

**Ninth Annual**  
**Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Skeena Valley Golf and Country Club**  
**March 15, 2015**

**In attendance**

**Committee Members (Voting)**

Larry Proteau - BC Federation of Drift Fishers (BCFDF)  
Gene Allen - Upper Skeena Angling Guides Association (USAGA)  
Rob Brown - Steelhead Society of BC Northern Branch (SSBCNB)  
Jim Culp – BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BC FFF)  
Randi Dozzi - North Coast Steelhead Alliance (NCSA)  
Walter Faetz - Skeena Angling Guides Association (SAGA)  
Peter Haigh - Lower Skeena-Nass non-affiliated angler  
Malte Juergensen – Terrace Rod and Gun Club (TRGC)

**Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO)**

Dana Atagi, Mark Beere (Chair), Joe De Gisi (minutes), Paddy Hirshfield, Jeff Lough

**Ministry of Environment (MOE)**

Dean Peard

**Ministry of Environment (MOE), Conservation Officer Services (COS)**

Ryan Gordon

**Public**

Jack Riddle – resident angler, Kitimat  
Frank Guillon – resident angler, Smithers  
John Riddle – resident angler, Kitimat  
Poul Bech – Steelhead Society of BC, Lower Mainland  
Troy Peters - Steelhead Society of BC Northern Branch (alternate)  
Scott McGinlay – resident angler, Terrace

**Regrets**

Brian Patrick - Regional Tackle Vendor Community \*  
Dustin Kovacvich - SAGA \*  
John Webb - Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)  
Eckard Mendel – Bulkley Valley R&G \*  
Larry Walker - Kitimat R&G \*

\* voting member of SFAC

**Introductions and Housekeeping**

9:50 AM - Meeting commences

**Mark Beere (MB)** – welcome to attendees, who introduced themselves; changes in committee membership this year: Andrew Williams replaced by Jim Culp as FFF representative; review of origins and history of SFAC, including establishment of Terms of Reference and varying participation by Rod and Gun clubs and First Nations; voting is done to express the balance of views; the SFAC meeting is only one of many venues for stakeholders to express their views to government

**Rob Brown (RB)** - clarification is needed regarding Steelhead Society representation, as he considers himself the SSBCNB representative and wonders why Poul Bech (PB) is attending

**MB** – this meeting is not the place for internal Steelhead Society disagreements; meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend

**Jim Culp (JC)** - according to the Steelhead Framework, representatives to regional committees should be regional residents

**MB** - there is a Provincial Angling Advisory Team (PAAT); provincial policies and issues are discussed there and not at the SFAC unless there is extra time at the end of SFAC

**Troy Peters (TP)** - as acting chair of SSBCNB, considers RB to be the representative and himself the alternate

**PB** – appreciates the opportunity to speak and listen at SFAC; Rob Brown is the SSBCNB representative

**JC** – questions why the provincial Steelhead Framework would not be discussed at SFAC, given the importance of Steelhead in the region

**MB** - Steelhead Framework can be discussed after regional proposals

**Dana Atagi (DA)** - policy is drafted by provincial-level staff who need to hear from stakeholders at the PAAT meeting

**MB** - could add another non-affiliated angler to the SFAC and nominations would be accepted; review of changes to provincial fisheries staff in Victoria

**JC** - clarification is needed about the announcement that Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC (FFSBC) will receive additional angling licence revenue

**MB** - regional MFLNRO Fisheries staff can now apply for the FFSBC funds for projects to benefit anglers

**Gene Allen (GA)** - will the funds would be accessible to groups outside of government?

**DA** - access will be through government representatives; there will be opportunity for partnerships

**Larry Proteau (LP)** – how will these funds come back to Skeena Region?

**MB** - proposal intake has just occurred; regional staff represent Skeena Region on the relevant committees which determine funding; proposals have been submitted for the small amount of funding currently available

**Joe De Gisi (JD)** - new funds also require sufficient capacity to deliver projects

**DA** - funds will be available available April 1 annually, and also that carryover will be possible.

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The review of 2014 proposals and the Regional Manager decisions began at 10:22 AM

**MB** – review of proposal SFAC-2014\_01 “**Allow the harvest of one trout per day for Skeena Region streams**”, including the Regional Manager decision

**MB** – review of proposal SFAC-2014\_02 “**Make the Steelhead Stamp mandatory on Skeena River IV on August 15 instead of Jul 1 annually**”, including the Regional Manager decision

