

Skeena Angler Advisory Team Meeting # 2 - Draft Minutes
April 5, 2022

Draft Agenda

1830-1900	Introductions, housekeeping, scope, conduct <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Agenda additions or changes- Update on Ministry re-org
1900-1930	Terms of Reference Discussion - Continued
1930-2000	Regulation Development/Removal Discussion
2000-2005	5-minute break
2005-2020	Regulation Development/Removal Discussion
2020-2030	Closing thoughts and actions going forward.
2030	Adjourn

Attendance

Troy Larden – Fish and Wildlife Section Head (Chair)
Kenji Miyazaki – Senior Fisheries Management Biologist
Joe De Gisi – Stock Assessment Biologist
Kris Maier – Fisheries Biologist
Emily Mason – Fisheries Biologist (Notetaker)
Trevor Rhodes – Associate Director, Fisheries
Alex Bussmann – Tackle Vendors
Allison Oliver – Skeen Fisheries Commission
Andy Towse – Kitimat Rod and Gun Club (Alternate)
Brian Niska – Northern BC Tourism
Dave Evans – Upper Skeena Angling Guide Association
David Lewis – Prince Rupert Rod and Gun Club
Frank Guillon – Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun Club
Jesse Stoeppler – Hagwilget First Nation
Jim Culp – BC Federation of Fly Fishers (Alternate)
Larry Proteau – Terrace Rod and Gun Club
Mike Langegger – BC Wildlife Federation

Sam Cooper – Non-affiliated resident angler
Dustin Kovacovich – Skeena Angling Guide Association
Stan Hislop – Fulton River Rod and Gun Club
Troy Peters – Steelhead Society of BC-Northern Branch

Discussion

Dave Evans (DE): Requesting a clarification on positions, where's David Skerik, and what is Paddy Hirshfield's position.

Troy Larden (TL): We will provide an update on staffing and the ministry reorganization in about 5 minutes.

The agenda for this meeting includes discussion about the terms of reference, follow up on the presentation from last week, what the next steps are in proposal development, what is the primary mandate of the committee, opportunities for future meetings, and next steps.

Brian Niska (BN): Will we talk about Skeena 4 guide licence renewal?

Response (TL): we're going to have individual meetings with tenure holders as this is out of scope for many participants of SAAT.

TL: Update on ministry reorganization: FLNRORD has been split into the Ministry of Forests (MOF) and the Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship (MLWRS). From the Resource Management Division, the Fish, Wildlife and Research sections have remained in the Ministry of Forests, while the Ecosystems and Geospatial sections have moved to the Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship. In general, MOF is more transactional and MLWRS is more strategic. There will be some staffing changes, but for the most part our jobs will remain the same and we will still be working as a team on resource stewardship. There will be upper executive changes and new leadership in both Ministries.

Current staffing changes: Dave Skerik is on temporary assignment until May. He is working on strategic activities for Region 7B and the Yahey decision as well as strategic discussions and negotiations around Treaty 8. Paddy Hirshfield has stepped into David Skerik's job (Director, Resource Management) and Cheryl Mackenzie is filling Paddy's base position (Resource Manager).

Frank Guillon (FG): Where are the Conservation Officers Service in this?

Response (TL): Ministry of Environment (MOE). Forestry enforcement (Natural Resource Officers) also went to MOE.

Joe De Gisi (JDG): Fisheries staff from the Ministry of Agriculture have moved to LWRS.

Terms of Reference Discussion

TL: After last meeting's discussion on the Terms of Reference (TOR) we invited any comments. The first comment was about adding habitat to the SAAT mandate.

Kenji Miyazaki (KBM): This person suggested habitat be part of the scope of SAAT. As we've talked about in the past, we still believe that habitat is out of scope for SAAT, however fisheries

staff are well suited to pass along comments/concerns to Provincial or Federal colleagues that have jurisdiction over habitat.

Mike Langegger (ML): Recreational regulation changes are like band aids on an arterial bleed. Fish and wildlife populations and ecosystems are in a sad state. Looking at habitat would expand our role as people who care about fish. I firmly believe we need to add a habitat component to the TOR, or at least language to say we will look at habitat issues in the future.

