



## Fish Hatcheries Overview

Conservationists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century tended to believe that man could improve on nature. The first conservation plan for Banff, issued in the 1880s, featured various suggestions to make Banff's nature better including a recommendation that a fish hatchery be established.<sup>1</sup> In western Canada ideas about improvement were coupled with concerns about rapid loss of once abundant wildlife as a result of settlement and exploitation and the desire to regulate fishing and hunting to reduce pressure on populations. Sports hunting and fishing were given precedence over hunting and fishing for food.<sup>2</sup> A fish hatchery was established at Banff in 1913; Waterton's followed in 1928, and a third hatchery was built in Jasper in 1941.<sup>3</sup> These hatcheries were intended to help build up favoured species of fish, especially those that were seen as good sport. In general, hatcheries were seen as more efficient than nature in producing fish. Hatchery programs received strong community support.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1970s only the Jasper hatchery was still in operation. Plagued by disease, it closed in June 1973. Since then policies regarding fish stocking and aquaculture have changed with more emphasis placed on sustaining natural populations. Sport fishing remains popular with park visitors.<sup>5</sup>

## Waterton's Fish Hatchery and Rearing Ponds

Public pressure from a variety of groups in Southern Alberta came to the fore in 1925 to convince the government to build a fish hatchery in Waterton.<sup>6</sup> The federal Department of Marine and Fisheries acknowledged the need for a hatchery the following year and sent representatives to find a suitable location in the park. The final choice was on Spring Creek just north of the Waterton River adjacent to Highway 6 north of the main entrance road.<sup>7</sup> Here the water was said to flow year round at a moderate current.

The tide of bureaucracy, however, did not move swiftly and it was not until August, 1927 that a call for tenders was made for construction of a small dam, a hatchery building and residence to be completed within three months.<sup>8</sup> Working in conjunction with J. B. Harkin, commissioner of national parks and Herbert Knight, Waterton's acting superintendent, employees of the Department of Marine and Fisheries drew up plans for the new facility. The successful bidder was Oland and Scott Construction of Cardston whose fine reputation had been demonstrated in the completion of numerous local projects.<sup>9</sup> Their price for the hatchery project was \$11,566.62.<sup>10</sup> Oland and Scott began work January 23 and by mid-March the residence for the hatchery superintendent was nearly finished.<sup>11</sup> The hatchery itself was completed shortly afterward becoming the second such facility in Canada's national park system.<sup>12</sup> It was Southern Alberta's only hatchery and provided fish stock to the entire region.

A *Lethbridge Herald* reporter, in writing nearly a full page story on completion of the hatchery noted, "It is true that local sportsmen have been active in this matter and they have been well supported by all agencies which have been anxious to provide good sport

for the tourists, for it is a known fact that tourists look upon Canada as a splendid...fishing ground and they are coming [to the park] in ever-increasing numbers to enjoy the sport ...."<sup>13</sup>

The tide of bureaucracy, however, did not move swiftly and it was not until August, 1927 that a call for tenders was made for construction of a small dam, a hatchery building and residence to be completed within three months.<sup>14</sup> Working in conjunction with J. B. Harkin, commissioner of national parks and Herbert Knight, Waterton's acting superintendent, plans were drawn for the new facility by employees of Marine and Fisheries. The successful bidder was Oland and Scott Construction of Cardston whose fine reputation had been demonstrated in the completion of numerous local projects.<sup>15</sup> Their price for the hatchery project was \$11,566.62.<sup>16</sup> Oland and Scott began work January 23 and by mid-March the residence for the hatchery superintendent was nearly finished.<sup>17</sup> The hatchery itself was completed shortly afterward becoming the second such facility in Canada's national park system.<sup>18</sup>

Fish stocking had begun in Waterton in 1922 thanks to the cooperative efforts of a Bozeman, Montana, hatchery which delivered the first shipment of 30,000 Eastern Brook Trout to the headwaters of Waterton Lakes. This work, a decade before the establishment of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, was touted by the local newspapers.<sup>19</sup> The practice continued over the course of several years.

