

Cold Lake – Lake Trout Regulation Working Group

Terms of Reference

1.0. Background

Cold Lake is a unique aquatic ecosystem and is an important contributor to the quality of life for local communities and the local and regional economy. The area has been a popular recreation destination for tourists from across the province and even the country. The opportunity for accessible and convenient lake trout fishing is an attractive draw for many anglers.

Lake trout populations in Alberta are predominantly limited to high elevation regions (such as the Rocky, Caribou, and Birch Mountains), along with several remote populations contained within the Canadian Shield in the extreme northeast of the province. There are very few boreal lentic habitats that support lake trout populations. These include Cold, Peerless, and Grist Lakes while Touchwood and Lesser Slave lakes had lake trout populations that have been extirpated.

After the collapse of the Cold Lake lake trout population in the 1940's, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), with the participation of anglers and Indigenous fishers has been working to recover the lake trout population. Recent index netting shows that population levels are now sufficient to explore the opportunity for increased levels of recreational harvest. Cold Lake will follow the same Fisheries Management policies as the rest of the province, which includes a prioritized allocation approach to conservation.

The department is committed to engage and collaborate with local stakeholders to learn about their values, needs, and interests, and to provide opportunity for input and collective wisdom in developing new options for a recreational harvest regulation for lake trout through a working group. Working groups have been useful forums for AEP recreation management initiatives in the past to improve collaboration and receive advice from stakeholders to inform management actions.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Working Group is to provide advice, ideas, input, expertise, and feedback to Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) to develop new lake trout harvest regulation options for Cold Lake. The Working Group will bring together a broad spectrum of local parties interested in the community and angling opportunities with other stakeholders. The group will identify and explore management options, learn about fisheries management strategies and challenges, and support the development of draft recommendations. The group provides an opportunity for participants to collaborate, exchange information and ideas, recommend solutions, and advise on opportunities from the perspective of the members. This group will not decide on the final regulation.

AEP will lead the Working Group as the regulatory decision-maker and will provide overall guidance and direction to the process. The proposals for regulation options will be developed through a collaborative process to ensure the perspectives and priorities of all participating stakeholders and organizations are considered. To promote such engagement and collaboration, the Working Group will consist of various representatives of recreational users and interest groups, municipal governments, and other stakeholders to provide advice, input, and suggestions into the development of harvest regulations. The decision to approve the final suite of options will remain the responsibility of Alberta Environment and Parks. The approved options will be included in the annual public engagement prior to the start of the 2023-24 recreational angling season.

3.0. Mandate

In collaboration with the AEP fisheries management team, the specific mandate of the Working Group is to support finding sportfishing regulatory options for lake trout that best serve the needs of all lake users. Working Group participants will achieve this mandate by:

- Recommending potential regulation options and provide feedback on potential options recommended by other working group members. Representatives of stakeholder groups should represent the opinions of their group membership including themselves.
- Acting as a sounding board in reviewing proposals, exploring options to overcome barriers, and evaluating the acceptable risks/benefits of management actions.
- Advising AEP on angler/community member use and experiences relating to the lake trout fishery at Cold Lake.
- Providing feedback on the potential outcomes of proposed regulations on the sustainability of the lake trout population at Cold Lake.

4.0 Scope

The following topics are in scope of this Working Group:

- Discussion, questions, comments, and proposals related to the development of a sustainable lake trout harvest regulation for Cold Lake.
- Discussion related to science, monitoring, and reporting of the state of the Cold Lake trout fishery.
- Discussion and questions related to the regulation development process, including partnerships involved and the enforcement of regulations.
- Discussion, questions, and comments related to the setting of management objectives.
- Discussion, questions, comments related to the priority of allocation of Alberta's fish resources and Cold Lake fish resources to users. Note: changes to allocation priority are not in scope.

The following topics are out of scope of this Working Group:

- Questions from the focus group regarding other waterbodies or species. In the interest of time-management, the focus group will only discuss lake trout management at Cold Lake. Participants are encouraged to approach biologists with any additional questions outside of sessions.
- Changes to Alberta's fisheries resource allocation priorities.
- Programming and initiatives outside of AEP's Fisheries Management (participants will be directed to connect with the appropriate Department or agency).
- Questions regarding changes to Indigenous Domestic Fisheries Regulations and Conditions. The Working Group will focus solely on sportfishing regulations.
- Commercial gill netting. The Government of Alberta has no intention of revisiting the decision to end commercial fishing in the province.

