

**SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC
VALUES OF
ANGLING IN THE
YUKON**



Prepared by the
Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board

June 1999

Report #3



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board would like to thank the people who volunteered their time by participating in the February 18, 1999 meeting of the Live Release Focus Group, as well as the Selkirk First Nation for permitting us to quote from the Ta'Tla Mun public meeting held in Whitehorse.

Photographs provided by Clayton White and Department of Renewable Resources.

Also available in this series:

The importance of fishing and fish harvesting to Yukon First Nations people,
by Stephanie Muckenheim, August 1998 (Report #1)

An evaluation of hooking mortality resulting from live-release fishing practices,
by Laberge Environmental Services, October 1998 (Report #2)

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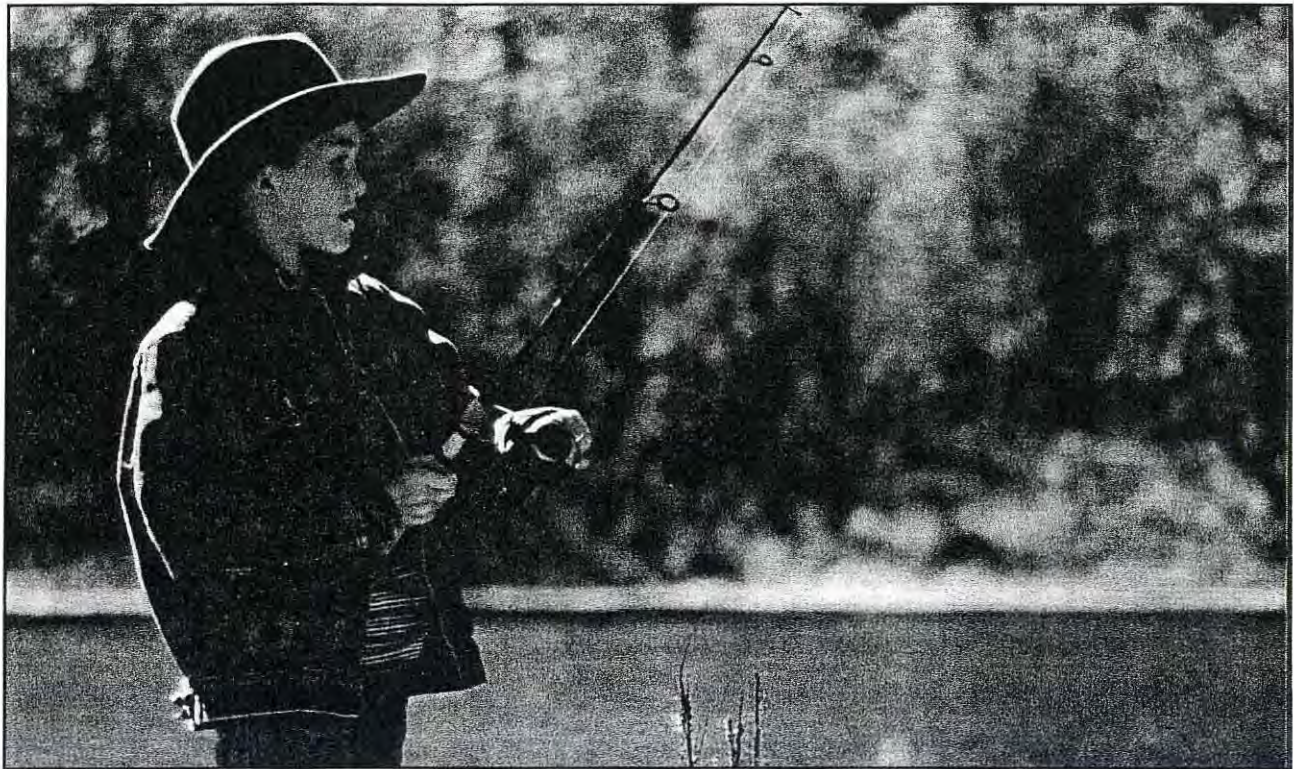
FOREWORD

This report is one of a three-part series prepared by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board as background for a territory-wide public review of the role of catch and release, or live release, techniques in the management of fishing in the Yukon.

