



The Quality Angling Experience Concept



April 2016

Introduction and Objectives

The British Columbia Federation of Fly Fishers (BCFFF) completed an original document titled *Quality Angling and Quality Angling Waters in British Columbia* in 2003. This previous document outlined the important resource that occurs in British Columbia with regard to Quality Angling and Quality Waters. The premise of the document introduced key characteristics to help define the attributes of the resource and discussed general management implications. The following represents an update to the original paper, builds upon the viewpoints that were introduced and develops the concept of Quality Angling Experiences in the context of current and future resource management options.

The BCFFF believes that it is essential to describe and clarify the attributes that define and shape Quality Angling Experiences (QAEs). An essential aspect of maintaining the integrity of British Columbia's Quality Waters and the concept of QAEs is the recognition and management of current and impending threats that have the potential to erode the inherent values of the quality angling resource. By describing the various elements that are associated with QAEs, our aim is to identify these threats and develop measures to ensure the protection of a very important resource in perpetuity.

Quality Angling and Quality Waters – British Columbia's Unique Resource

Anglers in BC are extremely fortunate to have direct access to a diverse collection of rivers, lakes, estuaries and beaches offering angling opportunities for numerous species of fish. The opportunities are generally unlimited and covered under the nominal cost of an annual fishing licence. In other parts of the world, especially in Europe and Great Britain, the majority of waters are privately owned. Fly-fishing is generally limited to "put and take" fisheries, where an angler purchases a day ticket, which entitles the angler to a bag limit of stocked (hatchery raised) fish. The cost to fish on a stocked lake for a day is considerably more than the cost of an annual licence in BC. Opportunities for more unique angling experiences for wild fish in remote settings (for example the Scottish Atlantic salmon rivers) are generally cost prohibitive for the average angler. While this scenario limits the number of anglers on any given managed reach of river, which maintains the quality of the angling experience, it comes at a significant monetary cost to the angler. Similar examples of unique, generally cost-prohibitive angling experiences occur in places such as Norway, on the Atlantic salmon rivers, or on the Kamchatka Peninsula steelhead rivers in Russia.



There is an interesting conundrum that is created by our unique range of opportunity and immediate “availability to all” angling resource in British Columbia. While anglers appreciate having the luxury of almost unlimited access at a very low cost, crowding is becoming a problem, which generally decreases the quality of an angling experience. While an angler may yearn for an uncrowded fishing experience akin to a beat on a Scottish river, would that same angler be willing to give up the unlimited range of accessibility and low cost of angling in order to achieve that experience? Ultimately, QAEs can be maintained by controlling angler numbers, which in the case of the examples provided in other countries, is achieved through monetary cost. This is a very effective tool, but is not applicable to the BC system. The challenge, in light of the underlying BC angling premise of unlimited access (generally speaking) and low cost of angling, is to maintain the low costs and range of access while still allowing for QAEs.

The Quality Angling Experience – Elusive Concept or Tangible Goal?

It is important to try to understand what is meant by a Quality Angling Experience, if we are to devise methods to protect and promote quality angling opportunities on quality waters. An individual angler may have a clear personal ideology about what constitutes a QAE, which is likely going to differ from



another angler’s perspective. Some anglers may place more of an importance on the numbers of fish caught in any given angling session, where-as another angler may put more emphasis on the surrounding environment (perhaps a wilderness setting) when defining what a QAE entails. An angler’s overall state of well-being may be intertwined with specific angling experiences, which highlights the difficulty in trying to isolate what actually constitutes a QAE.

There are too many variables to pinpoint the precise definition of a QAE, and it would best be viewed as more of a concept or general ideology as opposed to a tangible, easily definable feature. **The BCFFF takes the stance that the concept of a QAE should lean heavily towards conservation and using angling techniques that help to reduce the impacts on a resource that is facing numerous challenges, especially when considering species such as steelhead.** These challenges include (but are not limited to) human-induced climate change, unfavourable ocean survival and destruction of freshwater rearing habitat. Increased angler efficiency, in terms of accessibility, more effective fishing equipment/techniques and the availability of information (i.e. Internet resources) is stacking the odds in favour of the angler and increasing the impacts on a natural resource at a time when the resource is dwindling. Considering the current and predicted future uncertainty in the viability of species such as

wild steelhead, the BCFFF believes that resource management should always err on the conservative side (Precautionary Principle).

