



Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural
Resource Operations

BULKLEY RIVER ANGLING MANAGEMENT PLAN

This document was published November 19, 2013 and endorsed by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. Approval provided by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Wilson". The signature is written over a horizontal line.

Andrew Wilson
Director of Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management, Victoria, B.C.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana Atagi". The signature is written over a horizontal line.

Dana Atagi
Regional Manager of Recreational Fisheries and Wildlife Program, Smithers, B.C.

This Angling Management Plan is one in a series of plans for waters of the Skeena River watershed. For the context of this plan, see the overview document (MFLNRO, 2013).

1.0 Intent of this Document

This Angling Management Plan describes a suite of regulatory measures that have been implemented in response to longstanding concerns regarding quality of experience, crowding and conflict amongst anglers on the Bulkley River. The regulation changes presented in this document are the result of an extensive multi-year consultation process (see Dolan, 2009b; MoE, 2010). This plan outlines an approach to provide Canadian resident anglers with quality Steelhead fishing opportunities in balance with the interests of angling guides and the broader tourism industry. This plan is one in a series of plans that have been finalized for popular Steelhead rivers in the Skeena River watershed.

2.0 Scope and Objective

As the title implies, the scope of this plan includes angling and the management of anglers. Fish conservation issues are intentionally not addressed, as such matters were considered out of scope when this document was created¹. The Bulkley River Classified Water is spatially defined from the confluence of the Morice and Bulkley rivers to the Skeena River near Old Hazelton. All tributaries of the Bulkley are included under this plan, except for the Suskwa River, which has its own dedicated river-specific Angling Management Plan.

The primary objective of this plan is to establish a water-specific regulatory regime using the least restrictive measures possible to regulate angler use to levels that maintain the quality of the angling experience. While the intent of this approach is to achieve a balance amongst users, it is recognized that it will not satisfy everyone. Interests associated with the Skeena recreational Steelhead fishery are diverse, and competing. To assess whether this plan strikes a balance and impacts angler management issues of concern, monitoring will be conducted. Depending on monitoring results, adjustments to this plan may occur in the future as deemed appropriate by the ministry (see Section 8.0 for more information).

3.0 Description of River and Sport Fishery

Originating from Morice Lake, the Bulkley River watershed drains an area of 12,173 square kilometers. Combined with the Morice River², it accounts for 15 per cent of the total discharge of the Skeena River system. The total length of the Bulkley River is 141 km, and aside from the Skeena, it is one of the most accessible rivers in the watershed. Highway 16 is adjacent to this watercourse as are the communities of Houston, Telkwa, Smithers, Moricetown and Hazelton. Given its proximity to roads and population centers, the Bulkley River has a number of walk in access points and boat launch locations.

The Bulkley River is an internationally renowned Steelhead river. This Classified Water attracts the highest level of use (measured in angler-days) within the Skeena Region and is one of the most heavily fished rivers in the province. The system generally has favorable water conditions throughout most of the Steelhead angling season, occurring from September to October. During high run-off periods, however, the Telkwa River contributes significant turbidity making angling conditions poor. In these situations, many anglers move upstream of the Telkwa River

¹ Fish conservation issues are not discussed in this plan, as they are considered as part of other regional advisory processes.

² According to traditional convention, the Bulkley River should be named the Morice River, as the Morice is the larger watercourse where these two systems meet.

confluence, which can spatially concentrate anglers and exacerbate crowding issues.

The Steelhead fishery in the Bulkley River generally occurs during September and October. It is preceded by Chinook fishing in July and early August and pink fishing in August. Anglers targeting Coho salmon will also fish the river, often during the same time period as the Steelhead fishery. According to Gottesfeld and Rabnett (2008) and the BC Government's Fisheries Information Summary System, other fish species found in the Bulkley River include Sockeye salmon, Cutthroat Trout, Rainbow Trout, Bull Trout, Dolly Varden, Mountain Whitefish, Lake Whitefish, Lake Chub, Peamouth Chub, Northern Pike Minnow, Burbot, Prickly Sculpin, Slimy Sculpin, Large Scale Sucker, Long Nose Sucker, River Lamprey, Pacific Lamprey, Redside Shiner, Long Nose Dace and Three Spine Stickleback.

4.0 Previous Planning

In 1989, a draft Angling Use Plan was prepared for the Bulkley River (MOE, 1989). It prescribed seven angling guides and 1,700 guided angler-days. In the narrative, this plan discussed dramatic increases in use from guided and non-guided anglers. Issues between anglers and boats were also identified and management options including a no guiding zone, a no boat zone and the restriction on boat use by non-residents were considered. This draft plan was never finalized.