The first hatchlings from the new facility, just over 82,000, were transplanted by the end of September, 1929, in area streams and were supplemented by fish from the Banff National Park hatchery. Waterton was able to stand on its own the second year of operation planting no less than 1.4 million fry and fingerlings in 74 different creeks and



The fish hatchery and residence were located on Highway 6 just north of the registration building. (Photo: WLNP Archives)

# TENDERS

SEALED TENDERS addressed to the undersigned at Ottawa, and endorsed "Tender for Fish Hatchery, Waterton Lakes Park, Alberta", will be received

## UP TO NOON OF OCTOBER 3RD, 1927

FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A

## FISH HATCHERY

At Waterton Lakes Park in the Province of Alberta, the work to be completed within three months from date of signing of contract.

---

Plans, specifications and form of contract can be seen, and forms of tender procured at this Department, Ottawa, from the Postmasters at McLeod, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, Alberta, and also from Mr. R. T. Rodd, Inspector of Fisheries, Edmonton, Alta., Mr. D. A. Richardson, Fisheries Overseer, 2610 Second Avenue, N.W. Calgary, Alberta, the Superintendent of Waterton Lakes Park, Alberta, and Mr. J. A. Holmes, Fisheries Overseer, Pincher Station, Alberta.

---

Each tender must be accompanied by an accepted cheque on a chartered Canadian Bank equal to ten per cent (10%) of the whole amount of the tender, which cheque will be forfeited should the successful tenderer decline to enter into the contract prepared by the Department or fail to complete the work. Cheques accompanying the unsuccessful tenders will be returned.

A. JOHNSTON,  
Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries

Department of Marine and Fisheries,  
Ottawa, 25th August, 1927

rivers and in 13 lakes throughout southern Alberta. The hatchery territory extended from north of Claresholm, Alberta, west to the Livingstone Gap and south to the international boundary.<sup>20</sup>

Waterton visitors—fishermen or not—found the hatchery of great interest and it became not only a producing facility but also an educational tourist attraction.<sup>21</sup> Operation of the hatchery was transferred from the Department of Marine and Fisheries to the Department

of the Interior in 1931 but retained its own specialized superintendent who reported to the Waterton superintendent.<sup>22</sup> Fish stocking proceeded at a steady pace and by 1932 all of Waterton's lakes had been stocked, the last being Crypt Lake which proved to be the most demanding because of its location.<sup>23</sup>



*The rearing ponds were supervised by an attendant who lived on site and also provided information to visitors about fish rearing. (Photo: WLNP Archives)*



*At the end of the summer, the fish in the rearing ponds were transplanted to park waters. (Photo: WLNP Archives)*

By 1938, eight concrete rearing ponds<sup>24</sup> and an attendant's cabin were put into service in the townsite south of Cameron Falls. With its immaculate grounds, the rearing ponds created a showplace in the townsite<sup>25</sup> as well as providing an opportunity for visitors to learn about the science of fish management.<sup>26</sup> The hatchery itself was not without its attractions as well with immaculate landscaping and was the scene of a successful garden party-fund raiser during the Second World War.<sup>27</sup>

There were improvements at the ponds beginning in 1951 when signs were installed to inform visitors of the age and variety of fish in the ponds and in 1953 display cases were built to show the development of trout from the time the eggs were one week old through to the fish being 36 weeks old.<sup>28</sup>

