

The National Marine Fisheries Service's Code of Angling Ethics covers catch and release strategies, boating regulations and other actions directly related to a day on the water, but the general focus of these rules is something that carries over into our own homes and yards: Responsible anglers respect the environment.

Human impacts are taking an alarming toll on freshwater fish habitat. Never has it been more important for bass fishermen to understand the effect every action we take in our homes and yards has on the future of recreational angling.

At one time it was easy to blame environmental problems on big corporations with their spewing smoke stacks and leaky sewage pipes. But government regulations have become watchdogs for wildlife, creating pollution standards that big businesses must abide by.

For individual homeowners, the issue is still often a matter of personal ethics. And for anglers, our code of ethics involves respecting the environment — not just on the water, but in our own backyards.

Here are a few ways we can practice environmental stewardship in our own backyards, especially if you live next to bassin' waters.

1 Avoid spilling and dumping pollutants

All anglers know the importance of never dumping pollutants directly into a water body. However, the EPA cites nonpoint source (NPS) pollution as the nation's leading cause of water contamination. NPS pollution occurs when rainfall, snowmelt or irrigation picks up pollutants from the ground and washes them into rivers and lakes.

To help cut down on this pollution, never pour chemicals or oil into sewers, drains or into the ground around your home. Even the substances used to clean boats and cars can contain toxic ingredients such as chlorine, ammonia or other pollutants that can cause harm to fish. Instead, use old-fashioned cleaning products, such as baking soda, vinegar or lemon juice, or ask your marine or auto supply store for nontoxic cleaning products.

Plus, always collect any engine oil or other harmful chemicals in approved containers and take them to a designated recycling center.

2 Cut back on fertilizer and pesticides

Fertilizers and pesticides have been associated with waters producing afflicted bass. These chemicals also cause harmful algae blooms which harm bass by reducing oxygen levels in the water.

You can meet your lawn's nutritional needs without chemical fertilizers by using compost or allowing grass clippings to remain on the lawn. If you do feel the need to apply fertilizer, look for fertilizer that is very low in phosphorus or contains no phosphorus at all (0 for the middle number). Nitrogen should be at least 30 percent slow release, water insoluble nitrogen.

If pests are your problem, the first thing to do is to identify the insect. Your local county extension agents can help you identify insects and will be able to recommend the least toxic solution for the specific insect. These include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils and products containing a bacterium called *bacillus thuringiensis* (BT).

3 Conserve water

Wasting water at home reduces water in bass habitat and increases concentrations of minerals and contaminants in the remaining water, resulting in crowding and disease. Continued low water levels limit aquatic plant growth that is necessary as nursery cover for young bass.

Nationally, lawn irrigation accounts for about 32 percent of total residential outdoor use. Other outdoor uses include washing automobiles, maintaining swimming pools, and cleaning sidewalks and driveways.

Proper lawn irrigation techniques

can save thousands of gallons of water annually and help prevent NPS pollution runoff. Put out rain gauges to measure how much water you are using. Horticultural experts recommend that you water no more than 1/2 to 3/4 inch twice a week.

4 Limit paved surfaces

Paved surfaces such as driveways, sidewalks and patios prevent water from seeping down into the ground and cause the excess to add to NPS pollution.

Grasses, natural ground covers, pebbles or pavers can be attractive and practical substitutes for asphalt driveways, walkways and patios. Utilizing mulch in gardens helps retain water and prevent runoff. Creating water gardens or using rain barrels helps keep rainwater on your property, reducing runoff and helping to eliminate the need for additional irrigation.

5 Maintain your septic system

There are currently more than 25 million septic systems in the United States. If a septic system malfunctions or overflows, bacteria and harmful nutrients can contaminate nearby lakes, streams and estuaries.

