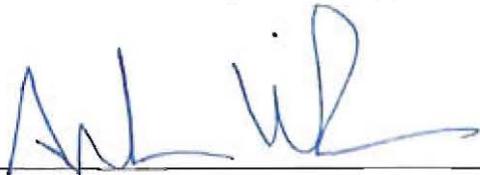

SKEENA RIVER SECTION IV ANGLING MANAGEMENT PLAN

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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 Skeena River Section IV¹ (Skeena IV). 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 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 created². The Skeena River Section IV (or Section 4) Classified Water is spatially defined from its headwaters to 1.5 kilometers (km) above the Zymoetz River confluence. All tributaries of the Skeena River in this zone are included under this 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 (see Section 8.0 for more information).

3.0 Description of River and Sport Fishery

The Skeena River is one of the largest drainages on the Pacific coast of North America. Originating in north-western B.C., the Skeena flows approximately 620 kilometres southwest and drains an area of 39,000 square kilometres before reaching the Pacific Ocean near Prince Rupert. Major tributaries include the Babine, Bulkley-Morice, Kispiox and Sustut rivers.

The Skeena River above the Babine River confluence is generally inaccessible (except by helicopter) and offers limited fishable water due to extensive canyon reaches. Some high quality wilderness angling opportunities exist where tributaries join the mainstem channel (i.e. Sustut, Mosque, Squingula rivers). Travelling upstream, the available fish supply diminishes steadily at each tributary junction. River conditions can change substantially from day to day, resulting from glacial tributaries with diverse discharge regimes. In contrast, the Skeena below the Babine confluence has better access, navigability, water conditions and fish abundance.

Generally, recreational anglers on the Skeena IV Classified Water are focussed on catching Steelhead. To a lesser degree, Chinook, Coho and Sockeye salmon are also targeted (Paish and Associates, 1985). Timing of these fisheries begins in March with spring-run Steelhead and early Chinook. The fishery is interrupted by spring run-off in May and June. By late June the

¹ In regulation, this section is referred to as Section 4

² Fish conservation issues are not discussed in this plan, as they are considered as part of other regional advisory processes.

river is usually fishable again, and Chinook salmon are the targeted species until August. Sockeye salmon enter the river in early August and are fished (when permitted) until late August when the Steelhead and Coho fishery commences.

Aside from the aforementioned species, Gottesfeld and Rabnett (2008) identify that the following fish are also found in the mid-Skeena River³: Rainbow Trout, Cutthroat Trout, Bull Trout, Dolly Varden, Mountain Whitefish, Northern Pikeminnow, Longnose Dace, Redside Shiner, Prickly Sculpin, Peamouth Chub, Largescale Sucker, Threespine Stickleback, River Lamprey, Kokanee, Coastrange Sculpin and possibly Green Sturgeon.

