

Executive Summary

Phase II Consultation Report (October – November 2008)

Skeena Quality Waters Strategy

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March 5, 2009

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

For years, resident anglers, non-resident anglers, guides, members of the Ministry of Environment's Sport Fish Advisory Committee, members of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' Sport Fish Advisory Board, and local Fish and Game Clubs have told the Ministry of Environment that some waters in the Skeena River system have persistent steelhead angler-use issues — crowding, disproportionate numbers of non-resident anglers or guided anglers, lack of opportunities for resident anglers, illegal guiding, and poor angler etiquette — leading to a degraded quality of angling experience.

In response to these concerns, the ministry implemented the Quality Waters Strategy in the Skeena Region in 2006. The Quality Waters Strategy is a province-wide process that aims to maintain and improve the angling experiences offered in BC's waters, by managing angler-use. The strategy includes a community engagement process, to help identify waters of concern that require new or revised regulations.

1.2 Process

From January to March 2008, the Phase I consultation process was held in the Skeena River watershed to identify concerns and issues from the public and stakeholders regarding sportfishing for steelhead. Participants in the consultation process were also invited to identify problems on area rivers and suggest potential solutions to address those problems.

From April to June 2008, three stakeholder-based Working Groups met to help develop a draft Angling Management Plan for the 13 priority waters of the Skeena River watershed: Kitsequecla, Kitwanga, Suskwa, Skeena IV upstream from Kitwanga Bridge, Kispiox, Babine, Bulkley, Morice, Zymoetz I, Zymoetz II, Kitsumkalum, Lakelse, and Skeena IV downstream from Kitwanga Bridge.

With the release of the draft Angling Management Plan on October 17, 2008, a second consultation process (Phase II) was undertaken. This report presents the results of the Phase II consultation process.

The Phase II consultation process asked the public and stakeholders the following questions:

- What do you like about the draft Angling Management Plan?
- What don't you like about the draft plan?
- How should the plan be changed to better address the issues the community has raised?

The goal of the Phase II consultation process was to gather feedback on the draft Angling Management Plan. This feedback was collected for the Working Groups to use in revising the draft plan to better reflect all community interests.

The Phase II consultation process began with the release of the draft plan on October 17, 2008, and ended on November 30, 2008. The general public and stakeholders were informed of the Phase II consultation process through the following means:

- Series of “news updates” and letters to a database of more than 500 email addresses
- Series of newspaper display advertisements in six area newspapers over a three-week period
- Regular updates to the Skeena Quality Waters Website
- Four-page Synopsis of the draft plan that was made available at Public Open Houses
- Display panels on the draft plan that were used at the Public Open Houses
- Slide presentation that was shown at the Public Open Houses

The general public and stakeholders were able to provide their input to the process through the following channels:

- A total of 28 sectoral stakeholder meetings held in the communities of Houston, Smithers, Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert in October and November 2008; 228 people attended
- Six Public Open Houses held in November 2008 in the major urban areas of the watershed with 145 people attending
- An online Response Form; 428 respondents participated who were divided into five User-Groups: resident angler (144), non-resident alien (NRA) (207), non-resident Canadian (NRC) (36), local business (26), and guide (15)
- About 350 emails sent directly to the facilitator
- Phone calls with the facilitator

1.3 Results

The majority of people who took part in the Phase II consultation process responded to the draft Angling Management Plan at a more general level rather than on an individual river basis.

1.3.1 Limited-day licence lottery

Limited-day licence lotteries involve the capping and allocating of limited-day licences for non-guided, non-resident anglers, either immediately or at some point in the future (triggered by a target number of non-resident anglers). The limited-day licence lottery received more attention than any other Management Alternative.