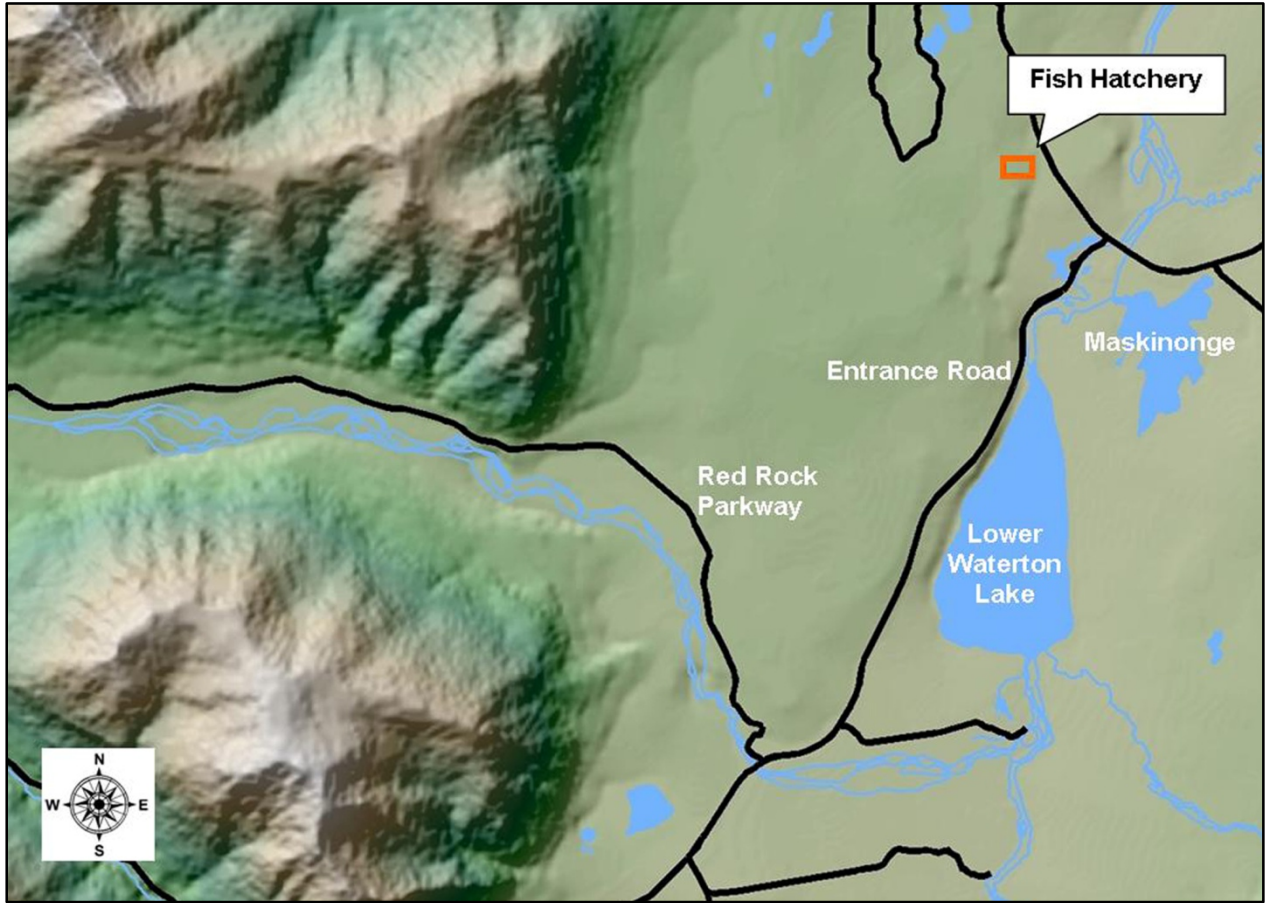
The hatchery closed in 1960 when “the consolidation of fish hatchery operations with those at Jasper National Park was effected. Although the hatchery buildings were

