

## Information you will need to submit

When seeking approvals or permits you will likely be asked for the following information. It will save time if you have this information available when you contact the agencies listed on page three.

- Your name, address and telephone number. If available, also include a fax number and an e-mail address
- Rationale for the dock, boathouse or boat launch and the design you have chosen
- The waterbody name and location of the work site including the lot and block numbers, and park, or section, township, range and municipality
- A detailed description of the work site including a map, survey plan or sketch with dimensions indicating the location of existing buildings, shoreline structures, property lines and the annual average high water level
- A plan view (top down) sketch or drawing of the work area showing existing shoreline and proposed dock, boathouse or boat launch
- A cross-sectional (side view) drawing showing the existing and proposed structures, current water level and annual average high water level
- The design of in-water support structures and the material used to build them
- A description of the type of substrate at the construction site indicating approximate percentages of sand, silt, clay, gravel, cobble, rock, bedrock, aquatic plant cover, or marsh etc.
- A list of any heavy equipment that will be used
- Proposed start and completion dates
- Any potential effects on boat navigation
- Any information you have about fish use of the site
- Open-water photographs of the work site and surrounding shoreline
- A description of explosive use
- Other agencies contacted

*A site visit by agency staff may be necessary before your proposal can be approved.*

## Working together to protect fish habitat

**Help maintain the quality of fish habitat in our lakes and streams. For more advice on how to construct an environmentally friendly boathouse, boatport, dock, or boat launch, contact agency staff.**

For further information or to obtain copies of other fact sheets in this series, contact



*Vertical planking is not desirable.*

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[www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/canwaters-eauxcan](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/canwaters-eauxcan)

Federal and provincial offices are listed in the phone book under Government of Canada and Government of Alberta.

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

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# Working Around Water?

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FISH HABITAT AND DOCKS, BOATHOUSES AND BOAT LAUNCHES

This fact sheet provides important information for property owners and leaseholders planning to build or modify a dock, boatport, boathouse or boat launch. It also describes who you should contact for government agency approvals.

Recently there have been a number of changes in the way proposals for in-water works are reviewed. These changes are outlined in the introductory fact sheet, *Working Around Water? What You Should Know About Fish Habitat*. This introductory fact sheet introduces the entire *Working Around Water?* series of fact sheets that are designed to help in the planning of different types of in-water works.

### Why shorelines are important

Shoreline waters provide habitat for hundreds of aquatic organisms including fish. The nearshore area is where many fish species lay their eggs, feed and seek protection from predators. Changes or disruptions to these areas can threaten their survival. If you own or lease waterfront property, you can help protect the fish populations in your lake or river by protecting fish habitat along your waterfront. If you use appropriate materials and designs for dock, boathouse, boatport and boat launch construction, fish habitat can be protected.

### Be aware of the Fisheries Act and other legislation

The federal Fisheries Act provides for the protection of fish habitat. Under this Act, no one may carry out any work that harmfully alters, disrupts or destroys fish habitat, unless authorized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Act also states that no one is permitted to deposit a deleterious (harmful) substance into water containing fish. Violations can result in substantial fines, the risk of imprisonment and a requirement to cover the costs of returning the site to its original state.

Most lands in Alberta below the average annual high water level are crown lands. Works or development on provincial crown lands or leased crown lands may require a permit or authorisation under the Alberta Water Act and the Alberta Public Lands Act. You should also contact the local municipal authority.

Other legislation that may be relevant to building a dock, boathouse or boat launch is outlined in the introductory fact sheet: *Working Around Water? What You Should Know About Fish Habitat*.



*Post-supported docks cause minimal disturbance to lake or river bottoms.*

# Working Around Water?

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FISH HABITAT AND DOCKS, BOATHOUSES AND BOAT LAUNCHES



### Environmentally friendly practices

The following environmentally friendly practices will help to ensure that your boat launch, dock, boatport or boathouse will not harmfully affect fish or fish habitat. Following these practices will also help you avoid violating the federal Fisheries Act.

