

**Tenth Annual
Skeena Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting
Skeena Valley Golf and Country Club
March 20, 2016**

In attendance

Committee Members (Voting)

Larry Proteau - BC Federation of Drift Fishers (BCFDF) *
Rob Brown – North Coast Steelhead Alliance (NCSA alternate) *
Jim Culp – BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BC FFF) *
Malte Juergensen – Terrace Rod and Gun Club (acting as non-affiliated independent angler – Lower Skeena Nass) *
Frank Guillon – Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun club, Smithers *
Philip Maher - Terrace Rod and Gun Club (TRGC) *
Troy Peters - Steelhead Society of BC (SSBC) Northern Branch *
Rob Vodola – SSBC Northern Branch (acting as non-affiliated independent angler – Kitimat) *

Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO)

Mark Beere (Chair, minutes), Troy Larden, Joe De Gisi (minutes), Paddy Hirshfield (minutes),
Renee Samels

Department of Fisheries and Oceans

John Webb (arrived at 1245 hrs)

Kitselas First Nation

Glenn Bennett, Jim Dopson (departed at 1200 hrs)

Not present

Gene Allen - Upper Skeena Angling Guides Association (USAGA)

Regrets

Brian Patrick - Regional Tackle Vendor Community *
Dustin Kovacvich – Skeena Angling Guides Association *
Walter Faetz - Skeena Angling Guides Association (attempted unsuccessfully via conference call)*
Randi Dozzi - North Coast Steelhead Alliance (alternate Rob Brown attended) *
Peter Haigh - Lower Skeena-Nass non-affiliated angler *

* SFAC committee member

Introductions and Housekeeping

1005 hrs - Meeting commenced

No new agenda items requested

Mark Beere (MB) – Two vacancies currently exist on the committee due to the ‘retirement’ and resignation of the Kitimat and Fraser non-affiliated angler representatives, respectively.

Malte Juergensen (MJ) – Volunteered as the non-affiliated angler for the lower Skeena-Nass area, which was supported by all members present. (Peter Haigh, holds this seat but was not present and has not responded to recent correspondence.) Philip Maher was introduced as the official rep for the Terrace Rod and Gun Club.

Rob Vadola (RV) – Indicated he could represent non-affiliated independent anglers in the Kitimat area, which was supported by all members present.

Larry Proteau (LP) - The BC Wildlife Federation continues to abstain from SFAC participation. This was discussed at length recently. Mike Langegger is now a BCWF Director.

LP - brought up that 8 out of 16 SFAC members are attending the 2016. This achieves the 50% needed for quorum.

General – The BC Wildlife Federation and three affiliated rod and gun club representatives (Tweedsmuir, Prince Rupert, Kitimat) have abstained from participating since 2012. Total committee members according to ToR = 16; vacancies = 2; abstainers = 4

MB – Introduced and led a discussion pertaining to the *Timeline for Angling Regulation Setting and Consultation* document (page 5 of the handout package) and sought and received consensus for an addition to the Terms of Reference (ToR) requiring that the Fish and Wildlife Section Head respond to regulations proposals within 2 months of SFAC meetings.

MB – Action item. The ToR needs to be updated to indicate that the ministry will respond to proposals within 2 months of an annual meeting.

Jim Culp (JC) - Asked about the decision making process for SFAC including voting and consensus. He said it seems we do both and clarification needed.

MB – Decision-making is supported by achieving consensus but consensus is not a requirement of a successful fisheries regulations proposal as outlined in the *Decision Making Criteria* (pg. 12 if this years’ regulations package shared with attendees). Some members expressed their desire to see a show of hands; therefore this practice is used as well.

JC - Would prefer to not make decisions, but rather talk and discuss issues.

Rob Brown (RB) - Always felt the voting was not really taken into consideration.

Philip Maher (PM) - SFAC should use voting and try to stand united on issues and let the majority rule.

General – There was discussion between PM and RB about how this committee works. RB emphasized that this committee was too diverse for voting and majority rules to occur

Glen Bennett (GB) – Provided SFAC with an update that 100 rod days were awarded by FLNR and that the Kitselas are excited about this opportunity to enter the angling guide industry with their partner, West Coast Fishing Adventures.

Jim Dopson (JD) - The primary goal of the Kitselas First Nation is to review their priorities for their fishery. Want to get youth involved in fishing and hope there is enough interest to train them to become fish guides. He said the Kitselas are working with Gilbert McKean and there is a mandate to train some of their members. They are also working with Kalum and Haisla First Nations to run a similar program.

