



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP DIVISION
FISH AND WILDLIFE BRANCH

Lower Dean River Angling Management Plan

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Issues of Concern

The Dean River is located in British Columbia's central coast, approximately 70 kilometres north of the town of Bella Coola. Its upper reaches drain the Chilcotin Plateau providing a relatively nutrient rich anadromous section. These chemical and physical habitat characteristics make the anadromous portion of the Dean the most productive summer steelhead river on the central coast.

The Dean River has been recognized world wide for both its fishery values and management vision. It has been the model for the province's Classified Water Strategy and has been evaluated for use in both the United States and New Zealand. Currently the anadromous portions of the Dean are divided into a Class 1 (Craig Creek to canyon, 5 km from estuary) and a Class 2 (canyon to tidewater, July and August) section.

In recent years demand on the lower portion of the Dean has been steadily increasing. In recognition of demand, and the unique opportunities provided by the fishery, managers brought forward a new Lower Dean Angling Management Plan. This plan has been developed to recognize the quality angling opportunities associated with the lower Dean River and rationalize both its commercial and non-commercial use.

In December 2003 the Dean River Advisory Committee passed a resolution to reclassify the lower Dean River from a Class 2 river (July and August) to a Class 1 river (June through September). The objective of the classification being:

- restrict commercial guiding activity to an acceptable level of use
- affirm priority rights of British Columbian resident angler interests, as established in the original Dean River Steelhead Angling Use Plan.

Management Concerns

Significant changes in angler use have occurred on the lower Dean River since the inception of the classified waters system in 1990. Upon new interpretation of the Wildlife Act, it has been determined that the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection may not have the right to limit the number of guided angler days during the unclassified period. As such, there have been requests for increased guided angler days on the lower Dean in June and September.

The second significant change is in the amount of non-resident aliens starting to use the lower Dean River as a camping destination. Prior to the last few years, few non-resident aliens have shown interest in camping angling opportunities. Most non-resident aliens have been guided anglers staying at one of the two main lodges on the lower Dean. Within the last few years, however, significant numbers of non-resident aliens are camping on the lower Dean. Currently a non-resident alien can camp at the Dean River for unlimited days in June or September, and another eight days in July and/or August.

Angling use on the lower Dean has increased 17% over the last 6 years due to increased non-resident alien participation. In 1996, non-resident aliens utilized approximately 301 days as opposed to 627 in 2002. Resident use declined from 604 days in 1996 to 478 in 2002. Non-resident alien use increased 100% over the past 6 years while resident use has declined 26%.

The Class 1 system has been used on the upper Dean as a mechanism to:

- provide a rational distribution of effort during the time the upper Dean is open to steelhead fishing
- provide a mechanism to control both guiding and distribute non-resident alien angling use
- affirm the right of resident anglers to a minimum of 60% of the total angler days on the upper river.

Set of Objectives

Given both the natural attributes and quality of angling experience, the Dean River Advisory Committee has recommended the lower Dean River, canyon to tidewater be converted to a Class 1 water. As a Class 1 water:

- angling guides would be entitled to be licensed for their historic use
- residents of British Columbia would be recognized as primary non-commercial users and at minimum 60 percent of the angling opportunities on the lower Dean would be reserved for resident use (if so required).

As a Class 1 fishery the lower Dean will be managed for an average angler density of **15** anglers per day or **3.8** anglers per kilometre for a total of **1850** angler days. Guided use will not exceed **220** angler days per any given month.

Non-guided non-resident alien use will be monitored for the next three years to assess if changing the lower Dean to a Class 1 system impacts use. If, after three years non-guided use is still exceeding capacity, the Regional Quality Waters Committee will consider implementation of available regulations to manage non-resident alien angling on the Lower Dean River.

Under the Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation (Wildlife Act) the lower Dean River (canyon to tidewater) will be listed as a Class 1 water June 1 through September 30. A Class One license and steelhead stamp will be required for angling the lower Dean for the period of June 1 to September 30.

