

**14th Annual Skeena
Skeena Angler Advisory Team Meeting
June 18, 2020, 9:00-12:00
Conference Call**

In attendance

Committee Members in attendance

- Al Hummel - Kitimat Rod and Gun Club
- Dave Evans – USAGA
- Frank Guillon- Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun Club, Smithers
- Brian Niska- Kermode Tourism
- Dustin Kovacovich - Skeena Angling Guides Association (SAGA)
- Mike Langeegger- British Columbia Wildlife Federation
- Sam Cooper - Regional Tackle Vendor Community, Smithers
- Al Hummel- Kitimat rod and gun
- Jim Culp - BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BCFFF)
- Dave Evans- Upper Skeena Angling Guide Association (USAGA)
- Jesse Stoeppler- Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition

Stakeholders/ Observers

- Lizzy Niska- Kermode Tourism
- Melissa Moure - USAGA

Provincial Government Employees- Ministry of Forest Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (MFLNRORD)

- Paddy Hirshfield - Regional Manager (Chair)
- Joe De Gisi- Fisheries Specialist
- Troy Larden - Fish and Wildlife Section Head
- Kenji Miyazaki - Fisheries Management Biologist
- Kris Maier - Fisheries Management Biologist
- Kindra Maricle – Fisheries Technician
- Trevor Rhodes- MFLNRORD Fisheries Associate Director
- David Skerik- Manager, Resource Stewardship

Handouts/ presentations:

- 2020 SAAT Proposal and Comments
- FLNRORD Skeena Drought Plan presentation

June 17, 2020

Meeting called to order at 9:05

1) Introductions, house keeping, scope, agenda additions or changes, committee membership, Action Items from 2019

Paddy Hirshfield (PH)- Asks if there are any additions to the agenda

Mike Langegger (ML)- Request to add habitat discussion to the agenda

BC Government – The current SAAT process and TOR is not setup to deal with fish habitat issues. The committee was developed with a focus on the development of angling regulations. This topic will need to be discussed in greater detail at future meetings.

PH- Adds DFO Mirror order request discussion to the agenda

PH- Goes over conference call etiquettes, members will be asked for their comments.

PH- Address the need to have a conversation about SAAT membership, terms of references, and First Nations participation. PH also acknowledges we don't have the time for the discussion in this meeting and suggests deferring the conversation until SAAT group can meet face to face.

Sam Cooper (SC)- Requests for clarification on FN participation being technical and not government

Mike Langegger (ML)- Will we be returning to face to face meetings?

PH- Yes, post COVID

Dave Evans (DE)- Most inefficient process, doesn't work for us (USAGA). We should look at the entire process- are we reaching the goals of everyone? We are seeing very few results- how can we change it to make this process more effective.

PH- Understands and agrees with DE. PH speaks of the complexity and volume of the proposals we receive and adds reg change cycle is on a bi annual basis.

2) Old Business -Action Item from 2019- Kwinamass powerboat ban

Kenji Miyazaki (KBM)- Dustin Kovavich (DK) had an action item from 2019 for the province to look into reports on how jet boats impact redds, egg development and juvenile fish.

KBM- Pointed to multiple studies in New Zealand and Alaska that showed power boats contributing to a disturbance in redds and loss in juvenile numbers and growth due to increase turbulence and turbidity from power boats being run in shallow near shore waters. Adds Yukon

and New Zealand have put signs out informing anglers and watercraft users on the effects powerboats on juvenile and adult fish when ran in shallow waters.

DK- Thanks for the follow up, also reviewed the reports. Asks if there is any info on boat size and motor power

KBM- will send out info with a follow up to refer to- **Action**

3) Section Head's Recommendations from 2019 (Troy Larden (TL))

TL- Goes over proposals from 2019, asks member for comments or questions

Jim Culp (JC)- Raises concerns about Kitasoo_Canoona, Green and Khutze Closures proposals.

TL- Adds Region 1 submitted a similar proposal ask JC for more info on the concerns he has with the proposal.

JC- Concerned about how these types of closures could set precedent for other areas potentially resulting in more closures. JC suggests engaging with FN in a QW working group to ensure anglers still have some opportunities.

ML- Asks if province has taken into consideration timing of salmon

Kris Maier (KWM)- Yes

DK- Echos JC concerns and adds it a social closure. DK doesn't support and concerned about how this proposal denies anyone access other than FN.

TL- Passed all of the data and information to the director, going to leave it up to her to make the decision.

