

Seventh Annual Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
March 17, 2013
Skeena Valley Golf Course

Committee Member Attendees (7):

Rob Brown (Steelhead Society of BC), Larry Proteau (BC Federation of Drift Fishers), Andrew Williams (BC Federation of Fly Fishers), Dustin Kovacvich (Skeena Angling Guides Association), Peter Haigh (Lower Skeena Nass non-affiliated resident angler), Randy Dozzi (North Coast Steelhead Alliance) and Brian Patrick (Regional Tackle Vendor Community)

Last Minute Cancellations (2):

Gene Allen (Upper Skeena Angling Guides Association); Bob Johnston (Non-affiliated resident angler) Eckard Mendel (Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun)

Committee Members that Declined to Attend (5):

Denys Bell (Tweedsmuir Rod and Gun), Mike Langegger (BCWF), Jim Grilz (PR R&G), Larry Walker (Kitimat R&G), Ted Luscombe (Terrace R&G)

Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Attendees:

Steve MacIver (Senior Regulations Officer), Dean Peard (Resource Information Biologist) Dana Atagi (Fish and Wildlife Section Head), Joe De Gisi (Stock Assessment Biologist) Mark Beere (Senior Fisheries Biologist), Jeff Lough (Fisheries Biologist) Paddy Hirshfield (Fisheries Biologist) and Eric Smith (Water Stewardship Officer)

Public Attendees:

Jim Culp (), Siegi Kriegl (Kitsumkalum First Nation Fish and Wildlife Manager)

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada:

Mark Reagan (Resource Manager of Recreational Fisheries)

Total meeting participants: 18

Meeting start 1000 hrs. Mark Beere Chair and Paddy Hirshfield minutes.

Committee Business

- Mark opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda (see Appendix A). Introductions were provided for new participants.

- Mark B. indicated the basis for decision making has been included in the proposal packages handed out to meeting participants once again.
 - The Committee Terms of Reference were discussed, mainly procedures pertaining to media conduct.
 - It was identified that Jim Culp had spoken to the media regarding committee business contrary to the SFAC Terms of Reference. As such, Mark B. indicated that Jim was asked to leave the committee for 2013. After some debate and discussion, Jim accepted this and clarified that he had not deliberately made this mistake and was trying to clarify an issue pertaining to the Steelhead Society of BC and felt he should have the ability to defend himself.
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Common Ground Discussion

- Larry Proteau requested a common ground discussion. Larry believes that the SFAC process is broken. Fish and Wildlife clubs feel threatened, because what they say gets leaked out. Larry referenced the Skeena Hunters Advisory Committee (SHAC) and indicated that perhaps on off years (i.e. when there are no regulation proposals for the upcoming year) the group could talk about business other than proposals. Larry feels the group is dominated by special interest groups that do not represent the silent majority.
- Mark B. indicated that regulations can be implemented at any time, so there are not “off years” for SFAC. Mark B. felt that discussing regulations at any time is of value as the development of regulations proposals can take months or years, in the case of amendments to federal and provincial regulations.
- There was general discussion regarding the lack of participation by some committee members. Mark B. listed the suite of issues which have been cited from members who have chosen not to participate in the meetings, yet remain active in committee business: disrespectful comments, committee business discussed in the media, ministry not censoring proposals that do not arise as a direct result of demonstrated declines in abundance from time series data sets and proposals arising in the absence of same, and segregating proposals (proposals that favor one type of angling method over another). In response, disrespectful comments have been made in the past and will not be tolerated. Mark B. said that differences of opinion are healthy but they cannot become personal comments. The same is true for the discussion of committee business in the media (as is evident from Jim Culp’s inability to vote/represent the SSBC this year). The Ministry is not in favour of censoring regulations proposals but rather will continue to encourage discussions regarding all proposals received. It is the exception, rather than the rule, that fisheries management decisions arise from demonstrated declines in abundance from time series data sets given the rarity of such data and the associated uncertainty - managers often adopt a precautionary approach. Regulations pertaining to terminal tackle types are one of the key means of managing fisheries/anglers – that said, only one such proposal has been implemented since the inception of the committee.
- Mark B. talked about the confusion between the federal and provincial processes, specifically that SFAB meetings were structured such that anglers vote to determine the fate of proposals and members have, for the most part, been granted their request that the federal government

‘(don’t) mess with the tackle box’. It was also reaffirmed that the purpose of this process is to provide a forum to promote discussion and provide advice regarding Skeena Region angling regulations for various angling groups.