The report is based on discussions involving the board's Live Release Working Group and representatives of various sectors of Yukon society who are directly involved with angling, either in a private or professional context. In addition, some material has been included from two reports of a 1995 survey of recreational fishing in the Yukon and a workshop summary concerning Ta'Tla Mun Lake.

None of the material presented in this report should be construed as representing the position or policies of the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

Introduction



Fish are harvested by a variety of means in the Yukon, from commercial netting to fish wheels to gaffing, but the activity that involves most residents and all tourists is angling, which is simply fishing with a line and hook.

The purpose of this report is to provide a general description of the roles and importance of angling in the Yukon, both from a social and economic perspective. Much of the basis for the report comes from a focus group meeting convened by the Live Release Working Group of the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB), which included fishing guides, fishing instructors, retailers of fishing equipment, tourism, and one lodge owner. At the suggestion of the focus group, the working group made further attempts to contact wilderness tourism guides and other lodge owners.

As well, every five years, a recreational fishing survey is coordinated by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Fisheries Section of the Yukon Department of Renewable Resources. Statistics appearing in this document were taken from both the national and territorial reports of the 1995 survey.

Since the purpose of this report is to facilitate public consultation on live release fishing in the Yukon, and since, whenever this subject was discussed, many suggestions were made for the improvement of such methods, it seemed appropriate to include these suggestions to further broaden public discussions. However, these suggestions do not represent recommendations from YFWMB and are provided only for public consideration and comment.

Who fishes in the Yukon, and why?



Who is fishing?

Residents

The Yukon has the highest per capita ratio of resident anglers in Canada. In 1995, one in every

three Yukoners bought a fishing license (Table 1) compared to 1 in 10 across Canada. Of the Yukon resident anglers, 35% were children. Of the adult residents, 74% were male and 26% female. About

	Resident	Non-resident Canadian	Non-resident other	Total
Total licensed angling population: adults*	8,318	3,779	5,619	17,716
Active male adult anglers	4,660	2,488	3,726	10,874
average age, years	42	49	50	47
Active female adult anglers	1,632	568	706	2,906
average age, years	37	41	47	42
Total	6,292	3,056	4,432	13,780
Children**	2,987	700	689	4,376
Total active anglers, all ages	9,279	3,756	5,121	18,156

*Individuals who purchased an angling license in the Yukon. This group provides the basis for the statistical information.
 **Individuals under 16 years of age.

Table 1. Numbers and characteristics of anglers in the Yukon, 1995.

half of Yukoners characterized themselves as “average” anglers while 35% said they were “experienced” and 20% were “beginners.”

Non-residents

In 1995, there were slightly fewer non-resident anglers in the Yukon than resident anglers and only about half as many non-resident children. In the focus group, it was observed that tourists who drive to the Yukon can be roughly divided into two groups. One group, termed “working class,” were mainly interested in catching a fish to eat, while the other group, termed “young

professionals,” were more interested in catching a few fish and releasing them.

Why do anglers fish?

According to the 1995 survey, all types of anglers are generally looking for the same things. Top on the 1995 list of good fishing characteristics were lack of pollutants in fish and water quality, followed by lack of angler crowding and natural beauty.

When asked why they fish, Yukon residents cited “relaxation,” “enjoying nature” and “getting away” as their highest motivation, with “family

Fish species	Resident		Non-resident Canadian		Non-resident non-Canadian		Total	
	Caught	Kept	Caught	Kept	Caught	Kept	Caught	Kept
Grayling	70,033	22,629	13,978	3,947	48,406	12,900	132,418	39,477
Lake Trout	29,931	11,689	6,485	1,314	17,626	3,222	54,043	16,226
Rainbow Trout	9,960	3,797	1,489	657	2,219	561	13,666	5,015
Northern Pike	35,441	7,206	8,373	1,183	21,563	3,082	65,379	11,472
Whitefish	2,559	1,520	82	34	1,931	553	4,573	2,108
Coho	2,089	535	14	14	2,318	276	4,422	826
Sockeye	1,671	462	63	63	934	380	2,669	906
Chinook	4,088	1,471	392	212	1,474	169	5,955	1,853
Arctic Char	757	589	124	0	868	74	1,750	663
Other	2,170	1,395	471	154	1,066	155	3,708	1,705
Total fish caught	158,704	51,299	31,473	7,581	98,409	21,376	288,587	80,258
Total weight of fish kept	167,481		21,282		52,748		241,510	
Average per angler	27		7		12		15	