Between 1996 and 1998, the ministry initiated a process to develop a number of Angling Use Plans, including one for the Bulkley River. A final plan was developed with community input from resident anglers, angling guides and business interests (MELP, 1998). It recommended:

- 10,500 angler-days total angler use and specific use targets by residency type
- Cap on non-guided, non-resident angler use
- 1,504 guided angler-days and seven licensed guides
- Canadian resident-only weekends during the Classified Waters period
- The ministry support in principle the improvement of boat launches at Telkwa and Quick

The Regional Director for the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks endorsed and signed off this plan in 1998, however, most recommendations were not implemented. Another process to address angler use issues was not attempted on the Bulkley River until 2006. At this time, the Skeena Quality Waters Strategy process was initiated, which led to the development of this plan (see MFLNRO, 2013).

5.0 Public and Stakeholder Concerns

The following concerns were raised by stakeholders and the public during development of the Bulkley River Angling Management Plan (Dolan 2008b). The issues below pertain to the management of anglers³ and include:

- Poor weather and turbidity elsewhere in the region often results in transfer of angling effort to the Bulkley River upstream of Telkwa.
- Anglers camping at put-ins for extended periods dominate certain sections of the river
- High use of personal float craft on some reaches (especially between Telkwa and Smithers) allows individual anglers to occupy more water than they traditionally would

³ For background on these concerns, see Dolan (2008a)

6.0 Angling Regulations Prior to this Angling Management Plan

The following angling regulations applied to the Bulkley River prior to the implementation of this plan:

Table 1. Status Quo Regulations on the Bulkley River Section Pre-2012

1	Class II Classified Water, September 1 to October 31
2	Mandatory Steelhead Conservation Surcharge Stamp, September 1 to October 31
3	Seven licensed guides and a maximum of 1,504 guided angler-days
4	Closed to angling, January 1 to June 15
5	Closed to angling all year above confluence with Morice River
6	Bait ban, August 1 to December 31
7	No angling from boats from the Morice River confluence to the Canadian National (CN) Railway Bridge at Barrett (August 15 to December 31) and in Moricetown Canyon or within 100 metres downstream, all year

7.0 Proposed Changes by East Working Group

The following recommendations were put forward by the East Working Group, an advisory committee of resident anglers, guides and tourism/business interests from the Smithers area. These measures were proposed based on input received during the Phase II Consultation Process (Dolan, 2009a) and guidance from the ministry. They are included in this document (see Table 2 below and Appendix A) to capture the difference between what was recommended and what was implemented by Government to address the identified angling related issues. This difference is important to consider as this plan is assessed in the future. In addition to river-specific recommendations, three watershed level proposals were put forward by all Working Groups. This includes a Skeena Steelhead stamp, limited day licence and rod day booking system, which are discussed in the overview document that sets the context for Skeena Angling Management Plans (MFLNRO, 2013)

Table 2. Final Working Group Recommendations for the Bulkley River

1	BC resident-only angling zone on the Telkwa, no guiding permitted
2	BC resident-only angling on Saturdays, guiding permitted
3	Reduction in guided angler-days
4	Require guides to demonstrate distribution of effort over Classified Waters season

Note: resident refers to BC residents only

8.0 Government Endorsed Recommendations

When the final Working Group recommendations were evaluated, criteria including fairness and equity, cost, regulation complexity and enforceability were used to assess the proposed changes. For a recommendation to be endorsed, it needed to be balanced the greatest number of interests and resolve (at least partially) angler management issues. The rationale explaining decisions to accept or reject recommendations is explained in MoE (2010) and summarized in Appendix A. Table 3 presents proposed regulation changes that were endorsed by Cabinet for the Bulkley River. **These regulations form the basis for this Angling Management Plan:**

Table 3. Government Endorsed Regulation Changes for the Bulkley River

1	Canadian resident- only angling on the Telkwa River, September 1-October 31, guiding not permitted
2	Canadian resident- only angling on Saturdays and Sundays, September 1-October 31, guiding permitted
3	Resolve 53 permit days for the Bulkley-Morice rivers by spatially confining them (in regulation) from the confluence of the Bulkley and Morice rivers downstream to the CN Railway Bridge near Barrett

Note: Only new and existing regulations pertaining to angling and angling management are included above to form the regulatory basis for this plan. Fish conservation issues are not included.

9.0 Monitoring

When Angling Management Plans were implemented in the Skeena Region, the ministry committed to reviewing them after three years. To inform this review, annual monitoring will be conducted to assess how the plans are impacting angler management issues. Baseline information regarding angler effort will be gathered from the e-licencing system and feedback from anglers will be taken into consideration. Additional information on angler use and satisfaction may also be collected through surveys or river guardian projects, however, this will depend on available resource (staff time, financial support) and annual ministry priorities.