- Larry asked if government was meeting with rod and gun clubs/BCWF on May 4th. Dana communicated that there will not be a separate process for SFAC committee members who chose not to attend the annual Terrace meeting. This does not mean that government is not interested in the rod and gun club/BCWF point of view, and these groups have requested and continue to receive committee business correspondence and provide regular feedback throughout the year.
 - Rob added felt that the BCWF was not showing up because they did not like the proposals being put forward.
 - Dustin indicated that he is a member of the BCWF and Terrace Rod and Gun Club and he is upset that the BCWF did not show up. Andrew added that he believes SFAC provides an opportunity to talk about fish management/conservation, and he hopes other committee members feel this is important too.
 - Jim added that the SFAB experiences the same issues as SFAC, and there should be no surprises that different perspectives are heard at the table.
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2012 Proposals and Regional Manager Response

Proposal 2012-1: Angling closure on the Lakelse River upstream of the Herman Creek confluence to angling all year

- Mark B. indicated this proposal was not endorsed.
- Jeff conducted the primary review of this proposal. Based on a literature review, it does not appear that significant numbers of CCT or SH are spawning in mainstem channel.
- From a salmon perspective, this area is a significant spawning area (Coho, Pink, Chinook, Chum, and Sockeye). If there were impacts on these species, the ministry would consider a closure. It is perceived that the risks associated with wading impacts are more for salmon than trout and char.
- Mark R. indicated that he has not heard any concerns from the SFAB regarding salmon anglers wading on redds.
- Dustin asked about the difference between trout and char redds and salmon redds and differential wading impacts. Jeff added that he felt the largest impact would be on the trout and char given the small size of their redds.
- Rob added that Coho are the most impacted given their run timing. When Pinks are in, there are so many fish that people are not there.
- Randy has not seen a decline over the years due to people fishing and wading this section of river. Doesn’t seem to him that people fishing in this area have caused a decline. Randy added that the presence of anglers keep some other users in check i.e. from ATV users damaging habitat. Randy felt that education would help and peer pressure would bring more awareness to the issue.

- Dustin added that the upper Lakelse receives a lot of effort in the early spring for trout. Easy to wade, family friendly etc. and closing this section would limit opportunities for folks looking for easy to access, high quality fisheries.
- Dustin asked if HCTF funding could be applied for to investigate the issue of wading on redds. Jeff indicated the fisheries branch would not likely deliver such a study given the high cost of such a project.
- Dustin felt that there should be some signage indicating that anglers should stay off the redds. Randy added that signs would be a good idea, the blurb in the regulations is not up front and center, so folks don't see it.
- Brian added that he would like to see signs indicating there should be no wading. Mark R. added that there is no provision in regulation to prevent this activity.
- Jim added that he felt that whitefish numbers are way down for the upper Lakelse and attention should be paid to this.
- **Action – Jeff indicated that he would follow up and seek partners to pay for more signs informing anglers to avoid spawning fish and their redds.**

Proposal 2012-2: Insect Creek Summer Steelhead Conservation

- Mark B. indicated this proposal was endorsed and will be implemented on April 1, 2013.

Proposal 2012-3: Sulphite Use in Bait Cures

- Mark B. indicated this proposal was not being pursued as recent industry changes have addressed this issue.

Proposal 2012-4 and 5: Fly-fishing only, Clore River and Zymoetz River, July 24-December 31

- Mark B. indicated these proposals were not being pursued due to the province's desire to maintain diversity in fisheries within conservation constraints; the response to proposals 2012-4 and 2012-5 was combined given their similar nature.
- Dustin responded to the comments that guides developed this proposal to make more money. He made this proposal on an ethical basis. This proposal would result in less money being made given around 30% of his clients are gear fishers. Steve added that from a provincial perspective, he has seen only proposals for the removal of fly fishing sections, as opposed to the creation of them.
- Rob added that he dislikes the phrase of staying out of the tackle box in the context of fly fishing only. He feels that managers should be in the tackle box. The barbed hook is a prime example of this. Managers need to be in the tackle box to manage populations effectively.
- Mark B. stated that regulations pertaining to changes in terminal tackle allow fisheries managers to better manage fisheries due to differential mortality between different terminal gear types; the provincial preference is to allow for opportunities where possible rather than close fisheries entirely
- General discussion followed. Estimated that ~85% of anglers in the upper Copper are fly fishers. Later in the season, or with cold water, there may be more gear fishers.

