

Fish in Schools: Raise to Release Program (FinS) Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in the FinS program. This document provides a detailed overview of the program.

Overview

FinS is an annual fisheries education initiative coordinated by Bow Habitat Station (BHS), Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). It provides students and teachers the opportunity to raise fish in the classroom. Over a four to five month period, students and teachers maintain and monitor the development of trout in their aquariums from egg to fry before releasing those fish into a provincially-approved water body. Schools that participate in FinS may incorporate the study of life cycles; their stages, needs, adaptations and habitat of trout into their learning environment. Participants discover that their ability to maintain a healthy aquarium environment is critical to the survival of their fish. Students are encouraged to make the connections between trout and their environments, and use that knowledge to identify impacts and actions that can make a difference. Furthermore, FinS aims to instill a sense of stewardship in all participants!

Program Goal

FinS will help to foster an awareness and understanding of fish while demonstrating the importance of healthy aquatic environments.

Program Objectives

- To raise trout from egg to fry within an aquarium system.
- To maintain a healthy aquarium environment for trout.
- To participate in a release event.
- To study and investigate trout life cycles and stages, habitats, needs and adaptations.
- To develop an awareness about human impacts and actions on aquatic ecosystems.

Eligibility and Requirements

To be eligible to participate in FinS, two applicants are required from each school and must fit the following criteria:

- a teacher or other permanent role (e.g. librarian, assistant principal, etc.) at a school within Alberta (if application is accepted both applicants will be referred to as School Coordinators);
- have consent from the school principal (signature required); and
- remain in good standing with FinS (past participants only).

School Coordinators have various responsibilities outlined under the following section titled **Structure and Roles**. You must fully read and understand these responsibilities. FinS is a time intensive program that requires daily monitoring, feeding and/or cleaning while fish are present. In addition, documentation submission and reporting are also necessary components that start before the fish arrive and end after the fish have been released. If School Coordinators cannot meet the necessary deadlines they may not be approved the following year.

Structure and Roles

FinS is contingent on an integrated structure of systematic roles that coordinate and provide the support necessary for the program. FinS is coordinated from Bow Habitat Station in Calgary by the FinS Team. The FinS Team is responsible for maintaining, planning and reporting on all aspects of the program.

The following section gives a brief description of these roles and how they interact:

FinS Team at Bow Habitat Station

The FinS Team consists of AEP staff who coordinate and maintain the program under the direction of the Fins Coordinator.

School Coordinators

The two applicants from the school are designated as School Coordinators on the application and co-ordinate the project at the school. Both School Coordinators are responsible for the project and any requirements as necessary.

Requirements of the School Coordinators include, but are not limited to:

- attending a 1/2 day training session (new participants only);
- setting up and maintaining the aquarium;
- coordinating egg pick-up/delivery;
- ensuring the fish are adequately cared for;
- coordinating the class/school's participation and transportation for the release of their fish into a provincially-approved water body;
- developing and submitting a curriculum resource to share with other participants;
- submitting required program documents; and
- meeting the terms of a Fish Research Licence.

Fisheries Representative

Fisheries Representatives are AEP Fisheries Biologists or Fisheries Technicians who provide expert technical, biological and aquatic ecosystem advice. It is the responsibility of the FinS Team to coordinate the assignment of a Fisheries Representative to each project.

Requirements of a Fisheries Representative include but are not limited to:

- collecting and properly disposing of mortalities;
- approving the provincial water body where fish will be released; and
- attending the release day if possible and providing information at the release (biological, habitat, fish management, aquatic ecosystems).

Program Details

Application – Submission, Waitlist, Form

New applications can be submitted in September, the application deadline in October 15 (see section: Important Dates).

In some geographical areas of Alberta, program demand is high; therefore new application availability is limited. In those areas, a waitlist may be in effect, and new applicants may be entered into the waitlist before being considered.

Application forms are available online at bowhabitat.alberta.ca, or can be requested by contacting the FinS Coordinator (see section: Contact Information).

Approval by the FinS Coordinator is required in advance in the event that one of the past participating School Coordinators wishes to transfer their current participation status to a new teacher within the same school. **Please contact the FinS Coordinator before the application deadline to make this request.**

NOTE: Past participants must fill out an application form on an annual basis to remain in the program (see section: Important Dates).