TL: I believe we're pushing on the same door. All members realize habitat is an issue, but the tools to address that issue are not within the scope of the committee. This isn't to say we can't talk about habitat. Our (Provincial staff) commitment will be to take those issues to the appropriate people. We can make space in each meeting to discuss habitat issues.

ML: Can we add something to the TOR that reflects that? Feel it needs to be in writing, so it doesn't fall to the side.

Troy Peters (TP): Agree with ML. It would be good to have something in TOR to put mechanism in place to create a clear path for habitat issues will be dealt with when they are brought up.

Dustin Kovacovich (DK): Agreed. Habitat needs to be discussed even if we're not making recommendations about it.

DE: Support ML's suggestion. Seems like lots of times when committee members bring issues to committee, seems issues aren't being listened to. Habitat needs to be in the TOR to manage systems we're concerned about properly. Seems like we're being shut down all the time and not getting much accomplished.

BN: Echo comments about importance of habitat but must be careful that we're in the right place with this, curious to hear Trevor Rhode's thoughts if we're in the right place to talk about habitat, perhaps we need a dedicated habitat committee to meet more frequently.

Trevor Rhodes (TR): The new Ministry will manage habitat strategically both at the branch level and regionally. Regional habitat staff are still present and will continue to work with fisheries staff.

BN: That's good news that it's still something that's included in this. However, a smaller committee might be more effective in accomplishing goals.

Frank Guillon (FG): Does anyone not support that procedure?

TL: Before anyone answers, to clarify we are agreeing to habitat discussions taking place within SAAT, with a commitment from Provincial staff to forward issues to agencies responsible for decisions around that issue.

ML: *(confirms that is what he's looking for)*

No further comments

Kris Maier (KWM): in interest of approving TOR at this meeting, suggest adding it to the second bullet point in section 2. In regard to the commitment to forward issues to appropriate agencies, that will be a verbal commitment that we make here?

ML: Yes, enough of the committee is present to be sure this commitment is upheld.

TL: The second comment submitted about the TOR was that unaffiliated anglers should be residents of the region.

KWM: Understand intent. The TOR indicates chairperson has discretion about who is included. The Skeena fisheries section agrees that there are people outside of the region may have extensive experience in the Skeena and may be a valuable addition to SAAT. The section feels that the discretion of chairperson would account for this.

TL: Also note this wasn't really an issue until COVID as meetings were in person, and it would be impractical for people out of the region to participate.

ML: I take it unaffiliated anglers are intended to capture local knowledge?

TL: Yes, but that local knowledge can be held by someone outside of the region who is an avid participant in the fishery within the Skeena. Chair has opportunity to approve or deny any members, its imperative that the chair takes into account value of member to team. I am going to propose language stays the same. I invite participants to raise hands if they object.

Larry Proteau (LP): We discussed at rod and gun executive last night we feel it should be residents – residents feel the pinch, its doesn't matter as much for people that travel here for two weeks per year.

TL: We hear from people throughout the province about restricting hunting and fishing opportunities. Resources belong to all citizens of the province. There are many folks, even those who live on the outskirts of the region, that have valuable knowledge regarding fisheries in the Skeena Region.

BN: maybe we could change language to say *priority* is given to resident anglers.

KWM: Sometimes there is low interest, and it can be hard to find unaffiliated anglers. Some folks in the Omineca fish in the Skeena a lot.

TL: I'd have no problem with BN's suggestion to give priority to Skeena residents.

Jim Culp (JC): I feel quite strong about giving opportunity to anyone across the province. I represent a province wide organization and we have people there fighting for Skeena issues. I am not in favour of changing language to give priority to Skeena region residents. I believe current approach is fair and reasonable.

David Lewis (DL): I believe it should be members from the Skeena. We have the provincial angling advisory team (PAAT) that covers the entire province.

BN: JC made a good case about who we need to get in the door. Members of JC's organization have access to/through his seat. We also need to exclude provincial ex-employees (for a time period).

LP: I agree with BN. I've been to about every single one of these meetings and we've driven away good unaffiliated anglers. Preference should be given to local anglers and there is a PAAT.

TL: anyone other than JC opposed to priority language?

No further comments

Added "Priority membership will be given to Skeena region residents" to TOR

TL: Those were the only 2 issues brought up about this version of the TOR. I would like to make a motion to accept this TOR. Anyone opposed please raise your hand.

