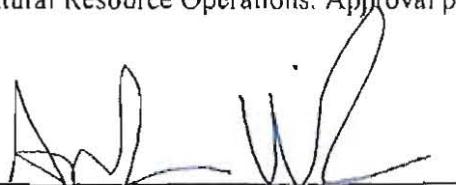

ZYMOETZ RIVER CLASS II SECTION ANGLING MANAGEMENT PLAN

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



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



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 longstanding concerns regarding quality of experience, crowding and conflict amongst anglers on the Zymoetz River Class II Section. 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 created¹. The Zymoetz River Class II Section is spatially defined from the confluence of Limonite Creek to the Skeena River 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 McDonell, 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.

Downstream of Limonite Creek, the Zymoetz River is designated a Class II Classified Water. This section is roughly 45 km in length. Unlike the upper watershed, it is easily accessed from forestry roads adjacent to both sides of the river. Anglers will commonly walk in to fishing locations, or may float sections of the river using rafts or personal watercraft.

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). The recreational fishery on this river is primarily Steelhead focussed. Effort spent targeting this species begins in August and builds as fish enter the system. Total daily effort peaks toward the end of September and beginning of October and may continue through the winter if conditions allow. To a lesser extent, Chinook salmon are also targeted (in June and July) along with resident trout and char throughout the year. In the spring

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

months of April and May, a smaller run of winter Steelhead also provides angling opportunities on this river.

Weather events causing 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, anglers typically avoid the lower river, choosing to fish upper 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 II Section (MOE, 1989). The one-page document recommended 450 angler-days of guiding activity distributed amongst five licensed guides. This plan was not finalized.

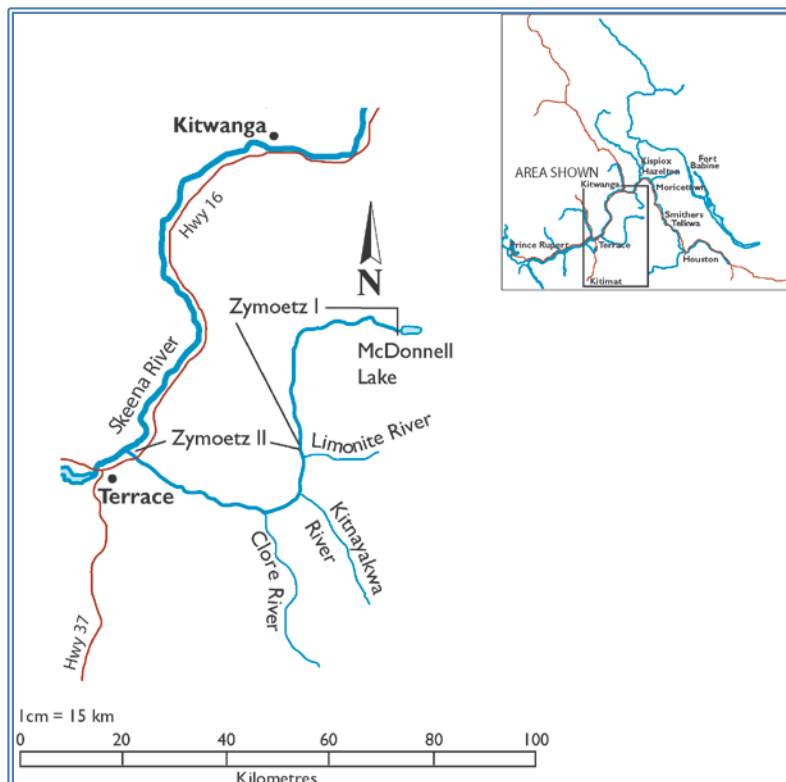


Figure 1. Map of Zymoetz River Class II Section. The Classified Water boundary extends from Limonite Creek downstream to the Skeena River.

5.0 Public and Stakeholder Concerns

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

- Increased fishing effort by non-guided anglers is a pivotal issue on this section of river, during shoulder seasons (August and November) and peak season (September and October). This is exacerbated by the proliferation of online marketing which targets this river.
- Increased boat traffic (in particular, one-person float craft such as rafts and pontoon boats) is causing additional crowding issues.
- Unrestricted guiding is occurring during the non-Classified periods in August and November. Increased effort during these shoulder season months has occurred in the past decade².
- Anglers are camping at popular fishing locations on the river, and monopolizing nearby runs. In many cases, this is happening on a long term basis (i.e. greater than two weeks), which unfairly prevents other anglers from fishing these areas.
- 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.

