

Tagish River Habitat Protection Area

Welcome to the Tagish River (Taagish Too'e/Taagish Héeni) Habitat Protection Area (HPA). This is a very special place to the people, fish, birds, animals and other living things that call this place home. Many fish and fisheries in this area are specially managed for licensed anglers. Please understand the regulations, know you are fishing within Carcross/Tagish First Nation (C/TFN) Traditional Territory, fish with purpose and respect.



© Rodney Hsu/
Fishing with Rod

Respecting the HPA

The Tagish River HPA protects a 5 km² slice of the Yukon River system between Marsh Lake and Tagish Lake. The Tagish River, also called “Six Mile” or “Tagish Narrows,” is in an historically important location for the First Nation as a meeting and gathering place for trade, ceremony and harvesting activities.

The wetlands in this area are the "lungs of the whole system" and essential to the water, birds, bugs, animals, grasses and other vegetation. The water, birds, bugs, animals, grasses and other vegetation make this a special area that was worth creating a habitat protection area. If something is out of balance, it can affect everything else, including the “finned ones” that live under water.

This is especially important for our slow-growing Yukon fish, which have a short summer during which to actively feed and spawn. They need a thriving habitat that provides a healthy abundance of aquatic plants and insects to eat. Maintaining proper aquatic habitat, such as riparian zones (vegetation buffer at the water's edge), fish habitat-like structure (stones, woody debris), weedy areas and high water quality not only keep fish happy, but reduce the risk of flooding and decrease erosion.

We hope you will do your part to support our sustainable fisheries, whether you are an angler, a birdwatcher, a boater, local resident, or a visitor.



Fish of the Tagish HPA

Lake Trout

(*Salvelinus namaycush*) the second largest salmonid, smaller only than chinook salmon

Arctic Grayling

(*Thymallus arcticus*)- males have a larger dorsal fin than females, that will almost reach the adipose fin when flat

Lake Whitefish

(*Coregonus clupeaformis*)- adults have a 'bump' near their shoulders, which leads to the name 'humpback whitefish'

Northern Pike

(*Esox lucius*)- spawn in spring, right after ice-out, in weedy areas

Least Cisco

(*Coregonus sardinella*) are the most common, but Bering cisco and Arctic cisco can occasionally be seen in the Yukon. - Some least cisco living in lakes can grow very large, up to 40 cm



Slow growing Yukon Lake Trout. Photo credit: Paul Vecsei





Don Toews, C/TRRC member holding a Tagish River Cisco. Photo credit: Karlie Knight

Lake Trout & Cisco

Lake trout and cisco are particularly important fish species in the HPA area. Lake trout are top predators that can live for up to 50 years with large females spawning numerous times. Lake trout, particularly females, are aggressive feeders in the summer because they require a lot of energy to produce eggs for the fall spawn.

Cisco, besides being an important food source for lake trout, as well as northern pike, birds and other animals, are also culturally important to C/TFN citizens. Sometimes referred to as “herring,” cisco were commonly fished from the bridge by children and enjoyed by the whole community.

The Game Mother story, set in Carcross, illustrates how she gave birth to all of the animals and taught them where and how to live. She also explained that they would need to give themselves to humans so that they could survive; and that the humans would be thankful and respectful because of that gift.

Cisco represent a connection from past to present, from predator to prey and from people to nature. The HPA is a crucial area of interaction between lake trout, cisco, and the people and animals that depend on them.

Fishing in the HPA

- Treat fish gently and with respect.
- Avoid targeting lake trout at great depths to avoid mortality associated with pressure changes.
- Practice live release in moderation.
- Keep any legal fish that are bleeding, or injured.
- Stop fishing when you reach your limit.
- Don't practice live release in warm water, or hot weather.
- If you are going to release a fish, do it right away.

Regulations: There are special management regulations in place for Tagish Lake, Marsh Lake for the Tagish River Bridge specifically, as it relates to fishing.

Visit [Yukon.ca/yukon-fishing-license](https://www.yukon.ca/yukon-fishing-license) for complete details.



Releasing a Yukon Lake Trout from shore.
Photo credit: Dennis Zimmermann

**“The fish come
to you as a gift.**

**It’s offering its life to
you. And if you don’t
accept it, that’s an
insult.**

**Sooner or later,
the fish will stop
coming to you.”**

**Mark Wedge, C/TFN Citizen, Tagish
River HPA Steering Committee Member
(Nadasay, 2003)**



Fish make a great meal and learning opportunity.
Photo credit: Dennis Zimmermann.

Know the regulations and have the right tools.
Photo credit: Rodney Hsu/Fishing with Rod

Catch & Release

Licensed anglers will sometimes catch a fish that's too big, or too small. In this case, they must, by law, release it. Within the C/TFN traditional territory, many First Nations people don't appreciate catch and release and feel that it is "playing with your food."

Catching and releasing fish is also very stressful on the fish and can lead to death. Approximately 15% of fish will die after release. You won't necessarily see this. Depending on many factors, including high temperatures, "playing" a fish for too long, or holding the fish out of water for a photograph, catch and release can increase mortality rates.

In order to ensure the fish survives for another day, handle the fish with respect and care.



Following Best Practices

- **Try not to target the larger fish:** especially large females: Large females carry exponentially more eggs and can spawn multiple times.
- **Handle fish quickly and gently:** Released fish survive better when kept in water and not pulled up from the deeper colder water late in the summer. Unhook and released as quickly as possible, and handle with wet hands only.
- **Use the right tools:** Use barbless hooks, keep pliers handy for unhooking, and use only rubber or knotless mesh nets to retain fish slime and make unhooking and releasing easier.
- **Use artificial baits:** Use artificial baits to reduce likelihood of deep-hooking, and don't remove hooks from deeply hooked fish: just cut the line. The fish can most often expel the hook on its own.
- **Capture the memory not the photo:** Removing the fish from the water for a photo increases their air exposure time and stress.





Releasing Lake Trout with the least amount of handling as possible.
Photo credit: Paul Vecsei.



School of whitefish.
Photo credit: Paul Vecse

Supporting Tagish River Fish and Fisheries

There are many partners that support and manage fish and fisheries within the C/TFN Traditional Territory. The Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council (C/TRRC), C/TFN Government, Yukon Government, Fisheries and Oceans Canada have supporting roles to support freshwater fish, salmon, anglers, habitat and water.

The Tagish River HPA has specific provisions set out within chapter 10 of the C/TFN's final land claim agreement. The C/TFN Government is actively managing, conducting research, planning, and monitoring numerous fisheries with their traditional territory.

The C/TRRC is a local advisory body that can make recommendations on renewable resources management and the conservation of fish and wildlife as set out under Chapter 16 of the C/TFNs final agreement. The C/TRRC is working on community-based planning, conducting fisheries research and supporting fisheries education and education.

The fish, fisheries and habitat within the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area hold important spiritual, cultural, recreational and ecological values for residents, First Nations citizens, and visitors. It is important to conserve, protect and respect these important fish species regardless of your preferred way of of engaging with them. As licensed public anglers, fish with purpose, respect, and follow the fishing regulations.

Yukon Fishing Regulations: yukon.ca/yukon-fishing-license

For more information about fish and wildlife in the Carcross/Tagish Traditional Territory [visit ctrcc.ca](https://ctrcc.ca)

