

Minutes from the Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting

March 16, 2014

Skeena Valley Golf and Country Club

In attendance:

Committee Members: Brian Patrick (Tackle Vendor Representative), Larry Proteau (BC Federation of Drift Fishers), Randy Dozzi (North Coast Steelhead Alliance), Gene Allen (Upper Skeena Angling Guides Association), Rob Brown (Steelhead Society of BC)

Ministry of Forests, Land and Natural Resource Operations/Ministry of Environment, Fisheries Branch: Mark Beere, Jeff Lough, Dean Peard, Paddy Hirshfield, Joe De Gisi

Conservation Officer Services: Gareth Scrivner (Terrace)

Members of the Public: Jim Culp (SSBC Alternate)

Chair: Mark Beere

Minutes: Paddy Hirshfield/Mark Beere

9:50 AM - Meeting called to order by Chair

Introductions

Agenda additions/changes

Committee membership:

Mark noted there are two vacant positions for non-affiliated resident anglers on the committee:

Fraser (formerly Sam Moroski) – who resigned stating that he felt the committee lacked the initiative to act upon the wishes of its members after submitting a proposal for which he received the unanimous support of the committee (single hook only in Skeena Region lakes). Review of the minutes of the 2008 sitting of the SFAC revealed that six of 16 members voted in support of this proposal. Skeena Fisheries staff supported the proposal and it received the approval of the Skeena Regional Manager. The proposal was forwarded to Headquarters in Victoria, where it did not receive the support of the Director due to his desire for province-wide regulations (for regulations simplification). This lack of support was due to the absence of consensus from regional biologists citing variation in the literature in regards to single versus treble hook survival rates.

Kitimat (formerly Bob Johnston) – who retired stating that he felt that the SFAC was important but that he did not spend as much time on the rivers as he used to.

Committee members agreed to seek out candidates to fill these two vacancies. Prospective candidates will be vetted by the committee.

Mark Reagan has left the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and his Resource Manager of Recreational Fisheries position; Angela Mahboubi will replace Mark Reagan.

General discussion re the SFAC:

Mark stated that in his opinion there is a very valid frustration that exists both among committee members, members of the public and BC Fisheries staff regarding the protracted process of amending federal fisheries legislation. He cited Eckard Mendel's 2008 proposal to allow 2 rods when ice fishing as an example, and noted that this regulation had received support both regionally and provincially yet the difficulty to proceed on a national scale (via an Order in Council) continues to delay implementation. Other examples exist, including the intersection of Headquarter staff desires for province-wide regulation changes that would include regionally approved regulations amendments, which are then delayed due to capacity challenges in Victoria. He stressed the value of the input and experience of participants to fisheries staff and the importance of maintaining a transparent regulations development process. Although much or more feedback is received from former committee members that are not in attendance, in-person responses to participant enquiries and discussions regarding decision rationale is a commitment the Skeena Fisheries Branch, to date, has chosen to maintain.

MFLNRO updates:

The Chair provided staff updates regarding Fisheries Manager and Director of Fish and Wildlife positions in Victoria. The successful applicant for the long-vacant Fisheries Manager position is Jason Morgan. Andrew Wilson has resigned from the provincial government; Albert Nussbaum is the acting as the Director of Fish and Wildlife. Dana Atagi has left his Fish and Wildlife Section Head position and is now the Resource Manager of Fish and Wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Section Head position has not been filled to date.

Mark and Jeff provided an update on the trout and char regulation implementation and future assessment work that is being considered. Jim suggested that we develop a list of waters that can sustain harvest. Jeff noted that BC has been facing challenges accessing the funds that have been ear-marked specifically for that task. Gene stated that in his experience the incidental catch of trout and char on the Kispiox is 10% of what it used to be.

Action items from the 2013 meeting:

1. Jeff had committed to following up with respect to posting signs to inform anglers of the impacts of wading on redds - Jeff reported that he has sought and obtained funding and will post a sign on the upper Lakelse River.
2. Mark had committed to providing information to summarize guide effort on lower Skeena River tributaries - This information is contained within this years' committee member information package.

3. Steven MacIver committed to look into licensing restrictions for salmon as they apply to the eastern provinces. This information is contained within this years' committee member information package. A request has been made of Steven to respond to the second part of that enquiry, specifically: How come BC cannot provide a resident only fishery while the eastern provinces can?

Resource Manager responses:

Mark presented the Resource Manager responses to the following proposals:

1. *SFAC 2013-01: Change the status of all fishable lower Skeena River tributaries to Class 2 Classified Waters*
2. *SFAC 2013-02: No fishing in areas of the Skeena watershed where catch and release regulations exist*
 - Rob indicated that we need to start the discussion on restricting the number of fish caught by anglers participating in catch and release fisheries.
3. *SFAC 2013-03: No fishing in the Lakelse River upstream of the CNR bridge while steelhead eggs are incubating*
4. *SFAC 2014-04: Change the status of Zymagotitz River to Class 2 Classified Water*
 - Larry indicated that he has seen lots of guides on this river. Rob agreed and reported that in the past, many people were fishing coho – not so anymore. Also, the bridge near the Erlandson Creek confluence is out and stream turbidity has decreased over time, so the lower seven kilometers are crowded.
 - Jeff asked whether guides were perceived to be the problem. It was agreed that residents fish this river quite a bit. He also asked what the conservation problems were on this river. Larry felt that overharvest was not the issue. Participants responded that crowding was the largest issue. Also that coho are the primary target on the Zymagotitz River and approximately 20K are stocked annually. Approximately 2/3 of the watershed is not accessible to the public, which provides protection for fish populations. Participants felt that bull trout/Dolly Varden were the most significant conservation concern and that large fish are no longer/very rarely captured. Jim felt that the pool below Erlandson Creek was probably the most heavily impacted location.
 - The fishery for steelhead occurs in the spring time, and this is when most of the guiding occurs. This river is also fished in the fall for coho.

