

# Sustaining the Indian Subsistence Food Fishery and Conserving Fish Stocks for Future Generations

## *A Summary of Domestic Fishing Regulations in Alberta*

### **Introduction**

The Alberta Government is responsible for managing our fish resources. This includes as a first priority the protection of fish stocks now, in order to ensure an abundance of fish in the future. Surplus fish stocks, not needed to maintain fish populations, are used to sustain Indian subsistence fishing, and to maintain recreational and commercial fisheries.

Alberta's fish resources have declined because of habitat loss and the over-harvest of fish to the extent that it is not possible to satisfy all current demands for fish. Fish harvest by all users must be regulated to match and not exceed the productive capacity of the habitat. Special management measures are also required to protect threatened species or collapsed and vulnerable populations.

**In Alberta, the right of Indians to fish for food is recognized in law and by government policy.** The Alberta Government is committed to sustaining the Indian food fishery within the constraints of fish conservation and legislative obligations. Following is a summary of the current regulations for Indian subsistence or "domestic" fishing. For more detailed information on these regulations and the regulations pertaining to specific lakes, please contact the nearest Fish and Wildlife Service office of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

### **Licences**

- A Domestic Fishing Licence is required by all Indians wishing to fish for food with a net. This licence is free and can be obtained at any Fish and Wildlife Service office.
- Domestic Fishing Licences provide Indian people with an opportunity to obtain fish for their household needs. The Alberta Government and Indian fishermen work together to ensure these needs are met without harming the resource.
- **A separate Domestic Fishing Licence is required for each lake to be fished.**
- Domestic Fishing Licences are not issued for stocked trout water bodies, nor for flowing waters.
- Documents showing Indian Status are required before Domestic Fishing Licences can be issued to Indian people.
- Other forms of Domestic Fishing Licences available from Fish and Wildlife Service offices include: Métis Domestic Fishing Licences issued to residents of Métis Settlements only for lakes on or adjacent to Métis Settlement Lands; and Domestic Fishing Licences issued to individuals after approval of an application showing a need to fish for food for subsistence purposes.
- Each Domestic Fishing Licence allows the holder to set one gill net of up to 95 meters (100 yards) in length.

- The minimum mesh size allowed is stated on each Domestic Fishing Licence. Usually, the mesh size is either 140 mm (5 ½ inches) or 152 mm (6 inches) to allow the harvest of only larger, mature fish that have already spawned a number of times.
- The holder of a Domestic Fishing Licence must be carrying the licence and be present when the net is set or pulled.
- Both ends of the gill net must be marked with a stake or spar buoy showing the number of the Domestic Fishing Licence in bold numbers at least 20 mm (¾ inch) high. When fishing through the ice, the stake must be at least 1 m (39 inches) above the ice and snow. When fishing through open water, the top of the spar buoy must be at least 1 m (39 inches) above the water.

### **Fishing Closures**

- Nets cannot be set in a stream or river and cannot be set within 50 m (164 ft.) of the mouth of any tributary.
- In some lakes, certain areas may be closed to fishing for conservation purposes. These closures usually begin April 1st to allow fish to spawn undisturbed, and apply to all fishermen including holders of Domestic Fishing Licences.
- In special cases, additional measures such as depth restrictions for setting nets are needed to protect vulnerable fish stocks. Where fishing closures and special restrictions apply, they will be specified as a condition on the Domestic Fishing Licence.

### **Monitoring of Harvest**

- In order to manage our fish stocks, fisheries biologists need more information on fishing pressure and fish harvest, particularly from those lakes where fish stocks are declining.
- The number of Domestic Fishing Licences issued for each lake is monitored to determine trends in fishing pressure. **Harvest must be recorded as a condition of the Domestic Fishing Licences issued for some, specified, lakes.** Where this is a legal requirement it will be stated on the licence.

### **Use of Harvest**

- All fish caught under the authority of a Domestic Fishing Licence must be used for subsistence purposes only and can only be distributed to members of the licence holder's family and household.
- **Fish caught under the authority of a Domestic Fishing Licence cannot be bought, sold, traded, bartered or offered to be bought, sold, traded or bartered.**
- It is illegal for holders of a Domestic Fishing Licence to sell the fish they catch, and it is illegal to buy these fish.
- Report any suspected illegal activity to the Fish and Wildlife Service or call Report a Poacher at 1-800-642-3800.
- Do not personally interfere with the activities of any fishermen.

### **Taking Care of Your Catch**

- Carry sufficient ice at all times and use only clean, sanitary containers.
- Ensure all fish are packed in ice and covered during transport.
- Remove gills and internal organs as soon as possible.
- All fish must be removed from nets at least once every day if the net is set in open water and once every 48 hours if the net is set through the ice.

