Constructed Ditches are used to provide farms with drainage and irrigation. While ditches provide water management functions for a farm, they may also be important fish habitat. This factsheet provides helpful points to be considered prior to filling in a constructed ditch on your farm.

There are many reasons why a farmer may choose to fill in a ditch that was constructed years ago.

- Constructed ditches take up valuable land. Arable land may be increased if a drain collector pipe can be used as an alternative to a ditch.
- Today’s larger farm equipment requires more room to move around. Smaller fields make it difficult to use large equipment effectively. Consolidating a number of smaller fields into one larger field increases production and machinery efficiency.
- Fewer constructed ditches provide additional land for manure application and reduces the opportunity for manure to enter ditches and adjoining watercourses.
- Fewer constructed ditches reduces the area that is affected by setbacks for buildings and some farm activities.

Points to Consider Prior to Filling in a Ditch

- Ensure that the channel to be filled in is a constructed ditch. If it is a channelized stream or natural watercourse, approval will be required from Land and Water BC (LWBC) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). For further information see Agricultural Watercourse Classification, Factsheet No. 2 in this series.
- Constructed ditches may contain valuable fish habitat. An Authorization from DFO may be required if fish are present in the ditch at any time of year. If the ditch is a valuable source of fish food or nutrients, approval may also be required.
- Do the work during the driest time of the year, generally from early August to late September.
- Prevent sedimentation of downstream watercourses. This can be done by blocking the constructed ditch at the outlet prior to filling in the rest of the ditch. See Factsheet No. 8 – Sediment Control.
- In most cases, a drainage collector pipe will need to be installed to maintain adequate drainage. The drainage collector must be sized correctly to accommodate the peak flow that may occur. See the BC Agricultural Drainage Manual, available from Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, for information on pipe sizing.
- Ensure that drainage patterns for neighboring properties have not been affected. In some cases, blind inlets to the collector pipe may be required if small side ditches require an outlet.

Contact Information

Agency Contacts, Factsheet No. 19 in this series contains a list of local agency contacts and other organizations that may be able to provide some assistance.