Response Forms clearly show that local business, NRAs, and NRCs who responded did not support a limited-day licence lottery. The reasons for rejecting this alternative focused more on the lottery than the eight-day licence. Reasons given for not supporting this Management Alternative include the following:

- Lack of flexibility and predictability for non-resident anglers to determine where and when they are going to be fishing
- Hospitality sector of the local economy in the Skeena watershed, which depends on non-resident anglers, will be devastated and some businesses will likely close

- No demonstrated crowding or angling quality problem so this sort of regulation is unnecessary

Response forms indicated that guides were weakly supportive of limited-day licence lotteries on some of the rivers, but not others.

Resident anglers were the only group that was strongly in support of a limited-day licence lottery. Resident angler respondents suggested that this measure would spread anglers over the season, reduce crowding at peak times, and lead to better quality angling. However, these respondents offered the following caveat: they cautioned that taking restrictive measures on only certain rivers in the watershed would result in a transfer of effort to less-regulated waters in the system. As a result, they suggested that if limited-day licence lotteries were going to be implemented, they need to be implemented on all Classified Waters or on a watershed-wide basis.

1.3.2 Limited-day licence only

A number of respondents from all User-Groups said that whether or not they supported the lottery alternative, a limited-day licence for non-guided, non-resident anglers could be an effective and useful tool on its own. As the draft plan combines limited-day licences (such as an eight-day licence) with the lottery alternative, the Response Form results give no information on the interest in a limited-day licence on its own. Comments from respondents in favour of this alternative included: this measure would make it difficult for illegal guides because they would need to move all the time; if limited-day licences are implemented, they should be implemented on all Classified Waters; and an angler should be able to purchase a limited-day licence for more than one river.

1.3.3 Resident-only zones

Response form results indicated that spatial zones for resident-only anglers (no non-residents, no guiding) received support from resident anglers, mixed support from local business and guides, and no support from either group of non-residents. Resident anglers felt this was an excellent way of addressing resident-priority although some suggested that resident-only zones might get crowded at times.

1.3.4 Resident-only times

Response Form results indicated that neither non-resident User-Group was supportive of resident-only times. However, during stakeholder meetings held in Hazelton and Smithers, comprised largely of non-residents, there was general support for a resident-only weekend day. Response Form results indicated that guides who responded were mostly not supportive of this Management Alternative. Resident anglers were overwhelmingly supportive of this alternative on all rivers, and local business was supportive on most rivers except the Kispiox and the Lakelse.

Three general comments emerged from all User-Groups in support of resident-only times:

- There needs to be more consistency across the watershed for the resident-only weekend times.

- A large number of non-resident anglers might be “pushed” to waters that do not have a resident-only day on the weekend, thereby creating a crowding problem on those waters.
- Guide “changeover days” might end up all happening on the same day, causing problems for scheduling and potentially creating problems for airline flights and helicopter bookings.

1.3.5 Mandatory Steelhead Stamp extensions

The Response Form indicated that all User-Groups were supportive of this alternative. Respondents offered the following reasons for supporting mandatory Steelhead Stamp extensions:

- It reflects the time steelhead are actually in the river
- Values the steelhead sport fishery more appropriately
- Brings in additional revenue to the province (although most respondents were very clear that they wanted this money to be directed to Skeena watershed steelhead management)

Some respondents expressed concerns about anglers who were targeting salmon and would be required under this Management Alternative to pay for something they would not be using.

1.3.6 Classified Water period extensions

There was a mixed response from User-Groups on this Management Alternative. Response Form results indicated that resident anglers and local business owners generally supported Classified Waters extensions. However, neither non-resident group supported this Management Alternative and guide responses were mixed.

Comments in favour of extending Classified Water periods included:

- Classified Waters period better reflects the time when steelhead are in the river and when the river is open to angling
- Increased angler fees might reduce crowding
- This measure would allow for the collection of more angler-use data
- This measure would lead to better management of guided rod-days by bringing “shoulder seasons” under tighter regulation

Guide respondents suggested that if the Classified season were longer, the ministry should allocate more rod-days. They noted that some guides are guiding on these rivers outside the Classified season now and they do not require rod-days. Hence, guide respondents felt that if the season were extended, the guides who are presently guiding outside the Classified season should be the ones to receive additional rod-days.

