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# **Regulatory Guidelines for Managing the F<sub>1</sub> Splake Sport Fishery in Ontario**

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**Fisheries Section  
Fish and Wildlife Branch  
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources**

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NOTE: Since the approval of this document in 2003, MNR has launched the New Ecological Framework for Recreational Fisheries Management. A key component of this new framework is the establishment of Fisheries Management Zones (FMZs) which will replace fishing divisions as the unit for managing recreational fisheries (Appendix I). The recommendations for the application of the regulatory options given herein have been updated to be consistent with the new FMZs.

This report describes the regulatory options for the management of F<sub>1</sub> splake in Ontario's inland lakes. The options are based on current scientific knowledge on the effectiveness of various regulations for managing splake. They are a combination of management strategies designed primarily to maximize angling opportunities.

The goal of this approach is to ensure that regulations can be rationalized on a sound biological basis, while, at the same time, streamlining and simplifying Ontario's fishing regulations and maximizing angling opportunities.

In order to provide consistency in the management of F<sub>1</sub> splake in Ontario, the regulatory options contained herein are the only options to be used in the development of any new regulations for F<sub>1</sub> splake. In cases where the existing regulations do not conform to the approach in this report, they should be analyzed using established criteria outlined in the provincial Approvals in Principle process.

These regulatory options do not apply to lake trout-brook trout hybrids or backcross found in the Great Lakes. In these instances, splake or backcross will be considered a lake trout for regulatory purposes.

## Introduction

The F<sub>1</sub> splake is a hybrid resulting from a cross between a brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) and lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*). The only valid way to differentiate between splake and its parent species is to count the number of pyloric caeca in the intestinal tract (Scott and Crossman 1973). Splake have been stocked in Ontario since the early 1950s (see Kerr 2000). Traditionally, splake are stocked in inland waters, which are deemed unsuitable for either lake trout or brook trout, in order to provide put-grow-and-take fishing opportunities. There is seldom, if ever, any expectation of establishing this hybrid through natural reproduction. Splake are often utilized to divert angling pressure away from heavily exploited lake trout fisheries.

The stocking program as of 2001 involved the release of over 800,000 splake on an annual basis (Table 1). F<sub>1</sub> splake stocking occurs over much of the province (22 of 26 districts) with the exception of the Great Lakes. According to provincial stocking guidelines, F<sub>1</sub> splake are not to be stocked into waterbodies containing viable, naturally reproducing populations of either brook trout or lake trout.

Table 1. F<sub>1</sub> splake stocking in Ontario inland waters by the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2001.

Region	MNR District	Number of Fish Stocked
Southcentral	Algonquin Park	31,500
	Bancroft	148,300
	Kemptville	16,000
	Midhurst	15,871
	Parry Sound	11,651
	Pembroke	61,746
	Peterborough	48,841
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>333,909</b>
Northeast	Chapleau	7,000
	Cochrane	27,000
	Hearst	24,000
	Kirkland Lake	108,700
	North Bay	47,450
	Sault Ste. Marie	18,096
	Sudbury	24,969
	Timmins	31,250
	Wawa	27,076
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>315,541</b>	
Northwest	Dryden	5,000
	Fort Frances	2,000
	Kenora	14,000
	Nipigon	82,000
	Sioux Lookout	2,000
	Thunder Bay	65,515
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>170,515</b>	
<b>Provincial Total</b>		<b>819,565</b>

## Open/Closed Seasons

When the splake stocking program commenced in the late 1950s, the provincial open season extended from May 1 to September 15. In 1961, splake was combined with lake trout for seasons and possession limits. Splake seasons varied with different lake trout open seasons until the late 1980s when new seasons for splake were initiated in eastern Ontario. Lake trout and splake were separated in the regulations by 1990. In 2002, there were nine division-wide open seasons for splake in Ontario (Table 2) and three exceptions by waterbody (Table 3).

Table 2. Division-wide open seasons for splake in Ontario. (2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Season	Division (s)
Open all year except December 24	7, 9, 29, 15, 18, 19, 25, 20, 21, 22/22A, 24, 33
Open all year	14
Closed all year	5, 26, 30
January 1 - March 7 & May 20 - October 15	27
January 1 - September 30 & December 1 - December 31	1, 2, 8, 11, 16, 17, 23
January 1 - September 30	3, 4, 12A, 28, 31, 32, 34
April 26 (last Friday) - September 30	12
April 27 (last Saturday) - September 30	6, 13
June 1 (first Saturday) - September 8	10

Table 3. Open season exceptions by waterbody for splake in Ontario (2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Season	Division (s)
Closed all year	(21) Muskrat R. (sections)
April 27 (last Saturday) - September 30	(4) Bruce and Grey Counties
January 1 - March 15 & May 18 (Saturday before Victoria Day) - September 30	(15) Lake Nosbonsing

