



Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural
Resource Operations

OVERVIEW OF ANGLING MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR THE SKEENA WATERSHED

November 19, 2013

1.0 Intent of this Document

This overview provides background information for twelve Angling Management Plans that have been finalized in the Skeena Region. Topics discussed in this document include:

- the history of angler management pertaining to the Skeena Steelhead fishery
- the Skeena Quality Waters Strategy process to develop Angling Management Plans
- stakeholder concerns regarding Classified Waters management and proposed solutions
- endorsed regulation changes approved by the B.C. Cabinet
- the approach to monitor river-specific Angling Management Plans

It is important to note that this document is not an Angling Management Plan, nor is it meant to replace extensive information prepared during the Skeena Angling Management Plan consultation process (see Dolan, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b; MoE, 2010).

1.1 History of Angler Management in the Skeena Watershed

In the late 1980s, the popularity of angling for Steelhead in the Skeena watershed was increasing. More and more people were fishing each year, attracted to the region for its wild and large fish, natural setting, and lack of competition from other anglers. As a first step to maintain the existing high-quality angling experience, the provincial government implemented limits to the angling guide industry in 1990. Caps were placed on the number of days each guide could operate and new entrants to the industry were restricted by regulations. An expectation was also created that the growing numbers of non-resident alien anglers would be managed. To summarize these initiatives, the Fish and Wildlife Branch prepared a number of draft Angling Use Plans (AUPs). These AUPs were brief documents which presented a description of each river, its fishery resource and a plan to manage anglers and angling guides.

In the 1990s, there were a number of attempts to complete the AUPs. No progress was made, however, due to a combination of public controversy and a lack of government support. In the early 2000s, public pressure increased to find a lasting solution to the continuing conflict among anglers. Ministry staff worked with anglers and angling guides to develop what became known as the Quality Waters Strategy (QWS). The strategy described a detailed approach to develop Angling Management Plans (AMPs; MWLAP, 2005). While this document was not developed as a policy (Dolan, 2012), it did provide guidance that was used throughout the province for a number of years.

1.2 Legislative Requirements for Angling Management Plans

According to the *Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation* under the *Wildlife Act*, Section 2.02 and 11(1.1), AMPs are a prerequisite to allocate of angler-day quota to angling guides and non-guided, non-resident alien anglers. No provincial standards exist outlining what these plans must contain.

1.3 Skeena Quality Waters Strategy

In 2005, the Quality Waters Strategy process was finalized at the provincial level. That same year, the Skeena Fisheries Branch submitted a funding application to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation to implement this process regionally. This application was approved and allowed the ministry to move forward with AMP development in the Skeena River watershed.



Figure 1. Map of Skeena River watershed.

With assistance from the Regional Quality Waters Committee, twelve Classified Waters were selected to have Angling Management Plans developed. They are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Classified Waters for Angling Management Plan Development

Bulkley	Babine	Morice	Kitseguella	Kitwanga	Kispiox
Suskwa	Lakelse	Skeena 4	Kitsumkalum	Zymoetz I	Zymoetz II

These waters were perceived to have, or possess in the future, the highest levels of angler conflict. An extensive consultation process was conducted to gather input regarding the problems on these systems, seek solutions and develop recommendations (Figure 2). Comprehensive reports were prepared at each stage in the process (Dolan, 2008a; Dolan, 2008b; Dolan, 2009a; Dolan, 2009b, MOE, 2010) and additional information is presented in Appendix A.



Figure 2. Timeline for the Skeena Quality Waters Strategy process to develop Angling Management Plans.

2.0 Public and Stakeholder Concerns

During the first phase of public consultation for AMP development (Dolan, 2008a), stakeholders indicated there were issues with how anglers participated in the recreational Steelhead fishery. Common concerns included:

- Not enough quality (uncrowded) fishing opportunities for B.C. residents
- Too many non-resident aliens and guided anglers
- Angler etiquette issues (not sharing fishing pools with others, fly versus gear conflicts; inter-personal conflicts; unacceptable jet boating practices and extended camping at popular fishing locations)
- Illegal guiding
- Absence of women, children and families in the recreational fishery
- Access issues including lack of boat launches and poor public access for walk-in anglers
- Too many boats, particularly jet boats and personal floatcraft (i.e. pontoon boats)

It is important to note that under the *Wildlife Act* and delegated authority under the *Fisheries Act*, the ministry has control over fishing regulations and some aspects of angler use. It does not have the ability to manage all issues concerning stakeholders. Examples of this include access and boat management which are under the direction of land agencies and federal transportation agencies. Other concerns such as angler etiquette are up to anglers themselves. Concerns pertaining to fish conservation issues that are managed by the ministry are not summarized above, as they are discussed through existing regional advisory processes.