1.3.7 Guide restrictions

A number of the recommended Management Alternatives included restrictions on guiding activity that can be implemented as a condition of a guide licence:

- Distributing guiding effort over the whole Classified Water period
- Limiting the number of clients of a guide or assistant guide
- Limiting the number of boats of a guide or assistant guide

- Limiting the number of guided anglers per boat

Response Form results revealed that all User-Groups supported these types of restrictions except the guides who were more varied in their responses. Comments from non-guide respondents included:

- Guided anglers contribute to crowding and changes should be made so their activity is reduced at crowded times.
- Guide restrictions need to be more consistently applied between different rivers.
- Guided anglers need to be regulated for activity because they tend to “hit the fish harder.”

1.3.8 Guide regulations

The draft plan contained two proposed recommendations that would require changes to the Wildlife Act, BC Regulation 125/90, which applies to Angling Management Plans:

- Increasing the number of guided rod-days that are allocated on a particular river
- Reducing the maximum number of guides that could have rod-day allocations on a particular river

Response Form results indicated that no User-Groups were supportive of increasing rod-day allocations for guides on any river. There was one exception and that was mixed responses by guides to four new opportunities on Skeena IV below Kitwanga Bridge.

Comments from non-guides on increasing rod-day allocations included:

- Increasing allocation to guides is not the answer; guides already have substantial allocations on these rivers
- If anything the total number of rod-days allocated should be reduced
- Any future allocation of rod-days should go to new guides
- Working Groups that contain guides should not be recommending increases in rod-days or any regulations that favour guides

The main comment from guides on increasing rod-day allocations was that they felt the proposed increases were not high enough to compensate for extensions to Classified Water seasons or creation of guided-only waters. In the case of Skeena IV, some guides commented that considerably more rod-days could be allocated because the carrying capacity of the river could accommodate that.

1.3.9 Ministry review of guided rod-days

A ministry review of guided rod-days was proposed on two waters. Response Form results indicated that only resident anglers were supportive of a review of guided rod-days by the ministry. Respondents opposed to the review had lots to say about: the whole process of how rod-days were originally allocated to guides in 1990; the need to change the system so that rod-days are no longer a “commodity”; and the desire to see rod-days belong to the Province of BC and “leased” back to guides. The nature of these comments suggests that unless the ministry’s policy regarding the allocation of rod-days

to guides changes, there would be little or no support for any kind of review by the ministry.

1.3.10 Guided only for non-residents

Response Form results showed that resident anglers strongly supported this alternative, guides supported it less strongly and both groups of non-residents and local business were strongly opposed. Comments from those opposed to guided only for non-residents included:

- Too intrusive, too restrictive a regulation; non-guided, non-residents should have some opportunities to fish
- Will have negative implications on the local economy
- Guides on Working Group were “looking after themselves”

Comments from those respondents in favour of guided-only for non-residents included that it was the only way to maintain quality angling on some fragile or wilderness (Class I) systems.

1.3.11 Process concerns

Process concerns fall into three broad categories.

1. Quality Waters Strategy process – Respondents expressed the following concerns regarding the process:

- Working Group composition created an unbalanced, unrepresentative and biased plan
- No local business representation on Working Groups and too many guides
- Tool box of regulations is too restrictive
- Process should include fish management in addition to angler management
- Confusion about what resident-priority actually means and how it translates into the planning process
- Quality Waters 2005 document was not always followed

2. Rationale for Skeena Quality Waters Strategy – Respondents expressed the following concerns regarding the rationale for the process:

- Where is the data to say there is crowding?
- What prompted this process? What groups brought forward the issue of crowding?
- How do you measure a quality angling experience and where is the data to demonstrate that angling quality has deteriorated?
- Lack of participation by resident anglers due to “burnout” from previous management planning processes

3. Phase II consultation process in Skeena Region - Respondents expressed the following concerns regarding the Phase II consultation process:

- The business community has not been adequately heard in the process
- There is a lack of trust for the process and in particular there is a desire to have an opportunity to review the revised draft plan