6.0 Angling Regulations Prior to Angling Management Plan

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

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

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| 1 | Class II Classified Water, September 1-October 31 |
| 2 | Mandatory Steelhead Stamp, September 1-October 31 |
| 3 | No fishing above the sign at the transmission line crossing (below Zymoetz Canyon), January 1-June 15 |
| 5 | Bait ban year-round |
| 6 | Maximum five licensed guides and a maximum of 200 guided angler-days available; 117 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-May 31 |

² Guided effort in the years preceding this plan has been as high as 160 angler-days in August and 30 angler-days in November.

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| 2 | Extend mandatory Steelhead Stamp requirement, July 24-May 31 |
| 3 | Guide restrictions: Maximum three anglers per guided group and one group per guide per calendar day |
| 4 | Guide restriction: distribute guided effort over the Classified Waters period. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 1: Guides use 30% or less of their angler-days per month from August to October • Option 2: Guide activity remains at current level and any new angler-days allocated to be used during former shoulder seasons (i.e. August and November) |
| 5 | Increase guided rod days to compensate for the extended Classified Waters period (no consensus on target increase, left to ministry to decide) |
| 6 | Non-guided, non-residents open access on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (three weekdays a week) |
| 7 | Creation of B.C. resident-only angling on weekends with a guided zone on Saturdays from Mattson Creek confluence to Skeena River confluence |

Note: Non-residents refers to non-resident Canadians and non-resident alien anglers

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 II Section. **These regulations form the basis for this Angling Management Plan:**

Table 3. Government Endorsed Changes Regulations

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| 1 | Extension of Classified Waters period, July 24-May 31 |
| 2 | Extension of Mandatory Steelhead Stamp, July 24-May 31 |
| 3 | Guide restriction: maximum three anglers/guided group and one group/guide/calendar day |
| 4 | Modify guided rod-day allocation to accommodate Classified Waters period extension. Maintain allocation of 117 days from September 1-October 31. Allocate 100 days from July 24-August 31 and 50 days from November 1-May 31 |
| 5 | Increase maximum guided angler-day quota in regulation from 200 to 267 |
| 6 | Canadian resident-only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday during the Classified Waters period, July 24-May 31. Guiding allowed on Friday and in a zone on Saturday from the Mattson Creek confluence downstream to the Skeena River confluence. |

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 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 A. Lewis. 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.
- 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.
- 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 Zymoetz River, Class II Section*. Smithers, B.C.
- Ministry of Environment. 2010. *Ministry of Environment Response to Working Group Recommendations for Skeena Angling Management Plans*. Victoria, 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 II 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 May 31

The Working Group recommended an extended Classified Waters period from July 24 to May 31 to reflect when Steelhead are in the river, cap unregulated growth in guiding activity during former shoulder seasons, increase revenues through Classified Waters licence sales and angling guide fees and better value the Steelhead resource. The start date of July 24 corresponds to one day after the Chinook closure. This timing will minimize impacts to Chinook anglers as they will not be required to purchase a Classified Waters licence. The end date of May 31 was selected as it includes the winter/spring Steelhead sport fishery.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses extending the Classified Waters period from July 24 to May 31.

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

The West Working Group recommended an extension of the mandatory Steelhead stamp period from July 24 to May 31 as it better reflects when Steelhead are in the river and targeted by anglers and aligns with the Classified Waters period. The Working Groups also felt this measure could potentially increase revenues and appropriately value the Steelhead resource.

Ministry Response – The ministry endorses extending the time period when a Steelhead stamp is mandatory from July 24 to May 31.

3) Increase Guided Angler-Days to Compensate for Extended Classified Waters Period

The Working Group recommended increasing the maximum number of guided angler-days in regulation to allow angling guides to operate outside of the former Classified Waters period. Due to the manner in which guides are regulated, the Classified Waters period extension would prevent them from operating in months other than September and October. The intent of this recommendation was to allow guides limited opportunity during the former shoulder season periods³ (i.e. July 24-August 31 and November 1-May 31).

