

## **BRLA Update on Bass Spawning Sanctuaries for Lake Networking Group**

The Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation has provided the Fisheries Conservation Foundation (FCF) a \$12,000 grant to help expand Bass Spawning Sanctuaries into Big, Lower, and Upper Rideau Lakes in 2026. The two key members of FCF are Dr. David Philipp (professor at University of Illinois and summer resident on Opinicon Lake) & Steven Cooke (Professor Carleton University). They are doing work all over the world, not just here.

Bass Fishing Sanctuaries are provincially supported “no fishing zones” from early season until 2 weeks after Bass Season opens. Conservation Officers can fine anyone caught fishing in these waters prior to them opening each year. That is much different than fishing in non sanctuary waters where it is virtually impossible for Conservation Authorities to fine people fishing prior to the opening of bass season since the fisherman state that they are not fishing for bass, but rather for pike or something else.

The goal is to allow the male bass to protect their nest until their babies can fend for themselves. If a male bass is removed from their nest for as little as 5 minutes (think catch and release), other fish devour all the eggs or recently hatched fish before the male can return. There is also some doubt if the male will even return to their nest. If a female bass is caught in a catch and release, she will probably not spawn for the rest of that season.

If we don't do something to allow more bass to make it past 1 year, we could face the problem encountered at Lake Scugog, a renowned walleye fishing lake. Lake Scugog became “fished out” as a result of overfishing and a limited number of walleye successfully making it beyond 1 year. Lake Scugog has been closed for ALL fishing for TWO YEARS! Think of the economic impact on the businesses around Lake Scugog!

FCF put a Bass Spawning Sanctuary in place in Lake Charleston and one in Lake Opinicon in 2024 and the results were amazing . We held a webinar in early September to review Dave's findings and it can be seen at: Protecting Spawning Bass Presentation  
Link: <https://vimeo.com/1007286442/e7ce73d5a0>

Moving forward, we need to convince the Ontario Provincial Government to expand the program to more lakes. We need more lakes involved to show that this is a significant issue for ALL lakes. If your Lake Association would like to join that effort, please contact me ([hansen.downer@gmail.com](mailto:hansen.downer@gmail.com)) or Dr. David Philipp ([philipp@illinois.edu](mailto:philipp@illinois.edu)) with a SUBJECT LINE of Bass Spawning Sanctuaries. We anticipate that convincing the Provincial Government to expand the program beyond Opinicon and Charleston Lakes will take one year minimum. As a note, the trials in those two lakes expire at the end of 2025!

Hansen Downer  
President Big Rideau Lake Association