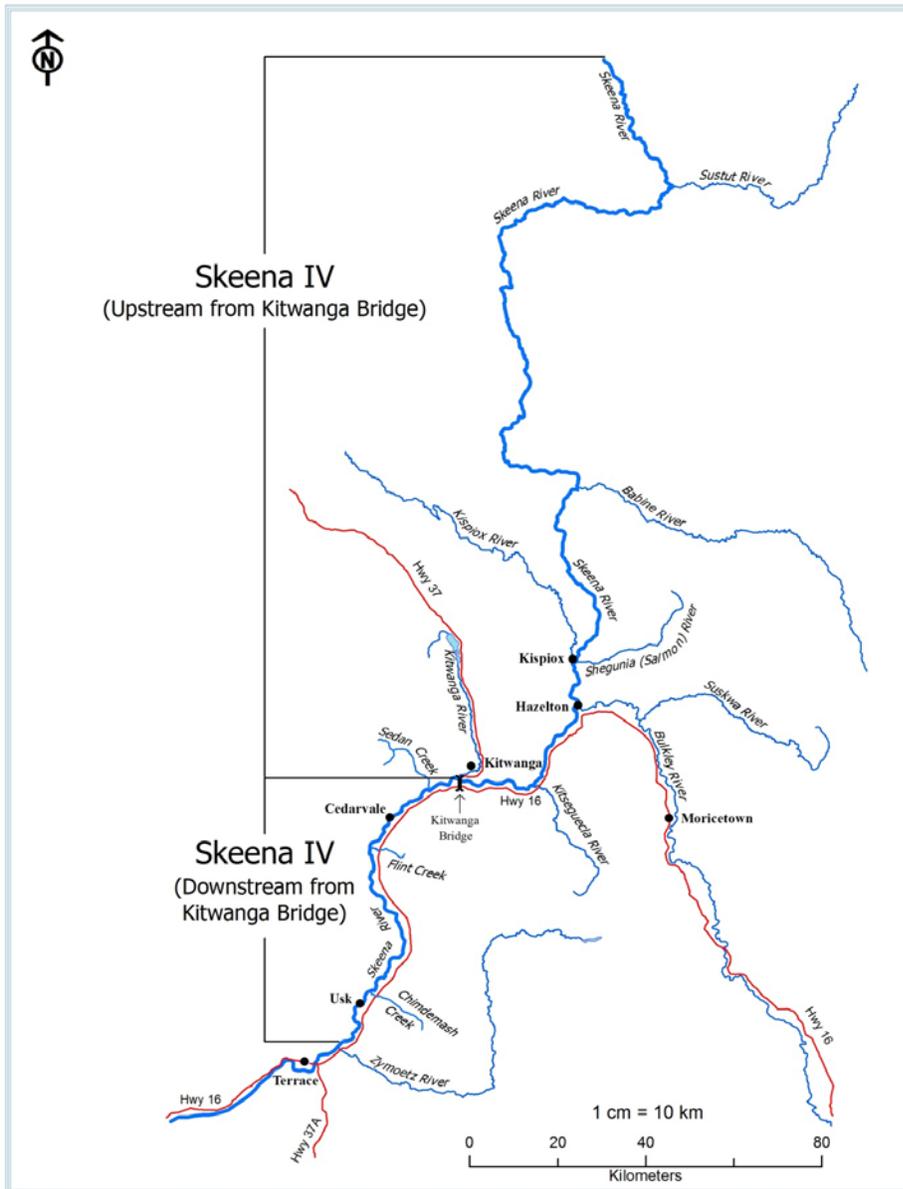


Figure 1. Map of Skeena River Section IV. The Classified Water boundary extends from 1.5 km above the Zymoetz River confluence to the headwaters of the Skeena River.

³ As delineated from Terrace to the Babine River confluence

4.0 Previous Planning

In 1992, a draft Angling Use Plan was approved for the Skeena River Section IV Classified Water (MOE, 1992). This two-page plan recommended a total of 10,000 non-guided angler-days with a maximum of 10 guides using 1,000 days in total. An allocation of angler-days among angler residency groups was not identified. Guiding activity was documented as spatially and temporally compressed near the Kitwanga and Kispiox river confluences. To address this, it was recommended that no more than 200 guided-days be allocated on the Skeena River between the Kitwanga and Bulkley rivers and no more than 100 days between the Bulkley and Kispiox rivers between September 1 and October 15. In the end, these restrictions were not implemented for angling guides operating on Skeena IV.

5.0 Public and Stakeholder Concerns

The following concerns were raised by stakeholders and the public during development of the Skeena River Section IV Angling Management Plan (Dolan 2008b). The issues below pertain to the management of anglers⁴ and include:

- Crowding during September and October near the confluences of the Skeena River with the Kispiox, Bulkley, Kitwanga and Kitseguecla rivers. Crowding issues also exist in the area upstream of the Kitselas Canyon and around the Skeena West Bridge.
- Illegal guiding.
- Increased use of jet boats and crowding near boat launch locations at Hazelton, Kispiox, Glen Vowell and Kitwanga.
- Angler conflict during overlapping fisheries for federally managed salmon species and provincially managed Steelhead.
- Lack of opportunity for new and existing angling guides. The allocation of 414 guided angler-days is below the maximum number of days permitted in regulation (1,000).
- Anglers accessing popular fishing locations at Kitwanga must cross First Nations reserve lands. Alternate access options are required, as this is private land and restrictions may be imposed.