- There were concerns that local businesses are “bullying” the ministry
- Stakeholder meetings were not well advertised and not enough notice was given in some communities
- Meetings were purposefully timed so non-residents would be unable to attend
- Non-residents should not be part of the consultation process
- There was a desire for multi-stakeholder meetings or public meetings where everyone gets to hear what everyone else is saying

General process concerns and questions included:

- Will the ministry actually have the political will and the resources (staff and funding) to implement a draft plan?
- Will the ministry have the staff and funding to enforce new regulations when they do not seem to have resources to do that for existing regulations?
- The whole process was dividing the community and pitting different groups and businesses against each other
- Lack of visible consultation process with First Nations
- There were not enough Working Group meetings

While many respondents restricted their comments to what they did or did not like about the Management Alternatives set out in the draft plan, some offered their own ideas on how the plans could be changed. Some of these ideas included:

- Set a four-consecutive-day limit for non-guided, non-residents with a mandatory day off in between every four-day stretch
- More angler education
- River Guardian programs for monitoring, data collection and assistance with enforcement
- E-licensing in place and functioning
- Increased enforcement
- Postpone the whole process until three things are in place: economic impact assessment for Skeena Steelhead tourism industry; hard data to determine the exact nature of the crowding problem; and a broader range of stakeholders is included in the Working Groups
- Re-classify all Class 2 rivers to Class 1 from September 15 to October 15
- Resident-only days on rivers throughout the watershed
- Better access to the rivers
- Ban or restrict powerboats
- If a lottery, need provision that allows a resident to obtain a permit to accompany a NRC
- Areas of rivers set aside with no angling at all to protect spawning and resting steelhead
- Lottery just for four-week peak of season
- Change fee structure to “tiered” pricing – costs more for each additional eight days fishing
- Make legal guide boats and guides more visible
- Stagger guide changeover days

- Province should say which tools it supports: additional tools should be considered
- Collect more and better data on carrying capacity, crowding, and angler quality through creel censuses, River Guardians, e-licensing, and other programs

The report presents detailed river-specific comments for each Management Alternative proposed in the draft plan.

1.4 Conclusions

The challenge of the draft Angling Management Plan is that it needs to address multiple interests related to steelhead angler management in the Skeena River watershed. Certain Management Alternatives do not always work for everyone. Any final decisions will have to find the best mix of Management Alternatives that meets the needs of most members of the User-Groups. The results of the Phase II consultation process suggest that it will not be possible “to please all of the people all of the time.”

During the Phase II consultation process and the preparation of this report, the facilitator talked with hundreds of people at stakeholder meetings, open houses and on the phone, read hundreds of pages of email submissions and online Response Form comments, and analyzed the results of closed questions in the Response Forms from the five main User-Groups in the watershed.

This Phase II Consultation Report attempts to triangulate all the different information gathered in the consultation process and draw a number of conclusions about which regulations and recommendations would be:

- Acceptable to the greatest number of people
- Consistent with the principles of the Quality Waters Strategy
- Address the angling-use issues raised by the community

The conclusions cover a broad spectrum of options from those that are directly related to the regulations from the Quality Waters tool box that are proposed in the draft Angling Management Plan, to those regulations that are clearly outside the tool box of the Quality Waters Strategy, to those that are important recommendations that need to be documented.

One strong over-arching conclusion that was heard from many respondents was that it is not possible to develop a comprehensive Angling Management Plan, implement it, and then walk away from it. Respondents said that it would be preferable to implement smaller measures in an Angling Management Plan, monitor the results including collecting information on angler satisfaction, and then determine whether problems have been addressed by the plan. If the problems have not been addressed, then there is good reason to re-visit the plan and incorporate regulations that will better address the problems.

1.4.1 Limited-day licences allocated by lotteries

The results indicate that all the major User-Groups (local business, NRAs, NRCs, and guides for some of the rivers) except resident anglers were not supportive of lotteries as a Management Alternative. In spite of this lack of current support for lotteries, many respondents suggested that with more data collection in the future, the ministry might need to move towards some sort of management that restricted the number of non-resident anglers on the water.

