lures.

Bait Ban – means where bait bans are in effect only unscented lures may be used. In specific streams, only maggots may be used as bait during certain times of the year to allow anglers to fish for mountain whitefish with less impact on trout populations. In specific lakes, only maggots and mealworms may be used as bait to allow anglers to fish for perch and lake whitefish with less impact on pike populations (see Important Definitions page 15).

Fishing with Bait Fish

Bait Fish means any of the following:

- suckers (family Catostomidae)
- sticklebacks (family Gasterosteidae)
- trout-perch (*Percopsis omiscomaycus*)
- Iowa darter (*Etheostoma exile*)
- minnows (family Cyprinidae), except carp, goldfish and the western silvery minnow.

HOOKING MORTALITY FROM BAIT

Restrictions on the use of bait are required to increase the survival of released trout. About 25% of trout caught on natural and scented baits die after release, compared with less than 4% caught on flies and lures. Differences in mortality rates of released pike and walleye caught on unbaited lures and baited hooks in most studies are quite similar, generally in the 3% to 10% range. Current information does not support a regulation on the use of bait at most waters containing pike or walleye. However, anglers are encouraged to voluntarily fish with unbaited lures because more fish may be hooked in the lip or mouth. Hooking mortality is generally higher for fish hooked in the gill area and stomach region.

Note: Pet store fish (tropical fish) or crayfish cannot be used as bait fish.

Bait Fish may be used in waters that do not have bait bans or bait fish restrictions. Where fishing with bait fish is prohibited, other baits including smelts, herring, gammarus shrimp and dead fish eggs (e.g., preserved “salmon eggs”) may be used, provided a bait ban is not in effect for that water body.

NOTE: Smelts and herring are of the saltwater families Osmeridae and Clupeidae. Use of the freshwater species cisco (Coregonidae), also called tullibee or lake herring, is prohibited from use as bait.

Parts of Game Fish. Only the skin, fins, eyes and dead eggs of game fish may be used as bait, provided these fish were lawfully caught by angling. Skin, fins, eyes and dead eggs of game fish may be used where the use of bait fish is prohibited, but cannot be used where bait bans are in effect. All game fish kept must be counted in the daily catch limit, including any fish from which parts are used for bait.

Collecting Bait Fish

Catching bait fish (such as suckers) by angling, bowfishing or spearfishing is allowed from all waters open to fishing with these methods, even at waters where the collection of bait fish by other means is prohibited.

Anglers may collect their own bait fish by minnow trap, dip net and seine net, but these fish must not be sold. The commercial collection of bait fish requires a Commercial Bait Fishing Licence. The following regulations apply to the collection of bait fish for personal use as bait:

- ▶ The collection of bait fish is not permitted in waters having a bait ban or restriction on the use of bait fish, and in some other specified waters (see Fish Management Zone regulations pages 26 to 78).
- ▶ **The possession of live bait fish is prohibited.** All bait fish kept must be killed immediately. Please do not kill more than needed because bait fish are important food for many sport fish.
- ▶ Fish other than bait fish must be immediately released unharmed. Game fish such as perch must not be kept.
- ▶ Seine nets may not be larger than 3 m in length and 2 m in depth.
- ▶ Minnow traps may not have dimensions greater than 60 cm in length by 30 cm in width, depth or diameter.
- ▶ No more than 2 minnow traps may be used at one time.
- ▶ Minnow traps must bear the operator’s name, address and Sportfishing Licence number.
- ▶ Crayfish cannot be used as bait. It is unlawful to possess live crayfish.

REMEMBER!

- it is illegal to use live bait fish or crayfish as bait.
- it is illegal to set out or use bait to attract fish unless the bait is attached to a hook used in angling.
- it is illegal to use scented lures or scented weights where bait bans are in effect.
- discard live unused bait within its original packaging inside a garbage receptacle.

Crayfish

Crayfish are native to the Beaver River system. However, they appear to have been illegally introduced into many Alberta waters and may be adversely affecting aquatic ecosystems.

Some people have expressed a desire to consume crayfish. In all waters other than the Beaver River, people may catch crayfish for consumption. Legal capture methods include angling (sportfishing regulations apply) or catching them by hand. No licence is required to capture crayfish by hand.

The retention and transport of live crayfish is illegal and all retained crayfish must be immediately killed to prevent the spread of this species. Please help prevent the spread of invasive species (see page 20).

Access to Fishing Waters

Anglers are reminded that healthy fish populations, and our ability to access fishing areas, are contingent upon courtesy and responsible conduct on the lands around them. It is the angler’s responsibility to know, understand, and abide by access conditions that apply when using and enjoying Alberta’s lands.

Permission is always required before entering or crossing:

- ▶ Private land (from landowner)
 - ▶ Indian reserves (from appropriate band council)
 - ▶ Métis settlements (from appropriate Métis settlement association)
 - ▶ Public land under agricultural or grazing lease
- While recreational “foot” access is generally acceptable on public land, anglers should be aware that:
- ▶ Fishing in the critical habitats offered by Alberta’s Wilderness and Ecological Areas is prohibited under the *Wilderness, Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*.
 - ▶ Off-highway vehicle access is prohibited in most provincial parks and provincial recreation areas.
 - ▶ Off-highway vehicle access may be limited or prohibited within counties, municipal districts or within special public land management areas such as Forest Land Use Zones (FLUZ).
 - ▶ Special conditions, such as extreme fire hazard, may warrant additional temporary access conditions.

Access to Public Lease Land

In 2003, the Alberta Government passed legislation clarifying the rules for recreational access on public lands leased for grazing and cultivation. While the new rules provide “reasonable access” on foot, as a recreational user you are required to contact the leaseholder prior to your visit, even if you are only crossing the land to get to a particular water body. Forest Grazing Allotments, such as those found in the forested area of the foothills along the Eastern Slopes, are not affected by this legislation.

As a recreational user it is your responsibility to know if the land you wish to access is public land under agricultural lease. A web site (srd.alberta.ca) provides information on the location of agricultural public lands, along with contact information. You can also call the local Public Lands and Forests Division office or a toll free hotline at 1-866-279-0023 for more information.

Vessel Restrictions

There are a variety of vessel restrictions in effect in Alberta that are administered by Transport Canada. For more information, please consult the federal Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations online at: <http://laws.justice.ca>

ILLEGAL STOCKING OF FISH

Alberta regulations prohibit the transfer of live game fish or live bait fish or crayfish from one water body to another. The placing of any live fish or fish eggs into any waters of the province other than those from which they were taken is also prohibited. Report anyone you observe relocating live fish or using live fish for bait to the nearest Fish and Wildlife Division office, or call Report A Poacher toll-free, 1-800-642-3800. The fishery resource that you are protecting is your own.

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