The BCFFF provides the following main attributes, which we feel help to provide clarity for what the QAE concept should consist of:

- Uncrowded waters, which is a difficult concept to define in itself. We believe that it means that a water is shared by an optimal number of anglers who share an ethic that seeks to protect and conserve the fish and fishery. Different types of water will be associated with varying sensitivities to crowding. Rivers tend to be more sensitive in this regard, where-as lakes generally have a greater capacity;
- Aesthetically pleasing surroundings, which generally refers to the depth and range of natural vistas, lack of development and the degree of “wilderness or wilderness-like appeal”;
- Challenging conditions, where angling experience is enhanced through the combination of skill and knowledge of the fish and its environment. The QAE concept should focus less on numbers of fish caught and more on the reward of catching fish with challenging angling methods. Being able to learn from an angling experience should be an important factor in any QAE. If catching fish becomes too easy through the usage of techniques that put the advantage heavily in the angler’s favour, a conservation issue can often result and opportunities for learning and fulfillment are decreased ;
- Water quality and fish habitat conditions that are conducive for a sustainable, healthy fish population;
- A reasonable supply of challenging fish to catch, such as unique runs of summer-run steelhead. The opportunity to take (kill) fish must never be factored into what constitutes a QAE; and



- Fly-fishing opportunity – some waters are uniquely suited to catching fish by fly fishing because of the physical nature of the water or the behaviour of the fish species present, which offers unique angling experiences.

Threats to the QAE Concept

The BCFFF concept of a QAE and the values attributed to the concept face numerous threats. Perhaps the most significant threat comes from the ideology/behaviour of individual anglers. To try to change an angler's way of thinking and encourage the use of techniques that would result in less fish caught is a very difficult undertaking. The emphasis, however, must be on conservation and decreasing our collective impact on the resource. This will ultimately help to increase the longevity of opportunities to fish for species such as wild steelhead.

Individual angler etiquette can also have negative implications to QAEs, with specific regard to overcrowding and allowing equal opportunities for access to a particular fishing area. Proper angler etiquette can help decrease the frustration that is often attributed to heavy fishing pressure.

An increase in the use of boats (especially jet boats) and helicopters is allowing for increased access to areas that may once have been accessible to people willing to put in the time and effort to access by



more traditional means (e.g. hiking). Internet resources are providing quick and easy reference guides allowing for increased access to previously less well known fishing areas. This increase in access puts obvious limitations on what may once have been QAEs in previously uncrowded areas.

Guiding operations have the potential to exacerbate problems associated with overcrowding, especially on non-classified waters where

guiding constraints are currently very minimal. The main driving factor behind some guiding operations is the ability to ensure the clients catch fish. This puts pressure on the resource and can limit the availability of both fish and fishing areas for the wider angling community. The BCFFF salutes and encourages both clients and guides that focus on Quality Angling Experiences.

The QAE Concept as a Conservation Tool and Recommended Measures to Promote and Protect the QAE Concept

The BCFFF constitution states that “... the Federation will take actions to safeguard or enhance the interests of fish and preserve, maintain and develop angling opportunities for BC.” Now that we have an idea of the QAE concept and the attributes that the BCFFF considers as being appropriate when defining the concept, there is the opportunity to further develop the concept as a conservation tool, or at least as a principle for directing positive action. The concept can also be used to maintain and develop angling opportunities in a responsible manner that reflects the intent of the QAE concept. The QAE concept, therefore, complies with the BCFFF constitution. The following measures are provided as potential options that would help to promote and protect the QAE concept:

Limiting the Effectiveness of All Anglers (including fly-fishers)

In order to address one of the main threats to the QAE concept and protect the integrity of quality waters, individual anglers need to change their angling ideology. This may seem to be an impossible task, but education, ideally through inclusion in regulation, or at least through guidelines included in regulations synopses, would help explain the concept. Some anglers are already open to the idea and are practicing fishing techniques that limit the impact on the resource. Movements such as the “Keep em Wet” campaign are helping to underscore the importance of limiting angling impact on wild steelhead through the proper handling of fish and suggesting self-imposed catch limits.