JC: The TOR includes language around both consensus and votes, consensus doesn't include votes. If a person is opposed and has reasonable and fair arguments, the issue is tabled. Need to be clear what method we're using for what discussions.

TL: Reminder that this isn't a decision-making committee, SAAT provides recommendations to decision maker, votes can help determine amount of support for recommendations.

JC: the amount of support should be captured in the minutes.

LP: I couldn't disagree more – I have opinions on certain regulations that aren't going to change – I'll either agree or disagree.

JC: It's more fair, we have to work hard to try to agree. The Sport Fish Advisory Board has created an awful lot of animosity and good ideas are ignored because they follow the majority rule.

TL: I believe what this section of the terms of reference is trying to address is that if we cannot reach consensus, we need a 2/3rds majority. If we relied on consensus and one person disagrees, does that mean the idea is dead in the water?

JC: Yes, unless it's re-worded or re-worked and consensus is reached at a later date. The onus is on the person to provide reasonable arguments for their lack of support. Chair decides "reasonable and fair"

TL: As a chair person I don't think its in the best interest of the committee for one person to decide whether someone's argument are reasonable and fair.

JC: Need a good facilitator. I think we need more time to talk about this particular piece of language in TOR. I can bring forward some TOR from other committees for SAAT to review. Majority rules isn't fair. In the time I've been on this committee very few proposals have made it through.

ML: It's about the discussions we have, not about convincing a chairperson. Having differing perspectives and views, having a good discussion, and sharing perspective and views with and convince the committee.

BN: JC, you made some good points, but I'd like to go on record saying I like the wording in section 4.3. Also, if you're trying to get gear-based restrictions (i.e., fly fishing only) you're not going to get consensus.

TL: JC, is this your hill to die on?

JC: No, I'm willing to concede this one, just wanted to state my issues with it. I will bring it up again in the future.

TL: any more concerns? Kenji will forward out this version with the changes we made today for signatures. Keeping in mind this is a living document.

No further concerns brought forward – TOR accepted.

Break

Presentation – Review of past proposals (KBM)

Allison Oliver (AO): Can you walk me through the units on your pie graphs (redundant proposals).

KBM: Percentages don't indicate percentage of pie – just percentage of each category that was redundant.

JC: What was the total number of regulations put forward over the years?

KBM: 130

TL: 17 of them going through to decision

Sam Cooper (SC): Does 130 include proposals coming from department or just advisory groups?

KBM: Both

SC: Do you have a breakdown of approved proposals from the province vs advisory board.

KBM: It's a bit convoluted as proposals were submitted, then tweaked by the group. I will have to look into it and report back.

AO: Have any of the redundant proposals if any have ever been approved?

KBM: Fluvial trout and char C&R, I can check for others.

AO: just wondering how many times they go in, what gets them approved, if it's a wasted effort?

TL: Discussion around merits an implementation of that proposal between 2006 and 2013 finally led to approval. Took care of 10-20 "redundant" proposals.

A couple objectives we look at when reviewing proposals are (1) Is it something we can implement? (enforcement) and, (2) are anglers going to have trouble complying? (complexity). Therefore, we are proposing discussion about removal of redundant regulations.

ML: Are there measures of success for the regulations put in place in regards to population recovery and management? My concern is that we're managing people through regulations, rather than identifying other things that are impacting fish. Is the success of regulations being assessed?

JDG: we've had it suggested by branch that if we can't put forward measurables then we shouldn't go forward with a proposal. Because of resourcing, we aren't often able to do the work that would determine changes in measures of success. The main exception has been around quality waters regulation changes. Measurables were social and had specific funding through guardian program to determine levels of angler activity and angler satisfaction.

As a biologist I don't like to say that we often don't have resources to assess success measures. But I don't want to be in the position that a regulation is needed but not be able to be implemented due to a lack of information that is rigorous and robust.

ML: We can look at regulations, bait ban, etc. - Those regulations were put in place 20-25 years ago and those populations are still low, some facing extirpation. We need to start managing the fishery rather than people. Need to think how we're going to move forward. Recreational regulations are a band aid on the arterial bleed.