Never dispose of chemicals, grease, cat litter, cigarette butts or other clog-

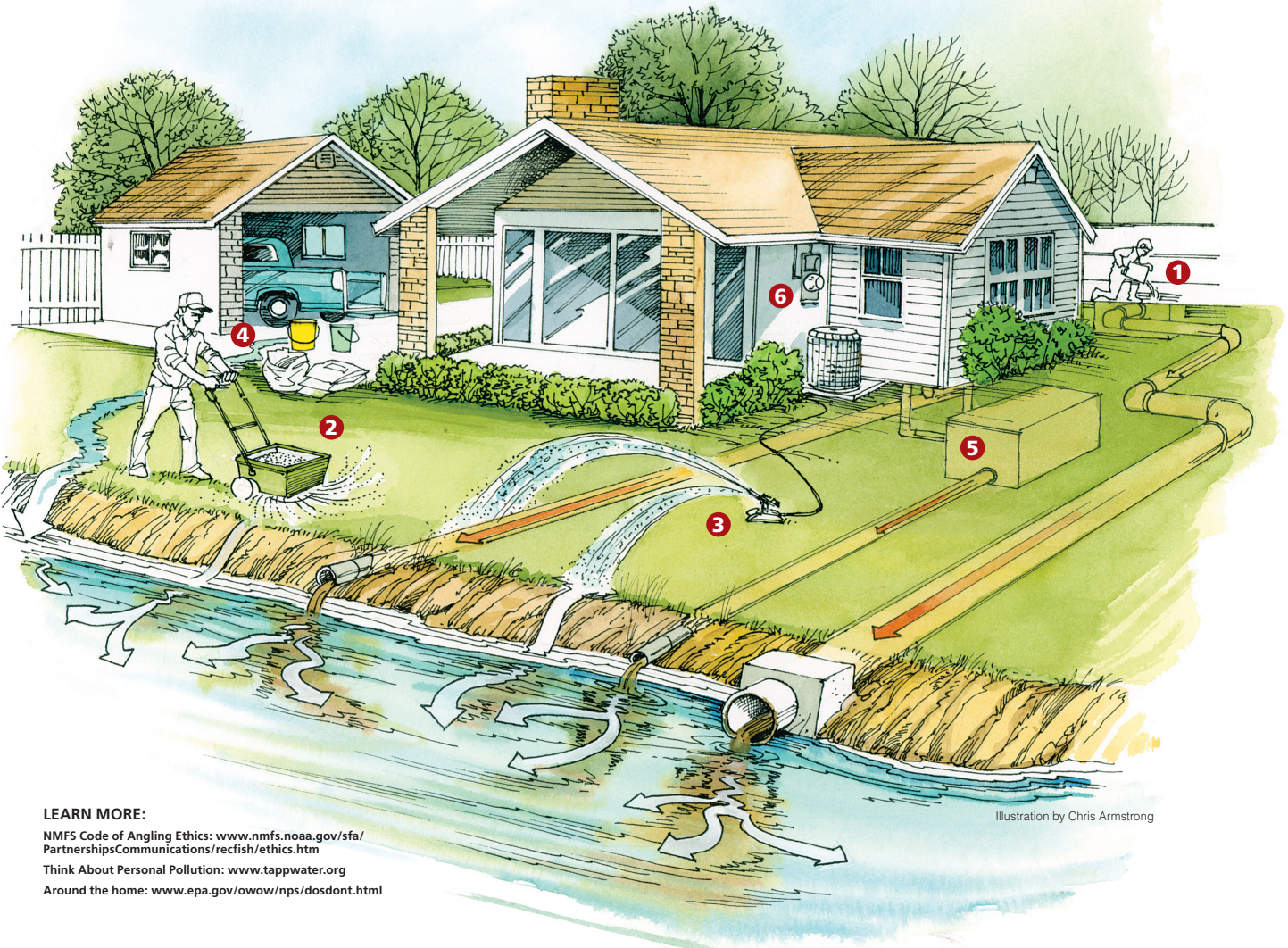
ging items into your drains. Don't plant large trees or shrubs near your drain field because tree roots can crack pipes or obstruct the flow of wastewater through drain lines. Never park your car, boat or other heavy vehicles on your septic field, as these may collapse the drain lines. Have the system checked and cleaned every three years or at the first sign of poor flushing or sluggish drains.

6 Conserve energy

We've all heard the reports of unhealthy mercury levels in fish. Bass are more susceptible to these unhealthy levels than many other kinds of fish because mercury tends to accumulate in muscle, not fat, and bass are very muscular fish.

The primary source of mercury emissions in the U.S. is coal-fired utility boilers. Other forms of generating electricity often remove large quantities of water from lakes or rivers for steam production and cooling, equipment cleaning, and other purposes. When power plants remove enough water from these sources, fish and other aquatic life can suffer.

Use energy-efficient water heaters and other appliances in your home. Adjust your thermostat to 68 degrees or lower in the winter and 78 degrees or higher in the summer. Weather-proof and insulate your house.



LEARN MORE:

NMFS Code of Angling Ethics: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/PartnershipsCommunications/recfish/ethics.htm

Think About Personal Pollution: www.tappwater.org

Around the home: www.epa.gov/owow/nps/dosdnd.html