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## Working Around Water?(Saskatchewan Fact Sheets)

### What You Should Know About Fish Habitat and Docks, Boathouses and Boat Launches

#### Saskatchewan Fact Sheet 2



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 Saskatchewan below the average annual high water level are crown lands. Most works or developments in or near water require a permit under the Saskatchewan Environmental Management and Protection 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*.

#### 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 practises 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 it is placed on. Use alternatives such as gravel or a marine railway.

**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 river or lake bottoms, or restrict the movement of water near the shore. If rock filled cribs are necessary, keep their size to a minimum. The least preferred structures use concrete or steel sheet piling that covers the bottom of a waterbody. Generally, solid docks made from cement or steel sheeting will not be approved. These structures are vulnerable to ice damage, destroy fish habitat, 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.

  
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**If cribs are built, use an open-faced design:**

Where cribs are built from timbers and are filled with rock, it is best if the crib is open-faced and not closed-faced. Open-faced cribs without solid planking provide fish and other aquatic organisms spaces to hide from predators. It is best if cribs are placed greater than two meters out from the high-water level and on bedrock to allow near-shore water circulation.

**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 build a crib dock or boathouse, use rocks that are clean and free of soil. The rocks must not be taken from the lake or river bottom, or the shoreline. Removal of rocks from these areas could destroy fish 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 which involve in-water dredging:**

Dredging may be harmful to fish and their habitat.

**Avoid covering or removing aquatic vegetation:**

Destroying aquatic plants 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 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:

Contacts for approvals and permits

If the structure...	Your first contact should be:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a foundation or cribs below the high-water level, or has skirting that blocks water movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries and Oceans Canada – Habitat Management and</li> <li>• Local municipal authority</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a public or commercial dock</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries and Oceans Canada - Habitat Management Program and Navigation Protection Program</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also contact the local municipal authority</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is floating, or is a cantilever design, or is totally above the high-water level; or is totally supported on posts, stilts, or poles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval from Fisheries and Oceans Canada is not necessary. Follow the environmentally friendly practices listed in this fact sheet.</li> <li>• Large commercial structures may require Fisheries and Oceans Canada –Navigation Protection Program approval</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is in a Provincial Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries and Oceans Canada</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May affect boat navigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries and Oceans Canada - Navigation Protection Program</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is in a federally owned Small Craft Harbour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries and Oceans Canada - Small Craft Harbours</li> </ul>

This fact sheet refers only 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 the work.*** Early consultation can save you from designing a dock, boatport or boat launch that will not be approved.

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## 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 3.

- Your name, address, telephone number and fax number.
- 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 date.
- 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 :



Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Regina District  
1804 Victoria Ave East  
Regina, SK S4N 7K3  
Phone (306) 780-8725; Fax (306) 780-8722

Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Prince Albert District  
125-32nd Street West  
Prince Albert, SK S6V 8E2  
Phone: (306) 953-8777; Fax: (306) 953-8792

Federal and provincial offices are listed in your phone book under Government of Canada and Government of Saskatchewan.

Cette publication est également disponible en français

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