

Management of Class 'A' Watercourses in Alberta

What Regulates Activities in Class 'A' Watercourses

Generally, activities in Alberta watercourses are regulated by *Water Act* approvals. However, the act specifies certain activities that must be regulated by relevant Codes of Practice. Due to the sensitive nature of Class 'A' watercourses, these activities may require a special review as outlined in a federal-provincial Working Agreement. Other statutes that regulate activities in watercourses of the province are the Alberta *Public Lands Act*, the federal *Fisheries Act* and the *Navigation Protection Act*.

What are Class 'A' Watercourses?

Class 'A' watercourses are critical fish habitat protection areas. Alberta's *Water Act* sets out a regulatory mechanism that governs certain activities within a water body through various Codes of Practice.

In the codes, watercourses are designated as Class A, B, C, or D based on an assessment by provincial fisheries biologists. In determining the class of a watercourse, the biologists use the significance of the class as fish habitat, and the sensitivity of the class to the effects of the regulated activities as criteria for the assessment.

Examples of such habitats include Bull Trout spawning areas and Lake Sturgeon over-wintering pools. It is important these areas are highly protected to assure the continued viability of fish populations. Class B, C and D watercourses are also important fish habitats, but do not require the highest level of protection.

Information on the four classes of watercourses in the province can be found in the Codes of Practice cited on the department's website and the 17 management area maps they refer to. The management area maps provide important information such as location of specific classes of Alberta watercourses and any associated restricted activity periods. More detailed information about Class 'A' watercourses are contained in an atlas maintained by Environment and Parks.

- [Water: Codes of Practice](#)

Where are Class 'A' Watercourses Located?

As shown on the map (see page 2) Class 'A' watercourses are found throughout the province. They are commonly found along major rivers, such as the North and South Saskatchewan, Red Deer and Milk Rivers. Many Class 'A' watercourses are also found along the east slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

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The Class 'A' Working Agreement

There is a federal-provincial agreement formally known as the Working Agreement: Class 'A' Watercourses (June 1, 2007) that sets down the cooperative goals under which federal and provincial regulators will manage proposed activities in Class 'A' watercourses to avoid potential risks. A notable element of the agreement is the establishment of a joint-agency review process, conducted by a panel of representatives from provincial and federal regulatory agencies. This process is described in full detail in Appendix C of the Working Agreement.

Activities in Class 'A' Watercourses – Key Planning Points

When planning activities that may be located in Class 'A' watercourses, the following points should be considered:

- Review the classes of the watercourses in the area of interest early in the planning stage to become aware of the locations of any Class 'A' watercourses
- Plan activities to avoid Class 'A' watercourses
- Be aware that the application and review process may require a significant amount of time
- Include detailed technical and biological information with the application

For additional information about the *Water Act*, the Codes of Practice, the Working Agreement: Class 'A' Watercourses, as well as detailed information on Class 'A' watercourses in Alberta and the joint review process, visit the Environment and Parks website at:

- [Water: Codes of Practice](#)

For more information about fish populations and habitats in a location of concern, please contact your local fisheries biologist.

- [Fish & Wildlife Area Office Contacts](#)