Table 2. Harvest of fish species by anglers and disposition of fish (in pounds) caught and kept in the Yukon, 1995.

togetherness” coming next, and “catching a trophy fish” as the least important reason. Catching a fish to eat ranked roughly in the middle of the range of Yukoners interests in angling. Still, in 1995, Yukoners kept 1/3 of the fish they caught which is a higher percentage than non-resident anglers and represents an average of 27 pounds of fish per resident angler (Table 2). In the focus group, a comment was made that with all the concern about toxins and contaminants in commercially produced foods, fish are becoming more appreciated as a “clean” and healthy food source than they have been in the past. The focus group also emphasized relaxation, being out of doors, harvesting fish for food, spending time with family, very important experience for youth, and perfecting fishing techniques as reasons for fishing.

Comments from the focus group identified several types of anglers including the “working class” group which had a high “use” ethic, the “young professional” group who were more interested in esthetics and the challenge of catching a few fish and then letting them go, and the “recreational” group who were interested in both fish as food and catch and release. Many who come to the Yukon look at fishing as a way of being on the water. Most have some idea about live release methods.

In a presentation at a public meeting in Whitehorse concerning a management plan for the Ta’Tla Mun Special Management Area, one participant made the following comments:

I like to think of myself as a fisherman. Not a sport fisherman but a fisherman. A fisherman who loves to fish and who has a very good reason for going out,

pursuing fish, looking for fish, being in places where you find fish, or basically using fish as an excuse to go to the places where they exist...

I’d like to suggest that for me a fish is priceless too. I can’t put a value on the peace of mind I get when I go fishing. I can’t put a price on how important it is to me to be with my family: my son, my daughter, my wife in the kinds of places where you find fish.

Whether it’s on the water, whether it is getting to the water, whether it’s just sitting there watching the fish, or whether I’m actually casting a fly to try to catch one...

Like many of you if I catch a fish and I am hungry and I’d like to have something... that I have caught myself, that’s been given to me by the earth, again the fish is priceless. You can’t buy something that good...

And in the process, not only am I having an enjoyable time, not only am I in one of my favourite places, not only am I getting away from the office and getting into the fresh air and finding peace and quiet, but I am learning something about what fish eat, when they eat it, how you can surprise a fish, where the fish hide out, when they feed, what they look like...

In many cases, I can tell if it’s a male or a female fish; whether it’s been feeding, what depth it was at. I can see the colouration. I can see the scars on its body. Where there are clips in the fins where it was possibly nipped by an otter. There’s a story with every fish that I catch, whether I keep it or let it go...

So, in my way, I’m building up my stories for my family, too. And I am learning about something that’s become very important to me.

Catch and release



The practice of catch and release fishing has a very long history among anglers but it has only recently come to the attention of the public in general. In its simplest form, catch and release, or live release fishing, involves removing the hook and returning the live fish to the water. However, the methods and reasons for doing so have come under increasing public scrutiny and comment, particularly since the practice has been formally recognized as a conservation and management tool by many governments.

A mandatory restriction, requiring release of all fish under eight inches in length, was in place until 1991, when the Yukon Department of Renewable Resources introduced the mandatory live release of all rainbow trout for Kathleen and McLean lakes, and "slot size" restrictions for the first "High Quality Management" lakes. Since then, the regulations have been expanded to include more high quality management waters and the minimum size restriction has been maintained.

When do you practise live release fishing?	Only when legally required	Whenever it seemed appropriate	Both for legal and personal reasons	Did not practice	Total who practised catch and release
Resident	2.0%	68.2%	29.8%	29.4%	70.6%
Non-resident Canadian	4.5%	78.0%	17.6%	37.7%	62.3%
Non-resident non-Canadian	2.2%	74.9%	22.8%	31.5%	68.5%
Average	2.9%	73.7%	23.4%	32.9%	67.1%

Table 3. Attitude of active anglers on catch and release in the Yukon, 1995

In the 1995 survey, about 74% of anglers voluntarily practised live release fishing in the Yukon (Table 3). In response to separate questions on the use of barbed hooks, residents at that time were almost equally divided on whether or not they should be banned in the territory.