6.0 Angling Regulations Prior to this Angling Management Plan

The following angling regulations applied to the Skeena River Section IV prior to the implementation of this plan:

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

1	Class II Classified Water, July 1-October 31
2	Steelhead Stamp not required unless fishing for Steelhead
3	No fishing above Cedarvale, January 1-May 31
5	Maximum 10 licensed guides and a maximum of 1,000 guided angler-days available; 414 angler-days allocated

⁴ For background on these concerns, see Dolan (2008a)

7.0 Proposed Changes by Central and West Working Groups

The following recommendations were put forward by the Central and West Working Groups, advisory committees of resident anglers, guides, tourism and business interests from the Hazelton and Terrace area respectively. 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)

The Central and West Working Groups developed individual proposals for Skeena IV. This followed direction from the Regional Quality Waters Committee who desired to split this section of river into two planning units, occurring upstream and downstream of the Highway 37 bridge at Kitwanga. This divide was created to reflect the length of river (~450 km) and differing nature of fisheries above and below the bridge. It also allowed Working Groups to address Skeena IV issues closest to their communities. The following table presents the recommendations that were proposed by each Working Group:

Table 2. Final Working Group Recommendations for Skeena River Section IV

Above the Kitwanga Bridge (Central Working Group)	
1	Mandatory Steelhead stamp from September 1-October 31
2	B.C. Resident angler-only times and zones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority option: B.C. resident angler-only on weekends from the confluence of Shegunia River with the Skeena River to the Kitwanga Bridge, guiding permitted • Minority option: B.C. resident angler-only on Saturdays in two zones 1) from confluence of the Shegunia River with the Skeena River to the Four-Mile Bridge and 2) from the confluence of the Bulkley River with the Skeena River to Kitwanga Bridge. Guiding permitted in these two zones.
3	Reclassify Skeena IV above the Shegunia River from Class 2 to Class 1
4	Long term: distribute guided effort over the Classified Waters period
Below the Kitwanga Bridge (West Working Group)	
5	Extend Classified Waters period from July 1-December 31
6	Mandatory Steelhead stamp from July 1-December 31
7	Increase guided rod-days by 586 to a total of 1,000 in a zone from the Flint Creek confluence downstream to the Chindemash Creek confluence
8	B.C. Resident-only angling in two zones with no guiding and non-resident angler access limited to three days per week. These zones include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shandilla Creek confluence to Sedan Creek confluence 2. Chindemash Creek confluence to the downstream boundary of Skeena IV⁵

⁵ Occurring 1.5 km above the Zymoetz River confluence

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 proposals. For a recommendation to be endorsed, it needed to be balanced the greatest number of interests and resolve (at least partially) angler management issues.

When the ministry reviewed the two sets of recommendations for Skeena IV, significant issues were identified that prevented them from being implemented as proposed. Problems included different times a mandatory Steelhead Stamp would be required and different time periods and zones for B.C. resident-only fishing. To overcome this, the ministry decided to embrace the recommendations to the extent possible while also aligning them for consistency (MOE, 2010).

The rationale explaining decisions to accept or reject recommendations are discussed in MoE (2010) and summarized in Appendix A. Table 3 presents proposals for regulation change that were endorsed by Cabinet for the Skeena River Section IV. **These regulations form the basis for this Angling Management Plan:**

Table 3. Government Endorsed Regulation Changes

1	Extend Classified Waters period, July 1-December 31
2	Mandatory Steelhead stamp requirement, July 1-December 31
3	Increase guided rod-day allocation by 586 days amongst 12 new guide licences in a zone from the Flint Creek confluence to the Chindemash Creek confluence
4	Canadian resident-only in two zones on Saturday and Sunday during the Classified Waters period, July 1-December 31 a) Shegunia River confluence downstream to Sedan Creek confluence, guiding permitted b) Chindemash Creek confluence downstream to 1.5 km upstream from the Zymoetz River confluence, no guiding permitted

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

- 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.
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- Ministry of Environment. 1992. *Draft Angling Use Plan for the Skeena River, Section IV*. 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 of Angling Management Plans in the Skeena River watershed*. Smithers, B.C.
- Paish and Associates. 1985. *Lower Skeena Creel Survey 1984*. Prepared for the Salmonid Enhancement Program.

