

Alberta Conservation Association
2022/23 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Fish Stocking Expansion – New Lakes

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Project Leader: Scott Seward

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Alberta Transportation

County of Grande Prairie

Evelyn and Leslie Wadey

Lacombe Fish & Game Association

Saddle Hills County

Taber Irrigation District

Town of Taber

Key Findings

- Recommendations from stakeholders and regional fisheries biologists identified six ponds as potential trout stocking sites for evaluation in 2022/23; however, none of the ponds passed Alberta Conservation Association’s screening criteria.
- Candidate ponds from previous years, Chestermere Pond near Chestermere and BP1 (a borrow pit) near Fort McMurray, both have fisheries potential but creating public access remains an issue at these ponds.

- Rotary Park Pond in Westlock, first assessed in 2021, also has potential given the town plans to dredge the waterbody and install summer aeration, but we will have to reassess the pond after dredging occurs.

Abstract

Stocked trout fisheries are popular in Alberta, with rainbow trout being the third most sought-after fish by anglers in Alberta. Given the popularity of stocked trout fisheries in Alberta, this project seeks to expand the number of stocked ponds through identification and screening of ponds with potential to support a stocked trout fishery. We identified and evaluated six new ponds (FS 1 in Didsbury, FS 179 in Carstairs, FS 232 in the Weberville area, FS 233 in Ponoka County, FS 234 in Penhold, and FS 235 in Rimbey) during the 2022 field season and determined that none met Alberta Conservation Association’s (ACA) criteria (e.g., water depth, dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, pH, water clarity, absence of invasive species, barriers to prevent fish escapement, etc.) for a stocked fishery. However, three ponds—Chestermere Pond (near Chestermere), a borrow pit (BP1 near Fort McMurray), and Rotary Park Pond (Westlock)—identified in previous field seasons may be suitable for future fisheries. We are working with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas and local municipalities to determine next steps.

Introduction

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) stocks over 60 waterbodies with catchable-sized trout (i.e., 20 cm) under its Fish Stocking (FS) project. Stocked trout fisheries are popular in Alberta, with rainbow trout being the third most sought-after fish by anglers in Alberta (DFO 2019). Our stocked ponds can receive upwards of 2,000 angler hours per hectare during the summer months (Fitzsimmons and Keeling 2016), making them some of the most intensely fished waterbodies in the province. Being within a reasonable driving distance of many anglers contributes to the popularity of FS ponds. To expand our FS project, we continue to identify new waterbodies to stock and/or develop.

Methods

Over the past eight years, we have evaluated a total of 236 waterbodies using Google Earth © (2021) imagery supplemented with input from regional fisheries biologists and stakeholders. Priority is given to waterbodies within a 50-km radius of a large urban centre; however, we also consider waterbodies farther from cities if we believe they will make exceptional fisheries. We use satellite imagery and provincial fisheries database queries to eliminate unsuitable waterbodies based on attributes including potential for fish escapement, presence of trout predators, water depth (excessive weed growth), overlap with sensitive amphibian habitat, and potential for user conflict (e.g., on a golf course).

In 2022, we evaluated six ponds (FS 1 in Didsbury, FS 179 in Carstairs, FS 232 in the Weberville area, FS 233 in Ponoka County, FS 234 in Penhold, and FS 235 in Rimbey) (Figure 1). We assessed the ponds to determine physical, chemical, and biological suitability for recreational trout fishing. We measured water depth, dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, pH, and water clarity. We also noted aquatic weed abundance, shoreline characteristics, absence of invasive species, barriers to prevent fish escapement, and accessibility to the public.