**DA** - do not expect the change suggested in the Regional Manager’s decision for proposal 2014\_02 to be implemented in the upcoming synopsis as the change is not a simple Variation Order (VO), but the region will forward the change to Victoria for provincial consideration

**LP** – has the change already been submitted to Victoria?

**PMH** - changes to regulations which require an Order in Council (OIC) are not on a fixed time cycle, and this change would also require a Treasury Board submission

**LP** - as Regional Manager wants the change, will Conservation Officers enforce the existing regulation?

**DA** - the existing regulation remains in force and bureaucracy takes time

**MB** - review of proposal SFAC-2014\_03 “**Allow non-resident alien anglers to fish the entire Skeena IV seven days a week during the Classified Waters period**” including the Regional Manager decision

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Review of the 2015 proposals began at 10:36 AM

**MB** – review of proposal SFAC-2015\_01 “**Zymacord River year-round bait ban**”.

**Walter Faetz (WF)** - speaking for Dustin Kovacvich; Zymacord River now receives more angling pressure than in past due to recent re-roading; the river is small and there has been a char decline; proposed regulation would be precautionary like other bait bans; many Coho fishermen use bait

**JC** - supports the proposal, as char are vulnerable and coho can be angled using other methods

**LP** - proposal shows “my hook is better than your hook” mentality; bait is no worse than other methods

**WF** - fly fishing is much more effective than in the past due to changing equipment

**LP** - Zymacord River needs a guide ban not a bait ban; are Conservation Officers are seeing significant char retention there?

**Ryan Gordon (RG)** -has mostly checked Coho fishermen on the river but it is significantly busier than it used to be

**LP** - is any biological evidence of a problem on the river?

**MB** - there have been no assessments conducted by the F&W branch on the Zymacord during the past 30 years

**LP** - proposal represents the top of a slippery slope to a fly fishing only regulation

**MB** - there is much evidence that bait leads to higher mortality rates for angled trout and char as shown in the scientific literature provided to the committee by e-mail

**LP** - literature should have been provided much earlier than five days before the meeting

**MB** - distribute material to the committee to share the available information for proposal discussions – better received before a meeting than after; SFAC has implemented one bait ban and no fly fishing only proposals in its ten year history; BC does regulate terminal tackle when needed but prefers to permit as many tackle options as possible

**LP** - most guided anglers fly fish; not much bait angling occurs on the Zymacord so no need to regulate

**MB** - appreciate LP's observations about angling - a creel survey could also inform re. how much bait fishing occurs on the river; Fisheries Section adopts a precautionary approach but wants to maintain angling opportunities as much as possible

**RB** - supports the proposal; not about how many anglers use bait but more fish die when bait is used

**JC** - fish tend to swallow baited hooks; fish abundance prior to angling is not known so the population status resulting from present numbers is not known; the hatchery program on the Zymacord is not necessary as two-thirds of the river is inaccessible

**Peter Haigh (PH)** – has trouble supporting a bait ban; fishes with grandchildren and now cannot take his grandchildren to harvest trout on streams; has seen fish die after capture by fly fishing; uses circle hooks for bait fishing and would rather see a circle hook requirement for bait fishing rather than a bait ban

**Randy Dozzi (RD)** - likes the idea of circle hooks; it is the angler and not the terminal tackle which determine whether angling is impactful

**GA** - not a lot of difference between fly fishing and “gear” fishing in terms of impact but bait is different and more fish will always die after capture with bait than lures

**Malte Juergensen (MJ)** - TRGC is not in favour of the proposal; education is most needed to address the problem of bait impacts

The vote on proposal SFAC-2015\_01 was 4 in favour and 4 against.

