



Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural
Resource Operations

ZYMOETZ RIVER CLASS I SECTION ANGLING MANAGEMENT PLAN

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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 Zymoetz River Class 1 Section. The regulation changes presented in this document are the result of an extensive multi-year consultation process (Dolan, 2009b; MoE, 2010). This plan outlines an approach to provide Canadian resident anglers with quality Steelhead fishing opportunity 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 Zymoetz River Class I Section is spatially defined from the outlet of McDonnell Lake to the confluence of Limonite Creek and includes all tributaries in this zone.

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 (see Section 8.0 for more information).

3.0 Description of River and Sport Fishery

The Zymoetz River, known locally as the Copper River, originates in the McDonnell, Dennis and Aldrich Lake chain, roughly 30 kilometres southwest of Smithers. It flows for approximately 109 kilometres before joining the Skeena River near Terrace. Important tributaries include the Clore and Kitnayakwa rivers and Limonite Creek. The Zymoetz River is a major tributary to the Skeena, contributing approximately 10% of the total flow (Gottesfeld and Rabbnet, 2008). The watershed drains an estimated area of 3,080 square kilometres.

Upstream of Limonite Creek, the Zymoetz River is designated a Class I Classified Water. This section is roughly 50 km in length. It is remote, has limited access and offers high quality fishing during fall months (high catch rate, large fish). Anglers will hike, raft, or use helicopter to reach this area from the communities of Terrace or Smithers.

The Zymoetz River supports significant fisheries values and is provincially renowned amongst anglers for its aggressive Steelhead and their willingness to take a fly or lure (Buchanan and Lewis, 1998; Morten, 2000). Similar to the lower river, anglers fishing the Class I section primarily target Steelhead. Total daily effort builds as fish migrate into the upper reaches past Limonite Creek, peaking between mid September and mid October. Salmon and resident trout and char are not commonly pursued by anglers in this Classified Water.

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

Weather events producing unfavourable fishing conditions are common on the Zymoetz River (Morten, 2000). Large amounts of rainfall and/or fast snowmelt causes high runoff and significantly reduces water clarity. In turn, this negatively impacts angler success, especially below the Clore River (the major contributor of sediment). In response to such conditions, anglers typically avoid the lower river, choosing to fish the clearer water in the upper river sections instead.

Fish species found within the Zymoetz River watershed include summer and winter run Steelhead, and Pink, Sockeye, Chinook, Coho, Chum salmon. Resident Rainbow and Cutthroat Trout, Dolly Varden, Bull Trout, Burbot, Mountain Whitefish, Sculpins, Long Nose Dace, Kokanee, Long Nose Sucker and Peamouth Chub are also found in the system (Gottesfeld and Rabbnet, 2008).

4.0 Previous Planning

In 1989, a draft Angling Use Plan was developed for Zymoetz River Class I Section (MOE, 1989). The one-page document recommended 350 angler-days of guiding activity distributed amongst three licensed guides. This plan was not finalized.