1. Guided Angling Opportunity

The maximum number of guides to be licensed on the lower Dean will be **3**, the maximum allocated guided rod days will be **740**. This is based on a 60:40 non-guided to guided split. A fully subscribed guide quota distribution over a weekly period (seven days) would average **7** guided clients per day or a density of **1.8** guided clients/km.

Table 1. The recommended maximum monthly guided angler days for the Lower Dean.

| <i>Month</i> | <i>June</i> | <i>July</i> | <i>August</i> | <i>September</i> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|
| Guided Days | 140 | 220 | 220 | 160 |

2. Non-Resident Non-Guided Angling Opportunities

Using a 60/40 non-guided, guided split the following reference points identify non-guided opportunities:

Table 2. Reference Points Identifying Non-Guided Opportunity

| <i>Month</i> | <i>Non-Guided Days</i> | <i>Guided Days</i> |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| June | 315 | 140 |
| July | 240 | 220 |
| August | 240 | 220 |
| September | 315 | 160 |
| Total | 1110 | 740 |

*Note: This is based on a 60/40 split over the entire angling season. June has a higher non-guided component to ensure historic resident angling opportunities. July has a higher guided component due to historic licensing. August has a higher guided component due to current lack of use by British Columbia resident anglers. Reference points identify only when non-resident aliens will be restricted from the fishery. There will be no restrictions placed on British Columbia resident anglers.

Support Data

Dean River Guardians have been collecting creel information on the lower Dean River for several years. Analysis of this use has revealed both guiding interests (June) and non-resident alien activity (July) have increased significantly over the past five years.

Current Use

Under the current management strategy the lower Dean River is classified from July 1 to August 31. June and September currently have no restrictions regarding the number of days available to non-resident aliens or for guided use. July and August are managed as Class 2 waters with no limit on non-resident alien angling opportunities but with limits to guide usage. Due to the complications of a mixed stock fishery (chinook and steelhead) and differing angler use patterns, each month will be separated for its specific discussion.

It must be remembered that the Dean is not an absolute creel, as not all cards are recovered, therefore these estimates are minimums. However, enough of a sample is recovered that the rates of use between the three distinct groups of residence should be consistent.

June

Angler effort in the lower Dean in June has varied over the period of 1996-2002 with an average of 545 days utilized (Table 1, Appendix A). A high of 707 reported creel days were utilized in 1997 and a low of 352 days in 2002. A severe decline in days in 2002 is considered somewhat of an anomaly as river conditions did not warrant fishing for most of June.

Historically, the lower Dean, in June, has been a camping destination for British Columbian residents. Between 1996 and 2002, on average 420 of the 545 recorded total angler days were utilized by BC residents (Figure 1, Appendix A). This accounted for 77% of the total use. The highest resident use was in 1997 with 584 days the lowest in 2002 with 216 days. BC resident use compromised over 80% of the total use in 1996-1999, but has fallen off to just over 60% in 2002. This is due mainly to the issuing of new guided days and fewer BC residents participating in the fishery.

Non-resident aliens had the second highest use on average, 81 of the 545 days accounting for 16% of the total. Alien use was lowest in 1988 at 35 days (6% of total use) and highest in 2002 with 116 days (33% of total use). This is due mainly to increased guiding activity in June.

Non-residents utilized, on average, 45 days accounting for 8% of total use. Non-resident use varied from a high of 70 days in 1998 (12% total use) to a low of 20 days in 2002 (6% total use).

While many of the campers are targeting chinook salmon, a significant amount of steelhead are captured in the June fishery. Data from 1988-2002 has indicated an average of 163 steelhead and 156 chinook are caught with some of the early steelhead being kelts. Significant declines in steelhead catch have occurred from 1988 onward while chinook salmon catch has been variable.

July

Angler effort for the lower Dean in July has steadily increased over the past 7 years (Table 1, Appendix A). Use peaked in 2002 with 576 angler days as compared to 350 in 1998. The average number of angler days has been 467. Angler days have typically been split evenly between non-resident aliens and residents (Figure 1, Appendix A).

