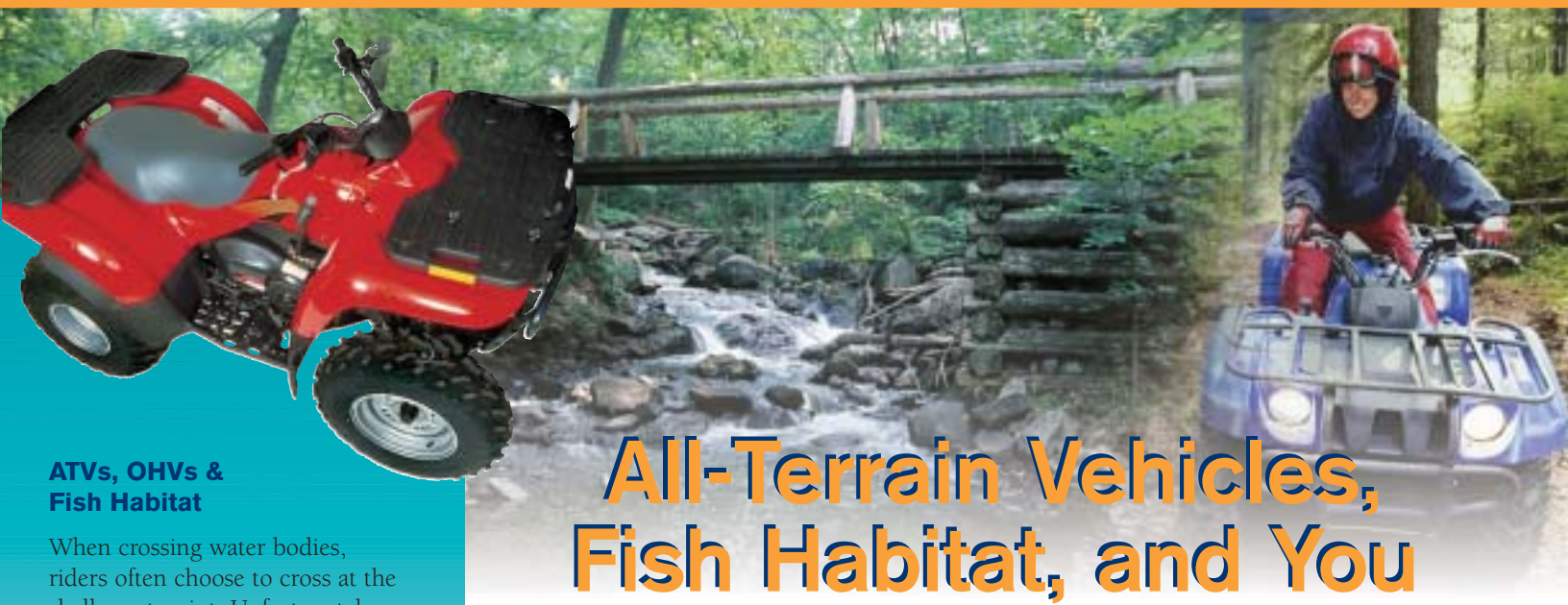

All-Terrain Vehicles, Fish Habitat, and You

Each year, more and more Canadians enjoy the use of all-terrain vehicles and off-highway vehicles (ATVs and OHVs). The wide variety of ATVs and OHVs include those motorized vehicles with common names such as 4x4s, quads, trikes, and off-road motorcycles. ATVs and OHVs provide a great way to travel, but operators should be aware of the potential impacts these vehicles can have on the environment. You can do your part by following these environmentally friendly riding practices that will allow you to enjoy off-roading activities while protecting our environment and aquatic ecosystems.

ATVs, OHVs & Fish Habitat

When crossing water bodies, riders often choose to cross at the shallowest point. Unfortunately this poses some of the greatest risks to fish and their habitats. These shallow crossing areas are also preferred by species such as walleye, trout, sucker and Arctic grayling as spawning sites. Gravel areas with shallow flowing water provide the eggs with clean and well-oxygenated water needed for their early growth. Driving over these areas can compact the gravel and cause siltation that may kill fish eggs and young fish, and at a minimum, will reduce the quality of the overall habitat.

The various plants in and along the shoreline of lakes and streams also provide important spawning, nursery and feeding habitat for many fish species. For example, northern pike rely on nearshore vegetation for spawning in the spring. Even though a creek, shoreline or wetland may be dry in the summer, it may provide important spawning and rearing habitat during high water.