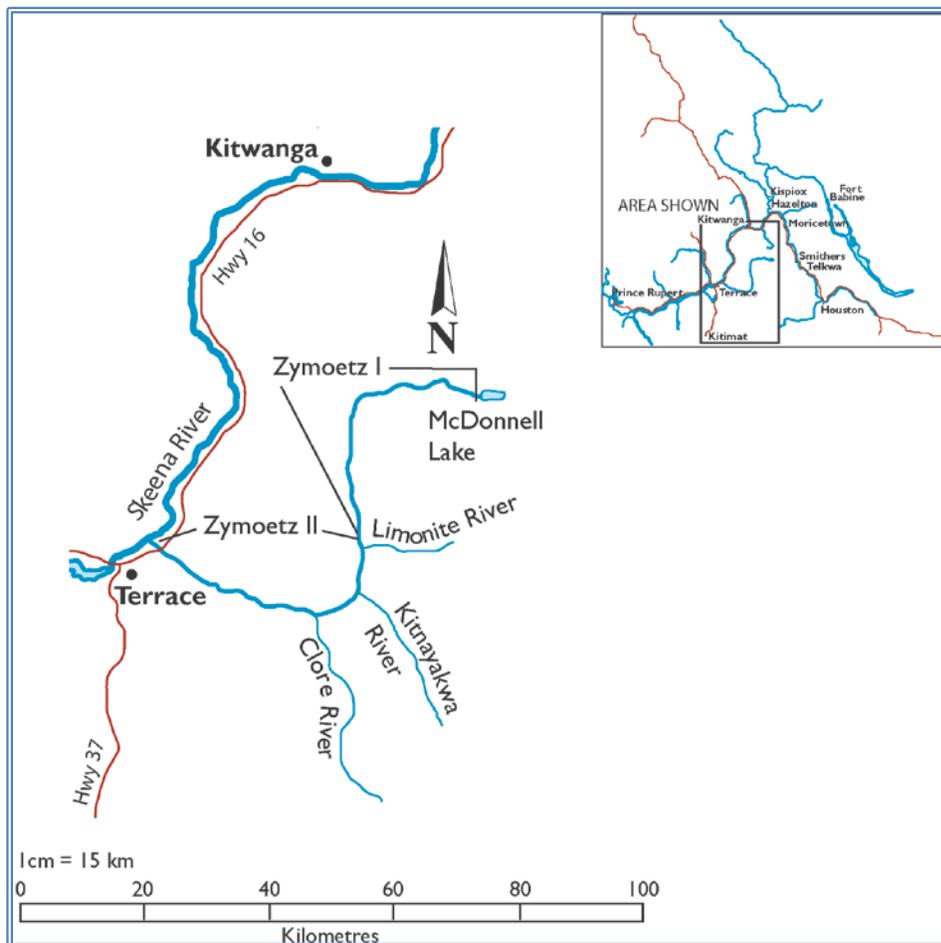


Figure 1. Map of Zymoetz River Class I Section. The Classified Water boundary extends from the outlet of McDonnell Lake downstream to Limonite Creek.

5.0 Public and Stakeholder Concerns

The following angler management concerns were raised by stakeholders and the public during development of the Zymoetz River Class I Section Angling Management Plan (see Dolan (2008a; 2009a; 2009b):

- Non-Canadian angler use is increasing, which is causing crowding issues. This is exacerbated by the proliferation of online marketing which targets this river. Due to its small size, the upper river section has a low capacity to support increases in angling effort.
- Illegal guiding is occurring, which takes business away from licenced angling guides, adds to crowding problems and does not contribute revenue for management of the resource.
- There is a need to improve the definition of “guiding” under the *Wildlife Act*. Some individuals will effectively “guide” by directing anglers to fishing locations, but will not accompany them. The current definition of guiding needs revision to include such activity.
- The current guided angler-day allocation should be reviewed. The *Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation* (ASCR) allows a maximum of 250 angler-days and three angling guides on the Zymoetz River Class I section and this may exceed the capacity of the system. Currently only 58 of the 250 angler-days are allocated. An appropriate number of guided angler-days should be determined and adjusted in the ASCR accordingly.
- The increased use of helicopters to access the upper Zymoetz River is contributing to crowding. When charters are not coordinated, helicopters may be operating in close proximity, degrading the high quality experience this remote section of river offers.
- Terrain and inaccessibility make it difficult to conduct angler licence checks in the upper reaches of the Zymoetz River. This decreases the effectiveness of enforcement staff.

6.0 Angling Regulations Prior to Angling Management Plan

The following angling regulations applied to the Zymoetz River Class 1 Section prior to the implementation of this plan:

Table 1. Status Quo Regulations on the Zymoetz River Class I Section Pre-2012

1	Class I Classified Water, September 1-October 31
2	Mandatory Steelhead Stamp, September 1-October 31
3	Closed to fishing all year from McDonell Lake downstream 3 km to signs
4	Bait ban year-round
5	Maximum three licensed guides and a maximum of 250 guided angler-days available; 58 angler-days allocated

7.0 Proposed Changes by West Working Group

The following recommendations were put forward by the West Working Group, an advisory committee of resident anglers, guides, tourism and business interests from the Terrace area. These regulations 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 Zymoetz River Class I Section

1	Extend Classified Waters season, July 24-December 31
2	Extend mandatory Steelhead Stamp requirement, July 24-December 31
3	Guide restrictions: Maximum three anglers per guided group and one group per guide per calendar day
4	Decrease guided angler-days in the <i>Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation</i> from 250 to 100 angler-days; increase allocated angler-days from 58 to 100 (42 day increase)
5	Limit access by non-guided, non-residents to two weekdays per week (Monday/Tuesday or Tuesday/Wednesday) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority Option: Immediate implementation • Minority Option: “Triggered” implementation after a threshold level of non-guided, non-resident angler effort is reached

Note – non-residents includes non-resident Canadians and non-resident aliens

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 balanced the greatest number of interests and resolve (at least partially) angler management issues. The rationale explaining decisions to accept or reject recommendations are explained in MoE (2010) and summarized in Appendix A. Table 3 presents proposed regulation changes that were endorsed by Cabinet for the Zymoetz River Class I Section. **These regulations form the basis for this Angling Management Plan:**

Table 3. Government Endorsed Regulation Changes

1	Extension of Classified Waters period, July 24-December 31
2	Extension of Mandatory Steelhead Stamp, July 24-December 31
3	Guide restrictions: maximum three anglers/guided group and one group/guide/calendar day
4	Decrease the maximum number of guided angler-days in regulation from 250 to 100; increase allocated angler-days amongst existing guides from 58 to 100
5	Canadian resident-only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday during the Classified Waters period, July 24-December 31

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, 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

- Buchanan, S. and Lewis, A.F. 1998. *Zymoetz River Steelhead: Summary of Current Data and Status Review, 1998*. Skeena Fisheries Report Sk#102.
- 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.
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- Ministry of Environment. 1989. *Draft Angling Use Plan for the Zymoetz River Class 1 Section*. Smithers, B.C.
- Ministry of Environment. 2010. *Ministry of Environment Response to Working Group Recommendations for Skeena Angling Management Plans Skeena*, Victoria, B.C.
- Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations. 2012. *Overview of Angling Management Plans for the Skeena River Watershed*. Smithers, B.C.
- Morten, K.L. 2000. *A Survey of Zymoetz (Copper) River Steelhead Anglers in 1999*. Skeena Fisheries Report SK#129.

