

North Central

Native Trout Recovery Program

The North Central Native Trout Recovery Program is a long-term initiative to recover native trout and whitefish in the central and northern East Slopes of Alberta. During the Program, management actions will be implemented in focal watersheds, with successful actions applied in subsequent watersheds over time. Actions will address the key threats limiting bull trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, and Arctic grayling populations and will include habitat remediation and/or fishing closures. The Program is part of an integrated provincial Fisheries Management approach, which means it is linked to the Provincial bull trout and Athabasca rainbow trout recovery planning processes, whirling disease and invasive species management, and the provincial Roadway Watercourse Crossings Remediation program.

Beginning in 2017/18 and running to 2023/24, management actions will be undertaken in the following watersheds:

- ES4 – Kakwa River
- ES3 – Berland River, Pembina River
- ES2 – Lower Ram River / North Saskatchewan River, Clearwater River, Pinto Lake, Red Deer River



The selection of these watersheds was based on:

1. **Biological factors:** Local populations have a reasonable chance of recovery. These watersheds have not degraded to the point where recovery efforts will be of little value.
2. **Economic factors:** Is there past, current or upcoming GOA or partner work in the area to help restore fish populations?
3. **Social factors:** Can angler attitudes and actions be changed to support

Why are we focusing on these watersheds?

- In many cases, it is difficult to pinpoint which threats are the most important to mitigate in a watershed because they act cumulatively and overlap in space and time. By acting in a few watersheds and using the best available science, we will learn how to most efficiently recover fish in the face of this uncertainty.
- Addressing habitat degradation and fragmentation at a large enough scale to significantly improve a fish population is a complex and costly task. Focusing recovery efforts in a few watersheds allows biologists, regulators, industry and stakeholders to work together and achieve meaningful change.

Why is it necessary to close some of the watersheds to fishing?

- Over the past 20 years, efforts to restore fish populations by implementing catch-and-release fishing regulations and other management actions have mostly failed.
- Proposed closures are very similar to the standard fishing regulations in place in East Slopes streams for several decades (1950s to 1980s), where alternate-year closures were used to protect fish. Each year, approximately half of the streams would be closed, and half would be open. This would be reversed the next year. This one-year rest period was not long enough to allow fish populations to recover from a year of intensive fishing.
- Proposed fishing closures may be in place for up to five years or more, depending on population status and public feedback.
- Fisheries Management will work with enforcement agencies to ensure proposed fishing closures are effective.
- The public will still be able to access these watershed areas for non-fishing activities (OHV use, hiking, camping, boating, etc.) according to local recreation regulations.
- Stocked lakes and ponds within closed watersheds will remain open to fishing unless otherwise posted.