- May want to consider looking at the ratio of gear fishers to fly fishers for any upcoming river guardian projects.
- Dana asked Steve how often he sees provincial regulation proposals related to fly-fishing only areas; Steve does not see many.
- Jim added his experiences regarding the Clore River and has conducted helicopter counts and has counted around 100 fish.

Proposal 2012-6: Trout/char catch and release all year in the Zymagotitz (Zymacord) River

- Mark B. indicated the original proposal was not accepted and gave a summary of the evolution for the current trout and char regulations. When the Director of Fish and Wildlife reviewed the proposal, the closure for char was embraced; you can fish for them but you can no longer retain one. For trout, the harvest of one trout per day was accepted and would be allowed during the summer from July 1 to October 31.
- Dustin added that he would like to see an allowance for char harvest in some remote areas
- Dustin felt the char population in the Lakelse was strong and there may be declines in the Zymoetz and Zymacord rivers. This was based on his fishing effort. Jeff added that assigning harvest quotas on angler catch per unit effort is a risky approach.
- Dustin asked for some background on how this proposal would be implemented. Jeff provided background, indicating that the Skeena Region would be proactive and not follow the reactive approaches done in other areas following stock collapses. Jeff spoke to what happens following a collapse and does not want this region to get to that point.
- Randy added that if anglers are still fishing with roe, there will be high mortality on char. Mark B. shared background regarding the 10 month/year fishing closure in SE Alaska implemented due to angler recommendations in response to the high (~48%) incidence of mortality for bait caught Cutthroat Trout.
- Randy indicated he would like a year round bait ban to be implemented, or at least a bait ban for all Skeena River tributaries. Catch and release with bait for char is not a good idea.
- Rob thanked the fisheries branch for championing this proposal.
- The exception of lakes was brought up in the context of the char retention closure in streams. Jeff added that lakes were not overlooked. Char retention is restricted in streams given this when they are most vulnerable.
- Jeff indicated that it is very hard to keep track of all the different resource developments that are occurring. As such, it is hard to assess the risk to fish populations.
- Dana indicated that some money would be available to carry out a risk assessment of trout and char in the Skeena Region.
- Andrew added that Mark B. could have stepped in and clarified in the local area papers that the trout and char proposal did not come from Jim and Rob but from the ministry.
- Jim indicated that a big sell job is required regarding the trout and char regulation changes.

Break for lunch at 12 PM.

Committee Review of 2013 Proposals

Proposal 2013-1: Designate all large, fish bearing lower Skeena River tributaries as Class II waters

- Mark B. read out the rationale for this proposal. Brian indicated the Kasiks had been fished out in the past with too many guides. Dustin indicated this statement does not apply to all guides and SAGA practices catch and release in these systems because they have to.
- Brian added that when the Skeena is washed out, anglers will target these tributaries. Dustin indicated that he would like the numbers to be compiled regarding angler use for these systems.
- Peter asked how this proposal would impact guides on these waters. Dustin indicated that this would negatively impact guides, particularly new entrants.
- Rob indicated that he felt the Zymagotitz was a problem. The Esctall is already a Classified Water.
- Brian added that these rivers should be classified year round.
- Peter asked for more information on how guides are allocated opportunity on new Classified Waters. Dana provided this background.
- **Action – Mark B. indicated guide reports records for the last five years on lower Skeena tributaries would be distributed to committee members.**

Proposal 2013-1:

- In favor – (3)
- Opposed – (3)
- Abstain – (1)

Proposal 2013-2 - All catch and release only fisheries should be designated as no fishing until mortality studies conducted

- Andrew indicated the logical extension of this proposal would require individuals to stop fishing once they had reached their daily quota. Is this the way we want to manage?
- Larry did not support this proposal, although he sees the merit behind it. Many people see catch and release as a form of torture.
- Rob asked whether it is better to torture and release than torture and kill?
- Dustin felt that there is a valid argument for this proposal although perhaps a bit heavy handed.
- Randy indicated he favors catch and release for trout.
- Jeff added that creation of no fishing areas would require significant cooperation with federal fisheries to close salmon fisheries.
- Andrew felt that going the route of killing fish would end up with hatchery supported systems and he does not want this due to the fact that hatcheries have been demonstrated to cause declines in wild fish populations.

