Boathouses, docks and moorings: Construction, maintenance and repair

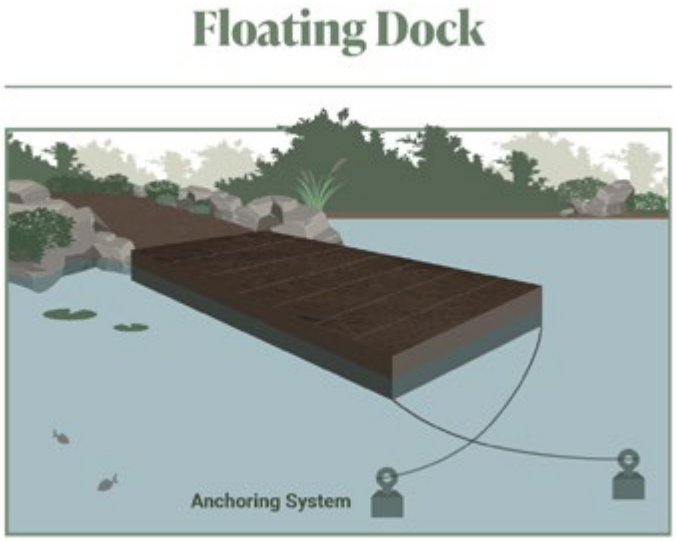
December 2025

1.0 About this code of practice

Boathouses and docks are common features on the Canadian aquatic landscape, and they are integral to the recreational use of waterways.

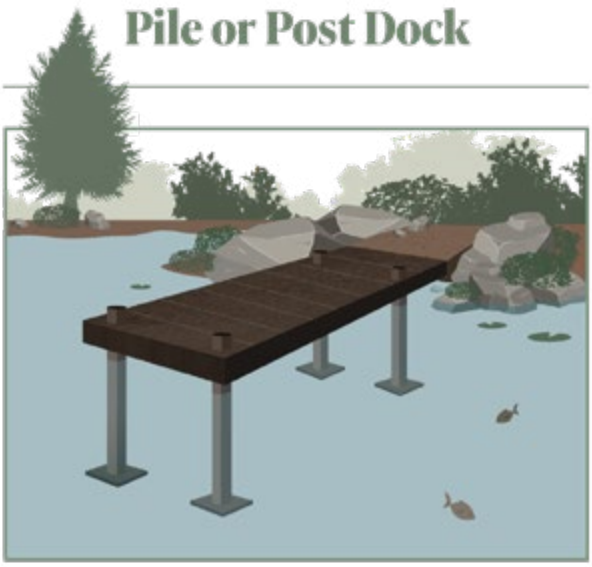
This code of practice applies to the construction, maintenance and repair of boathouses, docks and moorings that are either floating or supported by:

- pipes
- piles
- poles
- anchors
- concrete blocks
- cantilever arms



You can protect fish and fish habitat during the construction, maintenance and repair of a boathouse, dock or mooring by following the measures listed below. When implemented correctly, these measures can manage the risk of harmful impacts associated with the construction, maintenance and repair activities, which can include:

- disturbance of watercourse or water body bed and banks
- release of sediments or other deleterious substances
- changes to aquatic habitat



The purpose of this code of practice is to describe the conditions under which it can be applied to your project and the measures you are required to implement in order to prevent harmful impacts to fish and fish habitat and comply with the *Fisheries Act* and the *Species at Risk Act*. If you cannot meet all the conditions and implement all the applicable measures listed below, your project may result in a violation of the *Fisheries Act* and the *Species at Risk Act* and you could be subject to enforcement action.

DFO is responsible for the conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat across Canada. Under the *Fisheries Act*, no one may carry out works, undertakings and activities in or near water that result in the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat, or the death of fish, unless it has been authorized by DFO. Prohibitions in the Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations must also be followed unless authorized under federal or provincial law.

Cat. No. Fs23-762/1-2025E ISBN 978-0-660-75501-4

DFO's approval under the *Species at Risk Act* is also required if an activity affects an aquatic species at risk, any part of its critical habitat or the residences of its individuals.

If you are uncertain about whether this code of practice is applicable to your project, consult a qualified environmental professional. You may need to use other codes of practice or submit a request for project review. For any remaining questions, please contact the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program office in your area. It is your responsibility to comply with the *Fisheries Act* and the *Species at Risk Act*.

It is your duty to notify DFO if you have caused, or are about to cause, the unauthorized death of fish by means other than fishing, or the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat. Such notifications should be directed to the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program office found in your area.

This code of practice does not remove nor replace the obligation to comply with the requirements of any other federal, territorial, provincial or municipal regulatory agency including guidance about species and habitats managed by these jurisdictions.

We strongly recommend that you notify Indigenous communities that may be affected by the project prior to starting the project.

A project review by DFO is not needed when the:

- project activities meet the description in section 1 and the conditions in section 2
- measures to protect fish and fish habitat set out in section 3 of this code of practice are applied

Request a project review if your project does not meet all these requirements.