Residents utilized an average of 197 days or 43 percent of the total angler days. The lowest was 147 days in 1998 or 43 percent of total use. The highest was in 1999 at 249 days or 46 percent use.

Non-resident alien use on the lower Dean has almost doubled over the past five years from a low of 159 days in 1998 (45 percent total use) to a high of 332 days in 2002 (58 percent total use). The seven year average being 240 days or 51% total use.

Non-residents used on average 29 angler days, or 7 percent total use, on the lower Dean in July. This varied from a high of 44 in 1998 (13 percent total use) to a low of 12 days (2 percent of total use) in 1999.

August

Non-resident aliens utilize most of the angler days on the lower Dean in August, yet proportional use between residency types has remained fairly constant (Table 1, Appendix A). Total use has increased in the last 4 years, between 20 to 30 percent (Figure 1, Appendix A).

Resident use on the lower Dean has been consistent over the last 7 years. Reported angler days have averaged 32 or 21 percent of total use. Highest resident use was in 2000 with 72 days (35 percent total use) and lowest was recorded in 1997 at 6 days (8 percent total use).

Non-resident aliens used an average of 106 angler days (78 percent total use). This has steadily increased from a low of 59 days (78 percent total use) to 147 days in 2002 (77 percent total use).

Non-residents have used minimal days in July. Average use over the last 7 years has been only 3 angler days (2 percent total use). Five of the seven years had 1 or less days of use. The highest use was in 2000 and 1999 with 7 days used (5 and 3 percent total use respectively). The lowest year was 1998 where no non-residents used the lower Dean in August.

September

September is a month that sees limited use on the lower Dean. Average use from 1996 to 2002 has been only 13 days (Table 1, Appendix A) and has been split mainly between residents and non-resident aliens (an average of 40 and 43 percent total use respectively). Use has been most prominent in the last 3 years with 47 days in 2002 being the highest compared to 0 days recorded in 1996 (Figure 1, Appendix A).

Resident use has averaged 3 days with the highest being 14 (100 percent total use) in 2001 and the lowest being 0 in 1998 and 1996.

Non-resident aliens have used an average of 9 days in August. This varied from 42 in 2002 (89 percent total use) to 0 use in 1997 and 1996.

Non-residents used an average of 1 angler day with no use recorded for most of the years (2001, 1999-1996). The highest use was in 2002 being 4 angler days (9 percent total use).

Alternatives Considered

Currently there are limited alternatives for controlling guided and non-resident alien use on British Columbia waters. While several options are being considered as “tools” to administer this issue, only the Class 1 system with consideration for a lottery are recognized in legislation. Lotteries tend not to be preferred, as they have high administrative costs. Administering a lottery on the lower Dean, however, would not be as onerous if ran in parallel with the upper Dean lottery.

Consequences Addressed

As with any classified water there is a window of opportunity to regulate use and partition resources. The classified water process, on the upper Dean, has led to a world class fishery with both commercial and non-commercial interests allocated a proportion of the resource.

Classifying the lower Dean will establish regulated rod day quotas and business security for guides. It will realize the British Columbia resident as the primary non-commercial user and provide a mechanism to control crowding in a fair and transparent manner.

Analysis of Trade-Offs

All users will incur increased costs that are reflective of both the quality of the fishery and its intensive management. While guides will face limits to access, Class 1 days should become a more valuable asset due to limited supply. British Columbia residents will now be required to possess a classified waters licence and steelhead stamp but will be identified as the primary non-commercial user group. Non-residents will have to pay increased Class 1 fees but will have a higher quality regulated fishery. Non-resident aliens will pay more and may be regulated but will experience a higher quality fishery in years to come.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that the lower Dean River be adopted as a Class 1 fishery with limits to guided use.
- It is recommended that in the future, if required, restrictions on non-guided non-resident aliens be considered. Options for restricting use of non-guided non-resident aliens could include:
 - lottery
 - requirement for non-resident aliens to be guided, or
 - increased fees.

Appendix A