- **Use environmentally friendly materials for boat launches**

Avoid constructing boat launches out of cement. Pre-fabricated or poured cement will destroy the fish habitat on which it is placed. Consider alternatives such as gravel or a marine railway. Construction of boat launches will require contacting both Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the provincial government for approvals.

- **Site the location of the dock, boat launch or boathouse to avoid building on or over important fish habitat**

You should first survey the waterfront shoreline and lake bottom for important fish habitat. It is important to avoid building in areas where there is a lot of vegetation overhanging the water or over smaller sized gravels and aquatic vegetation in the water, as this is likely productive spawning and rearing habitat. You should site your structure where the productivity is low (i.e. little shoreline vegetation, sandy or very rocky lake bottoms, etc.)

- **Select a dock/boathouse/boatport which minimizes disturbance to the river or lake bottom**

Cantilever, floating and post-supported docks and boathouses are generally preferred because they do not disturb the bed of the river or lake and they do not restrict the movement of water near the shore. Cribs and concrete docks remove areas of the lakebed that fish may use to feed on aquatic plants, spawn, hide from predators, or simply to rest. You should consider these types of docks only when all other alternatives are not feasible, and when you know that the dock will not cover the plants and gravels that fish use. In addition to destroying fish habitat, these structures are vulnerable to ice damage and can create stagnant backwater areas. If your dock requires a concrete abutment, this should be located entirely on the upland property above the high-water level. In general, permanent docks for private use are not approved by Alberta.

Consult early with provincial and federal officials for constructing these types of docks.

- **Avoid vertical planking**

Vertical planking is not recommended along the sides of in-water structures because it can restrict water movement.

- **Use clean rocks taken from dry land**

If you are planning to use rocks in your project, use only those that are clean and free of soil. Rocks often provide important habitat for fish and their prey, as well as protecting the shorelines from erosion. Rocks must not be taken from the lake or river bottom or the shoreline. Removal of rocks from these areas could destroy existing habitat.

- **Be careful with building materials**

Some building materials may release contaminants into the waterbody, harming fish and fish habitat. For more information see the following fact sheet in this series: *Working Around Water? What You Should Know About Fish Habitat and Building Materials*.

- **Avoid projects that involve in-water dredging**

Dredging may be harmful to fish and their habitat.

- **Time work to avoid sensitive periods**

In-water activities should not occur during local fish spawning and nursery periods since it could disturb spawning behaviour, smother eggs and kill young fish. If you are planning any in-water work, contact Fisheries and Oceans Canada for details on timing your project.

- **Minimize the amount of shoreline vegetation that is removed**

The root mass of shoreline vegetation helps to hold your shoreline together against the forces of erosion. Try to leave as much shoreline vegetation intact as possible. One way to do this is to build a small walkway from your cottage to your waterfront. Having a small regularly used path helps to maintain shoreline vegetation.

- **Control shoreline activities**

Ensure that sediment and deleterious substances do not enter the water during construction.

### Contacts for approvals and permits

If you are building or modifying a dock, boathouse, boatport or boat launch, the table that follows will help you decide who you should contact.

#### If the structure...

- **has a foundation below the high-water level, or has skirting that blocks water movement**

#### You should contact :

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Alberta Environment
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
- Your local municipal authority

- **is a public or commercial dock**

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
- Your local municipal authority

- **is floating, or is a cantilever design, or is totally above the high-water level; or is supported on posts, stilts, or poles**

- Approval from Fisheries and Oceans Canada is not necessary, except in cases concerning large or commercial structures.
- Alberta Environment (only if the structure is permanent)

- **is in a provincial park**

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Alberta Community Development

- **may affect boat navigation**

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada

- **is in a federally owned small craft harbour**

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada

- **Involves excavation, dredging or the deposit of sand, gravel, concrete, etc. below the high water level**

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Alberta Environment

This fact sheet refers primarily to the requirements of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. **Approvals from other federal, provincial, or municipal agencies may be required. It is the responsibility of the proponent to ensure they have all the necessary approvals in place before proceeding with work.** Early consultation will help you design a dock, boatport, boathouse or boat launch that will not harm fish habitat.