



Fish Habitat and All-Terrain Vehicles

Newfoundland and Labrador Region

**BETTER
PRACTICES
TO PROTECT
FISH AND
FISH HABITAT**



All-Terrain Vehicles

Every year, an increasing number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador are enjoying the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) whether it is to explore the outdoors, haul a load of wood, carry gear to the cabin or travel to a favourite hunting spot. An ATV is a great way to travel, but operators should be aware of the potential impacts they can have on the environment.



Throughout our province, ATV operators encounter various types of fish habitat such as streams, rivers, ponds, wetlands and beaches. In fact, some people may be operating their ATVs through or near these areas without considering that it may be important habitat for many fish species.



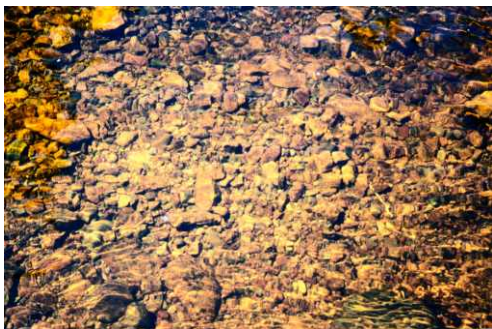
What is Fish Habitat?

The *Fisheries Act* defines fish habitat as those parts of the environment on which fish depend directly or indirectly in order to carry out their life processes. It also defines fish to include all the life stages of fish, shellfish, crustaceans, marine animals and marine plants.

Fish require clean, clear, sediment-free water, shelter and a plentiful food supply. A variety of habitat types are also required for most fish species to carry out their life processes.



Spawning and rearing habitats are critical areas where fish deposit and fertilize their eggs and young fish develop. In Newfoundland and Labrador rivers and streams, Brook Trout and Atlantic Salmon spawn in the area between riffles and pools. Riffles are shallow areas with rapid currents and a surface flow broken by gravel, rubble or boulders. Pools are deeper areas with slower flows.



Spawning habitat

In the marine environment, important fish and fish habitats occur along shorelines and beaches. Capelin spawning beds are found along beaches and shellfish, such as clams, spend most of their lives within or on the bottom of coastal or estuarine areas. In general, the intertidal zone is considered a productive area and may support many fish species life stages.

Wetlands (bogs) are commonly damaged by ATV use. While they do not directly provide habitat for fish, they contribute greatly to it by filtering water, affecting flow and providing nutrients.



Spawning capelin



Capelin eggs

As important freshwater and marine habitats are shallow, they may often be used by ATV operators as crossing points or routes of travel.

Impacts to Fish Habitat

Driving an ATV along riverbanks and across rivers and streams can harm fish habitat by damaging the banks or bottom of the river or stream causing a sedimentation event that could result in:

- Reduced water quality and clarity;
- Smothering of developing fish eggs and spawning and rearing habitats;
- Reduced food supply;
- Crushed fish eggs and fry; and
- Loss of vegetation that provides shelter.

ATV use along beaches can also harm fish and fish habitat by:

- Smothering of burrowing species such as clams;
- Reducing water quality and clarity;
- Smothering of developing fish eggs and spawning and rearing habitats;
- Crushing fish eggs and fry;
- Loss of vegetation that provides shelter;
- Reducing food supply; and
- Destroying spawning areas.



ATV tracks along beach

Improper ATV use can also damage habitat for many other wildlife species that live near the water, in bogs, or on barrens. Shore birds, ground nesting birds, small mammals and plants depend on these areas, so please take care.



Piping plover eggs on a beach



Hatched piping plover chick



Barren areas frequented by ATVs

How You Can Help Protect Fish Habitat

A good rule of thumb for ATV riders as well as operators of any off road vehicles is to stay out of the water.

- Steer clear of wetlands, shorelines and waterbodies.
- Avoid driving an ATV along beaches and streambanks.
- Stick to established hard roads and trails.
- Cross streams at bridges only.
- Choose a large anchor tree when using a winch so that it can withstand the pull.

If you must cross a stream because of an emergency or safety concern please:

- Cross where the approach is stable and has a low slope;
- Cross at right angles to the stream;
- Cross where the streambed is made of bedrock or large rubble;
- Reduce speed when crossing;
- Avoid areas with vegetated, silty or sandy bottoms; and
- Keep your ATV in good repair, free of mud, oil and other harmful substances that could impair water quality.



Trail signage developed in association with the Burin Peninsula Association of Salmonid Enhancement on ATV activity around fish habitat.

Remember, we all need clean water to survive. Please help protect our aquatic resources by driving responsibly around bodies of water.

For More Information

If you would like to learn more about fish and fish habitat and how to help protect both by the proper use of ATVs please contact:

Habitat Protection Division
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
P.O. Box 5667
St. John's, NL A1C 5X1
(709) 772-2443

For additional information regarding the use of ATVs in Newfoundland and Labrador, please contact the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador at:

Inland Fish and Wildlife Division
Environment and Conservation
P.O. Box 2007
Corner Brook, NL A2H 7S1
(709) 637-2372

Water Resources Management Division
Environment and Conservation
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6
(709) 729-5713

Crown Land Administration
Environment and Conservation
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6
(709) 729-2654

Information regarding the use of ATVs may also be found on the Environment and Conservation website:
http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/lands/cla/atv_info.html

Please note that federal and/or provincial permits may be required for ATV activities conducted in, around and over bodies of water. Contact the above government departments for further information.