2.0 Conditions

The following conditions describe when this code of practice can be applied:

- you determine if there are aquatic species at risk within the affected area by consulting our aquatic species at risk map, and confirm that the work will not take place within the:
  - entire distribution area, including critical habitat or residences, of any molluscs listed under schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
  - critical habitat or residences of any other aquatic species at risk
- the work does not include:
  - use of explosives
  - construction of new crib docks
  - use of foam floats

- pile driving using impact hammer
- removal of natural wood debris, rocks, sand or other materials from below the ordinary high water mark
- placing fill, excavating or grading below the ordinary high water mark, or dredging (if dredging for the purpose of maintaining a previously dredged navigational area, consult the code of practice for dredging: routine maintenance)

- for maintenance and repair of existing structures, there is no permanent increase in the original design footprint below the ordinary high water mark
- for new construction, the footprint is limited to pipes, piles, poles, anchors and cement blocks
- pile installation is completed using a vibratory hammer or drilling methods
- you implement the measures in section 3 to protect fish and fish habitat when carrying out the works, undertakings and activities

As a condition of this code of practice, please submit a notification 10 working days before starting work. Notifications will inform the continuous improvement of the codes of practice over time.

Submit a notification

In the event you need to use the PDF form instead, you must:

1. download it to your computer
2. use PDF software to open it (such as, Adobe Reader or Foxit PDF)
3. fill out and save the form
4. email the completed form to your regional DFO office

For more information: How to download and open a PDF form.

3.0 Measures to protect fish and fish habitat

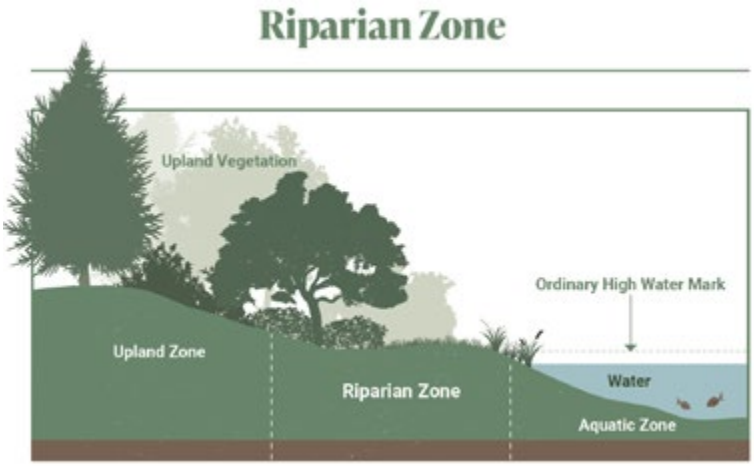
3.1 Protection of fish

- Carry out the project in accordance with timing windows.
  - limit the duration of in-water works, undertakings and activities.

3.2 Protection of the riparian zone

- Use existing trails, roads, access points or cut lines.
- Limit vegetation removal, pruning and grubbing to the area required for accessing the project site.
- Reinstate stream banks and slopes of the affected riparian zone.
- Re-vegetate the affected riparian zone with native species suitable for the project site.

3.3 Protection of aquatic habitat



- Ensure that equipment and machinery are clean and free of aquatic invasive species prior to arriving to the project site.
- Limit disturbance of fish habitat features (for example, aquatic plants, rocks, woody material) to the area required to carry out the project.
    - Limit operation of vehicles and machinery to the area required to carry out the project.
    - Mooring anchors and chains should be adequately sized to secure vessels or structures and prevent the anchor or chain from shifting or dragging along the bed of the watercourse or water body.
    - Limit the extent to which the structure covers aquatic vegetation.

3.4 Protection of fish and fish habitat from sediment

- Manage sediment laden water flowing onto or through the site during all phases of the project.
    - Install erosion and sediment controls prior to beginning the project.
        - Develop and implement an erosion and sediment control plan for all phases of the project.
            - » Regularly observe the watercourse or water body for signs of suspended sediment during all phases of the project and take corrective action when and where required.
            - » Inspect the erosion and sediment controls regularly during all phases of the project.
                - Repair the erosion controls during all phases of the project.
            - » Operate machinery on land in stable areas.
            - » Use biodegradable materials for erosion and sediment controls whenever possible.
            - » Remove all non-biodegradable erosion and sediment controls once the project site has been stabilized.
            - » Dispose of, and stabilize, all excavated material above the ordinary high water mark or top of bank of any nearby watercourse or water body.
    - Keep the erosion and sediment controls in place until all disturbed ground has been stabilized and suspended sediments have settled.

3.5 Protection of fish and fish habitat from other deleterious substances

3.5.1 Develop a prevention plan

- Develop a plan to prevent deleterious substances from entering a watercourse or water body.

- Maintain all machinery on site in a clean condition and free of fluid leaks.
- Wash, refuel and service machinery in such a way as to prevent any deleterious substances from entering a watercourse or water body.
- Store fuel and other materials for the machinery in such a way as to prevent any deleterious substance from entering a watercourse or water body.
- Dispose of all waste materials on land in a designated area away from the ordinary high water mark of any watercourse or water body.
- Use untreated materials (for example, cedar, tamarack, hemlock, rocks, plastic, etc.) as supports for dock structures that will be submerged in water.
- Ensure plastic barrel floats are clean prior to use in water.
- Use only pre-cast, cured concrete for anchors and moorings.