### Recommended Season Dates:

- Since splake are stocked entirely to provide artificial angling opportunities and since they are not to be stocked into lakes containing other salmonids (e.g., brook trout or lake trout), the length of the open season should be maximized. It is recommended that FMZs in which splake are planted should have an all year open season.
- There should be no open season for FMZs in which splake are not stocked or present

### Catch and Possession Limits

Catch limit is defined as the number of fish an angler is allowed to catch and keep in one day. Fish which are caught and eaten that day as a shore lunch are counted as part of the daily catch limit. The possession limit is the number of fish an angler is allowed to legally possess any time whether on-hand, in cold storage, or in transit. In most cases the daily catch and possession limit are the same. The concept behind catch and possession regulations is to limit the harvest, to equitably distribute the resource among users, promote an ethical use of the resource and to convey a realistic expectation regarding capacity of the resource to sustain itself for naturally reproducing species, other than splake.

The catch and possession limit for salmon and trout species, including hybrids, are considered in aggregate, thus the catch and possession limit is the combined number of these different species.

In 1957, the splake catch limit was 3 in one day and fish could not be less than 7 inches in length. By 1961, the limit was 3 fish per day in southern Ontario and 5 fish per day elsewhere. In 1981, a catch of 2 fish per day (May 1 - September 8) and 1 fish per day (March 14 - April 30) was instituted in Division 29 (southeastern Ontario). In 1986 the five fish limit was designated for several individual lakes in Division 29. There were five division-wide catch and possession limits for splake in Ontario in 2002 (Table 4) and no exceptions. In all cases, catch and possession limits are the same.

Table 4. Division-wide catch and possession limits for splake in Ontario (2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Divisions	Catch Limit by License Type		Possession Limit by License Type	
	Sport	Conservation	Sport	Conservation
1, 2, 8, 11, 16, 17	3	2	3	2
3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12A, 29, 13, 15, 27, 28, 14, 18, 19, 25, 20, 21, 22, 2A, 31, 32, 33, 34,	5	2	5	2
12	2	2	2	2
23	3	1	3	1
24	2	1	2	1

### Recommended Catch and Possession Limits:

- Since splake catches are based entirely on a hatchery-reared product, there is no concern about biological sustainability of the resource. With a year-round open season, the only desire would be to distribute the harvest of fish among as many anglers as possible. It may also be desirable to have higher creel limits for splake to divert angling pressure away from heavily utilized lake trout fisheries. For these reasons, it is recommended that the catch and possession limits be standardized at five (5) fish for the holder of a sport fishing licence and two (2) fish for the holder of a conservation licence.
- F<sub>1</sub> splake catch and possession should continue to be included as an aggregate with other trout and salmon species.

### Size Limit Regulations

Depending on the hatchery and genetic background of the fish, there is a wide range in sizes of F<sub>1</sub> splake when they are stocked. The overall goal, however, is to stock the largest product possible for immediate returns to the fishery. As a result, there is seldom a need for size limit regulations. There are currently no size limit regulations for F<sub>1</sub> splake in Ontario and none are planned.

## **Recommendations for Size Limits:**

- **Size limit regulations are generally not an appropriate regulatory option for F<sub>1</sub> splake. The use of size limit regulations for F<sub>1</sub> splake should be discouraged.**

## **Sanctuaries**

Since F<sub>1</sub> splake are stocked solely to provide relatively short-term, artificial fisheries, there is no need for sanctuaries to protect them at any time of year. There are currently no sanctuaries for F<sub>1</sub> splake in Ontario and none are planned.

## **Recommendations for Sanctuaries:**

- **Sanctuaries are generally not an appropriate regulatory option for F<sub>1</sub> splake. The designation of fish sanctuaries for F<sub>1</sub> splake should be discouraged.**

## **Special Regulations**

There are currently no special regulations for splake in Ontario and none are planned.

## **Recommendation for Special Regulations:**

- **The use of special regulations for F<sub>1</sub> splake will be discouraged except where they can be thoroughly rationalized and are implemented on an experimental basis with plans for a thorough assessment of their relative effectiveness and a reasonable expectation for ensuring compliance so that the integrity of the experimental project is maintained.**

## **References**

- Kerr, S. J. 2000. F<sub>1</sub> splake: An annotated bibliography and literature review. Fisheries Section, Fish and Wildlife Branch. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Peterborough, Ontario. 79 p. + appendices.
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- Scott, W.B. & E.J. Crossman. 1973. Freshwater Fishes of Canada. Fisheries Research Board of Canada. Ottawa. 966 p.



**Appendix I New Fisheries Management Zones for Ontario's Sport Fisheries**