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**MB** – review of proposal SFAC-2015\_02 “Clore River fly fishing only July 24 to December 31”

**WF** - again speaking for Dustin Kovacvich but does not support the proposal; gear fishing is as effective as ever but fly fishing is now as effective as gear and fly fishers are trying to catch as many fish as possible; catching large numbers of fish will have a negative impact regardless of the method of angling

**RB** - although SSBCNB has supported the proposal in the past it no longer supports it and would prefer to regulate the fishery referred to in the proposal as floating lines only and hook size restriction

**JC** - agrees with WF and RB, and believes there are only 100 to 200 Steelhead present in the upper system; unique fishery where dead-drifted dry flies catch Steelhead; should protect that special opportunity especially with growth projected for the Terrace area and new anglers not aware of the special character of this fishery

**RD** - does not support the proposal, as fly fishing only will not prevent impacts of angling

**LP** - is there a biological concern for the fish population?

**MB** - data available are genetic assessment, dated helicopter counts, and Steelhead mail questionnaire

**LP** - does not support the proposal as there is no evidence of a problem with abundance

**RB** - 200 Steelhead is a problem with abundance

**PB** - discussion is useful and will have provincial impacts; all groups need to find a way to reduce their impacts to fish, including eliminating the social objective of catching as many fish in a day as possible

**MB** - recreational fishery managers are now realizing that catch and release of large numbers of fish does have an impact; this is complementary with the proposed regulation to make air exposure of a released fish illegal; education is important in these cases but regulation seems required to increase compliance.

**WF** - education is necessary; guides can drive the needed education

**JC** - fly-fishing only regulation would not accomplish what is needed; a daily limit on the number of fish that could be caught and released has been discussed at SSBCNB

The vote on proposal SFAC-2015\_02 was 1 in favour and 5 against, with 2 abstaining.

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**MB** – introduction of proposal SFAC-2015-3 “**Zymoetz River I fly fishing only July 24 to December 31**”.

**RB** – can’t agree that the angler and not the gear create impacts; terminal tackle such as pink worms result in very high catches; fly fishing only would allow this fishery to remain open; tackle restrictions are needed to keep fisheries open while minimizing the harm to fish; motivation of a fly fishing only regulation is not promotion of a certain type of fishery

**Frank Guillon (FG)** - has fished all kinds of methods, but regardless of the tackle used too many fishers are obsessed with numbers; anglers need to be educated to enjoy other aspects of fishing; possibly anglers should only be allowed to hook two fish per day

**WF** - if fishers were only allowed to hook two per day it might cause them to use less efficient methods

**GA** - a limit on catch and release makes sense but question its enforceability; guides would take more clients per day so just as much impact; guides can prohibit clients from using some types of flies

**LP** - proposal was not seeking to limit catch and release but to create a fly fishing only regulation; does not agree with any fly fishing only regulations

**JC** - like the Clore River, Zymoetz I is a special place and a fly fishing only regulation would preserve it

**MJ** - TRGC opposes the proposal; fishers should be allowed to angle using the method they choose; education is the answer starting at an early age

**WF** - the meaning of “fly fishing only” is unclear

**PB** - Victoria fisheries branch are trying to reword the definitions

**JC** - it is possible to fish a fly using casting gear and a float

**JD** - synopsis defines “artificial fly” and “fly fishing”; the regulations can stipulate either of these

**RB** – such good discussion about daily catch and release limits could lead to a workable compromise

**GA** - how would such quotas be enforceable?

**PH** - guides could enforce it themselves for their clients

The vote on proposal SFAC-2015\_03 was 2 in favour and 5 against, with 1 abstaining.

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**MB** introduced proposal SFAC-2015-4 “**Kispiox River fly fishing only September 1 to October 31**”.

**GA** - fly fishing is effective early in the season but less effective later as the water temperature drops; most Steelhead anglers on the Kispiox River are unguided non-residents; later in the season the Steelhead are in tanks which cannot be fished effectively with flies but can be fished effectively with rubber worms under a float

**LP** - potential solution would be to implement resident priority and restrict non-residents, not to limit the method to fly fishing only

**JC** - rubber worms are extremely effective

**WF** - Alaskan angling guides driving south for the winter stop to fish the Kispiox River late in the year and have significant impacts as they are highly effective anglers

**RD** - scented worms are bait and would be illegal on the Kispiox

**GA** - not enough enforcement to prevent the use of scented worms, and even unscented pink worms result in deep-hooked fish

**Jack Riddle (JR)** - could proposal be changed to limit its application to non-residents only?

**GA** - would like to make the regulation apply to non-residents of Skeena Region specifically

**JR** - opposes a fly fishing only regulation but could support a residency-based regulation

**JC** - residency-based regulation would not solve the problem

**RD** - it would be best to just ban pink worms as it is too easy to cheat with scented worms

JC - many types of lures can be deadly effective

SM - as there are many ways to be highly effective, it makes more sense to regulate who is fishing

RB - fly fishing will never be as effective as other methods.