The initial Working Group recommendations indicated the guided allocation should be increased by 150 additional days. When this recommendation was revisited following the Phase II Consultation Process, this increase received significant discussion and a range of increases were reviewed. The ministry reported that guiding activity occurring during the shoulder seasons averaged about 239 angler-days from 2006 to 2008. As the Working Group did not reach

³ Angling guides holding quota during the Classified Waters period do not need to use any of their days to guide during shoulder seasons, when their tenure is unrestricted. With the extension of the Classified Waters period, shoulder season become restricted and require guides to use a portion of their allocated angler-days if they desire to operate. In the interest of fairness, the Working Group believed that the ministry should allocate more angler-days to compensate for these new shoulder season restrictions.

consensus on this recommendation, the Working Group left it to the ministry to determine an appropriate increase to the number of guided angler-days.

4) Guide Restrictions - Distribute Guiding Effort over the Classified Waters Period

The Working Group made a recommendation to distribute guiding effort over the Classified Waters period via two options, 1) guides use 30% or less of their angler-days per month for August, September and October or 2) guide activity remains at its current level during September and October and any new angler-days are to be allocated during the former shoulder seasons. It is important to note that the Working Groups did not reach consensus on these two options, deferring the final decision to the ministry.

Ministry Response to Recommendations 3 and 4 – The ministry recognizes that in the interest of fairness and equity to the guiding industry, it is necessary to allocate angler-days during the shoulder seasons to compensate for lost opportunity. The ministry endorses maintaining status quo guiding effort during September and October (117 angler-days) and allocating an additional 100 days from July 24 to August 31 and 50 days from November 1 to May 31. The ministry deemed that allocating the average effort from 2006 to 2008 (239 guided rod days) during the shoulder months was not appropriate and considered too high. Further, the allocation of 150 angler-days reflects the intent of initial AMP recommendations made by the West Working Group.

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

The Working Group recommended a maximum of 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 calendar day.

6) Non-guided, Non-Residents Open Access Three Weekdays per Week

The West Working Group recommended that access by non-guided, non-resident alien anglers should be limited to three weekdays per week. Functionally, this recommendation provides resident-only angling from Friday to Monday (4 days/week) and non-guided, non-resident alien anglers open access Tuesday to Thursday (3 days/week) during the Classified Waters period.

Working Group members believed that allowing non-guided, non-resident anglers to have unrestricted access for three days per week recognizes their economic contribution to local communities. Working Group members also felt it was important that the open access days are different from those days available to non-guided, non-resident anglers on the Zymoetz River

Class I section. The rationale for this was to retain weekday opportunity for non-guided, non-resident anglers on the Zymoetz River in either the Class II or Class I sections.

7) Creation of B.C. Resident-Only Angling on Weekends

The Working Group proposed resident-only angling on Saturday and Sunday. Working Group participants felt this restriction recognized resident priority and would significantly reduce crowding.

8) Creation of a Guided Zone on Saturdays

Further to Recommendation #7, the Working Group proposed that guiding be restricted during the resident-only weekends with an exception. On Saturday, guiding would be allowed from Mattson Creek (23 km on Copper River FSR) to the Zymoetz River confluence with the Skeena River (approximately one-third of the Class II section). On Sunday, guiding would not be allowed. This guide exemption zone recognizes that angling guides require flexibility and require some access for their clients during the weekend period.

Ministry Response to Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 – The ministry endorses Canadian resident-only Friday, Saturday and Sunday with guiding allowed during week days (Monday to Friday). The ministry recognizes that non-guided, non-resident alien anglers contribute to crowding on this easily accessible Classified Water. Restricting non-guided, non-resident alien anglers to three days per week was considered too intrusive. As such, Canadian resident only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday was endorsed as a compromise. Resident-only times for Zymoetz II were harmonized with resident-only provisions for Zymoetz I to achieve regulatory simplification.

The ministry endorses the recommendation for no guiding on weekends, with the exception to allow guiding on Saturday in a zone. This zone extends from the confluence of Mattson Creek downstream to the Zymoetz River confluence with the Skeena River. This endorsement acknowledges that angling guides have compromised by agreeing to daily restrictions (group size and number of groups), and require flexibility to guide on Saturdays.

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