

Fishing Guide Advisory Committee

September 26, 2023, 2:30-5:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Introduction

Raquel identified Committee members and WDFW staff on the call along with Kimberly Gordon a consultant helping synthesize guide regulations in other states. Raquel reviewed the meeting agenda.

Participants

DFW Employees: Raquel Crosier, Chris Donley, Leah Snyder, Jim Scott

Advisors: Blake Merwin, Doug Saint-Denis, Bob Kratzer, Toby Wyatt, Jeff Brazda, Jan Patricio, Ryan Bullock, Keith Robbins, Roy Morris, Patric Gaffney,

Other Attendees: Kimberly Gordon, Jonathan Stumpf

Hot Topics

Concerns were voiced about repairs and improvements needed at agency boat launch sites, particularly Vernita Bar. It was mentioned that a local guide group offered to donate their time and equipment to do the work. There has been a discussion around the possibility of applying for grants to fund the necessary work. The group discussed the permitting process and challenges associated with doing work outside of the footprint of the launch. Raquel and Chris offered to look into options at Vernita Bar.

Guide Regulation Discussion

During the meeting, the advisory committee revisited ideas on regulations for guides to get input on how well they achieve the values and objectives the committee has been working towards and which accommodate the diversity and needs of guide businesses operating in Washington State.

The committee discussed four main themes routinely acknowledged as issues with certain high-volume fisheries. These themes are distribution and equity of fishing opportunity, professionalism and safety, crowding and quality of experience, and accountability and enforcement. The values adopted around the problem statements include:

- To improve distribution and equity of fishing opportunities for all anglers.
- To reduce overcrowding and improve the quality of experience for all anglers.
- To improve accountability and enforcement for the guide industry.
- To implement standards that increase the professionalism and reputation of the guide industry and ensure safety for guided anglers.

The staff outlined four packages with different combinations of the ideas the committee has been discussing. The packages range from comprehensive of all ideas but more complex to implement, to just a few ideas and simpler to implement. The first option, Option 1, is the most comprehensive package, requiring both legislative and regulatory changes. The legislative items

that require RCW change would include: restructuring licenses, moving to limited entry for salmon, steelhead and sturgeon guides, increased license requirements and fees, additional permits/endorsements and increased accountability on guides for violations made by their clients. The regulatory items require WAC change and include limiting guides from fishing in popular fisheries for resident and non-resident guides with time/area restrictions or a limit on the number of trips allowed to be taken a day, and a limitation on guides fishing and retaining fish while guiding.

Option 2 would exclude the license restructuring and additional required permits and endorsements, making it more straightforward for implementation purposes. Options 3 and 4 include only regulatory changes, no legislative action.

WDFW staff walked through an initial attempt to measure how each package would achieve the committees values and objectives and asked for input from the group as the group walked through each option.

The group reviewed each option and there was a lot of good input provided by committee members.

- The group did not like the idea of restricting access or increasing fees on non-residents. There was discussion around larger guide businesses relying on non-resident guides and the small proportion of non-resident guides.
- The group provided perspectives for and against going to limited entry. Some guides who also have charter licenses described that new guides could still get in buy buying a limited license off of another fisher or buying an unlimited non-salmon, steelhead and sturgeon license. They also mentioned that for charters going limited entry increased the value of their license. There were concerns voiced by larger operations that operate like an outfitter about who would own the license, the guide or the business. Those businesses are currently buying the license and insurance for their guides and want to be able to rotate which staff are guiding on the license year-to year.
- The group voiced concerns about special use permits and any limitations on their ability to move around the state to access different fisheries. They asked for a deeper dive into locations so they can provide input on crowding in those fisheries.
- The group voiced concerns with guides and crew being able to fish while guiding. They need to be able to have a rod out to show clients different techniques but there was less concern with guide retention of a fish while guiding.

The group discussed the need to think more about these options and committed to getting back to staff with ideas over the coming month. Agency staff committed to coming back with more information about how special use permits work in other states, a list of waterbodies to think

about and a refined set of options based on the discussion. Agency staff also offered to look into the mechanics of limited entry and how a cap vs limited entry might work and how transferring and assigning license to a business vs an individual might work.

OP Steelhead Petition Update

Jim Scott, Special Assistant to the Director joined the group to provide an update on the petition to list Olympic Peninsula Steelhead. He talked through the process for NOAA's review of the petition, the timing and analysis being conducted by their biological review team. He mentioned that there have been three large meetings with the biological review team, co-managers, and NOAA to discuss the findings. Additionally, there were five watershed review meetings, where individuals involved met on a smaller scale to examine specific watershed intricacies. These meetings occurred from June through early July, and during that time, WDFW responded to requests for data from NOAA. WDFW had significant engagement with co-managers, which allowed them to fulfill these requests. NOAA expects to complete its technical analysis by November, pending a government shutdown. WDFW anticipates the project's completion by the end of the year. If the findings show that an ESA listing is warranted, they will issue a draft notice with a year-long public comment period before making final decisions. The outcome of the decision will not impact this seasons steelhead fisheries.

Next Steps

The Fishing Guide Advisory Committee has scheduled its next meeting for December 5, 2023, via Zoom from 2:30 to 5 p.m. Additionally, there was a request to hold a meeting before then to discuss Coastal Steelhead seasons.