2014 Proposals:

1. *SFAC 2014-01: One trout from streams all year round. Submitted by the BC Federation of Drift Fishers.*
 - Larry presented his proposal noting that he it would simplify the regulations and allow anglers to retain a mortally injured fish.
 - The effectiveness of slot limits was discussed.
 - Gene enquired about his perception of survival rates for salmon and steelhead; specifically, do bleeding salmon have higher survival rates than steelhead?

- Rainbow Alley was identified as an example of an area where harvest could be considered and perhaps the Stellako River.
- Jeff indicated the challenge of opening a system to harvest year round is identifying the population unit impacted by the fishery.
- Larry asked how the ministry would bring forward future regulation changes on the trout and char changes. Jeff indicated the ministry would bring this back to SFAC. Larry indicated the hard part of this regulation change is the timelines involved. It takes too long to bring about revisions, a comment agreed with by all, as changes other than variations to federal regulations are very slow to be processed by the remaining Victoria staff. Also, he wants to see some stratification of the region and a plan to work through the areas to identify threats and opportunities to opening the fishery up. Jeff reiterated that this objective was planned pending access to funds.
- Gareth indicated that some of the anglers he speaks with are not sure about the new trout and char regulations and what they can keep and not keep. This has led them to not retain fish as a result.

Vote:

- In favor – 3
- Against – 2

Make steelhead stamp mandatory in Skeena 4 as of August 15 instead of July 1

Jim felt that August 1 was a more appropriate time

Vote:

- In favor – 5

Dustin Kovacvich mailed in his feedback in opposition to this proposal: “I would support Alexandre Bussman's recommendation for the steelhead stamp if the dates were changed to August 1 to Dec 31 for Skeena IV. I also think that possibly changing the entire Skeena to steelhead stamp mandatory from August 1 to Dec 31 may be a reasonable change in regulation. This is more in the prime summer steelhead fishing season and would be a good simplification of regulations for the entire Skeena River.

Allow non resident alien anglers to fish the entire Skeena 4 portion seven days a week during the Classified Waters period

- Gene disagreed strongly stating that the many hours volunteered to participate in the QWS process led to this outcome
- Other members also felt this would go against what was worked on during the QWS process

- Paddy relayed that the proponent felt this requirement was onerous and curtailed angling effort

Vote:

- Against – 4
- For – 1

Dustin Kovacvich mailed in his feedback in opposition to this proposal: “I do not support Alexandre Bussman's recommendation for opening Skeena IV for non-resident usage on weekends. I sat on the QWS and it was seen as needed to allow for less crowding on weekends on the Skeena IV for residents to fish the mouth of the Kitwanga River, and near Terrace. Heavy crowding in these two areas was seen as detrimental for family and friend fishing by BC residents on weekends.

I would support Alexandre Bussman's Recommendation for the Steelhead Stamp if the dates were changed to August 1 to Dec 31 for Skeena IV. I also think that possibly changing the entire Skeena to Steelhead Stamp Mandatory from August 1 to Dec 31 may be a reasonable change in regulation. This is more in the prime summer steelhead fishing season and would be a good simplification of regulations for the entire Skeena River.”

All agreed that the regulation proposals put forward by Dustin Kovacvich after the proposal submission due date were not to be considered this year. The rationale was to allow the committee members to review this proposal with their constituents first before responding at the SFAC meeting.

General discussion

Larry said committee members who have resigned from the committee should receive all information pertaining to committee business. Mark confirmed that all members past and present were sent a meeting invitation, regulation proposal template as well as a request to respond (via e-mail December 10, 2013). All who responded received a meeting agenda. Larry felt that members who did not respond to the meeting invitation should receive the meeting agenda and meeting materials in the event they change their mind. Mark noted the deadline to for notifying the Chair of their intention to attend, as per the TOR, is six weeks in advance of the meeting and that all interested parties’ requests for information will be fulfilled.

Larry felt that to be efficient, in years where there are few proposals, the in person meeting could be replaced with a phone call instead. Other committee members felt that the value of the meeting would be lost without an active, face-to-face exchange of ideas.

Joe indicated his desire to obtain feedback from lake anglers. The possibility of having meetings in Smithers or Burns Lake was noted. Joe indicated that if he cannot get lakes district anglers to attend the SFAC he will need to solicit this input through other means (holding separate meetings).

Joe noted that colleagues in Southern Interior are looking at making barbless restrictions on lakes with conservation concerns, regardless of the number of points on a hook, an approach that will allow non-target species to be released with less harm. The committee indicated general agreement they could accept such a proposal.

Joe also brought up set lining in BC. In the Yukon, the line must be checked every 30 hours. Joe would like to make a change to have a more humane set line regulation, as, at present, there is no time limit on checking a set line. Anglers are required to put their name on the line, and fish only one line, but some anglers are running a set-line trap line by fishing other angler's gear.

4:00 PM - Meeting adjourned