Much of the discussion at the focus group involved live release fishing and although this topic has no real beginning or end, for clarity, the comments from the focus group have been divided into three basic categories: tackle, methods and enforcement. (See also Recommendations, page 13.)

Tackle

- Many comparative studies have been done on barbed and barbless hooks but there is really not much difference in their effects on the fish related to live release.
- At Dalton Post, one person was attempting to live release fish with a “huge” rod and the wrong hooks.
- Fishing guides use barbless and single hooks to make releases easier and minimize handling time.
- It is possible to fly fish without any hook as small pike will grab and hold on anyway.

- Barbless hooks are more expensive and manufacturers say there isn’t enough of a market for them.
- It is easy to make your own barbless hooks.
- Barbed hooks take more pressure to hook.
- Treble hooks are a different topic from barbless.
- Every angler should have a pair of needle nose pliers and make barbless or single hooks as required.
- Enforcing single and barbless hooks imposes on the people who just want to catch a fish to eat.
- Enforcing hook restrictions will only anger people.
- Single hooks have a better hooking percentage and are more effective and easier to release than treble hooks.
- Treble hooks make more of a mess if you are trying to release the fish.
- Triple treble hooks are the most awkward of all.
- Efficiency of various hook styles varies with the season.
- It’s not economically feasible for retailers to carry both barbed and barbless hooks.

Methods

- The “young professionals” generally have poor handling practices and guides often handle the fish or instruct them on proper methods.
- Some TV shows demonstrate poor live release methods and others show good methods.
- The average person does not know the difference between good and poor methods shown on TV.
- The Yukon Fish and Game video on live release had good reviews.
- For most Yukoners, angling is the only option for catching fish for food.
- Most of the people who come for instruction in fly fishing are not very aware of live release procedures.
- Europeans who come repeatedly to the Yukon have high experience with live release, while others have no understanding and just want to catch a fish to eat, in which case the guides do all the handling.
- Many who fish at Dalton Post have very poor and careless methods.
- Others at Dalton Post know what they are doing or have professional guides.
- Dalton Post is an exception to the rule that people are careful anglers.
- It must be noted that anglers are much better now than they used to be due to better equipment like fish finders and shows that instruct them how to catch fish.
- It is a mistake to focus on the “mortality” aspects of live release fishing because it implies ineffectiveness.
- More attention should be paid to the “survival” statistics for live release which are quite impressive.
- A substantial sector of the angling population is highly skilled in live release and an also substantial sector has no skill in live release.

Enforcement

- There could be a fishing license like a Firearms Acquisition Certificate that shows the angler has passed a live release fishing course.
- Over-regulation of people will discourage them from fishing.
- Conservation officers do not monitor fishing practices but do check tackle and charge anglers if the wrong tackle is being used.

Angling ethics and methods



As with other fish and wildlife harvesting methods, the ethics of angling are strongly associated with the anglers' relationship to the resource, particularly in terms of conservation and respect.

In the focus group discussions, it was strongly emphasized that using proper live release methods was, for the angling community, a sign of the highest respect for the value of fish, both as a food resource and as a living animal. It was also noted that this live release ethic was not shared with many First Nations cultures when it was viewed in the context of "playing with fish." (See also report no. 1 in this series, The importance of fishing and fish harvesting to Yukon First Nations people.)

Still, the focus group concluded that it was necessary to find some common ground on this issue and one participant summed up this intent:

"At the end of the day, we are all Yukoners. We share a common resource and the foundation of our thinking on both sides is based on respect."

In terms of conservation, a fishing guide at the focus group explained how angling was rotated and dispersed throughout the season, beginning with grayling in the spring and moving on to trout in the summer and then pike. He stated that it was very easy to have an excessive impact in one area in a short time, adding that it was necessary to keep moving from spot to spot. He also acknowledged the concern of continually increasing pressure and the limit that a fish population can sustain.

A retailer, with a long history in the Yukon, stressed that not too long ago, most people judged the success of their fishing experience by the number of fish that they caught. But this person felt that this is rapidly changing and that the quality of the

experience is judged more on esthetics as live release angling becomes more widely practised. By the same token, it was also acknowledged in the group that some anglers are still “greedy.”