RD - would earlier closure of the Kispiox to fishing be effective?

GA – no, the issue is about numbers of fish being caught on different types of terminal tackle

PH – could modify the proposal to fly-fishing only Monday to Friday

GA - would be willing to change the proposal as long as the objective is met

PH - if the concern is late season, why does the proposed change end at October 31?

FG – this and the next two proposals really should be considered as a package

PMH - fly fishing only could be implemented by VO, but residency regulations require Cabinet approval

GA - fly fishing only regulation allows the fishery to remain open to all while limiting the impact

The vote on proposal SFAC-2015\_04 was 3 in favour and 4 against, with 1 abstaining.

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**MB – introduction of proposal SFAC-2015-5 “Bulkley and Kispiox rivers extend the Classified period from September 1 – October 31 to September 1 – November 15”.**

GA - opposes the proposal as representative for the guides in his geographic area, wishes to withdraw it

JC - these waters could still be classified to the end of the year and thus reduce non-resident activity

GA – extending classified period would also negatively affect guides unless more days were allocated

PMH – clarification of how guiding on classified waters is regulated during the unclassified period and what the options might be for allocating additional days if the classified period was extended

GA - an open bid process for allocation of guided angler days allows non-resident guides to purchase the days; the income does not stay in the region and the guides do not care as much about the rivers

WF - would not want to be involved in an allocation process

FG - could additional days allocated to existing guides be confined to a defined period?

PMH – yes; allocation could also be limited to existing guides with use only during the shoulder period

RD - when the recent Quality Waters process was finished, understood that new days would only be allocated to existing guides to make up for what guides were relinquishing on other issues

PMH – no, new days on Skeena 4 were to be open to allocation to existing and new guides

Proposal SFAC-2015\_05 was withdrawn by the proponent and no vote was held.

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**MB** – introduction of proposal SFAC-2015-6 “**Increase the classified licence fee for all non-residents from \$22/day to \$50/day**” .

**GA** - raising fees would discourage non-resident activity; River Guardians did well and more are needed

**PMH** – need clarification about whether the proposal was intended to be provincial in scope

**GA** - proposal was only intended to include Skeena Region

**PMH** – would the proposal apply across Skeena Region or just to the Kispiox River?

**GA** - just the Kispiox, but small rivers such as the Kispiox and Suskwa are the most vulnerable

**WF** - increased fees would affect guides as many include the cost of licences in their rate, but Steelhead fishing in the Skeena watershed is a bargain at the present rates, which he hears from his clients

**RB** - what BC charges for Steelhead fishing is deplorably low

**PB** - the money raised would go to FFSBC

**PMH** - since the Kispiox is a Class II water, this would make Class II more expensive than Class I

**MB** - the change would have to apply to Class I also

**GA** - he would trust FLNRO to modify the fees to a workable scheme but the intent of the proposal remained to collect more revenue to benefit the fishery and discourage excessive non-resident use

**PH** - cannot support the proposal as written but does support increased fees for non-resident anglers

**JL** - proposal is not a VO but would require an Order in Council and Treasury Board submission

**SM** - questioned the effect on non-classified rivers such as Kitimat which could see increases in activity

**PB** - it would also be necessary to consider the effect on shoulder season angling on classified waters

**MJ** - TRGC opposes the proposal, many non-BC Canadians contribute to the regional economy while fishing and care very much for our rivers; regulations shouldn't pit Canadians against each other; non-BC Canadians would like a “pay once per season” classified waters tag like BC residents

**JD** - data available from dated tags is of value in understanding how much activity occurs and where

**GA** - could the same information be obtained by other means such as River Guardians?

**PMH** - yes there are other ways to try to get that information, but more expensive

**RB** -Steelhead angling should be priced similarly to how Atlantic salmon fisheries are managed

The vote on proposal SFAC-2015\_05 was 6 in favour and 2 against

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## **General Discussion**

**RB** – there are concerns about the operations of Sweetwater Travel in guiding on the upper Skeena River; Sweetwater is camping in yurts at the mouths of tributary rivers and keeping boats there; other guides and anglers feel excluded from this portion of the river



**GA** - his company does conduct one trip per year on that portion of the river with four anglers for six days; the upper Skeena River is seeing much more angling activity than in the past

**RB** – clarification needed about whether there is a provincial policy against monopoly in guiding

**DA** - there is not an effective bullet-proof policy

**LP** - are First Nations are charging fees for fishing the Kispiox River, and is there an obligation to pay?

**GA** – yes; his company pays a flat fee but others pay a daily fee

**PMH** - the fee was to cross the Kispiox Reserve; it is a structured fee based on residency with no clarity yet as to whether it will continue in 2015

**LP** - if non-residents are already paying \$100 per day to fish the Kispiox, why expect that an increase in the Classified Waters fee would have a large effect on non-resident effort?

