New rules on canyoning, ice climbing and similar sports on Bernese lakes and rivers
April 2020

The cantonal government has revised the Ordinance on Fishing. New rules will now apply to people using lakes and rivers in the canton of Bern for water sports such as canyoning or ice climbing. These sports are generally permitted, but the annex to the Ordinance lists the lakes, rivers and stretches of water where these sports are prohibited or only possible subject to additional restrictions. The basic idea behind the revision is to give equal rights to both private and commercial users. The map “Restrictions on sports activities on Bernese lakes and rivers” on the cantonal Geoportal: www.geo.apps.be.ch provides a summary of the stretches of water on which additional restrictions apply to water sports.

Water sports are now generally permitted from 16 April to 30 September between 9am and 7pm each day. Canyoning is permitted until 31 October. Where different rules apply on specific stretches of water, this can be seen on the Geoportal.
Where different rules apply, these have been introduced for various reasons and were drawn up by a working group comprising both representatives of the companies providing commercial water sports and of cantonal angling and nature conservation organisations and the cantonal agencies concerned:

- Stretches in cantonal nature conservation areas are closed to water sports, as any disturbance of the wildlife is contrary to the nature conservation regulations.
- Lakes and rivers with confirmed occurrences of the seriously endangered fire salamander are closed to water sports.
- Stretches running through flood plains of national importance are closed to commercial tours because of the increased disruption they cause. This also applies to stretches that run through highly valuable wildlife habitats or ‘resting zones’ for game, where visitors are required to keep to the paths.
- Commercial tours in federal game reserves require the authorisation of the Hunting Inspectorate.
- Further seasonal restrictions apply during the spawning period for river trout in the autumn and the breeding season for priority national species in the early summer.
- Certain stretches that can only be accessed in winter because of the hydrological conditions and where no serious disturbance of wildlife is likely at that time may be accessed until 31 December.

Where stretches of water are at imminent risk, the Fishing Inspectorate may impose additional restrictions at any time. **The rules do not apply to swimming and activities governed by the navigation legislation (e.g. river rafting).**

The new rules represent a win-win situation. Lakes and rivers can be directly protected from the negative effects of certain sports and commercial providers will be treated in the same way as ordinary members of the public.