Appendix A –Working Group Recommendations and Ministry Response

The following section presents West Working Group recommendations for the Zymoetz River Class I Section. Each proposal is followed with the corresponding 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) Extension of Classified Waters Period July 24 to December 31

The Working Group recommended an extended Classified Waters period from July 24 to December 31 to reflect when Steelhead are potentially in the river and available to the sport fishery. The start date of July 24 corresponds to one day after the Chinook closure to minimize financial impacts to anglers targeting this species (they won't have to purchase a Classified Waters license). This date is also consistent with the beginning of the Classified Waters period for the Class II section. The end date of December 31 was selected as it corresponds to the closure for all upper Skeena tributaries (above Cedarvale) to protect overwintering summer Steelhead.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses implementation of an extended Classified Water season from July 24 to December 31. The ministry acknowledges that this recommendation could also be used to manage angling guides during the current shoulder seasons, should this be deemed necessary in the future.

2) Extension of Mandatory Steelhead Stamp July 24 to December 31

The Working Group recommended extending the mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 24 to December 31 on Zymoetz River Class I section to reflect when Steelhead are in the river and targeted by anglers. It is also consistent with the recommendation for Zymoetz Class II section. The Working Group felt it may increase revenues and better value the Steelhead resource.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses implementation of a mandatory Steelhead stamp extension from July 24 to December 31 as it provides consistency with the extended Classified Waters period and with the recommendations for Zymoetz II.

3) Guide Restriction: Maximum Three Anglers per Guided Group and One Group per Guide per Day

The Working Group recommended guide restrictions including a maximum three anglers per guided group and one group per guide per day to limit the number of anglers per guide and the number of groups per guide per day. The goal of this recommendation was to distribute guided effort over the Classified Waters period and to avoid crowding situations due to high guiding activity on a particular day. The draft Working Group recommendations originally referred to anglers per boat, but by using the word “group,” it covers both boats and walk-in groups of anglers. Working Group members indicated that there were few problems with “peaks” in guide activity during September and October but there is a significant concern regarding the high level of guide activity in August, which contributes to reduced quality of angling experience.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses this recommendation to restrict angling guides to a maximum of three anglers per guided group and one group per guide per day.

4) Modification to Number of Guided Angler-Days

Working Group members felt the number of guided angler-days for the Zymoetz River Class I section was too high. Prior to 2012, the maximum number of days identified in the *Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation* was 250. This is higher than the 200 day maximum for the Class II section, despite the lower section being larger and possessing considerably more access. The Working Group proposed decreasing the total number of guided angler-days in regulation from 250 to 100. The current allocation to the three licensed guides is 58 angler-days and it was proposed that this be increased from 58 to 100 days. Allocating another 42 angler-days was deemed to have minimal additional crowding impact as 30 permit days (10 for each guide) have been granted annually by the ministry for the last two years. As such, anglers should experience little change in guiding activity on the river as a result of this increased allocation.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses the recommendation to decrease the maximum number of guided angler-days on Zymoetz I from 250 to 100 days. To achieve this, 42 angler-days would be available for allocation and the 30 permit days will no longer be issued. The allocation of these additional rod days will be consistent with Section 11 of the *Angling and Scientific Collection Regulation*.

5) Limit Access by Non-Guided, Non-Residents to Two Weekdays per Week

Working Group members felt that limiting access by non-guided, non-residents on Zymoetz I would provide for increased resident angler opportunity. They recommended limiting access by non-guided, non-residents to two weekdays per week (Monday/Tuesday or Tuesday/Wednesday) during the Classified Waters period. The majority option was for immediate implementation and the minority option was triggered implementation after a threshold level of non-guided, non-resident angler effort was reached. The Working Group felt that this proposal was consistent with the resident priority policy. Participants felt that limiting access by non-guided, non-residents to two weekdays per week, with or without a trigger, would also help to address concerns about long-term camping.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses the creation of a Canadian resident-only Friday, Saturday and Sunday for the Zymoetz River Class 1 section. This recommendation provides non-guided, non-resident alien anglers access four days each week (Monday to Thursday). The ministry acknowledges that consensus was not achieved regarding when to implement this option and also felt resident-only access five days a week was too intrusive given resident-only provisions on surrounding rivers. The ministry also acknowledges that resident-only access five days of the week may have too great of an impact on the business community.

It is important to note that resident-only times and zones proposed by 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).