

Anglers asked to help in research

MATT DYKSTRA
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The University of Alberta is angling for data.

And some of its researchers are turning to the reel experts for more information on ecosystems and life-cycles of local fish.

Professor Mark Poesch with the university's conservation ecology department has launched a citizen science-based research project that allows fishermen and anglers to easily submit data on their catch for study.

"Working on fisheries research, I realized that anglers and citizens interested in waterways are an enormously under-utilized resource and we could actually be plugging in to their local knowledge," said Poesch.

"We want to shatter that illusion of the ivory tower and bring citizens into the scientific process."

Launching the project just in time for Canada Day week-



CODIE MCLACHLAN/EDMONTON SUN

University of Alberta researcher Mark Poesch, with a tray of fish on Friday, is helping to launch a citizen science-based website.

end, fishermen and river hobbyists are asked to file their fish photos and stories to Poesch's lab online by scrolling to the bottom of www.markpoesch.com.

Poesch said there are three ways they can help. Citizens can report their catch by sub-

mitting a photo along with any other details such as the fish's size and location.

There's also an angler-specific survey that will help researchers learn where anglers are fishing and a traditional knowledge survey that asks people to share their fishing stories that may have been passed down through the generations.

"It's called a shift in baseline syndrome," explained Poesch. "We only put in context what good fishing is relative to what's in our memory and if we don't have some of these historical stories documented, we do start to lose the context of what is a good lake as opposed to a bad lake."

One of Poesch's main goals is to gain a greater understanding of species that are at-risk or declining to initiate more targeted research.

"If they do catch an endangered fish, for example, we certainly want to know about it," he said. "If they catch a monster walleye or a monster bull trout, that's also fantastic

to know."

Poesch said citizens can be "the canary in the coal mine" by being the early warning sign for endangered or expanding species. He also hopes to study invasive species, such as the rainbow trout that are starting to infringe on the territory of some native trout species.

If the website gets buy-in from the local fishing community, Poesch hopes to expand the study and continue gathering research for years to come. Researchers can show how Alberta's bodies of water have changed in 10 or 20 years from now, he said.

"And the fishermen are going to appreciate it too.

When they upload photos, they'll see a whole bunch of other catches in our gallery and that will hopefully help them learn about what's out there and appreciate it even more."

matthew.dykstra@sunmedia.ca

 @SunMattDykstra