3.0 Objectives

The primary objective of Angling Management Plans 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 these plans strike a balance and address angler management issues, monitoring will be conducted (see Section 5.0 for more information).

It is important to note that the scope of AMPs includes angling and the management of anglers (as the title implies). As such, fish conservation issues are not discussed.

4.0 Final Outcomes

Working Groups composed of resident anglers, angling guides and business and tourism interests were tasked with developing recommendations for AMPs. This was a challenging job which involved consideration of public input (Dolan, 2008a; Dolan 2009a), weighing competing interests and incorporating direction from the ministry. In the end, proposals were put forward in three categories including:

1. regulatory measures intended to apply to all priority waters;
2. river-specific changes; and
3. non-regulatory measures

As the ministry has no direct control over the non-regulatory measures, they are not discussed in this document (see Dolan, 2009b). For more information on the process to develop recommendations and outcomes that were endorsed, see Appendix A and B.

4.1 Skeena Watershed Recommendations

Three system-wide proposals were put forward by Working Groups for all priority waters. They include a limited day licence, a Skeena Steelhead Stamp and a rod-day booking system (for long-term consideration).

The intent of the limited day licence was to limit non-guided, non-resident anglers to a maximum period of (up to) eight days per person per river during the Classified Waters period. This measure was perceived as a solution to crowding issues by requiring non-resident anglers to “move on” after fishing a specific river for eight days. This approach would manage anglers by distributing their effort throughout the region, rather than having individuals focus on one system (a noted problem). It was also felt such a regulation would limit long-term camping and increase barriers for illegal guide operations. Working Group members agreed that the ministry should track angler use over time and the maximum number of days should be adjusted according to management needs.

The Skeena Steelhead stamp was proposed to generate revenue for regional Steelhead management and better reflect the value of the Skeena Steelhead resource. Working Groups developed this recommendation as they believed the Steelhead resource was undervalued relative to comparable international fisheries. This stamp was intended to be a licence requirement in addition to the existing Steelhead Conservation Surcharge, offered on a one, eight of annual basis between August 15 and October 31. The funds generated from the sale of this licence were proposed to be directed to regional fisheries management budgets rather than general revenue. The cost of the stamp was proposed between \$100-200 for non-residents and \$10 for residents per season.

A rod day booking system was proposed on a long term basis given the current lack of public support for such a measure. This recommendation was intended to provide a means of spatially and temporally managing anglers. Similar to a reservation system, anglers would be required to identify the river and period of time they desired in advance. Caps based on carrying capacity would restrict total effort on a river and time specific basis¹. It was recognized that this approach provided the most comprehensive solution to addressing crowding issues, in addition to creating significant barriers to illegal guiding. Working Groups felt this system should restrict non-guided, non-resident alien anglers initially and if warranted be applied to other user groups (residents included) to maintain a high quality of experience for all anglers.

The ministry was not able to endorse these three proposals in the short term due to a lack of current capacity or perceived need (MOE, 2010). It is important to note, however, that these recommendations were identified as having merit for future consideration.

¹ Discussed further in Dolan, 2009, pages 8-9

4.2 River-specific Recommendations

In addition to the regional proposals, Working Groups recommended a number of river-specific changes. These included water re-classification (change from Class II to Class I), extension of the Classified Water season and time period when a Steelhead Stamp is required, increased management and restriction of angling guides and resident-only times and zones (see Appendix B and river-specific Angling Management Plans).

In general, the ministry accepted all river-specific recommendations. In some cases, however, changes were made to ensure regulations were consistent among rivers. For example, Working Groups proposed a number of different options for resident-only times and zones. In some cases, these measures were proposed on different week and weekend days for adjacent rivers. The ministry recognized that unless these restrictions were consistent, angler crowding could result through transfer of effort from one river to another. For this reason, resident-only weekends (i.e. Saturday and Sunday) were generally accepted for all rivers².