4) Proposal Review results and next steps (TL)

TL- Proposals 1-4 all deal with QW, suggests we defer these 4 and begin with proposal 5. Any objections?

Dave Evans (DE)- Asks what the timing will be for QW discussion

PH- We would like to engage later this year on the QW process going forward and on proposals related to QW (1-4).

DE- Are we still having a process?

PH- Whoever is interested from SAAT, we can form a QW sub committee and discuss expectations from QW

DE- Concerned about another process

PH- Sub committees are common and effective

DK- Wants to be treated on the same level as Non-resident aliens (NRA)

DE- Request clarification from the province on what is QW and what is not. What items should get directed to QW and what should get directed to SAAT?

PH- Proposals 1-4 would be examples of proposals that should be part of a QW discussion

DE- Request clarity- **Action**

PH- Acknowledges DE request

Proposals 1-4 deferred:

- 1. Restricting non-guiding non resident anglers to the same extent as angling guides (DK).**
- 2. Changes to the timing of the Kitsumkalum River classified waters periods (DK)**
- 3. Implementation of an angler booking system for non resident anglers (MM)**
- 4. Canadian resident only on the Suskwa, Kitsequecla, and Kitwanga rivers, Sept 1-Oct 31, if not all year (MM)**

- 5. Background regarding recreational and guided angling with in the Gitxsan traditional territory (BW, VS)**

TL- Proposal 5 is an information statement from Gitxsan Government around the Ayookw laws. Gitxsan are clear that they are restricting access to their territory, if anglers are confronted by Gitxsan members request permission and be polite.

ML- Do decision makers look at constitution, or just Section 35?

David Skerik (DS)- Decision makers take the entire body of law into consideration, very complex.

DK- Requests clarity around Gitxsan government body, asks who speaks for who?

TL- Gitxsan Crisis management made up of some Hereditary Chiefs. Gitxsan Watershed Authority (GWA) is the primary body that the province deals with for management decisions. The federal government also works with GWA.

PHA- GWA is the technical arm, they work with multiple organizations to pursue research projects such as drought management.

DK- Just wanted clarity on how First Nation groups are represented, wants to know who speaks for who and concerned there are separate bodies.

DS- We need everyone's support, we need to unify and have patience. But be confident in our principles that we are bringing to the table. We need to be respectful- they do have priority rights. The alternative is conflict- we want to move forward from this.

Brain Niska (BN)- We are using up time and should move forward. Acknowledges this is an important conversation but not for this meeting.

PH- Agrees that this isn't a proposal but an information sharing opportunity.

JC- Suggest we set a separate time to talk about this, its important and needs to be part of a larger conversations

PH- We extended the invite to Gitxsan but they were not able to attend

DE- Concerned about who the proposal represents and wonders why this proposal didn't get deferred along with proposals 1-4.

TL- This is an information note, suggests we move forward.

DE- What happens with this now?

TL-The proposal will not disappear. The province is a member of the Crisis Management Team and meets monthly. Invites others to tune into the meetings if they are interested. Before BC would move ahead there would be formal engagement.

DK- How is priority access defined by the province?

PH- Conservation first, Section 35 second, and recreational activities third. Adds its very complex and the gradient between hierarchy is not well defined.

BN- Thinks there hasn't been much conflict, Skeena 4 doesn't see a lot of sockeye pressure. Is there creel data suggesting there is much pressure?

PH- Doesn't think this the right place to have this conversation, defers it to QW conversation.

6. Kitimat River Regulation Changes: no fishing, tributary closures, bait ban, and quota increase (MFLNRO)

KWM- Introduces the proposal and answers general comments. Hatchery steelhead terminated in 2017, last smolts released in 2018. Hatchery fish do not have adipose fins so there should be any confusion. Acknowledged ML habitat concerns but added we do not have the platform to deal with this. A number of people have suggested there should be a year-round bait ban-willing to adapt and add this to the proposal. Angling guide reporting data shows since 1994 only 17 steelhead caught and reported in the Kitimat from Dec to March. Based on this data there are not many steelhead available. Cutthroat and Dolly Varden numbers out number Steelhead in the

month of March. Willing to push the end of the closure date to March 15. Suggest we break out the proposal to see what is supported.

ML- Hatchery is a mute point. Goose Creek is a prime spawning area. These regulations will do nothing. When these fish don't have habitat, it doesn't matter. If we lose the habitat, we are going to lose more fish.

KWM- Hatchery fish are going to be in the system for a number of years. Concerned about CT hybridization.

