



# THE NEW ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH TO ILLEGAL FISH INTRODUCTIONS

The Ministry of Environment is responsible for providing quality fishing opportunities, as well as protecting native fish species. Unfortunately, the growing number of waters with illegally introduced fish species poses a huge threat to our native fish resources and the benefits we derive from them.

Recently reported introductions of fish such as bass, pike and yellow perch are almost certainly due to deliberate and illegal activities of individuals intent on creating new fisheries. While these species may support fisheries in other locales, the unauthorized spread of these species outside their range in B.C. is at the expense of our native fisheries. The impacts will be irreversible in many cases.

### Ministry Response

The Ministry is getting tough with illegal fish introductions in order to protect our native resources. Policy is now in place to enable removal or control of such species where they pose high risks. In support of this policy, a new management approach has been developed that emphasizes **zero-tolerance** for new illegal introductions of fish species such as bass, yellow perch, black crappie, walleye and pike.

People caught moving or releasing live fish into lakes or streams will be prosecuted. (This, of course, does not apply to catch-and-release fishing, when releasing fish directly back into the water at the point of capture.) If newly identified introductions of fish species are discovered, they may result in a fishing closure on that water to provide a strong disincentive for future introductions and to prevent future spread. At a minimum, a strictly enforced fishing closure for the introduced species will be imposed on the lake or stream.

The Ministry recognizes that in some cases, fisheries for introduced species have been long established. These fisheries may be managed to maintain fishing opportunities where they pose minimal threat to native resources. However if a water is identified as being the source of fish for illegal introductions, it may be closed to fishing for that species.

This new management approach will be phased in across the province over the next few years. In 2009, the Kootenay Region is piloting new regulations aimed at addressing the issue of illegal introduction of non-native fish species. You can find these new regulations on page Region 4-1 ([URL](#)).

### You Can Help!

Protecting our native aquatic systems and the fisheries they support is a responsibility that we all share. Report any suspicious activity related to the illegal transfer of live fish to the Conservation Officer Service (1-877-952-7277). This offence holds a **penalty of up to \$100,000 for first time offenders, and/or a prison term of up to 12 months for a second offence.** In addition, a **REWARD of up to \$20,000** is available to anyone providing information leading to the successful prosecution of individuals responsible for the illegal transfer of fish species in B.C. waters. This reward is ongoing and is supplied by the **B.C. Wildlife Federation, in co-operation with the Ministry of Environment.**



"Northern pike - illegally introduced in southern B.C."

Colin James 2008



Yellow perch - illegally introduced in several regions

Robert Bison

**IT IS ILLEGAL TO POSSESS LIVE FISH OR RELEASE LIVE FISH INTO B.C.'S LAKES OR STREAMS**