Another change made by the ministry was to broaden the definition of “resident-only”. Working Groups desired resident-only time and zone restrictions to permit B.C. resident anglers to fish and restrict 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 expanded the definition of resident-only to include B.C. resident anglers and Canadian anglers from other provinces. This is discussed further in Section 5.1 of MoE (2010).

5.0 Monitoring Angling Management Plans

When AMPs were implemented in the Skeena Region, the ministry committed to reviewing them after three years. To inform this review, 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. Carrying out these projects will depend on available ministry resources (staff time, financial support) and annual priorities.

² Exceptions include the Zymoetz, Telkwa and Lakelse rivers where Canadian resident-only times and zones extend beyond weekend days.

6.0 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). Skeena Quality Waters Strategy*. 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.
- Dolan, A. 2012. *Review and Evaluation of the Quality Waters Strategy*. Report prepared by Alan Dolan and Associates for the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Victoria, B.C.
- Ministry of Environment. 2010. *Ministry of Environment Response to Working Group Recommendations for Skeena Angling Management Plans*. Victoria, B.C.
- Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. 2005. *Quality Waters Strategy Resource Document*. Victoria, B.C.

Appendix A - Consultation Summary for Skeena Quality Waters Strategy Process

Phase I Consultation Process – January to March 2008

The Phase I consultation process was held in the Skeena River watershed to identify public concerns regarding the quality of experience associated with the recreational steelhead fishery. Participants were invited to identify problems on local rivers and suggest potential solutions. The results of that process included:

- Skeena Quality Waters Strategy website created
- Twenty-five stakeholder meetings held in the communities of Houston, Smithers, Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert, 113 people attended
- Six public meetings held in the above communities, 255 people attended
- 248 online Response Forms completed regarding the draft Angling Management Plans
- More than 60 people provided direct email comments to the facilitator
- Phase I Consultation Report published (see Dolan, 2008a)

Draft Recommendations for Angling Management Plans – October 2008

From April to June 2008, three stakeholder-based Working Groups developed draft recommendations for Angling Management Plans. With the guidance of facilitators, they used the Phase I Consultation Report, angling use data, and their local knowledge and experience on the rivers, to develop the draft recommendations. The results of their volunteer efforts were published in Dolan (2008b).

Phase II Consultation Process – October to November 2008

The goal of the Phase II consultation process was to gather feedback on draft Angling Management Plans for the Working Groups to consider. The results of this process included:

- Twenty-eight stakeholder meetings held in the communities of Houston, Smithers, Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert, 228 people attended
- Six public open houses held in the above communities with 145 people attending
- An online response form was developed with 428 respondents participating
- About 350 emails sent directly to the facilitator
- Phase II consultation report published (see Dolan, 2009a)

Revising Draft Angling Management Plans – April to June 2009

Following the Phase II Consultation Process, the Working Groups met to revise the draft recommendations for Angling Management Plans. This revision was based on input received from the public during the Phase II Consultation Process (see Dolan, 2009a).

Final Working Group recommendations posted – October 2009

The final Working Group recommendations for Angling Management Plans were publicly released on October 16, 2009 (Dolan, 2009b). This information was forwarded to the ministry for consideration. In November 2009, ministry staff met with the Working Groups to discuss which recommendations were endorsed, not endorsed, deferred and the rationale for these decisions.

Ministry Response to Working Group Recommendations – April 2010

In April 2010, the ministry publicly released a response to the Working Group recommendations (MOE, 2010). This document presented the Working Groups recommendations and the response from the ministry. This review considered factors including fairness and equity, cost, regulatory complexity and enforceability.

Tourism and Economic Assessment of Proposed Changes - 2011

In the fall of 2010, the provincial government announced the endorsed recommendations would not be implemented on April 1, 2011. Instead, a tourism and economic assessment would be conducted to determine impacts before any regulation changes were implemented. This assessment included a review of 2010 licence sales which indicated:

- In the fall of 2010, 18,992 classified waters days were purchased in the Skeena region by non-resident Canadians and non-resident aliens.
- 2,391 days (13%) were purchased on weekends by non-guided anglers from the USA or Overseas. These anglers would be impacted by the proposed Canadian resident-only times and zones.
- There was an equal distribution of classified waters license purchases throughout the week. If the distribution was skewed toward weekend days, more non-Canadians would be impacted from Canadian resident-only times and zones.