3.5.2 Implement a response plan

- Implement a response plan immediately in the event of a spill of a deleterious substance (including sediment).
  - Stop all works, undertakings and activities.
  - Report spill immediately when a deleterious substance enters a watercourse or water body.
  - Contain water with deleterious substances.
  - Clean-up and dispose of water contaminated with deleterious substances.
    - Use an emergency spill kit.

3.6 Underwater noise

If pile or sheet pile driving is required, use vibratory hammer or drilling methods. The following mitigation measures are applicable in the marine environment:

- Define an exclusion zone, of at least 500 m from the source of the noise, in which no whales, dolphins, or porpoises should be present during the work generating underwater noise.
- Ensure that an observer is present on site for the full duration of the work generating under water noise.
- Monitor for marine mammals for at least 30 minutes prior to the start of pile installation.
- Only begin work if there are no whales, dolphins, or porpoises in the exclusion zone.
- Begin generating underwater noise very gradually to allow whales, dolphins, or porpoises that may be present in the exclusion zone, but not visible, to leave the area.
- Stop the work if whales, dolphins, or porpoises are present in the exclusion zone.

4.0 Glossary

Affected area: The area within which all of the proposed project impacts are likely to occur either directly (i.e., project footprint) or indirectly (i.e., downstream or other surrounding areas).

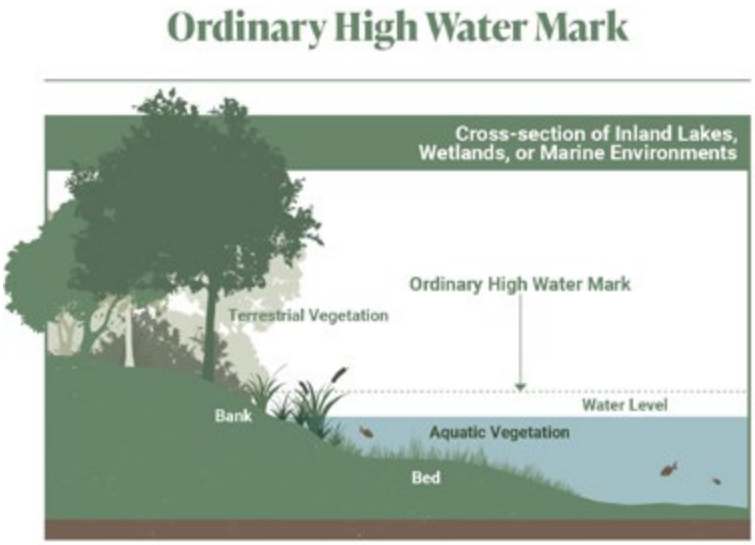
Aquatic invasive species: Fish, invertebrate or plant species that have been introduced into a new aquatic environment outside of their natural range.

Aquatic species at risk: Any aquatic species listed under Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* as endangered, threatened or extirpated.

Deleterious substance: Any substance that, if added to water, would degrade, alter or form part of a process of degradation/alteration to the quality of that water so that it is possibly rendered deleterious to fish, fish habitat, or to the human use of fish that frequent that water. For example: fuel, lubricants, paints, primers, rust, solvents, degreasers, antifreeze, uncured concrete, foam, creosote, chlorinated water, herbicides, etc.

Harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat (HADD) – Policy Interpretation: Any temporary or permanent change to fish habitat that directly or indirectly impairs the habitat's capacity to support one or more life processes of fish.

Marine environment: Comprises all ocean, coastal waters and estuaries, including intertidal zones and salt water marshes, and extending up to the freshwater limit in the case of watercourses.



Ordinary high water mark: The usual or average level to which a body of water rises at its highest point and remains for sufficient time to change the characteristics of the land. In flowing waters (e.g., rivers, streams) this refers to the "active channel/bank-full level" which is often the 1:2 year flood flow return level. In inland lakes, wetlands or marine environments it refers to those parts of the water body, bed and banks that are frequently flooded by water so as to leave a mark on the land and where the natural vegetation changes from predominately aquatic vegetation to terrestrial vegetation (excepting water tolerant species). For reservoirs this refers to normal high operating levels (i.e., full supply level).

Qualified environmental professional (QEP): A person who is experienced in identifying and assessing potential impacts to fish and fish habitat generated from various works, undertakings or activities conducted in or near water, and implementing management measures to avoid and mitigate them. QEPs possess a post-

secondary degree or diploma in biological, geophysical or environmental sciences and are often referred to as:

- aquatic biologist
- fisheries biologist
- fluvial geomorphologist
- applied scientist
- fisheries technician
- environmental consultant
- natural resource consultant

Riparian vegetation: Occurs adjacent to the water body and directly contributes to fish habitat by providing shade, cover and areas for spawning and food production.

Riparian zone: Area located between a watercourse or water body's ordinary high water mark and upland area. The width of the riparian zone may be further defined by provincial, territorial or municipal regulations or guidelines.