Appendix A –Working Group Recommendations and Ministry Response

The following section presents Central and West Working Group recommendations for the Skeena River Section IV. Each proposal is presented and the ministry response is provided at the end. For a complete discussion on all Working Group recommendations, see Dolan (2009b) and for additional information regarding the ministry response, see MoE (2010).

Central Working Group Recommendations: Skeena IV above the Kitwanga Bridge

1) Mandatory Steelhead Stamp from September 1 to October 31

Working Group members proposed a mandatory Steelhead Stamp from September 1 to October 31. They felt it better reflected when Steelhead were being targeted by the sport fishery, would yield additional survey data, would not negatively impact salmon anglers (because most of their fishing would be earlier in the season) and would stop anglers from “pretending” to be fishing for federally managed salmon species when they are actually targeting Steelhead.

2) B.C. Resident angler-only times and zones

Recognizing the lack of support for a limited day licence and lottery based system, Working Group members recommended resident angler-only times to help maintain resident priority:

- Majority Option: Resident angler-only on weekends in one zone from the confluence of the Shegunia River with the Skeena River main stem to the Kitwanga Bridge.
- Minority Option: Resident angler-only on Saturdays in two zones 1) from confluence of the Shegunia River with the Skeena River to Four-Mile Bridge and 2) from confluence of the Bulkley River with the Skeena River to Kitwanga Bridge
- To reduce angling guide effort, the Working Groups agreed to permit guiding during proposed resident angler-only times, except on change over days when guiding is not permitted.

3) Reclassify Skeena IV above confluence of the Shegunia River to Class I

Working Group members proposed reclassifying this portion of the Skeena River from Class 2 to Class 1. They felt this section of river reflected the high quality experience and limited access that was defined by a Class 1 designation. It was felt that the resulting increase in fees (from \$20/day to \$40/day for non-resident Canadians and non-Canadians) would act as a slight deterrent and reduce angling effort. In addition, the Working Group believed that a Class 1 designation would elevate the status of this river section during land use planning processes.

4) Long term: Distribute guided effort over the Classified Waters period

Working Group members identified that peaks in angling guide activity could cause crowding problems in the future. If such patterns are observed, they recommended that guiding effort be distributed over the Classified Waters period as follows: July - 0%, August - 10%, September 1-15 – 25%, September 16-30 – 25%, October 1-15 – 25%, October 16-31 – 15% (these percentages were derived from current guiding activity as reported to the ministry).

West Working Group Recommendations: Skeena IV below the Kitwanga Bridge

1) Extend Classified Waters season from July 1 to December 31

An extended Classified Waters period from July 1 to December 31 on Skeena IV below Kitwanga Bridge was chosen because it better reflects when Steelhead are in the river, increases revenues through licence sales, and more appropriately values the Steelhead resource.

2) Mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 1 to December 31

The Working Group recommended a mandatory Steelhead Stamp from July 1 to December 31 on Skeena IV below Kitwanga Bridge. The objective was to reflect when Steelhead are available to the sport fishery, increase revenues through licence sales, enhance value of the Steelhead resource and mirror the proposed extension for the Classified Waters period.

It was recognized by the Working Group that anglers targeting salmon only would not like this measure because it would require them to spend additional money on a Steelhead stamp when one was formerly not required.