BN- Concerned about how an increase in bag limit of hatchery steelhead will cause an increase in pressure and there for a higher number of by catch- you might cause more damage.

KWM- Trout aren't a high value target because of other opportunities. Doesn't think there would be an increase in pressure. Best Management Practices for hatchery steelhead harvest is 70% retention, right now only approximately 30% are being harvested.

Al Hummel (AH) - Agrees with habitat issues, doesn't support bait ban proposal

DK- In support of a fair part of the proposal, happy to hear adjustment of dates are being considered

DE- Has same habitat concerns

JC- Supports bait ban

ML- Not just LNG impacting habitat, propane rail ect.

PH- Agrees that habitat discussion pertains to fisheries management, but not in the scope of the proposal

KWM- Request a round table from members on Quota change:

FC- Supports the date change and increase in quota

SC- Supports the date change to March 15

DK- asks if the province has considered the current regulation that allows CT retention from July 1- Oct 31

KWM- Doesn't think there is a large harvest on CT, however, doesn't have a great population estimate.

DK- Support bait ban

DE- Does not support

BN- Does not support, thinks it is a poorly laid out proposal

AH-Does not support

PH- Asks AH if there are any parts of the proposal he supports?

AH- Not much pressure Jan- March, chances of fishing are almost null. Majority of Kitimat resident do not support bait ban.

JC- Supports

Jesse Stoeppler (JS)- Supports, and agrees key is in habitat protection

KWM- Talked to a number of people who have fished the Kitimat in the winter, people fishing in the winter think there should be a bait ban.

BN- Time is at a premium, this proposal was already brought up. Not sure why this proposal is being brought up at a stakeholder review process when there are other avenues the province can pursue.

KWM- Encourages BN to read Eric Vogt's thesis

AH- Discussion with Kitimat residents should have happened a year before the proposal was submitted.

PH- Aspects of this proposal are up for consideration and that's why we are having this conversation again. We are trying to figure out where there is support and where there isn't and that is why it is on the agenda again.

Support:

Yes	No	Conditional with Changes
3	3	2

10:30-11:40 Break

7. No fishing for spawning steelhead in Region 6 May 1- June 30, with exemptions (MFLNRO)

TL-Introduced the proposal added there was few comments around dates

JC- Strongly supports this proposal. Lakelse and Kalum are difficult lot of variability in timing of return to spawn, agreed 30th of April should be the cut off for steelhead.

DK- Asks province when the majority of steelhead spawn in the Skeena?

KBM- End of May beginning of June

DK- Agrees, recommends May 15- June 30, dates could be up for discussion on a watershed to watershed basis

TL- Thanks DK, and reminds group proposal is meant to not just protect spawning steelhead but staging steelhead as well

DK- Some people are mis-informed around when steelhead are spawning, thinks there should be education in the synopsis

AH- Supports a May 15 date agrees with DK

JC- It is more complicated than we think, spawning takes place in April in some areas, thinks we should stay on the safer side. Hasn't seen many fish in Lakelse this year.

BN- Thinks it should be illegal to fish for spawning steelhead. Supports May 15 date. Thinks it should be an educational tool. Concerned that just by throwing the closure down it will not protect fish. Adds there is fresh fish showing up in late June.

KBM- The majority of the fish at Tyee in June are kelts, exception being the Skeena and other large mainstems

KWM- We understand there is a large range in spawning time, we want to catch where the majority of steelhead are spawning. Thinks this would be a good way to communicate this by having it in the regs. There may be opportunity for some areas to open earlier.

ML- Have consequences other than public angling been considered during these periods? I.e.- logging, and development.

PH- Yes, there are in stream work windows that are specifically designed to avoid in stream impacts from construction and development

FG- Supports

Yes	No	Conditional with Changes
2		3

8. No angling with bait for finfish other than salmon, in Region 6 streams, all year (MFLNRO)

TL- Introduces proposal and asks members for comments or concerns

FG- Does this include using bait for ling cods?

TL- Fluvial systems only

ML- Thinks bait ban should be considered on a system to system basis and not as a blanket approach

DK- Would there be exceptions to allow bait on some systems for example white fish on the Dease River?

TL- We are fully up to recommendations

DK- Bait ban will significantly reduce catch and release mortality

JC- Full support for full bait ban

ML- Points to system down south (Chilcotin, Thompson rivers) where bait bans have been in place for over 20 years and the rivers are still in a state of crisis.

JC- Says not in the Thompson, they have been having this debate in the 2000's. Bait is a thing of the past we need to move on from it.