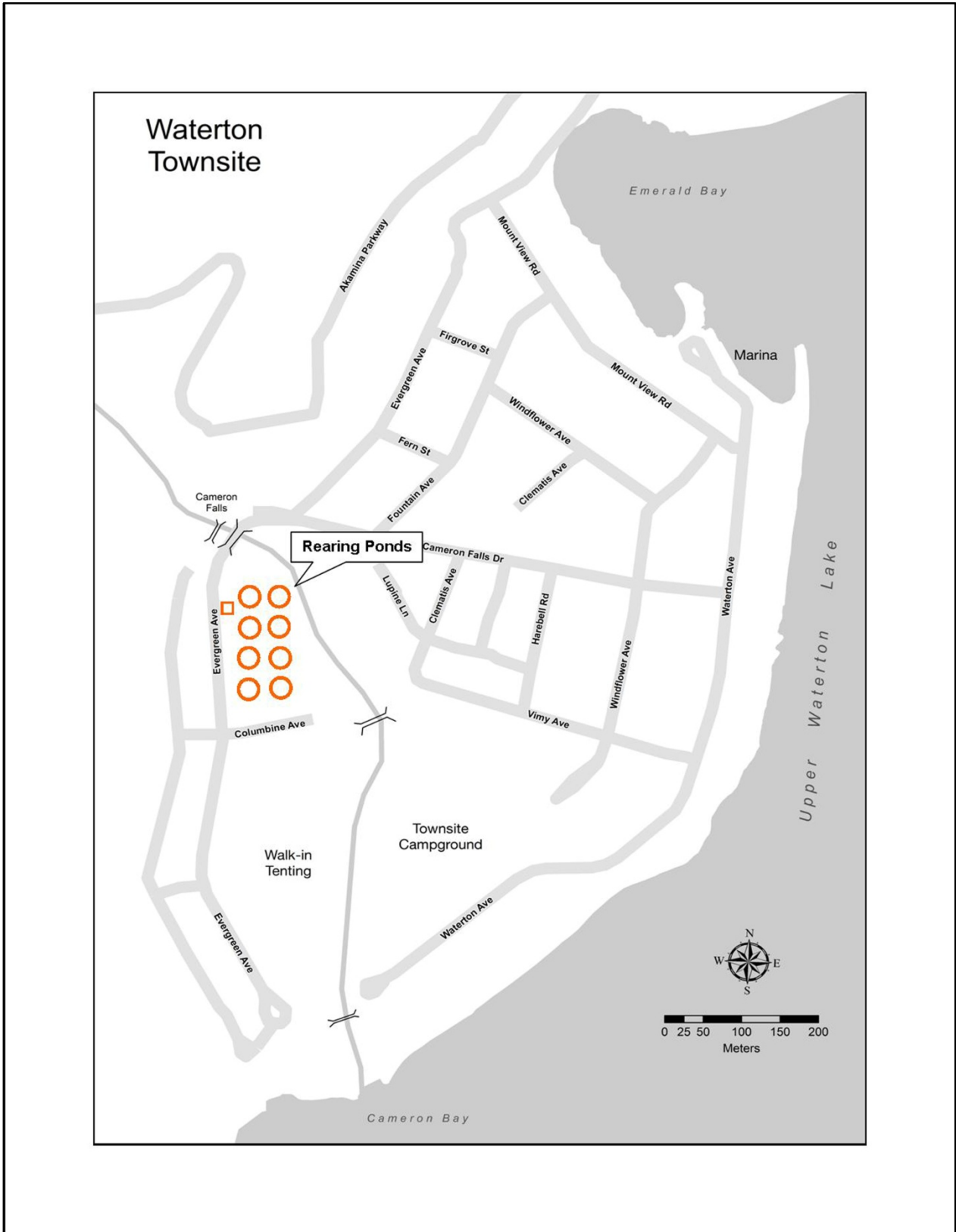
converted to other uses, the rearing ponds inside the hatchery were retained for holding adult fish stocks which were captured for egg collection” and returned to their home waters.<sup>29</sup>

The townsite rearing ponds were scheduled to be removed in 1971, but public pressure on politicians resulted in an extension until 1973 at which time all but two of the ponds were shut down because of a fish disease. The entire operation in the townsite ceased in the fall of 1976.<sup>30</sup>

Today there are 17 native species and seven species of non-native fish in Waterton Lakes National Park. Stocking of many of Waterton’s lakes ceased in 1972 and ended entirely in 1987.<sup>31</sup>







