

# Using Baitfish in Vermont

What Vermont Anglers Need to Know to Help Stop the Spread of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia



**Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)** is an untreatable fish disease that affects a wide variety of fish species. **VHS HAS NOT YET BEEN FOUND IN VERMONT.** However, it has caused massive fish kills in the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, and several inland lakes in New York, Michigan and Wisconsin since 2005.

## What is Being Done To Protect Vermont?

VHS poses a great risk to the health and well-being of Vermont's fish populations and to recreational fishing in this state. The new baitfish regulation that went into effect in April 2008 is designed to slow or prevent the arrival of VHS to Vermont by controlling the commercial and private harvest, sale, and use of wild baitfish.

## What Do The New Rules Mean For Me?

### Personal Baitfish Use. Under the new rule, anglers:

- May harvest approved baitfish species for personal use, provided baitfish are used on the same waterbody where they were captured.
- May harvest and use baitfish in lake and pond tributaries up to the first barrier impassable by fish. For rivers and streams, this includes all tributaries to that river or stream up to the first barrier impassable by fish. Anglers may fish with live bait freely up and down connecting streams and rivers, provided they don't pass a barrier (dam or waterfall for example).
- May store baitfish on waterbodies for an indefinite period of time.
- Have 96 hours to transport commercially purchased baitfish to the waterbody designated on their receipt. Once baitfish are on the waterbody, there is no time limitation for use.

- Cannot transport baitfish away from waters of the state by motorized vehicle.
- Fishing border waters (Champlain and Connecticut River) may buy and use baitfish from NY or NH baitshops that are certified by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department for use only on those respective border waters.
- May use and transport commercially prepared and preserved baitfish and fish eggs, provided they are retained in the original packaging at all times.

### Commercial Baitfish Use. Under the new rule:

- Baitshops are now designated as "statewide" or "waterbody-specific."
- Statewide bait dealers may only sell disease-free hatchery baitfish.
- Baitfish purchased from a statewide baitshop may be used anywhere in Vermont.
- Waterbody-specific bait dealers must be located on a specific waterbody, and may harvest wild baitfish from that waterbody for sale and use only on that waterbody.
- Baitfish purchased from a waterbody-specific baitshop may only be used on the designated waterbody.
- Personal and commercial harvest of baitfish is prohibited on any waterbody the department lists as "closed to baitfish harvest." At this time no waters are listed.

## What Can I Do To Help?

If we are going to protect our valuable fisheries resources, we need everyone to learn and use safe angling and boating practices. Moving fish from location to location is believed to be the greatest risk factor for spreading VHS. However movement of water, including the water in bilges and motors, could also spread the disease. It is not yet known whether VHS will have any significant longterm impacts on fisheries in infected waters. But, the spread of diseases and other aquatic nuisance species can greatly reduce the value of our fisheries. We are all going to have to work on this together to protect the future of fishing in Vermont.

Note: The above information is only a summary and is not meant to be a complete legal interpretation of the regulation. To see the complete permanent regulation, get more detailed information on the VHS fish disease and learn how to help prevent its introduction and spread, visit the Fish & Wildlife website at [www.vtfishandwildlife.com/vhs.cfm](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/vhs.cfm).

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