

Quality Stocked Fisheries

The Rocky Area has 60 sport fish-bearing lakes that offer some of the best and most diverse fishing opportunities in the province. Of these lakes, 16 have cool water species such as northern pike, yellow perch and walleye, six contain native trout species (i.e. lake trout and bull trout) and 38 are stocked with other trout (rainbow, cutthroat, brook, brown, and golden).



Photo: Steve Herman

Trout are typically stocked in ponds and smaller lakes where they are unable to reproduce and harvest is expected to be high. Most of these fisheries are managed with a standard set of regulations (open all year, harvest of up to five trout of any size and bait allowed). This usually results in high angling pressure and yielding smaller trout.

However, by the late 1990's various public input suggested that a growing segment of anglers wanted to see a selection of trout ponds managed differently in order to promote larger fish. In response, Alberta Fish and Wildlife created the concept of "Quality Stocked Fisheries". These unique trout fisheries are stocked at lower rates to limit fish competition for available food items, and are managed using a special set of fishing regulations (winter closures, reduced or zero limits and bait bans). Those actions are necessary to allow fish to grow older and therefore to larger sizes. As well, most Quality Stocked Fisheries are aerated in collaboration with the Alberta Conservation Association to significantly promote survival throughout the year.

Specifically, the goals of a Quality Stocked Fishery are:

- 1) Produce trout of at least 50 cm in length within four years of stocking;
- 2) Manage the lake with the regulations needed to maintain 10-15% of the trout population in the 50 cm and larger size range; and
- 3) Provide angling diversity for Albertans.

In creating Quality Stocked Fisheries, many challenges had to be addressed. First, the angling pressure is extremely high in Alberta. Indeed, we have roughly 375 licensed anglers per lake compared to 1.9, 1.7 and 2.3 in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, respectively. It is therefore important to assess angling pressure at a lake to see if a Quality Stocked Fishery is even feasible at that location. Second, candidate lakes must be evaluated to determine whether they have an adequate balance of shallow and deeper habitats, high food production, low predation on fish, no competing fish species, good water quality, sufficient oxygen or possibility of aeration, high potential for angler access and strong angler support. Once all of these questions have been answered favorably a Quality Stocked Fishery may be attempted at a particular lake.

Of the 38 trout-stocked lakes in the Rocky Area, three are managed as Quality Stocked Fisheries. These are Beaver Lake, Fiesta Lake and Ironside Pond. All three lakes have special regulations aimed at providing larger fish.

Beaver Lake

Beaver Lake was the first Quality Stocked Lake in the Rocky Area. It is also the largest at 31.2 hectares (ha) in size. It was initially stocked in 1999 and is currently stocked annually with 3500 rainbow trout of roughly 15-20 cm in size. This represents a stocking rate of 112 fish/ha.



Photo: Jay Wieliczko, Alberta Conservation Association

The regulations at Beaver are:

- April 1 – November 30: Trout limit 0; bait ban
- December 1 – March 31: Closed

Fiesta Lake

Fiesta Lake is 7.1 ha in size and was initially stocked in 2007. Every year, this lake receives 550 rainbow trout of over 20 cm in size. This represents a stocking rate of 77 fish/ha.



Photo: Bill Tonn, University of Alberta

The regulations at Fiesta are:

- April 16 – October 31: Trout limit 0; bait ban
- November 1 – April 15: Closed

Ironside Pond

Ironside Pond is the smallest Quality Stocked Lake at 3.3 ha in size. It was initially stocked in 2005 and is currently stocked annually with 500 rainbow trout over 20 cm in size. This represents a stocking rate of 161 fish/ha.



Photo: Rocky Konynenbelt

The regulations at Ironside are:

- April 16 – October 31: Trout limit 0; bait ban
- November 1 – April 15: Closed

All three lakes are presently being monitored to assess the success of the Quality Stocked program. To this effect, all fish stocked for several years were marked to identify their year of stocking, which allows tracking of those fish over the following years to assess age and growth. A team of experienced fly fishing anglers volunteer their time to help ESRD fisheries staff collect valuable data on these fisheries. Results from lake evaluations will allow fisheries managers to make adjustments in the stocking rate at each lake while trying to keep the Quality Stocked Fishery objectives in mind.

For more information on the Quality Stocked Fishery program, contact one of the Fisheries staff listed at the bottom of the main web page.

| *Written by Rocky Konynebelt, Senior Fisheries Technician, Alberta Fish & Wildlife*