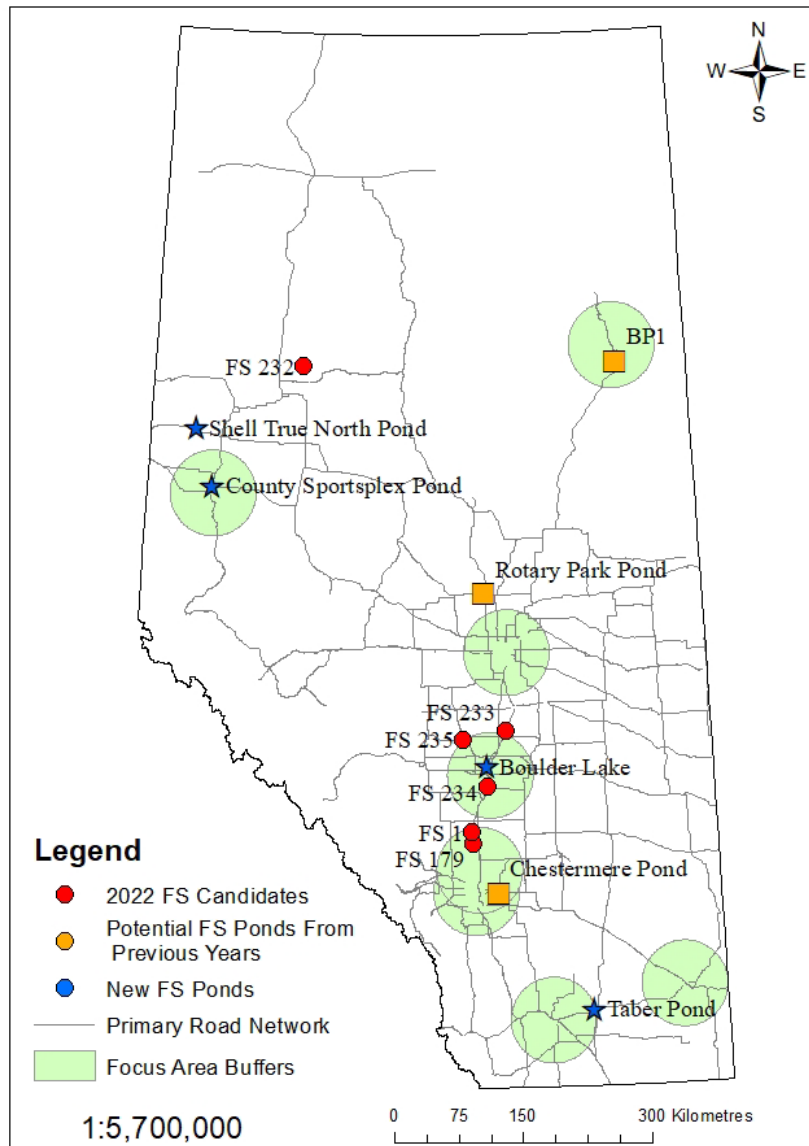


Figure 1. Provincial focal areas for fish stocking expansion, new fisheries developed over the last seven years, and candidate ponds undergoing evaluation with a preference for waterbodies within the 50-km buffers.

Results

Insufficient water depth, poor water quality, and invasive species encroachment resulted in all six ponds failing to meet ACA's screening criteria. In addition to assessing new waterbodies, we continue to work toward having other waterbodies identified in previous field seasons developed into fisheries. We are working with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas to address access issues at Chestermere Pond (near Chestermere) and BP1 (a borrow pit, near Fort McMurray), candidate ponds from 2017 and 2020, respectively. We are also working with the Town of Westlock to determine if Rotary Park Pond will become a suitable candidate once water depth is increased through mechanical dredging (Figure 1).

Since 2015, we have developed four waterbodies (Taber Pond, Boulder Lake, County Sportsplex Pond, and Shell True North Pond) into fisheries and stocked them with various species of trout.

Conclusions

There are a limited number of waterbodies across the province that are suitable for trout stocking under FS expansion. Nonetheless, we have added four new ponds over the past eight years with more developments on the horizon. All four ponds have been very well received as anglers take advantage of these new opportunities. This project continues to find and develop fisheries, creating new fishing opportunities near large urban centres across the province.

Communications

- ACA brochure "Remember the Old Fishin' Hole? Let's bring that back."

Literature Cited

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). 2019. *Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada, 2015*.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Ottawa, ON.

Fitzsimmons, K. and B. Keeling. 2016. *Stocked Trout Survival and Camera-based Angler Survey at Selected ACA Stocked Ponds*. Data Report, D-2106-106. Alberta Conservation

Association. Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada. 25 pp + appendices.

Google Earth. 2021. Province of Alberta, Alberta, Canada. CNES/Airbus 2021, DigitalGlobe 2021. Google 2021. V 7.3.4.

Photos



Photo 1. Candidate waterbody for fish stocking expansion, FS 179, within the Town of Carstairs, Alberta. Photo: Diana Rung



Photo 2. Anglers enjoying one the new fisheries at County Sportsplex Pond, within the town of Clairmont, Alberta. Photo: ACA