BN- Bait ban was immensely successful on the Squamish system. Agrees with DK having a bait ban on a case to case but thinks a blanket approach would simplify regs which is important

DE- Supports- about time

SC- Supports echos BN comments

JS- Supports

AH- Supports

Support:

Yes	No	Conditional with Changes
6		1

9. Proposed changes to the timing of current river closures. Changes closure dates on some river systems from Jan 1 to Dec 1 (DK)

DK- Flexible on earlier dates but received push back from resident anglers on earlier dates. Decided to Dec 1 and okay on an earlier date. Would like the guide conspiracy theories comments to end.

JC- In 2018, date was Nov 15 and was agreed on, now we are going back to Dec 1. We agreed to Nov 15, why don't we stick with that?

SC- Concerned this a QW discussion, need to consider transfer of pressure.

BN- Understand SC point, dates should be based on the science when fresh fish stop showing up

JC- Thinks fish need more protection not just a QW discussion

BN- Went with Dec 1 because thought everyone could get behind this

DK- Open for discussion would be okay with Nov 15, summer run steelhead should have more protection.

FG- Supports Dec 1

DE- USAGA supports Dec 1

Support:

Yes	No	Conditional with Changes
3		1

TL- Invites Trevour Rhodes Assistant Director a chance to commit on the engagement process and how he supports the director in the engagement process

TR- Relativity new, thanks group for being part of the convo. Role is “heavy lifting” for branch. Working with the regions to support and listen to stakeholders. Provide provincial context and consistency. Assisting with the assessment and engagement at Regional and Provincial level. Provide back up for the director, may see his signature on these proposals.

5) Drought Management overview and discussion (KWM)- 1130

KWM- Goes over Drought Management Presentation slides 20- 33:

DK- Asks about real time data at fish counting fence at Kitwanga?

KWM- Not real time but we do have data from Kitwanga.

JC- BCFFF would be interested in funding a temperature gauge on Lakelse

KWM- Will follow up JC – **Action**

DK- Recommends installation on the railway bridge

KWM- Caries on with presentation

JC- Fished Nadina in July isn't very “fishy”, water temp was high not many anglers.

DK- Lakelse, most trout leave in July and August pretty warm around every year. Thinks a July 31st closure wouldn't be a bad thing. Suggest moving the boundary down stream.

KWM- Ends presentation

BN- Agrees education is the path forward, is there any data from catch rate from these high temp zones?

KWM- Not specifically, creel data catch rate in the Bulkley Morice for Bull Trout, Doll Varden shows approximately 2 Fish per day for all gear types

BN- We need to understand how catch rate as they relate to temperatures. Suggests when temperatures get high catch rate goes down. There is a ton of creeks that cool the Skeena, thinks there should be 30+ temperature gauges on a system like the Skeena.

KWM- We completed a desktop exercise and you can pretty much write of all tributaries except for the Kitsumkalum and the Zymoetz rivers because the other smaller tributaries aren't able to cool the mainstem Skeena significantly.

JC- Doesn't think we are at the Stellako level- continue to watch.

PH- Lots of questions left to answer, we are looking for this engagement.

DE- Concerned why temp regimes are based on BT, doesn't think the process is based on sound science. Concerned that two sensors are representing the entire Bulkley River.

PH- If you look around the province, we are an outlier, other areas in the province have gone to total closures without any data.

JC- Commends KWM work

AH- Is the entire Skeena being shut down?

KWM- See slide 26, will be treated on a watershed to watershed basis. This is largely directed to the Kispiox, Bulkley and some of the trout fisheries. Some of the best quality data in the province. Brings up Oregon study showing large cold tributaries not significantly cooling the mainstem. **Action**-send out Oregon study

BN- Can we compare our data to Oregon?

KWM- Our temperatures are in the same regime, maybe 1-2 degrees higher

MM- In the provincial drought document it states implementing gear restrictions would be the first step to addressing chronic drought conditions. Curious why this isn't in the Skeena drought plan?

KWM- The provincial plan is guidance, already a bait ban in the Bulkley. Would be in favour of a hook size restriction. If there are ideas like that, we are all for it. Not aware of any where else in the province that has addressed drought or elevated temperatures with a gear restriction.

MM- Feels more attention should be brought to gear restrictions as it is outlined in the provincial drought plan

KWM- Asks MM what kind of gear restrictions she would propose

MM- Bait ban would be the first one. Dry line dry flies would be the second one.

