

Bull Trout Management and Recovery

Historically, bull trout were common and widely distributed in Alberta waters. Their range extended from the mountains and foothills out into the parkland and prairies, as far east as Lethbridge in the Oldman River, Carseland in the Bow River, Morrin in the Red Deer River, Edmonton in the North Saskatchewan River, Whitecourt in the Athabasca River, and Peace River in the Smoky / Peace system.



Photo: Isabelle Girard

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, bull trout populations experienced significant reductions in both range and numbers due to overfishing, competition with introduced non-native species and habitat degradation.

In response to these declining populations, Alberta Fish and Wildlife produced the first Alberta Bull Trout Management and Recovery Plan in 1994. Among other things, the plan recommended:

- A *Species of Special Concern* status for bull trout
- The establishment of a provincial zero harvest limit (i.e. catch and release only)
- The implementation of research and inventory projects to define bull trout ecology, population status, habitat requirements and impacts of industrial and recreational activities
- The urgent need to raise public awareness of bull trout, its importance and status

These recommendations have been implemented since 1994 and have resulted in significant progress towards the stability and partial recovery of bull trout in Alberta. Indeed, some populations have recovered partly. However, other populations have not improved; hence, many years of efforts are still needed to preserve and restore this species. To this end, fisheries managers are currently updating the Alberta Bull Trout Management and Recovery Plan.

Some Albertans have asked if the harvest of bull trout will once again be considered, and if so, when. As most populations of bull trout have simply not reached harvestable status, the catch and release regulation strategy will remain province-wide. However, if in the future, the species recovers enough for its status to improve and move away from *Species of Special Concern* then harvest would be considered on a case by case basis.

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