1.4.2 Limited-day licence on its own

Many respondents indicated that they would accept a limited-day licence on its own without a lottery for non-guided, non-resident anglers. One of the main issues raised by local tourism businesses is that anglers desire the flexibility to decide when and where they want to fish. An eight-day licence provides this flexibility.

Many respondents indicated that they felt these sorts of tools needed to be implemented on all the Classified Waters of the Skeena River system, rather than just specific rivers that are experiencing crowding. They suggested that if any sort of restrictions were placed on one river, then angling pressure would transfer to a less-regulated river. Eight days was the most commonly discussed length of time for a limited-day licence, so it will be used for discussion purposes here.

Three options emerged regarding eight-day licences:

1. Each non-guided, non-resident angler gets eight days of fishing on each river. This is either eight consecutive days on an eight-day licence or eight one-day licences. So each angler is capped at eight days fishing on each river during the Classified Water season but they can fish whenever they choose.
2. Each non-guided, non-resident angler gets eight days of fishing on each river and then can buy an additional eight days at a higher fee on each river. The third eight days fishing would cost more again. There would be no limit on the total number of eight-day licences that an angler could buy on any one river during the Classified Water season. There would also be one-day licences with rates that increased after each increment of eight-days fishing was reached. Anglers can fish whenever they choose.
3. Each non-guided, non-resident angler can buy as many eight-day or one-day licences on any river. However, if they buy a licence (eight-day or one-day) during the peak of the Classified Water season on that river (usually September 15 to October 15), the licences would cost more.

1.4.3 Non-resident Canadians and non-resident aliens

During both the Phase I consultation process and this Phase II consultation process, respondents were quite clear that Canadians from outside British Columbia (NRCs) should be treated differently from non-residents from outside Canada (NRAs). They offered the following suggestions:

- NRCs should pay more than resident anglers but less than NRAs
- NRCs should have the same access to the sport fishery as resident anglers
- Hence, if limited-day licences were implemented, a separate fee and access

structure would need to be set up for NRCs and NRAs

1.4.4 Guiding

Most participants in the consultation process felt that, with the possible exception of the West Working Group rivers, there are few Management Alternatives in the draft Angling Management Plan that address the role guides play in crowding and angling quality. Two measures were suggested that could help address the peak in guiding activity in the late-September, early-October period:

1. Distributing guiding activity throughout the Classified Water period
2. Placing restrictions on the number of boats, number of clients per boat, or number of guides or assistant guides on a river on the same day

1.4.5 Classified Waters and Steelhead Stamp

A number of Management Alternatives recommended extending Classified Water periods to better reflect the time that steelhead are in the river, to gather more accurate data through the provincial Steelhead Harvest Analyses survey, and to provide more money to direct at steelhead angler management and fish management issues. Extending Classified Water seasons was well supported by most User-Groups although guides did not support this Management Alternative on all waters. Respondents noted that extending Classified Water seasons is a relatively easy thing to do.

In parallel with the suggestion of extending the Classified Water seasons, a number of Management Alternatives recommended extending the time that Steelhead Stamps are mandatory. This Management Alternative was well supported by most User-Groups for many of the same reasons that were suggested for the extension of Classified Waters. Respondents felt this Management Alternative could be considered on a number of rivers. One exception to the support for Steelhead Stamps was in the case where anglers are targeting salmon and not interested in steelhead. Most respondents felt that in these cases, the Steelhead Stamp would create an additional fee that was unfair to salmon anglers.

1.4.6 Ensuring resident-priority

There was strong support for having regulations in place to ensure that resident anglers have some exclusive fishing opportunities on the rivers. The main option put forward over and over again was to provide a weekend day for resident-only fishing either weekly or every other week on all waters during the Classified Water period. Respondents suggested that Working Groups will need to look carefully at which days and which rivers, to ensure that non-residents are not displaced to a limited number of rivers and that guides do not all change clients on the same day.