Frank Guillon (FG) – First Nations (FNs) should have a role in representing stakeholders in the area. How we are going to have FNs attend and how this would occur?

MB - SFAC began with FNs participation. FN's participation declined as they learned of the scope of the committee: reviewing recreational angling regulations proposals.

General - There should be a generic FN recreational angling representative on SFAC. Not every FN will want to be present. If others want to be present, they will come forward.

Paddy Hirshfield (PH) - Provided an update regarding the Skeena IV steelhead stamp. This regulation change proposal will require an Order in Council and further consultation with Victoria. It will be included as part of the Quality Waters regulation review in 2016.

JC – The date should not be later than August 15 for the Skeena IV steelhead stamp.

LP - Brought up a DFO SFAB regulation change for the Kasiks River. Desire to have provincial and federal governments close a section to protect Coho; anglers are targeting this species during the closed time and claiming to be fishing for freshwater fish species. There was some discussion on mirror orders and MB explained how they work.

Joe De Gisi (JDG) - John Webb will be updating the DFO website to reflect which rivers have mirror orders requested by the province or vice versa.

Review of regional manager response to Response to 2015 SFAC proposals. Start 1130 hrs.

MB – read through the regional manager responses to 2015 proposals.

- 2015-1 – Bait ban on the Zymagotitz (Zymacord) River all year
- 2015-2 and 2015-03 – Fly fishing only, Clore River and Zymoetz River 1, July 24-December 31

- 2015-4 – Kispiox River fly fishing only, September 1-October 31
- 2015-6 - Increase the Classified Waters licence fee for non-residents on the Kispiox River.

Review of 2016 proposals. Start 1140 hrs.

MB – ToR states we can review a maximum of 12 proposals. Proposals SFAC 2016-9, 12 and 14 were combined as they all pertain to the implementation of a booking system to regulate angler effort. SFAC 2016-15 was previously submitted by BC Fisheries staff and was only included here to facilitate a brief discussion/update.

2016-1 - Lachmach River mirror order to rescind no fishing September 1-October 31.

Vote: In favor: 8, against: 0, abstain: 0

2016-2 - Hook size restriction, hook placement restrictions, and spoon restriction

JC – Hook size is important. Big hooks kill fish. In the past, used hooks up to 3/0. Different manufacturers have different hook sizes. Jim said that he felt the max hook size should be 2/0.

RB - was unsure of what this proposal meant by a trailing hook on a spoon, feeling that most hooks come trailing in the package. He said that he experimented with trailing hooks and found they hook fish deep and cause bleeding.

PM - Smaller hooks have been found scientifically to do less damage.

Troy Larden (TL) - There is a hook size limit currently in place on the Thompson River.

LP - Asked if a mirror order is required for hook sizes, and asked if the province does this and DFO doesn't, does it leave the regulation open to compliance issues.

MJ – If the angler sets the hook right away, there is no issue. Don't let the fish bite at it, as this creates a deep hook set. He felt that it is an education issue.

FG - When single barbless came in effect within the region, there were no single hooks available from the manufacturers. Frank said that a lot of people will leave fishing if they have to put on split rings and smaller hooks and this will not be favourable.

JDG - 15 mm and 3 cm (the set line hook size) are “on the menu” in federal regulations as options. To have other sizes included, would need to undertake a process with Ottawa to get a new size class introduced.

Lunch 1200-1245 hrs.

MB - provided an update that, due to technical difficulties, Walter Faetz could not attend the meeting via conference call.

MB - Noted that the SFAC acronym has been adopted by DFO more recently – the Sport Fish Advisory Committee. Was solely familiar with the use of the SFAB – Sport Fish Advisory Board associated with federal fisheries stakeholder meetings.

John Webb (JW) - The SFAB is the parent body and the SFAC are the regional committees.

JC – Doesn’t like the confusion created by both being called SFAC. Was involved with the Sport Fish Advisory Board since inception and it was *never* the SFAC – this is a more recent change.

MB – continued discussion on proposal 2016-2.

PM – There is no substantial information regarding hook size one way or the other, so until that is done, this proposal should be not forwarded. He said he has not read a study regarding hook gap size.

Vote: In favor: 1, against: 6, abstain: 1

2016-3 - Angling guide restrictions on Skeena 2 Classified Water

PH – This proposal seeks to create a regulation similar to the Kitsumkalum and Zymoetz rivers whereby not more than 1 group/day and not more than 3 anglers/group are allowed.

RB and JC - The number of days is way too high, as put forward in the proposal. Use estimates should be based on existing days used. Also, guiding in the spring on Skeena 2 has grown significantly.

JC - Skeena 2 should be involved in the Quality Waters process.