Fish habitat will be protected if you follow the environmentally friendly guidelines in this fact sheet.

Riding

- Select your route in advance to avoid streams, rivers, lakes, marshes, beaches and wetlands, even if they are dry at the time of crossing. Many fish species and their eggs and fry are particularly vulnerable during the spring and fall seasons.
- Stay on established hard roads and trails. Braided trails can result in unnecessary and extensive environmental damage. ATV/OHV trails should be at least 30 metres away from all water bodies and wetlands. Try to maintain this “buffer zone” at all times.
- In general, try to avoid operating your vehicle during very wet conditions (such as after heavy rains and spring runoff) as the ground surface can be more easily damaged.
- Where the approach directs muddy water towards the water body, consider constructing cross-ditches along the trail. These ditches should be directed towards thick vegetation that would allow the soil and sediment to be filtered out before it reaches the water body.

Crossing Water Bodies with Steep Approaches

- Wherever possible, avoid crossing water bodies where the approaches are very steep. Steep banks are not only a safety hazard for the operator, they are also very vulnerable to soil erosion, especially during rainfall and runoff events. Plants help to stabilize banks and minimize bank erosion. Plants can be damaged or killed after repeated crossing attempts, leaving soil exposed to wind and rain. In some areas, particularly in northern

Watercrossing

- Do not drive your ATV or OHV up and down a stream channel or waterway at any time.
- Consider constructing bridges at water body crossings to minimize impacts to the water body and its fish habitat. (If bridges are the preferred option, be sure to acquire all regulatory approvals and permits before starting the work).
- If you cross a water body where there is no bridge, use crossings that others have used, or choose a location with a rocky bottom and low, stable banks. Minimise the number of times that the water body must be crossed, and cross slowly to avoid stirring up sediment that could drift downstream and smother spawning beds. Cross the water at right angles to the stream banks.
- Do not clear away the branches or brush in or around the water. Such plant and tree materials, even when dead, provide important habitat elements such as shade, predator protection, and rearing and feeding areas for fish. These features also help to maintain the stability of shorelines, stream banks and channels.

Cette publication est également disponible en français

regions, plants are easily damaged and are slow to recover. In such cases, banks become ongoing sources of sediment.

Minimize Your Impact on the Slopes

- Do not remove vegetation on banks to gain access to upslope areas.
- Avoid water crossings where winching is necessary. Trees used for winching often become uprooted or damaged by cables and may die.
- Where winching is the only option, make sure that the anchor tree is big enough so that it is not pulled out of the ground or unnecessarily damaged by the winching. Use wide straps instead of cables or ropes, and place the winch strap as close to the base of the tree as possible to minimize damage.

Avoid Sensitive Areas

Some sensitive areas like bogs, fens, marshes, muskegs and small creeks may not contain fish, but are critical to a healthy watershed. These areas provide a water source and a filtration system which improves water quality. They also provide very important habitats to a wide diversity of species such as birds, small mammals and small aquatic organisms. These areas often connect to other water bodies downstream where fish can live. If these sensitive areas are to be crossed, consider constructing a suitable crossing such as a bridge. A better option is to stay on high ground and avoid these areas altogether.

What Else Can I Do?

- Know the limits of your machine.
- Make sure ATV and OHV tires are maintained and capable of operating on the ground conditions on which you plan to ride.
- Ensure that your ATV or OHV does not have any fuel or oil leaks.
- Never wash your ATV or OHV in the water body since this can pollute the water.
- Take out what you took in. Make sure that you pick up all garbage (including broken fenders and mud flaps) and dispose properly.
- Respect signs that restrict ATV or OHV access.
- And last, but not least, consider the impacts that your ATV or OHV might have on the environment, and do your part to protect our waters and aquatic habitats.

Working Together to Protect Fish Habitat

The *Fisheries Act* plays a large role in ensuring the conservation and protection of our fisheries by providing for the protection of fish and fish habitat. Under this Act, no one may harmfully alter, disrupt or destroy fish habitat without an authorization from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Act prohibits the deposit of a deleterious (harmful) substance, such as pollutants and sediment, in waters frequented by fish.

This fact sheet does not constitute approval under the *Fisheries Act*, or under any other federal, provincial or municipal legislation or regulations that may be in force across different jurisdictions in Canada.

Help maintain the quality and quantity of fish habitat in our lakes and streams. For more advice on responsible ATV or OHV use, or any other activity in or near water, contact your local DFO district office.

For more information on the Fisheries Act, visit our website at:
www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/canwaters-eauxcan