1.4.7 Changes to licence fees

Fees for licences and surcharges (Steelhead Stamps) were suggested as a way to create a financial disincentive to angling. Rationale for this idea was that a fee increase would reduce the number of people fishing on the rivers and hence reduce crowding. The fee increases were directed at NRAs and NRCs, although most respondents indicated that NRCs should pay less than NRAs. Local business respondents felt that in

a time of increased economic uncertainty, raising fees may not be the best route to follow. However other business respondents noted that the value of the Canadian dollar against its American counterpart might help offset an increase in fees.

1.4.8 Manage anglers on a watershed basis

There was strong consensus in and outside the community that the steelhead sport fishery needs to be managed more on a watershed basis. Respondents suggested that managing anglers on one part of the watershed has potentially significant effects on angler-use in other parts of the watershed.

1.4.9 Economic impact study needed for steelhead sport fishery

Many respondents suggested that there is a need to have a much better understanding of the steelhead sport fishing economy, including both the guiding industry and other businesses that depend on non-guided, non-resident anglers. They suggested that this sort of study would answer the question: Where does the money come from and where does it go?

1.4.10 Relationship of quality angling to the tourism economy

Discussions with a range of stakeholders revealed that the Skeena Region offers a diversity of steelhead angling opportunities. All these different activities contribute to the local economy in different ways.

Respondents said that there are activities such as illegal guiding, long-term or illegal camping, trespassing, and poor angler etiquette that lead to poor quality angling experiences and also probably lower tourism revenues for the communities.

Some respondents, notably guides, suggested that tourism organizations and establishments need to have a better understanding of how to ensure that they will get the most tourism dollars flowing into the economy from non-resident anglers, while still offering a range of quality products and services to those anglers. They recommended that tourism organizations should work with other organizations and governments to address low-quality angling experiences that are both causing angling quality problems on the rivers and likely translating into sub-optimal tourism revenues.

1.4.11 Provide education programs for all anglers

In both the Phase I and Phase II consultation processes, many respondents highlighted the need for better angler education, because that would lead to a better quality angling experience. A number of tourism organizations have indicated a desire to partner with the ministry to develop education materials and programs. Suggested topic areas include:

- Proper catch and release and handling of fish
- Angler etiquette — working a pool, rotational angling, sharing the river with gear or fly
- Fish identification
- What is illegal guiding and how you can help prevent it
- Boat safety

1.4.12 Implement River Guardian programs

River Guardian programs that were set up on some of the local rivers have received rave reviews from all User-Groups. It was suggested that revenue generated by local licence sales and other charges should be used to pay for these programs, which have the potential to provide a number of different functions including:

- Monitor implementation of Angling Management Plan
- Collect angler satisfaction data on quality of angling experience
- Conduct creel censuses and collect data on angler density, carrying capacity, and breakdown of anglers by place of origin
- Increase presence of ministry on the river
- Report regulation infractions problems to Conservation Officers

1.4.13 Address illegal guiding

Illegal guiding has been raised over and over again and there are clear indications through US and European websites that it is taking place. However, it is difficult to determine what impact this issue is actually having. A few suggestions were brought up to deal with illegal guiding:

- Re-define guiding in the Wildlife Act so it does not include the transfer of money
- Have legal guides identify themselves on the river through signage or flags
- Limited-day licences, depending on how they were structured, would make illegal guiding more difficult because illegal guides and their anglers would be forced to move around more

1.4.14 Improve access

Many respondents felt that improving access on the rivers would reduce crowding by better dispersing anglers, although some respondents worried that it might result in crowding in previously uncrowded areas where access is limited. Respondents suggested that there seem to be some opportunities to work with other agencies (tourism, local governments, First Nations, Integrated Land Management Bureau, private land owners) to provide more access to area rivers. Given the dislike by many anglers of powerboats and the impact that they have on a quality angling experience, one respondent suggested that it might make sense to focus an access plan on opening up the river for walk-in anglers and those that plan to float the river without powerboats.

