



Action Alert - AEP Sportfishing Engagement

Dear AWA Members,

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) is proposing to implement new Time-of-Day angling closures for the 2022-23 sport-fishing seasons for the Bow River and other East Slopes Zone 1 (ES1) fisheries including the Oldman, Highwood, Crowsnest and Elbow Rivers.

Time-of-Day angling closures are intended to reduce angling-related stress on fish during times of hot weather and reduced in-stream flows which can persist for extended periods during the summer months in Southern Alberta. AEP's goal with implementing these closures is to limit angling effort in the hopes that this might result in reduced hooking and handling mortality for fish during warmer periods.

Currently, AEP manages risks to fish during times of warm weather and low flow through voluntary advisories. The advisories provide guidance to anglers on best practices to reduce stress to fish during these conditions. This approach means that angling effort is reduced only if and when anglers make the voluntary decision to follow the guidance – leaving fish at the mercy of anglers who may choose to do the right thing, or not. In this system, anglers may be unaware that an advisory has been issued for the stream they're fishing in.

AEP is running their annual fisheries engagement program until February 7, 2022, which includes an online survey (available at: <https://www.alberta.ca/2022-23-sportfishing-regulations-engagement.aspx>) for Albertans to provide their feedback on the proposed changes to the 2022-23 sport-fishing regulations.

AEP has presented two options for how these Time-of-Day angling closures could be implemented. third option which is to stick with the status quo of having anglers manage their own fishing activities voluntarily. The two proposed options are described below:

1. Time-of-Day Angling Closures – **Fixed Period**

- Waters closed to angling daily between 2:00 PM and 12:00 AM from July 1 to August 31
- This option takes a precautionary approach as the closures will occur regardless of temperature and flow conditions

2. Time-of-Day Angling Closures – **Semi-Fixed Period**

- Waters closed to angling daily between 2:00 PM and 12:00 AM from July 1 to August 31
- However, a fishery could open “in-season” if low flows and high temperatures subside
- Fisheries will not be re-closed if low flows and high temperature conditions return
- This is a finer scale management approach, requiring staff to monitor hydrographic conditions and make decisions based on collected data

Given the information provided, **AWA supports the implementation of option 1**, following a Fixed Period angling closure. We have concerns with option 2 as a fishery may not be re-closed once it has been declared open, even if high-stress conditions return to a given waterway. Option 1 seems to provide stronger protections to fish during times of high temperature and low flows. Therefore, we encourage AWA members to complete this survey and support this first option.

There are many other items included as part of this AEP sport-fishing engagement. They fall into two categories – notification items or consultation items. Notification items are proposed changes to regulations which have been recommended by science to address conservation concerns when alternative options for protecting a species or population are limited. AEP isn't seeking feedback on notification items, as they are intended to inform anglers of changes with a high likelihood of implementation. Consultation items are ones where AEP has determined the populations to be sustainable and able to support a level of harvest. Here, AEP seeks feedback from anglers on how they would prefer a fishery be managed (such as through tag or size limits).

One notification item is a proposed bait ban in both the Clearwater and North Saskatchewan Rivers (mainstem between the Bighorn Dam and Highway 22/39). This ban is proposed because the use of bait increases the potential for catch and release mortality in the native bull trout population, which is currently listed as Threatened under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The bait ban will bring these two rivers in line with the rest of the region as they are the only two streams remaining in the Eastern Slopes (ES1/ES2) that currently allow bait use. AWA appreciates this proposed change from AEP to reduce the stress and mortality and hopefully aid in the recovery of one of Alberta's charismatic cold water trout species.

Any questions or concerns can be directed to AWA's conservation specialist Phillip Meintzer at pmeintzer@abwild.ca.



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