Additional comments made by the focus group

- The current approaches in the Yukon promote “sport” and “recreational” aspects of angling but do not give enough attention to fish as a food source.
- We have to remember what comes first and that is the fish.
- We have to remember that angling is a privilege, not a right.
- Angling is important for teaching children proper ways of managing and conserving a resource.

Economic value of angling

Any analysis of the economic value of such a complicated resource use as angling will

undoubtedly be incomplete because it is so difficult to accurately relate all expenditures to particular causes. In addition, a tourism representative at the focus group expressed frustration that such examinations usually fail to fully “unpack” the data, that is, to deconstruct the statistics and make them meaningful to people.

As a background report to discussions of live release angling, it is beyond the purpose and scope of this report to either fully account for or “unpack” the economic significance of angling in the Yukon. However, it is important to establish some orders of magnitude as a reference in furthering our understanding of the roles and impacts of angling in the Yukon.

The 1995 survey broke this aspect of angling down into major expenditures and investments, and direct expenditures (see tables 4 and 5). The total of these two components in 1995 was

Expenditures	Resident	Non-resident Canadian	Non-resident non-Canadian	Total
Fishing equipment	\$391,101	\$25,596	\$74,622	\$491,320
Boating equipment	\$3,028,472	\$399	\$14,205	\$3,043,075
Camping equipment	\$1,329,021	\$6,853	\$162,398	\$1,498,272
Special vehicles	\$2,445,909	\$26,078	\$605,182	\$3,077,169
Land and buildings	\$113,863	---	\$6,922	\$120,785
Other	\$184,049	\$13,088	\$51,246	\$248,383
Total	\$7,492,415	\$72,014	\$914,576	\$8,479,005
Total attributable to sport fishing	\$4,291,817	\$45,021	\$401,959	\$4,738,798

Table 4. Major expenditures and investments relating in whole or in part to recreational fishing in the Yukon, 1995.

approximately \$12 million. Of this, Yukoners spent 58% and non-residents spent the remainder which tended more towards food costs and services.

A different way to look at the economic importance of angling could be derived from another portion of the questionnaire. Here, 23% of non-resident anglers stated they would not have come to the Yukon at all if there were no fishing opportunities. Another 30% stated they would have spent a shorter time in the territory (see Table 6). A recent report by the Yukon Department of Tourism indicates that the total revenue from Yukon tourism in 1994 was

\$124 million, of which 9% or \$11.6 million was generated by tourists who were anglers. Although it is risky (but irresistible) to compare statistics from different sources, a total lack of fishing opportunities would have decreased the general tourist revenue from anglers by 23% or \$2.6 million.

While acknowledging the deficiencies of such exercises from the preceding information and speculation, it could be relevant to state that, for the purposes of this report, the economic value of angling in the Yukon runs to well over \$10 million annually.

Expenditures	Resident	Non-resident Canadian	Non-resident non-Canadian	Total
Lodging costs	\$38,698	\$192,057	\$356,234	\$586,989
Campsite fees	\$58,324	\$125,868	\$239,608	\$423,801
Food costs	\$1,015,288	\$543,896	\$811,892	\$2,371,077
Travel costs	\$1,134,073	\$590,399	\$1,143,940	\$2,868,413
Boat costs	\$331,626	\$33,903	\$52,028	\$417,557
Boat rental	\$38,534	\$5,753	\$162,227	\$206,514
Fishing supplies	\$321,135	\$82,079	\$122,328	\$525,542
Guide costs	\$34,606	\$4,751	\$46,297	\$85,653
License fees	\$102,128	\$60,124	\$121,998	\$284,249
Access fees	\$217	\$0	\$9,390	\$9,607
Other costs	\$24,353	\$18,176	\$74,141	\$116,671
Direct expenditures, total	\$3,098,983	\$1,657,006	\$3,140,082	\$7,896,072

Table 5. Direct expenditures made in the Yukon in 1995.