KWM- We can't regulate dryline and dry fly

ML- Regardless of what gear you use, fish stressed by high temperature have a high mortality in a catch and release fishery

KWM- Yes, when fish are stressed it matters less what they are caught with

DK- Guide have to complete a guide report for 20+ years, suggests mining the guide data

KBM- A lot of the data up till 2012 was in paper.

KWM- Trout and char are by catch and under reported. Reminds group to fill out forms

BN- Suggests adding a temp recording to guide reports

KWM – Done- **Action**

FG- If it is hot, we shouldn't be fishing

KWM- Plenty of fisheries that are not thermally stressed.

PH-Final comments, good and bad science vs information gaps. KWM has done a lot of work. This has been presented on before. Looking for preference on how we manage drought. Entire section is keen to find support.

6) Mirror Order discussion

PH- Received a similar DFO mirror as last year and addition. Quite a bit of engagement on the stakeholder side. We as region receive info to inform the decision makers. We have proposed the questions to DFO and we haven't heard back.

JC- Mirror Order concerns 1-6:

1) Regulation - After hearing that the mirror order for the Kitsumkalum River would include the whole watershed along with a phone discussion after the meeting saying that the mirror order would prevent people who may be camping out, staying in summer cabins or fishing for a day on the lake from being able to fish because of the blanket mirror order that is a complete angling closure is unacceptable. There is no good reason why vacationers, day campers and local people cannot fish for trout or char in the lake during the prime summer months when they will not cause any harm to Kalum chinook salmon.

My decision at the meeting was to go with the mirror order because unethical angling has been known to take place on the lower Kalum River. That likely is not a good reason when there is no

definitive information saying it will happen this year. The BCFFF is changing its position from support to "**no support**" for this mirror order.

The emphasis should be more DFO Fishery Officer and Conservation Officer Patrols to curb bad behavior because there is no glaring conservation issue facing Kalum chinook salmon.

Our position has not changed for the other mirror orders.

(2) We "**do not support a mirror order**" for the main stem Skeena River particularly when a bait ban will be in place during the salmon closure reducing the possibility of catching a chinook salmon while fishing for steelhead. There is not a conservation crisis for chinook salmon in this section of the Skeena because they are for the most part moving fish and no Kalum chinook are known to pass through or hold in the upstream section above the confluence to Hells Gate.

(3) We "**support a mirror order**" for the Kitwanga River mouth and closed area for salmon fishing because there are conservation issues for Kitwanga sockeye and chinook salmon and there are past conflicts and future potential ones.

(4) We "**do not support a mirror order**" for the mouth of the Kispiox River because we do not see a conservation problem for chinook that would be exacerbated by angling for steelhead.

(5) We "**support the mirror order**" for the water around the confluence of the Bulkley and Morice River to protect chinook salmon.

(6) We "**do not support a mirror order**" for the Meziadin River confluence with the Nass River because we have not heard a good reason why this should happen.

DK- Doesn't agree with Mirror order

DK- Most concerned that DFO admitted this isn't a conservation closure but a social closure, worried about precedent setting for future closures

PH- Asks other members for there comments

FG- Only aware of the little Bulkley and Morice being a concern

PH- Outlet of Morice Lake regulation is not part of this mirror order package, they are a standing regulation.

DK- Concerned about closing access to fisheries when there are regulatory measures that can allow fisheries to continue.

PH- There needs to be more than a one-line rationale, BC and feds need to work together for all regulations. Stakeholders are bringing groups together. Decisions have not been made as of yet. This isn't the first year we have seen this type of mirror order and probably not the last- lets make it right.

DK- Need to consider properties and users on the Kalum Lake.

7) Closing and next steps

KBM- Thanks everyone for there comments and emails. Not all members were on the call today so next steps will be to put all the comments and concerns together for proposals 5-9. A review form will be attached to put down any final concerns and support or not support for the proposals. Then section head decisions will be put together.

ML- Habitat discussion not addressed

PH- **Action item** to carry on habitat discussion in future meetings

DE- What are future meetings for QW discussions going to look like

Meeting Adjourned at 12:30

8) Action Items:

- KBM to send out research papers pertaining to impacts of recreation motorboats
- PH to provide members with clarity and timing of QW SAAT sub committee meetings
- KWM to follow up with JC for temperature sensor installation for the Lakelse River
- KWM to send members Oregon Drought study
- KWM to add temperature recording column to the guide outfitters reporting sheet
- Add habitat discussion to the next meeting agenda