1.4.15 Address use of powerboats on rivers

Many anglers mentioned that powerboats were an issue on the rivers. They said that jet boat noise and other aspects interfere with the quality experience that many anglers expect and jet boats can also negatively affect fish spawning habitat. The possibility of restricting powerboats on some rivers of the Skeena watershed for safety and environmental reasons under the federal Navigable Waters Act or provincial Wildlife Act, as suggested by one respondent, should be explored. Most anglers felt that the focus should be on removing jet boats from the smaller rivers in the watershed and allowing jet boats on the main stem of the Skeena because of the size of the river, the distances between fishing holes and the lack of access in certain stretches of the river.

1.4.16 Implement e-licensing

There was strong support from everyone who took part in the Phase II consultation process to move e-licensing along and ensure that it can sell licences including the possibility of capping the number of licences in the future, collecting fisheries and angler satisfaction data, and monitoring angling pressure and other parameters.

1.4.17 Improve the Quality Waters Strategy

The Skeena Angling Management Planning process was the first, large scale “field test” of the Quality Waters Strategy since it was launched in 2005. During the Phase II consultation, respondents suggested a number of changes to the policy to make it more effective and useful:

- Regional Committees and Working Groups need to have full stakeholder representation
- Regulations tool box needs to be broader
- Planning and consultation process should include fish management with angler management
- Allocation of guide rod-days in 2005 document (MWLAP 2005) must be harmonized with present ministry policy on rod-day allocation

1.4.18 Address conservation of steelhead

There are serious concerns around the conservation of steelhead populations in the Skeena River system and a number of people raised some of the different issues that are impacting or could potentially impact the species in the future.

The ministry has ongoing programs looking at population dynamics and other aspects of steelhead biology and management. Recent funding through the Pacific Salmon Foundation and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund are adding to the ability to effectively manage salmonids in the Skeena River watershed.

Two suggestions came up a number of times that are directly related to angler-use in the Skeena rivers and these are:

- Consider closing fishing for steelhead at spawning times in certain rivers and at times when fish are very vulnerable to mortality from catch and release
- Study impact of catch and release on mortality of steelhead at different times of year

1.4.19 Address illegal camping

One of the things that became apparent as more and more community conversations took place is that there is an identifiable group of non-residents who come to rivers in the Skeena watershed and camp for long periods of time to fish for steelhead. Respondents noted that some of these people camp on Crown land either legally or illegally and that there is a sense that this tourism group contributes very little to the local economy, but may be responsible for some of the crowding and angling-related conflicts on the rivers. Respondents suggested that cooperation with tourism organizations, Ministry of Forests and Range, the Integrated Land Management Bureau, and other agencies to ensure campers are not overstaying their welcome or camping on

Crown land illegally would be a productive route to explore.

1.4.20 Improve enforcement

While ministry officials have continually stated they do not have the resources to add more conservation officers to monitor anglers during the steelhead season, public and stakeholder respondents continue to ask for more enforcement. Respondents noted that River Guardians, though not equipped with all the powers of conservation officers, could assist in dealing with some of these enforcement problems. Better education on the regulations was also deemed important.

1.4.21 Review and revise guided rod-day allocations

Most User-Groups (except guides) were not in favour of allocating any new rod-days to guides. Some respondents indicated they were comfortable allocating new rod-days to new guides rather than existing guides. Some non-guide respondents were concerned that two rivers — the Babine and the Morice — needed a reduction in the total number of rod-days allocated to guides.

Generally, respondents talked a lot about the need to ensure that the whole system of rod-day allocation to guides was reviewed. In particular, respondents noted that:

- Rod-days should remain the property of the province and not become a commodity
- Rod-days should be leased to licensed guides through a fair and equitable system that allows new guides to enter the business as well as ensuring that existing guides can remain in a viable business
- Recommending increases or decreases in rod-days should not be done by Working Groups that contain guides because that is a perceived conflict of interest

The report also draws some individual river-specific conclusions.