Financial Responsibility

New schools will be required to purchase the selected aquarium system and any necessary replacement parts thereafter from Bow Habitat Station. The cost of a new aquarium system is approximately \$830, plus GST. For more details on costs, please contact the FinS Coordinator. Designated FinS sponsors are not available at this time; however we encourage schools to seek sponsors at their own discretion.

Past participants may utilize existing systems; however, upgrades may be required. Upgrade requirements will be determined based on equipment failures, success rates and/or other factors. This will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Any equipment upgrade purchases will be the responsibility of the school.

Egg Delivery

School Coordinators are expected to coordinate egg delivery arrangements. In some cases, eggs are shipped to a pre-selected AEP office, and are to be picked up the same day either by the School Coordinators. Eggs may also be picked up directly from one of four fish culture facilities in Alberta; however, this must be arranged in advance. Egg delivery details will be arranged and communicated in December/January.

Approximately sixty five eggs will be delivered to each project. Included with the egg delivery will be two copies of the Fish Research Licence. School Coordinators must sign both copies and retain one copy for their records well returning the second signed copy to the FinS coordinator.

At the time of egg delivery, detailed information must be recorded. This information is required to complete the Egg Delivery Form. This form will be delivered with your eggs and must be submitted by the end of January to the FinS Coordinator. After delivery, the shipping supplies (e.g. thermos, cooler and ice packs) must be returned to BHS as soon as possible.

Trouble Shooting and Maintenance

FinS projects must be monitored daily. A FinS Manual found on the FinS website is available to assist with maintaining and troubleshooting (see section: Resources).

For preventative measures, participants must ensure that maintenance or custodial staff are aware of the project so units are not accidentally unplugged. It is also recommended that School Coordinators have an emergency plan in the event that the aquarium loses power as a result of a power outage.

Fish health is dependent upon many factors and some mortality is expected to occur. If a project has an extensive mortality rate (>80%) for two consecutive years, a review will be conducted to determine possible solutions. This review may require documented information that School Coordinators must maintain throughout the project.

Release of Fish

The FinS team and school coordinators are expected to coordinate the release of the fish at the end of the project (May or June) with the Fisheries Representatives. In the event that a school does not maintain surviving fry, School Coordinators must advise the FinS Coordinator. The FinS Coordinator may be able to arrange for replacement fry in order for a release event to continue. School Advisors must liaise with the Fisheries Representatives and School Coordinators to determine a release site and date. Final approval of the provincial water body must be made by the Fisheries Representative. This information will be documented on the FinS Final Project Report form.

Involvement of the local media is encouraged to showcase FinS projects. **Please ensure all media involvement is communicated to the FinS Coordinator in advance. FinS is a Government of Alberta initiative, therefore communications protocols must be followed.**

Closing the Project

Following the release event, the FinS unit must be disinfected. Please refer to the FinS Manual for instructions. The Final Project Report Form must also be submitted to the FinS Coordinator (see section: Important Dates for deadlines).

Planning for Next Year

Past participants must fill out an application form on an annual basis to remain in the program (see section: Important Dates for deadlines). Participants that do not wish to continue participating in the program for the following season are required to fill out a Withdrawal Form and submit it to the FinS Coordinator as soon as possible. The FinS Coordinator will contact all past participants before the application deadline as a reminder to send in their application forms.

Important Dates

Note that the following dates are a general timeline only. These dates may vary slightly from year to year.

- New and/or renewal applications - **October**
- Approval confirmations - **November**
- Fish Research Licence applications - **November**
- FinS equipment requests - **November**
- FinS equipment shipments - **December**
- FinS training sessions – **December/January**

Prior to **Christmas holidays**, the FinS unit should be set up, without water, to ensure all necessary parts are present.

- FinS units must be set up and fully operational - second week in **January**
- Eggs will be delivered – second/third week of **January**
- Egg delivery forms due - **January 31**
- **Calgary Release Dates – late May and early October**
- Final Project Report form due - **June 30**

Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to contact the FinS Coordinator for additional information at:

**Bow Habitat Station
1440 – 17A Street SE
Calgary, AB T2G 4T9**

Email: fins.program@gov.ab.ca

**Ph: 403-297-6561
Fax: 403-592-8552**