KWM: (In response to effectiveness of trout and char regulation) Time series of abundance at the time weren't as good as what we have now. At least for fluvial char regulation did seem to move the needle on abundance. What that move primarily allowed us to do in terms of trout and char is work from a place of security. for example, we have a precautionary approach in place and have time to determine which populations are strong enough to sustain a fishery. Not a fan of gear restrictions. Spatial and temporal regulations have better results. Temporal restrictions have been underused.

JDG: We are getting to a point now with some lake species where we can compare their status with the past. We are trying, comes down to the fact that it's an expensive business. Trying to make big decisions with small inferences. As long as folks understand the limits, I think we're ok. Would like much more data than what we have access to.

KWM: Due to lack of resourcing.

JC: We need to put lots of effort in to monitoring and assessment, this is a big conversation. We're still having a debate about whether Thompson River steelhead should be put on the endangered species list. The Coldwater River is spawning habitat for Thompson steelhead, it has been logged to the waters edge. The atmospheric river has caused a lot of habitat disturbance. Etc. etc. DFO has done cost-benefit analysis as to whether we should save fish. Is this going to happen with all at risk populations? We all agree habitat is a huge issue but not helpful to talk about regulations not working. There's a time and place that a dry fly may be a conservation measure that we should looked at.

BN: When we talk about a fly-fishing regulation, I believe our goal is to try and catch less fish – however it can be discriminatory. We could go outside the current toolbox such as a catch and release limits could achieve the same goal.

TL: Bringing it back to removal of regulations. We are inviting SAAT members to take a look through and regulations and comment. I have a couple examples.

- 1) Pink fishing in the Morice river until December 31st – because of that regulation, our implementation of steelhead closure was highly ineffective last fall. Talked to DFO and they have agreed there is change needed to that regulation.
- 2) Nilkitkwa fly fishing regulation – not currently meeting objective
- 3) Silverthorne lake outlet no fishing – no fish there anymore, unnecessary

Any comments or thoughts on that?

JC: Comment on synopsis – love reading it but don't understand half of it because of grammar and language – would be great to have someone re write it in plain language.

TL: Thank you for the suggestion. The next item of "homework" is to think about what problems need to be solved in fisheries management, focus on TOR scope/mandate. What are issues we need to build objectives around and then regulations to meet those objectives. Could be conservation or social objectives. At a future meeting we're going to bring those forward and

discuss them as a group. Opportunity to have some thoughtful problem solving. Invite perspectives from each group on how we achieve the objectives to promote conservation.

LP: We have the highest fees in the province to fish for salmon. Around Terrace there are only two stocked lakes. I was just wondering if there are any new lakes that are going to be stocked, or maybe the committee could come up with lakes they would like to see stocked. I asked TR about this a year ago. There is potential for tourism around this especially towards the eastern part of our region. I'd like to see a small committee get together and discuss something like this.

TL: That is a little outside of the scope of the committee, but JDG, any comments?

JDG: We can put that on the next agenda for me to talk the criteria we consider before stocking new lakes. It can't be covered in the remaining meeting time. Those decisions are driven outside of the region.

KWM: LP, I could share some exceptional small lake fisheries in the Smithers area.

DE: when are we going to start talking about the steelhead crisis? Seems like you don't want to talk about the plan for steelhead. Didn't give us a completion date. Getting concerned about when we will talk about that.

TL: Right in the middle of large amount of data analysis to determine what decisions we can make. Communications are forthcoming. Province is looking to establish some thresholds in advance of season. *missed some of response due to audio.*

DE: Just want to make sure we have a plan that addresses why we don't have abundance in the Skeena rather than what to do when we don't. Let's make sure that happens.

TL: Thank you DE, that's on our agenda.

KBM: I will share redundant regulation information with group. Ideally, we'd have another meeting in early fall/late summer about regulations. However, anticipate more meetings on other topics such as steelhead. Dates will be sent out via e-mail.

TL: Remember to think about what problems in fisheries management need to be solved for discussion next time, these can be forwarded to myself or KBM.

TR: We're going into another phase of the synopsis, so the comment about simplifying the language was helpful. The Skeena steelhead management plan will be multi-phase, the next year or so will be interim management before we have all the information needed for a longer-term plan.

Adjourn 8:37pm