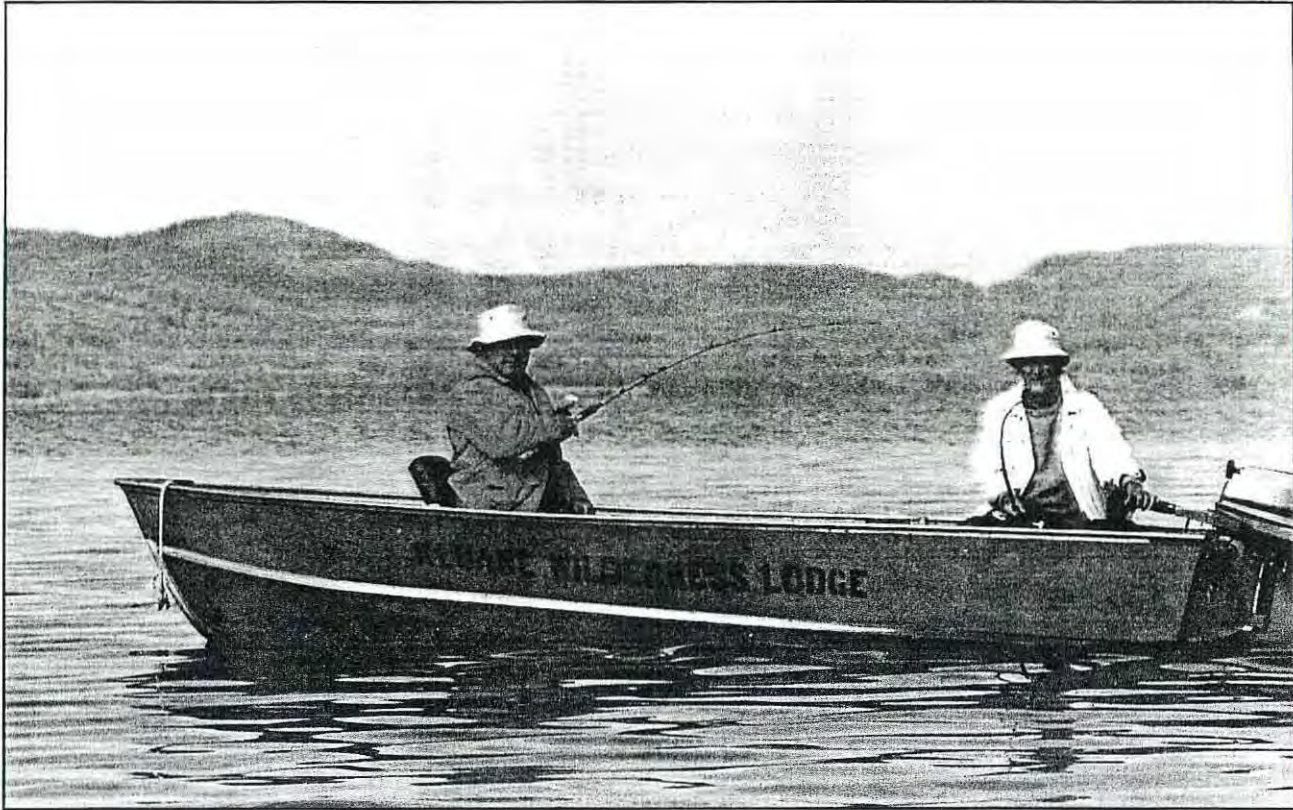
Activity	Non-resident Canadian	Non-resident non-Canadian
Stayed shorter time	10.2%	20.9%
Substituted other activities	84.6%	60.7%
Not come at all	5.2%	18.4%
Total	100%	100%

Table 6. Attitude of non-resident anglers if there had been no fishing opportunities in the Yukon, 1995

Additional comments made by the focus group

- Fishing is important to every hotel owner and vital to the survival of tourism in the Yukon.
- Tourists and visitors are looking for areas which promote live release angling.
- Guiding anglers provides economic diversification for people with income from several sources.