RB - There should be no more days allocated on Skeena 2. Also said that the fishery from March 1 to May 31 targets spring Steelhead, which are less abundant than fall run fish.

Vote: In favor: 8, against: 0, abstain: 0

2016-4 – Ban on natural baits (with exceptions) while river fishing for Steelhead in Skeena watershed

JC – All that needs to be said is written in the proposal.

General - No substantive discussion was had due to the controversial nature.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 4, abstain: 2

2016-5 – Modify closure period on lower Zymoetz to December 1-June 15

PM - This area is a valuable resource for locals from Terrace and Smithers.

FG – Noted this proposal would have a negative impact on use of the upper Zymoetz by Smithers residents.

JC - Provided historical perspective and felt that these fish are very vulnerable and that environmental conditions do not normally allow access.

FG - If this proposal is intended to protect fish, then other systems should be included such as the Morice, Kispiox and Bulkley.

PM - Is there is a conservation concern with Steelhead? If angling is harassing fish, then we should stop doing it.

MJ - Environmental conditions protect these fish and self-regulates angler access, explaining that steelhead cannot be caught (don't bite) when water temperatures become cold.

RB - The conservation argument, to quote former BC Senior Fisheries Biologist, Colin Spence, is the "data death spiral". You can watch and study a resource while it becomes depleted. Proving a conservation concern is the wrong standard, we should be precautionary.

JC - Provided a more detailed context for this proposal. Fish do not take at 1 degree Celsius.

MB - Provided background on the Pacific Stock Assessment Review Committee vetted target for Skeena aggregate is 35K fish. This has been met in 13 of 60 years. Skeena steelhead abundance has, for the most part, remained within the *Routine Management Zone* classification. Many rivers south of the Dean River have been in *Conservation Concern* or *Extreme Conservation Concern* zones. The 2015 summer steelhead aggregate escapement was estimated at 27 580.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 5, abstain: 1

2016-6 – Creation of catch and release daily limit on Zymoetz River

LP - This proposal would make regulations confusing and hard to enforce. Should also apply it to trout and char.

PM – Catch and release is recognized as viable alternative to harvest. Going back on it would contradict the viability of catch and release fishing and create large issues. It should be up to the discretion of the angler about when to stop.

TP - This is not a new idea. Already done with Atlantic salmon on some systems. Troy said that this would be acceptable if the ministry did some research to see how many fish are in the river, then this proposal could be better informed by science.

RV - Angling guides would be concerned about this proposal as the client could be done in 20 minutes and the other client could keep fishing. Awkward.

RB - When catch and release was first proposed, there was lots of concern. He said there was never any doubt that this doesn't do damage, also when combined with air exposure. He said that catch and release does have impacts and this was always recognized. Anglers were initially against catch and release, but it caught on and times have changed. This proposal could be accepted too.

PM - This proposal takes it too far. Especially for those who spend so much to come here and fish. After they take 2 casts and catch 2 fish in a day, then they are done? This doesn't seem fair. Phil said that a video showing catch and release and how to do it should occur. He also said that if we feel this concerned about catch and release then we should require anglers to carry a landing net.

MB – Budget willing, a video will be produced outlining the best approach to fish handling in catch and release fisheries for steelhead as part of the post-capture stress monitoring research proposed for this summer in the Skeena Region.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 5, abstain: 1

2016-7 – Restriction of helicopters to provide angler access on Zymoetz Class 1 section

JC - Experienced a day on the Zymoetz River where angling guides were working the upper river and the guides and the helicopter pilots were not talking.

RV – Doesn't believe the situation as described in the proposal.

PM – There are non-fishing related helicopters working in the Zymoetz watershed.

FG – Five helicopters operating in close proximity without communication is an aviation problem, not a fishing problem.

PH – BC Parks is only place where such regulations are currently used.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 5, abstain: 1

2016-8 – Modify upper Canadian resident only zone boundary on Skeena 4

JC – Opposes this proposal because those impacted aren't represented at the SFAC table. Needs to be discussion with stakeholders in this area.

PH – Clarified where this proposal applies, and what its intent is (weekend opportunity for non-resident alien anglers based in Smithers).

RB – Opposes this proposal; the present regulations represent what was agreed to. Further discussion should occur for this proposal.

PH – This proposal will be included as part of the Quality Waters review process

Vote: In favor: 0, against: 6, abstain: 2

2016-9, 2016-12, 2016-14 – Booking system proposals on select rivers in Skeena watershed

JC - 2016-9 distorts the issue and resident anglers play a large role in the crowding issue. A solution should not focus on just non-resident alien anglers. Jim felt that unless a booking system included resident anglers it would not be effective. He felt that maybe the Bulkley should be a pilot.