Modifying Resource Management Regulations Associated with Harvest Opportunities

Regulatory control associated with harvest limits and opportunities should be considered, as harvest incentives generally result in overcrowding. At the very least, enforcement should be increased for



harvest fisheries, to ensure that illegal activities such as snagging and/or flossing are addressed. More significant penalties for infractions should also be implemented. This would help decrease the number of anglers present by discouraging the “anglers” intent on fishing illegally, which would increase the overall quality of the angling experience for others. Increased enforcement would also, of course, help decrease the impacts on the fish. Fly-fishing-only regulations may be considered as appropriate conservation tools under

specific circumstances, as angling opportunities/effort can be maintained while decreasing the pressure

on the resource (i.e. reducing the number of fish caught). Methods that are extremely effective should be discouraged, or catch and release limits imposed to decrease the impacts on the fish.

Improving Angler Etiquette

Anglers also need to become more aware of proper angler etiquette, which again should be addressed through appropriate education, regulation changes and/or building on applicable guidelines included in regulations synopses. Angling practices that involve claiming a particular run or pool for an extended length of time need to change. Simple concepts such as rotating through a pool and not “stepping in” below an angler can go a long way in maintaining a QAE, especially on waters subject to heavy fishing pressure.

Ensuring All User-Groups Have an Equal Say in the Management of the Resource

Many anglers (both resident and non-resident) that are attracted to BC’s quality angling experiences are fly-fishers. These anglers contribute substantially to the provincial economy. It could be argued that fly fishers generally seek and demand QAEs; therefore, fly fishers must be given adequate consideration in the management of the fishery resource.

Collecting and Maintaining Appropriate Resource-use Data

In order to make informed decisions about the fishery resource and to help maintain the concept of a QAE, appropriate data needs to be collected and made available to resource managers. By knowing the various attributes of anglers (e.g. total numbers, place of origin, length of stay for visiting anglers and total guiding activity), appropriate management decisions can be formulated. The data would be particularly useful in dealing with issues such as overcrowding and fishing effort, especially on waters where there is a conservation concern.

Improving the Management of Guiding Activity

Guiding activity should be more carefully managed, especially on non-classified waters. Limitations and constraints on guide licences should not be focused purely on Classified Waters. This would help to maintain QAEs for resident anglers and help to address overcrowding concerns.

Implementing Improved Controls on Boat Use

Limiting boat use (especially jet boats) and helicopter access through regulatory changes would help to prevent the erosion of QAEs by reducing overcrowding and also by limiting the effectiveness and efficiency of associated angling methods. This would help conserve the resource for the enjoyment of everybody (level the playing field). Power boat bans, implementing boat-free areas, eliminating fishing from boats and using horsepower restrictions (through regulation) are all measures that could be used more frequently to address the threat posed by a relatively recent increase in boat use.

Limiting Angler Access

Limiting access is an effective measure in maintaining the QAE concept, as evidenced by the quality of angling experiences in countries such as Norway, Russia (e.g. Kamchatka) and Scotland. Private ownership is the primary factor in maintaining QAEs in these areas, which does not apply to the BC fishery resource as a means to limit angler access. While the angling community may be reluctant to admit that the number of participants in certain fisheries needs to be limited, to preserve the QAE concept, it is an option worth considering. The proper management of current initiatives that help preserve QAEs on quality waters (e.g. through the Classified Waters system) is an important aspect to take into account. The management of Classified Waters should be closely monitored and updated, as necessary, to ensure that proper goals and objectives are being met. Perhaps the Classified Waters concept could be expanded to include additional waters and be modified to decrease angler numbers, where applicable.

Increasing the Revenue Available for Resource Management

Sacrifices may need to be accepted (i.e. in terms of higher costs to the angler) in order to be able to fish, especially on Classified Waters, to meet the management objectives associated with any regulatory changes. Ultimately, if angler licence revenue is directed back into the resource, be it through increased enforcement, habitat enhancement or angler education, increased costs should be considered as a viable management measure if we are to maintain the current range and value of angling experiences.

Summary

British Columbia provides very unique and diverse angling opportunities that are readily accessible at a very minimal cost. It is our goal that the QAE concept, which includes the attributes considered most important by the BCFFF, can be used as a conservation tool in support of forward thinking guidelines that endeavour to protect both the resource and intrinsic angling values. The continued recognition of threats to the QAE concept and further discussion into appropriate management measures will help to ensure the of quality quality quality perpetuity.



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