Current status of angling

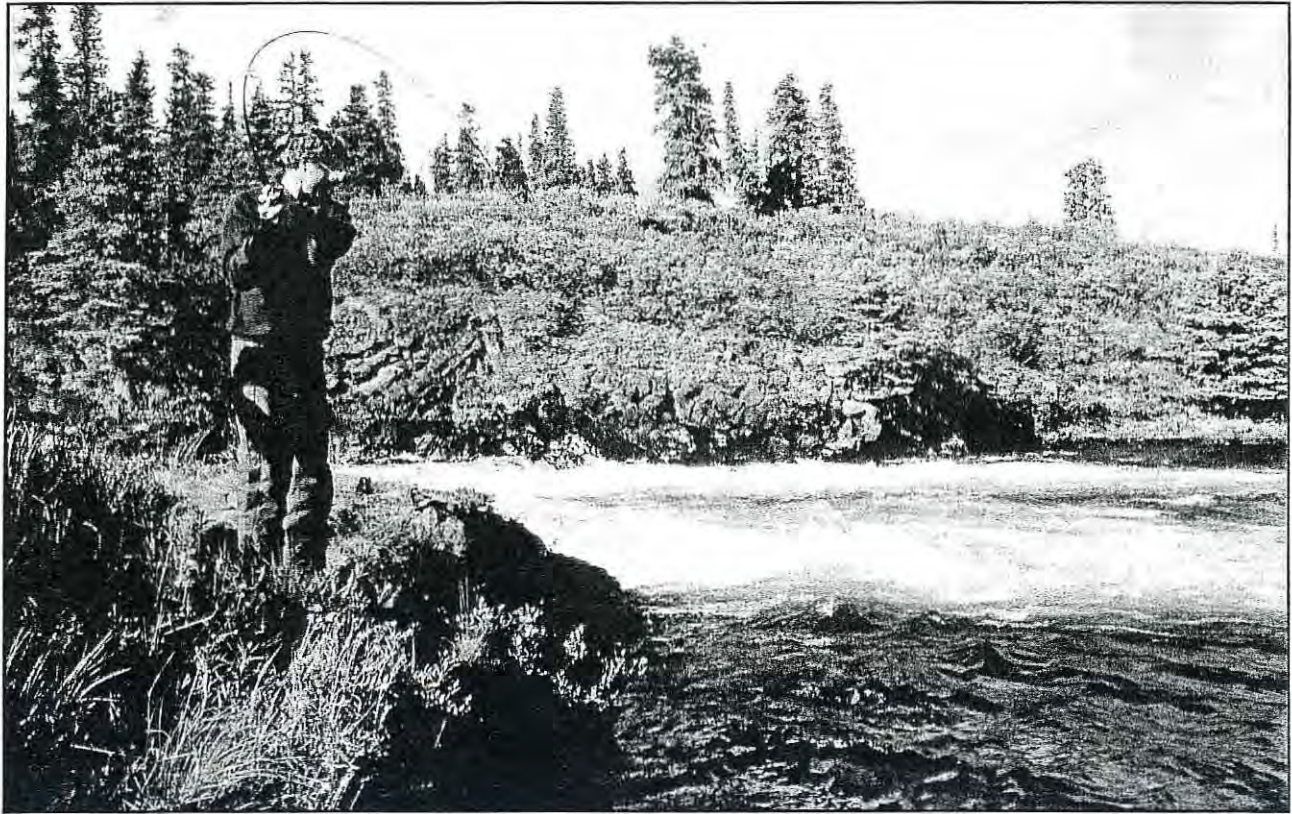


There has been much speculation about the status of angling in the Yukon. At the focus group a concern was expressed that, if interest in fishing declines, so will public support for maintaining fish stocks. The 1995 survey indicated a 6.6% decrease in the number of anglers across Canada from 1990 to 1995 and this was mainly Canadian residents. By comparison, the number of active anglers in the Yukon

increased by 2%. The activity of Yukon resident anglers increased by 1%, but the activity for non-residents decreased by 2.4% over the same period.

With respect to live release angling, across Canada, anglers in 1995 released 55% of all fish caught compared to 48% in 1990. For the Yukon, in particular, anglers released 72% of all fish caught in 1995, compared to 67% in 1990.

Recommendations



The angler's focus group was convened in order to provide background for the development of recommendations on live release angling. In discussing the social and economic values of angling in the Yukon, many recommendations arose on these topics as well. These have been included in this report to stimulate public comment and response.

These recommendations are not to be construed as coming from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. The board will only develop recommendations following full consultation with the public. This document and its companion documents represent the first phase.