- 
- <sup>1</sup> W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, Vol. 4, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1981), 19.
- <sup>2</sup> George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 125-126.
- <sup>3</sup> Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, Vol. 4, 19-23.
- <sup>4</sup> Colpitts, *Game in the Garden*, 157-58.
- <sup>5</sup> Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, Vol. 4, 19-23.
- <sup>6</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 20, 1925, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>7</sup> "Select Site for Fish Hatchery at Waterton National Park," *Lethbridge Herald*, May 4, 1926, 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Call for Tenders, poster, WLNP Archives, Box 108, Item 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Oland and Scott's work in the park included the Waterton Lakes Dance Pavilion (1926), the Prince of Wales Hotel (1926-1927), Stanley Hotel (1927), RCMP Barracks and Office (1928), Anglican Church (1928), plus at least a dozen private park cabins. Even while the hatchery job was underway, the company was building three staff dormitories and a recreation cabin for the Great Northern Railway at the Prince of Wales Hotel site.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter to C. Bruce, Fisheries Engineer, from Herbert Knight, acting superintendent, Waterton Lakes Park, April 4, 1928; WLNP archives, Box 108, Item 4.
- <sup>11</sup> "Waterton National Park Makes Ready for Spring," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 16, 1928, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Banff's hatchery was built in 1913 and Jasper's was built in 1941.
- <sup>13</sup> "New Fish Hatchery at Waterton Will Stock South Streams," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 23, 1928, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>14</sup> Call for Tenders, poster, WLNP Archives, Box 108, Item 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Oland and Scott's work in the park included the Waterton Lakes Dance Pavilion (1926), the Prince of Wales Hotel (1926-1927), Stanley Hotel (1927), RCMP Barracks and Office (1928), Anglican Church (1928), plus at least a dozen private park cabins. Even while the hatchery job was underway, the company was building three staff dormitories and a recreation cabin for the Great Northern Railway at the Prince of Wales Hotel site.
- <sup>16</sup> Letter to C. Bruce, Fisheries Engineer, from Herbert Knight, acting superintendent, Waterton Lakes Park, April 4, 1928; WLNP archives, Box 108, Item 4.
- <sup>17</sup> "Waterton National Park Makes Ready for Spring," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 16, 1928, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>18</sup> Banff's hatchery was built in 1913 and Jasper's was built in 1941.
- <sup>19</sup> "Fingerlings for the Park Lakes," *Lethbridge Herald*, May 18, 1922, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>20</sup> "Over Million Frys, Fingerlings Planted in 74 Streams in Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, January 25, 1930, page 3. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.
- <sup>21</sup> Ian A. L. Getty, *The History of Waterton Lakes 1800-1937*, (unpublished, 1971, revised 1972), 149. WLNP Archives Box 115, Item 12.
- <sup>22</sup> W. F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, volume 4, (Ottawa: Minister of Environment, 1981), 20. WLNP Library.

---

<sup>23</sup> “Cutthroat Planting in Crypt Lake Hatchery Victory,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Aug. 22, 1932, 2. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.

<sup>24</sup> Each pool was nine metres in diameter and about half a metre deep in the centre. “Waterton Has New Fish Ponds,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Nov. 13, 1937, page 17. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.

<sup>25</sup> “Wonderful Waterton,” *Lethbridge Herald*, July 7, 1939, 7. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.

<sup>26</sup> V. E. F. Solman, J. P. Cuerrier and W. C. Cable, *Why Have Fish Hatcheries in Canada’s National Parks?*, from transactions of the 17th North American Wildlife Conference, March 17-19, 1952. WLNP Archives Box 108, Item 12.

<sup>27</sup> “Wonderful Waterton,” *Lethbridge Herald*, July 23, 1941, 11. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.

<sup>28</sup> “Wonderful Waterton,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 10, 1953, 19. (item slightly damaged) WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 23.

<sup>29</sup> W. F. Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, volume 4, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Resource Conservation Report for 1976, WLNP Archives, Box 114, Item 6.

<sup>31</sup> Stocking records journal, WLNP Archives, Box 106, no item number.