

Invasive Species Alert!

Smallmouth Bass in Cultus Lake | November 16, 2020

What's Bad About B.C. Bass?

01. Eat everything!
Including the endangered pygmy sculpin and sockeye salmon

02. Can outcompete native species for food and habitat, decreasing local diversity

03. Ability to migrate and flourish in lakes AND rivers

Bass in Cultus Lake

In 2018 Cultus Lake got even busier with the introduction of smallmouth bass. In Canada, these bass are native to the Great Lakes and St Lawrence River System, but due to their popularity as a sport fish, they have been introduced throughout the world. In British Columbia, they were first introduced in 1901 through a legal introduction to boost sport fishing. Since then, they have been spread throughout southern and central BC. In recent years, all introductions have been illegal, without the understanding of the devastating effects these fish can have on the ecosystem.

Why should we care?

Smallmouth bass are voracious predators, feeding opportunistically on anything they can fit in their mouths. Cultus Lake is surprisingly diverse with 19 different fish species, including two species-at-risk, Pygmy Sculpin and Cultus Lake Sockeye Salmon. What's concerning is that bass are known to feed on both salmon juveniles and sculpin. They have also extirpated species such as sticklebacks, minnows and dace from lake ecosystems. All of these native species play a key role in a balanced ecosystem. With the introduction of a new top predator, the lake is at risk of losing its diversity.

A new species can also cause competition in the lake for both food and habitat. Smallmouth bass may be outcompeting the native fish for prey. This includes current sport fish such as rainbow trout, and Dolly Varden. If bass outcompete these species for food, native populations may dwindle. Bass also have large 'spawning grounds' where they build shallow rock nests, and defend the nests fiercely. The current known areas are between Sweltzer Creek and Sunnyside campground, where over 60 nests were counted in Spring 2020. This spawning may take up habitat that was previously key habitat or foraging grounds for other species.

Once introduced, bass are incredibly adaptive and can flourish in a variety of ecosystems. They can survive in a wide range of temperatures and show little preference to lake size and depth. Smallmouth bass can also thrive in river systems. This is especially concerning considering the close proximity and connectivity of Cultus Lake to the Fraser River.



With all this in mind, there is still hope for Cultus Lake! Currently, we are researching both the impacts of smallmouth bass and how we can potentially suppress their population. If you would like more information on the project please contact me at margettsw19@mytru.ca. I am always looking for volunteers during the summer, so reach out if you're interested!



Don't forget, transporting live fish is ILLEGAL and without a permit you can be fined up to \$100,000 and potentially serve jail time. Please report any suspicious activity to a conservation officer at: 1-877-952-RAPP