Methods

- Send recommendations to TV shows regarding instruction on proper live release methods.
- Promote TV shows that demonstrate proper live release methods.
- Target live release instruction towards successful "business people" whose perceptions of fishing are changing.
- Pay special attention to the Dalton Post situation.
- Require anglers to take a live release course in order to get a license.
- Hold live release workshops.
- Decide whether the territory goes barbless or not so that retailers can order appropriate tackle.

Recommendations

- Review present barbless hook regulations.
- All anglers must carry needle nose pliers to fix their own hooks.
- Emphasize the positive aspects of live release rather than the negative.
- Hold a public education campaign regarding use of treble and single hooks.
- Educate anglers about bringing fish up from deep water.
- Educate anglers on reducing playing time.
- Use landing time instead of playing time to emphasize bringing a fish safely to the angler.
- Extend public workshops on fishing, moose and bear hunting into communities.
- Reduce public confusion about status of live release.
- Do not curtail live release angling as it will hurt businesses.
- Do not recommend a number of fish that can be live released as it will limit tourist interest.
- Promote either stopping fishing when you reach your limit or moving on to another species, another lake or another activity.
- Promote single hook use.
- Revise regulations to show people what they should be doing.
- Promote the fact that catching, keeping and eating a fish is also a healthy thing to do.
- Revise regulations to recognize fish as a food source and show responsible means of harvesting them.
- Emphasize respect for the resource and do not dwell on poor treatment of fish by anglers.
- Revise regulations to emphasize that fishing is a valid component of all cultures which express respect in their own way.
- Revise regulations to provide appropriate examples of respectful methods from a variety of cultures.
- Change regulations title from “Sport Fishing” to “Licensed Angling.”
- Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board should produce public service announcements on anglers’ responsibilities.
- Put more emphasis on the benefits of angling in fostering a healthy society — a little humour would help.
- Ethical decisions should not appear in regulations.

Ethics

- Emphasize the value of fish as a food source instead of just concentrating on the sport and recreational values.

Enforcement

- Make regulations simple enough so they are easy to understand and follow.
- Dalton Post is too crowded. Expand the area to reduce confrontation. Recognize increased costs of enforcement, but the impact of increased harvest by anglers must also be considered.
- Expand Klukshu area to reduce conflicts.
- Do not want regulation signs all over the place.
- Regulations should work like a car license to reinforce the principle of privilege.

- Connect issuing license with public education.
- Do not make up rules that have no possibility of being enforced, e.g. what kind of limits can you put on live release for a particular lake?
- Need to provide “enforcement” with the means of being effective.
- Use “fireside” approach to make sure people get licenses.

Conservation

- Promote conservation by encouraging anglers to diversify their interests to include whitefish, inconnu, burbot, arctic char, rainbow trout and salmon.
- Encourage the stocking of pothole lakes.
- Redirect fishing activities to other lakes to decrease pressure on the most popular ones.
- Kathleen Lake should be avoided in the fall.
- Tell anglers that whitefish only go for special fly tackle.
- Not sufficient to tell people to avoid spawning areas. Need to tell them what else to do.
- Suggest alternatives that allow people to continue fishing with less impact on the fish, e.g. if you just want to see if you can get a fish to bite use tackle with no hook after you have caught your limit.
- Some lodges only allow fish to be taken if they are damaged.
- Need to harmonize our conservation values and create a cooperative social climate around fish and wildlife management.
- Promote youth interest in fishing, e.g. have a youth’s voice on the public service announcements.
- Distribute angling information to other groups and encourage them to get the message out, e.g. Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce.
- Examine possibility of bringing all retailers together to inform them of these issues.
- Create a major public awareness campaign with a consistent and unified message from the Yukon Fish and Game Association (YFGA), government departments, YFWMB, guides and retailers.
- Use billboards and posters to promote ethics.
- Provide a program for the schools; kids will tell their parents about responsible actions.
- Include other methods of fishing than just angling when determining how to manage impacts on a resource.
- Analyse all forms of fishing and their role in utilizing and conserving the resource.
- Create a straightforward and consistent message for use by tourism organizations.
- Create stronger promotion of conservation message such as work done by the YFGA on rebuilding fish stocks and habitats.
- Fish populations are declining in some of the most accessible areas and any of the overharvest problems are access related.
- Address specific problem areas with special solutions.
- Inform the public about the importance of angling based on relevant statistics.
- Keep an enhance fish module in the hunter education program.

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