

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2007

Copy: **Pond and Dugout stocking with recreational fish**

Cross-legged and right in the crosshairs of summer's setting sun, the lone figure feels the small dock's irregular and blissfully sunwarmed slabs of timber beneath seat bones. A mere handful of hours ago that same figure was in a frantic downtown office at week's end, gazing into a computer's unforgiving demands. Leaning back now, he takes his time and carefully threads a fishing line; overhead is the shrill cry of a red-tailed hawk and the eerie calls of just arrived swallows flitting atop the pond's surface, furiously gobbling feeding insects. A damselfly lands atop the dock, a shimmering iridescent cobalt blue and now there is silence, a mere whisper of wind casting ruffles across the water.

Recreational fishing, and the stocking of rural ponds and dugouts, is addictive in our increasingly fast paced lifestyles. Many owners don't even fish once they've stocked, preferring instead to wander out and sit at the water's edge, casting out their trout's daily rations, breathing in the seasons and connecting with bird behaviors, insect peccadilloes, and scribbling down in diaries weather patterns even TV experts still can't accurately predict. Grandparents connect with grandchildren, parents and teenagers barbecue the catch as a rite of honour - these summer evenings often translate as treasured memories into scrapbooks. All in all, the benefits in terms of health and recreation are huge.

In Alberta alone there are over 3,000 recreational fishing stocking licenses issued annually. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development handles these, which are effective on your \$10 cheque being accepted, and expire 31<sup>st</sup> March each year. Conditions mean that your 'Recreational Fish Culture' license allows you to "acquire, propagate, rear and keep [but not to sell for financial gain] one or more species of cultured fish." You need to have your body of water initially inspected (if you allow your license to lapse it has to be re-certified). The deal is a "safe environment [which] guarantees containment of [your] fish to the licensed water body [your pond or dugout, or equivalent], restricts public access and is surrounded by privately owned land to which the applicant has title (if you are sharing with a neighbour (s), you will both need to present documentation of title and of agreement between you to this effect). A rough timeline for these licenses generally averages up to two weeks for inspection and another for processing.

The exception can be simple dugouts often "exempt from requiring an approval under the Water Resources Act if they are used for *"household purposes"*, and requiring less than 1250 cubic metres of water per year to fill." Great, so your kitchen cup of tea may have had a trout swimming around in it not that long ago. Additionally, if you need to pump or dam water to fill your proposed fishing venue, you may require an "Approval to Divert and Use Water" (managed by

Alberta Environment under the Water Act, contact them at their Edmonton offices at 780-427-5296)), and which will be required *before* submitting your application for a Recreational Fish Culture License. For areas where spring run-offs may occur permission may also be denied; certainly requirements will be tougher (you'll need to have screens protecting all exits if there is any considered risk of fish escaping into wild habitat). If your proposed site is part of a permanently flowing stream's pathway your application will in all likelihood be refused for those same wild habitat concerns.

Fish licenses will be refused straight off too for any locations on public lands, plus there are restrictions also (and a prohibited area) in three major areas adjacent to Calgary, Edmonton and Red Deer (information available at [www.agric.gov.ab.ca](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca) - if you type in 'restrictions for recreational fishing licenses' in their search window, there's a stack of information and helpful maps besides. Licensing application forms can be downloaded (three pages) here too – the pass rate encouragingly hovers around the 99% mark).

Commercial fish stockists (essentially for rainbow and brook trout, and triploid grass carp) are regulated by the governing body of the Alberta Aquaculture Association ([www.affa.ab.ca](http://www.affa.ab.ca) or contact at Box 87, Rumsey, Alberta, T0J 2Y0). Associate members cost out at \$10 annually (and which are aimed at the "recreational fish culturist"). Commercial members' membership runs at \$100 annually and is highly active in promoting aquaculture in Alberta. These are the guys you buy your 'fingerlings' (young fish) from, and who – once April slides in – are working crazily long hours. Dan Meynard, Association Treasurer and also owner of Smokey Trout Farm near Red Deer ([www.smokytroutfarm.ca](http://www.smokytroutfarm.ca) or telephone 403-342-5206), doesn't just stock fish for you to collect, his operation can deliver to your door and, like many other commercial operations, will continue to offer customers advice and aftercare service as part of the transaction.

When buying baby fish, the rough rule of thumb is buy not less than 5 to 6 inches in length (anything smaller has a higher rate of mortality). Fish are sold by size, and the larger the length the more expensive the fish; In captivity, for the smaller sizes, growth rate is approximately one inch per month, so at approximately eight months of age will see a pan-sized trout (as opposed to 2-3 years in the wild).

**SIDEBAR>> Water quality is a huge issue; monitoring PH values can hit the obsessive compulsive ticket once you're in this game, and then add into that regular checking for another vital, oxygen. Oxygen essentially keeps your fish alive, and the 'dissolved oxygen' content from top to bottom of fishing areas can alter dramatically with temperature variation and weed proliferation. Ideally you want six parts per million although in the right circumstances four can squeak through as acceptable. "When fish are talking to you, at the surface," remarked one advocate, "you are in serious shit."**

**SIDEBAR>>Algae and weeds are complex subjects, with a stack of available information. Grass carp fish come into their own here, as they are herbivorous and strictly vegetarian feeders. Grass species they consume include Richardson pond weed, flat stemmed pond weed, filamentous algae, chara, water plantain, Canada waterweed and floating leaf pondweed. The only fertile grass carp in the province (they are an imported species from the Far East) are held at Lethbridge Community College's Aquaculture Centre for Excellence (ACE) and act as the brood stock for the sterile (triploid) fish available for stocking water bodies and dugouts. Amazingly, this foreign species generally over-winter well for repeated seasons, a good deal as they're more expensive at \$20 a throw (for more information click onto [www.grasscarp.org](http://www.grasscarp.org) ).**

**SIDEBAR>> Included in your costing (exclusive of dugout and pond construction) should be fish feed (the better varieties run at roughly 42% protein and 22% fat), and you'll need cool dry storage areas for the same. Then add in aeration units (for more uniform oxygen distribution throughout your water area) with electric models, where you need safely installed electric wiring connections, and which can clock out at roughly \$450 for a small unit with, say, monthly \$10 running costs. Alternatively, windmills are another option (pressure gauges, note, require constant checking), and which often can be solar panel powered. Diffusers, water sampling, oxygen testing kits, predator deterrents (one workshop meeting positively hissed when blue herons, an obvious arch enemy, were mentioned) need all to be factored in.**

**And then, of course, finally you need to buy fishing rods....and barbecues!**