Ministry Endorsed Regulation Changes Implemented – April 2012

In the fall of 2011, the provincial government announced that the ministry endorsed regulation changes (see Appendix B) would be implemented on April 1, 2012. These regulations were approved by Cabinet via Order in Council 499-2011 and 500-2011.

Appendix B – Ministry Endorsed River-Specific Recommendations

Bulkley River

- Canadian resident-only on Saturday and Sunday from September 1 to October 31; guiding not permitted
- Telkwa River Canadian resident-only all week from September 1 to October 31; guiding not permitted
- Regional Manager to resolve 53 Permit Days upstream of CN railway bridge

Morice River

- Canadian resident-only on Saturday and Sunday from September 1 to October 31; guiding permitted

Babine River

- Canadian resident-only Saturday and Sunday from September 1 to October 31 in a zone from the outlet of Nilkitkwa Lake (smolt fence) downstream to the Nilkitkwa River confluence; guiding not permitted
- Reduction of guided angler-day quota (long term)
- Regional Manager to resolve 80 angler-day discrepancy

Kitwanga and Kitseguecla Rivers

- Resident-only on Saturday and Sunday from April 1 to March 31; guiding not permitted

Suskwa River

- Change from Class 2 to Class 1 designation from April 1 to March 31
- Canadian resident-only on Saturday and Sunday from April 1 to March 31; guiding not permitted

Kispiox River

- Canadian resident-only Saturday and Sunday from September 1 to October 31; guiding permitted

Lakelse River

- Change from Class 2 to Class 1 designation
- Extension of mandatory Steelhead Stamp from September 1 to May 31
- Canadian resident-only zone April 1 to March 31 from outlet of Lakelse Lake downstream to powerline crossing located 3.5 km upstream of the Lakelse River confluence with the Skeena River.

Zymoetz River Class 1 Section

- Extension of Classified Waters period from July 24 to December 31
- Extension of mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 24 to December 31
- Guide restrictions: maximum 3 anglers/group and 1 group/guide/day
- Increase allocation of guided angler-days from 58 to 100

- Decrease guided angler-day allocation from 250 to 100 in Schedule A of B.C. Regulation 125/90
- Canadian resident-only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from July 24 to December 31; guiding permitted

Zymoetz River Class 2 Section

- Extension of mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 24 to May 31
- Extension of Classified Waters period from July 24 to May 31
- Canadian Resident-only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from July 24 to May 31
 - Guiding allowed on Friday and in a zone on Saturday from Mattson Creek confluence downstream to the Skeena River confluence
- Guide restrictions: maximum 3 anglers/group and 1 group/guide/day
- Modify guided angler-day allocation to accommodate Classified Waters period extension
 - Maintain allocation of 117 days from September 1 to October 31
 - Allocate 100 days from July 24 to August 31
 - Allocate 50 days from November 1 to May 31

Kitsumkalum River

- Extension of mandatory Steelhead Stamp from August 7 to May 31
- Guide restrictions: maximum 3 anglers/group; 1 group/guide/day in upper river and 1 group/guide/day in lower river
- Reduce total number of angling guides from 13 to 11
- Ministry decision to alter no guiding period to November 1 to April 1
- Canadian resident-only from April 1 to March 31 on:
 - Saturday in zone from Kitsumkalum Lake outlet downstream to Glacier Creek confluence; guiding not permitted
 - Sunday on the entire river; guiding not permitted

Skeena River Section IV

- Extension of Classified Waters period from July 1 to December 31
- Extension of mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 1 to December 31
- Increase guided angler-day allocation by 586 days amongst 12 new guide licenses in a zone from Flint Creek confluence to the Chimdemash Creek confluence
 - Concern was expressed that allocation may be too high. Accordingly, these days will be offered on a limited term opportunity, such as 20 years or less.
- Canadian resident-only on Saturday and Sunday from July 1 to December 31 in the following areas:
 - a) Shegunia River confluence downstream to Sedan Creek confluence; guiding permitted
 - b) Chimdemash Creek confluence downstream to 1.5 km upstream from Zymoetz River confluence; guiding not permitted