**GA** - the access fee only applies to about 15% of the river so anglers can avoid that section if they want

**JC** - would it be possible to limit the guiding on Skeena 4 to a smaller area within Skeena 4?

**DA** - Skeena 4 has only 414 guided angler days on the entire water; Sweetwater Travel has an operational advantage because the company owns the lodges on the Sustut River.

**JC** - resident anglers should have a sanctuary for the once-in-a-lifetime experience provided by Skeena 4

**PMH** - a review of all the Classified Waters regulations in concert will occur after 2015-16, as any changes will have effects on other waters

**GA** - some of the problems on Skeena 4 are due to illegal guiding and under-reporting

**JD** - the requirement for non-BC residents to have a daily tag allows for auditing of guide reporting

**FG** - it is always possible for reporting to be falsified

**RD** - anglers are using jet boats to access the lower Lakelse River, coming up to the bridge from the upstream channel to the Skeena; no boundary sign on the upstream channel, only on the lower one

**JC** - concerned about angling at the outlet of Kalum Lake, where steelhead overwinter; anglers are driving across lower Glacier Creek; Kalum River requires additional assessment by Fish and Wildlife

**LP** – when will the new angling regulations synopsis be available, and will there be changes?

**MB** - Kitsumkalum bait ban has been implemented January 1 to June 30; the Yakoun River (now in Region 1) bait ban was not implemented

**JL** - synopsis will be available soon; the other changes in the Region 6 section of the synopsis are primarily improvements in how existing regulations are communicated

**LP** - why has FLNRO not brought forward a proposal to close Meziadin Lake to recreational angling as suggested by an official of the Nisga’a Lisims government?

**DA** - no official request for any angling closures has come from Nisga’a Lisims; explanation of how angling guiding on Nisga’a Lands is regulated

**JL** - FLNRO hopes to partner with the Nisga'a on trout and char assessments in their area

**SM** - when does the Kitsumkalum River bait ban take effect?

**MB** – The new synopsis will introduce the change. The Steelhead Framework has some general guidance on Summer Steelhead bait regulations; original proposal was from November 1 onward but this was not accepted and instead the ban begins on January 1 to permit the use of bait in angling for late season salmon

**SM** - opposes the Kitsumkalum River bait ban as it is not needed

**MB** - bait ban brings the Kitsumkalum River regulation more in line with other summer Steelhead stream regulations where no angling for overwintering and spawning fish is not permitted

**RD** - Zymoetz River closure to angling may need to happen earlier than January 1 due to increased activity associated with coming development; may need to start as early as mid-November

**TP** - with all of the discussion about limiting our impact, possibly the committee should consider a daily catch limit; would end a lot of disagreement and put a ceiling on angling impacts, acknowledging the need for self-policing

**By show of hands, no one present would oppose the general principle of a daily quota for catch independent of harvest.**

**JL** - there would still be significant details to be worked out, for instance would the quota be per species or total for all game fish species

**RB** – what is the status of a proposal making it illegal to remove an angled fish from the water unless the fish was to be harvested?

**MB** - the proposal was distributed late so it was taken out of the proposals for this year; there is substantial scientific literature related to sub-lethal impacts of removing fish from the water and Skeena Fisheries has forwarded an independent proposal to HQ for consideration; this proposal has support from BC regional biologists

**PB** - SSBC is pushing for this as a law but there is hesitation within the provincial Fisheries Branch

**JC** - it will be a long road to get anglers to recognize the issue

**RD** - mishandling of fish is still the norm in many settings

**GA** - any comments on the management of Skeena Sockeye this year?

**MB** - Sockeye returns are expected to be higher this year than last year, and intent to allow commercial fishing later in the summer (into August) has been expressed by DFO; FLNRO's Steelhead concerns/values (including minimizing by-catch) are not currently acknowledged by the DFO

**Meeting Adjourned ~4:15 pm**