PM - Asked whether the level of effort on the Zymoetz River should warrant a booking system.

JC – Said that it does.

MJ – What is the appropriate number? Skeena Region angler densities are low relative to other places in the world and a booking system is not needed.

PH – Kootenay's manage non-resident (e.g. Alberta) and non-resident alien anglers by two week blocks with a curve.

TP – How did this region manage to regulate non-resident anglers (i.e. Canadians)?

PH – No salmon in the Kootenays.

JC - The upper Zymoetz (Class 1 section) should be allocated to two angling guides. The remaining licence should be purchased and allocated among the existing two operators.

TL – How would a guide buy-out change the situation?

LP - How should we look at these proposals together?

MB - They will be reviewed and discussed during the Quality Waters review process.

Vote: support for the concept for a booking system for non-residents. In favor: 6, against: 1, abstain: 1.

2016-10 – Ban power boats on Zymoetz Class 2 section

JC - Spoke to this proposal and said it was a bit of an unwritten rule. Not much use by jet boats on the Zymoetz River at present. Jet boats have been used above both canyons on the Zymoetz River.

Vote: In favor: 5, against: 0, abstain: 3

Action item – FLNR to forward the website address for Department of Transportation process to restrict the use of power boats on rivers (**Joe – do you wish to add that Uniform Resource Locator here?**)

2016-11 – Ban powered boats on Kitsumkalum River October 15-May 1 and daily catch and release limit

General - It was recognized that this proposal was 2 in 1.

LP - Some people will take their boat out for a run up to the lower canyon in the spring.

LP – Opening up the drift boat gazetted road on the Kalum would be difficult as its condition has deteriorated.

JC - There are conservation issues with jet boats, fry on the banks due to large wakes. Could be flexible on when this proposal applies e.g. November 1 to April 1.

RB - There are esthetic and angling issues associated with jet boat use as well.

General – Consider restricting boats on the upper Kalum to see how it works and how people react. It was recognized that water levels influence the boat-ability of this river significantly.

PM - We do not need to put in further conservation-based restrictions on the Kitsumkalum River. Fish stocks are recovering relative to past activities (i.e. forestry and log driving in river).

RB – Kalum steelhead are not that abundant and they are vulnerable. The stream is not yet recovering from logging.

General – Discussion about the confluence of Deep Creek and angling effort that occurs there. Some felt that effort by angling could not create a conservation concern at this location.

FG - Said that you cannot stop jet boats unless you can show they cause an impact.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 5, abstain: 1

2016-13 – Fly fishing only with gear restrictions on Zymoetz River, Class 2 Section.

JC - This was a fall-back position from his proposal for a catch and release quota of 2 steelhead/day.

PM - If the majority of catch and release fishing on Zymoetz 2 is from fly fishing and if there is a conservation concern, then fly fishing should be restricted. He also asked what is the definition of a floating line would be saying that he could catch just as many fish with a floating line as a sinking line.

JC – Trying to reduce the impacts of fishing by specifying float line, fly size, no weights.

General - There was the recognition that this proposal was intended to manage angling catch.

PM – Too many different restrictions. Also, we have to be careful where we discriminate. He explained what happens if an individual has a prosthetic arm, would they be excluded. He said we need to be inclusive, not exclusive and be careful where we create restrictions.

Vote: In favor: 2, against: 5, abstain: 1

For discussion/update only 2016-15 – Restriction upon removing Steelhead from Region 6 waters prior to release

MB – The ministry will be studying the physiological impacts of catch and release fisheries for steelhead in partnership with University of Massachusetts scientists.

General - There was the recognition that elevated stress hormone levels in fish can lead to reduced egg production, particularly in larger fish. Other health related issues were also discussed.

TP – Studies show more significant effects on larger fish.

Additional discussion:

RB - Brought up another proposal from Randy Dozzi regarding snagging. There are people jigging with a fly rod. He said he would like the winter run fishery on the Zymoetz to be fly fishing with a floating line only. This also applies to the Lakelse River.

MB – Reminded all of the proposal submission format and deadline: 6 weeks in advance of annual meetings.

JC - Asked about the Morice River opening downstream of Morice Lake starting Oct 1 annually. He felt this was a sanctuary area and that it should be closed to fishing. Apparently, this was brought up in federal SFAC discussions.

FG - If this is going to go anywhere, more work is needed.

JW – Proposal from federal SFAB to close this section of river to all angling.

Meeting adjourn approx. 1630 hrs.