- Rob indicated that there may need to be caps on catch and release as people who catch too many fish are causing higher levels of mortality

Proposal 2013-2:

- In favor – (0)
- Opposed – (6)

Proposal 2013-3: No Fishing in the Upper Lakelse River upstream of the CNR Bridge

- This proposal is a modification to 2012-1. Last year's proposal was meant to describe the lower boundary as the CNR bridge instead of Herman's Creek confluence.
- Brian indicated that he thought this closure should apply to Steelhead. He has seen anglers kicking the redds to chum the resident Rainbow Trout.
- Dustin felt that active spawning in the upper Lakelse occurs mid-May and Steelhead spawning occurs before trout fishing occurs. Dustin felt there would be a large social implication if this area is closed.
- Rob indicated that there should be no fishing for Steelhead from Jan 1 to June 15. The intent of this would be to reduce the amount of pressure in this area and reduce the amount of wading that occurs.
- Jim disagrees with this proposal. He feels most of the Summer Steelhead spawn in the Herman's Pool area.
- Dustin indicated that there should be a regulation that prevents harassing actively spawning fish.
- Randy felt that until river boats and roe are banned, this closure will do nothing. This means that if the fish don't come into the river, it is the result of lower river impacts from river boats or bait fishing.
- Andrew asked where fish are considered home free i.e. when will there be a point on a river at which point they are free from fishing pressure. Andrew feels that all rivers should have some sort of closure at their upper end.
- Dana added that managing Skeena River tributaries below Cedarvale is a challenge because of the mix between summer and winter Steelhead. The fresh fish (winter run) are not exposed to commercial fisheries and have a lower risk of becoming a conservation concern than summer fish.

Proposal 2013-3:

- In Favor – (1)
- Opposed – (6)

Proposal 2013-4: Designate Zymagotitz (Zymacord) River as Class II Classified Water

- This proposal is different than 2013-1 as it proposes no allocation to angling guides.
- Dustin indicated that if this proposal created a BC resident only fishery, he would consider it. It would be highly discriminatory to restrict guides unless it was BC resident only.

- Randy asked about a bait ban for this river. There should also be a power boat ban and no fishing from boats.
- Larry mentioned the Zymacord River is enhanced. There are 25K coho put into this river each year.
- **Action item – Steve will look into licencing restrictions for salmon as it applies to eastern provinces. How come BC cannot provide a resident only fishery while the eastern provinces can?**

Proposal 2013-4: Committee Members with Voting Status

- In favor – (6)
- Oppose – (1)
- A discussion followed regarding Randy Dozzi's concern for jet boat use on Lakelse Lake tributaries with respect to safety and impacts to depressed sockeye spawning populations. Randy will follow-up with the Office of Boating Safety.
- Steve added that Transport Canada is more receptive to calls for boat bans from municipalities than from the province. Boat restrictions are the responsibility of the Office of Boating Safety with Transport Canada under the Vessel Operating Restriction Regulation.

Section Updates

- Jeff provided an update on the Coastal Cutthroat Trout project on the Kitimat River.
- Jeff provided an update regarding the provincial Bull Trout management plan.
- Joe asked the committee if there were any lakes in the Terrace area that could be candidates for stocking. Joe provided some general criteria for stocked lakes and things that get considered prior to stocking i.e. fishless lakes with no rare or endangered amphibians and lakes that don't exchange water with surrounding watersheds.
- Dustin proposed Finlay Lake off the Kalum Lake road as a stocking candidate. This lake has houses around it and it is very easy to access.
- Paddy provided an update on Classified Waters management indicating a review of the Skeena Quality Waters Strategy process has been conducted. This work was led by Victoria and conducted for all regions that have used the Quality Waters process. Approximately 20 recommendations were developed to improve the strategy which were forwarded to the province for consideration.
- Paddy indicated that monitoring is being conducted for the 12 Classified Waters with recent regulation changes. Feedback from anglers is desired to understand the impact of the regulation changes. Paddy also mentioned that River Guardian funding had been applied for and approved to monitor these regulation changes. If the province implements a River Guardian program, the first season would be the fall of 2013.

Meeting adjourn ~ 4 PM

Appendix A – Meeting agenda for 2013 Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee

Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee Agenda 2013
March 17 - Skeena Valley Golf and Country Club
3525 Golf Course Avenue, Terrace, BC

- 9:30-10:00 am Coffee, seating
- 10:00 am Introductions
- 10:05 am Committee ‘common-ground’ discussion
- 10:25 am Fish and Wildlife Section Head’s response to 2012 proposal recommendations
- 12:00-12:45 pm Lunch (provided)
- 12:45 pm 2013 Regulation Proposals
- 3:30 pm QWS, Skeena Fisheries Section Updates
- 4:30 pm Adjourn