10.0 References

- Dolan, A. 2008a. *Consultation Report Phase I (January – March 2008). Skeena Quality Waters Strategy*. Report prepared by Alan Dolan and Associates for the Ministry of Environment, Smithers, B.C.
- Dolan, A. 2008b. *Draft Angling Management Plan, Skeena Quality Waters Strategy*. Report prepared by Alan Dolan and Associates for the Ministry of Environment, Smithers, B.C.
- Dolan, A. 2009a. *Consultation Report Phase II (October – November 2008)*. Report prepared by Alan Dolan and Associates for the Ministry of Environment, Smithers, B.C.
- Dolan, A. 2009b. *Recommendations of the Working Groups, Skeena Quality Waters Strategy Angling Management Plans*. Report prepared by Alan Dolan and Associates for the Ministry of Environment, Smithers, B.C.
- Gottesfeld, A. and K. Rabnett. 2008. *Skeena River Fish and their Habitat*. Ecotrust. Portland, Oregon.
- Ministry of Environment. 1989. *Draft Angling Use Plan for the Bulkley River*. Smithers, B.C.
- Ministry of Environment. 2010. *Ministry of Environment Response to Working Group Recommendations for Skeena Angling Management Plans*. Victoria, B.C.
- Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations. 2013. *Overview: Angling Management Plans for the Skeena River Watershed*. Smithers, B.C.
- Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. 1998. *Bulkley River Angling Use Plan*. Smithers, B.C.

Appendix A –Working Group Recommendations and Ministry Response

The following section presents the East Working Group recommendations for the Bulkley River and the response from the ministry. For a complete discussion on all Working Group recommendations, see Dolan (2009b) and for additional information regarding the ministry response, see MoE (2010).

1) Reduction of Guided Rod-Days

The Working Group recommended a reduction of guided rod-days for the Bulkley River. It was felt the number of guided days exceeded the capacity for this system. It was recommended that the ministry recall chronically unused rod days as a first step. Concern was also expressed that a recent transfer of 53 guided days historically used on the lower Morice and upper Bulkley would result in a separate allocation for each river (effectively doubling the original quota). To address this, the Working Group recommended eliminating these days from the maximum allocation for the Bulkley and applying them to the Morice from the upper Bulkley downstream to the CN Railway Bridge near Barrett

Ministry Response - The ministry endorses the recommendation to address the 53 permit days. As of April 1, 2012, these 53 guided days have been confined (by regulation) to a zone on the upper Bulkley River from the confluence with the Morice River downstream to the CN Railway Bridge near Barrett. The ministry was not able to endorse the recommendation of reducing guided effort by recalling unused rod days as a “use it or lose it” policy does not currently exist for angling guide quota.

2) Distribution of Guide Effort over the Classified Waters Period

The Working Group recommended that guides distribute their effort over the Classified Water period on the Bulkley River to help alleviate crowding at certain times of the year and certain parts of the river.

Ministry Response - The ministry was unable to endorse this recommendation as the Working Group did not indicate how distribution of rod-days should occur i.e., how many rod-days per day/week/month or clients per guide/boat restrictions etc. Without an approach reached by consensus, it is a challenge for the ministry to implement this recommendation recognizing that angling guides require flexibility depending on the size, location and timing of their operations.

3) Resident-Only Angling on Telkwa River

Working Group members proposed the creation of a resident-only zone on the Telkwa River upstream from the CN Railway Bridge⁴ from September 1 to October 31. This zone would restrict non-guided, non-residents as well as guided anglers. Participants acknowledged that this recommendation would have little impact on angling guides, as the Telkwa is rarely subjected to guide activity. Working Group members felt that creating a resident-only zone was important to help maintain resident priority. This recommendation would also offer increased angling opportunities for resident anglers.

Ministry Response - The ministry endorses resident-only angling on the Telkwa River with no guiding permitted from September 1 to October 31.

4) Creation of Resident-Only Angling on Saturdays⁵

Working Group members recommended resident-only angling on Saturdays for the Bulkley River with guiding permitted, to provide resident priority. It was felt that given the lack of support in the Phase II Consultation Report for limited-day licences allocated through a lottery system, there was a need to find management alternatives that provided some regulation of non-residents while offering increased angling opportunities for residents.

Ministry Response - When the ministry met with the Working Groups in November 2009 to review their final recommendations, it was identified that resident-only Saturdays for the Bulkley, Babine and Morice were not consistent with surrounding rivers. The Central and West Working Groups generally recommended resident-only angling on Saturdays and Sundays, while the East Working Group recommended Saturdays only. Concern was expressed that resident-only Saturdays on the Bulkley, Babine and Morice may attract displaced anglers from surrounding rivers on Sundays, elevate crowding, increase regulatory complexity (decreasing enforceability) and fail to provide resident opportunity for a quality experience.

The ministry considered a range of alternatives for implementing resident-only times including: resident-only Saturdays for the Bulkley, Babine and Morice; resident-only Saturdays system wide (for all priority waters); and resident-only weekends for the Bulkley, Babine and Morice. Given the considerations outlined above, the ministry endorsed Canadian resident-only Saturday and Sunday for the Bulkley and Morice rivers in addition to the Babine River in a zone.

⁴ Located at the confluence of the Bulkley and Telkwa rivers.

⁵ Resident-only times and zones proposed by all Working Groups permitted BC anglers to fish and restricted anglers from other provinces (non-resident Canadians) and countries (non-resident aliens). In response to feedback from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the ministry broadened the definition of resident-only to include BC resident anglers and Canadian anglers from other provinces. This is discussed further in Section 5.1 of MoE (2010).