3) Increase guided angler-days by 586 for Skeena IV in a zone from the Flint Creek confluence downstream to the Chindemash Creek confluence

Working Group members felt that Skeena IV was underutilized and could accommodate additional guided angler-days. In order to avoid creating crowding and “hot spots”, Working Group members recommended restricting the 586 new angler-days to a presently underutilized zone between Flint Creek and Chindemash Creek. These new angler-days would be distributed amongst 12 new guide licences with no single guide being allocated more than 50 angler-days. Guides would be limited to guiding only one group per day in this zone.

4) B.C. resident angler-only in two zones: 1) Shandilla Creek to Sedan Creek and 2) Chindemash Creek to the downstream boundary of Skeena IV; no guiding; non-resident anglers access three weekdays per week

Working Group members felt that these resident-only zones would provide resident priority. In addition, the resident-only zone from Shandilla Creek confluence downstream to the Sedan Creek confluence may address the issue of long-term camping by non-residents at the mouth of the Kitwanga River.

Ministry Response to Working Group Recommendations for Skeena IV

Significant issues were identified when the ministry reviewed Skeena IV recommendations. The two sets of proposals for one Classified Water and differing objectives prevented them from being implemented as proposed. The following issues were identified:

- Lack of harmonization regarding dates of mandatory Steelhead stamp and Classified Water season above and below Kitwanga bridge
- Proposed Class I section above Shegunia River had significant implications for management and allocation of guided rod-days. Specifically, this would require creation of a separate Classified Water and new Angling Management Plan.

- Overlap and inconsistencies existed between Working Group recommendations for resident-only zones upstream and downstream of the Kitwanga bridge.

Based on these points, the ministry endorsed the following measures for the Skeena IV AMP:

- Extension of the Classified Water period from July 1 to December 31
- Extension of the mandatory Steelhead stamp from July 1 to December 31
 - The dates for the Classified Water season and Steelhead stamp were harmonized to reduce complexity and manage administrative costs.
- Increase guided rod-day allocation by 586 days amongst 12 new guide licenses in a zone from Flint Creek confluence to the Chindemash Creek confluence
 - Concern was expressed that allocation may be too high. Accordingly, these days will be offered on a limited term opportunity i.e. 20 years or less.
- Canadian resident-only⁶ in two zones on Saturday and Sunday, July 1 to December 31
 - Zone 1: Shegunia River confluence downstream to Sedan Creek confluence, guiding permitted
 - Zone 2: Chindemash Creek confluence downstream to 1.5 km upstream from Zymoetz River confluence, guiding not permitted

Canadian resident-only angling boundaries were selected based on the intent of the Working Group recommendations and the belief these areas would address crowding “hot spots” in easy to access locations on the Skeena River. The time periods were selected based on endorsed measures on adjacent rivers. The ministry did not endorse recommendations of the West Working Group for resident-only four days per week as this was believed to be too restrictive.

The ministry could not implement guiding restrictions on change-over days as not all guides operate on the same schedule. Some lodges offer 8-day packages, while others do not. Change-over day restrictions would work for guides with consistent schedules, but may disproportionately impact operators who book on a variable day basis.

The ministry acknowledges that the Central Working Group made a long-term recommendation to distribute guided effort over the Classified Waters period. This recommendation was made for Skeen IV above the Kitwanga Bridge. The ministry recognizes that this recommendation would impact all Skeena IV angling guides, including operators from the Terrace area. It is also noted that the West Working Group did not recommend a distribution of guided effort below the Kitwanga Bridge. Given these issues, the ministry was not able to endorse this recommendation. It is important to note that the recommendation to change Skeena IV from a Class 2 to Class 1 River above the Shegunia River was conceptually supported by the ministry. Unfortunately, administrative challenges including establishing a new Classified Water for the Class 1 section and necessary rod-day allocation proved problematic and this recommendation was subsequently not endorsed when this AMP was created.

⁶ It is important to note that resident-only times and zones proposed by all Working Groups permitted B.C.B.C. 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 B.C.B.C. resident anglers and Canadian anglers from other provinces. This is discussed further in Section 5.1 of MoE (2010).