5.0. Responsibilities

The Working Group is responsible for providing advice to AEP staff and for bringing forward the interests and perspectives of respective member organizations and constituencies. Members are expected to be active participants, engage in discussion, and contribute. The following general topics represent the responsibilities of the Working Group, with additional topics added as necessary:

- Members will understand the process and scope of work through the review and acceptance of the Terms of Reference and commit to moving forward together as a team.
- Members are accountable to their membership communities by relaying information and seeking advice. Regular contact is recommended.
- Members will make every effort to attend all Working Group meetings and be prepared to participate.
 - If a member is unable to attend a meeting, a delegate may be selected or alternative methods of participation may be made available (via teams or zoom, through email after).
- Members will work collaboratively and be open to a variety of ideas and views shared by others through the planning process.

6.0. Guiding Principles

The Working Group will operate under the following guiding principles:

- Work constructively, collaboratively, and in an inclusive manner.
- Participate openly and honestly. Respect the opinions and perspectives of others.
- Allow and encourage others to contribute to open and transparent discussions.
- Strive for consensus-based decision-making.
- Base decisions on the best available scientific information where possible.
- Integrate social, economic and environmental values.
- Be aware of and respect government legislation and policies, including existing authorizations and approvals under the Fisheries Act and associated regulations
- Respect First Nation's Treaty Rights and Traditional Uses.
- Recognize diverse and conflicting realities of the other sectors.
- Recommendations will consider the Fisheries Management allocation approach to conservation, Indigenous harvest, recreational use, then primary commercial use.
- All members of the Working Group will respect and follow the Meeting Rules of Conduct identified in the Terms of Reference.

Working Group members will strive to observe the following working assumptions, extracted from Alberta's Approach of Collaborative Practice:

Everyone has wisdom
We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result
There are no wrong answers
The whole is greater than the sum of its parts
Everyone will hear others and be heard
You can always change

Meeting Rules of Conduct

Rules of conduct are a set of expected behaviors during the Working Group meetings. They will keep discussions productive and make certain that everyone is heard, and that Working Group members work together toward a greater understanding. These guidelines also apply to conversations about the Working Group meetings in the broader community.

Three of the most important rules of conduct for this working group are:

1. **Respect:**

Members are expected to show respect for each other's time, personal integrity, perspective, contribution and priorities. Respect means listening carefully with the intent of clearly understanding what the other is saying before responding. It means treating one another with professional cordiality, even if there is disagreement on a topic.

2. **Seek Clarification:**

Members will seek clarification on questions, roles, intent and direction in a manner that focusses on solutions and greater understanding. This enables the team to shift from monologues and arguments to a conversation in which members can understand everyone's point of view and be curious about the differences in their views. Members will show a willingness to adapt with new knowledge and changing conditions, while remaining consistent with the spirit and intent of management plans.

3. **Transparent Communication:**

Members will focus on open, collaborative, respectful and transparent communication within the Working Group, to the Department, and with the public.

The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring a strong, inclusive, healthy and respectful workplace that is free of harassment, violence and discrimination. The Government of Alberta will not tolerate harassment or violence in the workplace from anyone and is committed to eliminating and doing everything reasonably practicable to prevent this inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour.

7.0. Governance and Decision Making

The governance structure and process for the Working Group and Alberta Environment and Parks is as follows:

- The AEP Team leading the Working Group are responsible for planning activities, collaboration and coordination with stakeholders, gathering information, technical assessment and presentation of proposal evaluations.
- The Working Group will provide advice to the department on potential lake trout harvest regulations. This advice will be discussed during the meeting, recognizing that consensus may not be achieved on the overall advice, and that the department will review all input carefully.
- Working Group members are expected to represent the interests of their organizations and constituents to ensure that proposed solutions or recommendations are acceptable to all.
- The Working Group will work towards consensus to make recommendations that serve as many of the stakeholders as possible. Given that stakeholders are representing a variety of interests, full consensus may not be reached.
 - If consensus cannot be reached, the Working Group will discuss draft recommendations and document the elements where consensus could not be achieved. Organizations with opposing views should express their objections, which will be incorporated into the final recommendations.
- The decision to approve the final regulation options for provincial public engagement will remain the responsibility of Alberta Environment and Parks.
- The final regulation decision is based on the provincial public engagement and the Minister of the Environment.

8.0. Working Group Membership

Alberta Environment and Parks will establish the Working Group membership:

- The Committee will consist of representatives of key stakeholders.
- Stakeholder groups are encouraged to nominate one representative who can participate in all four Working Group meetings.
- Members are expected to represent the views of themselves, their organization and the community. Members may want to discuss the Working Group with members of their organizations to solicit feedback and recommendations. Participants will be made aware if there is something confidential that should not be shared with the public. A website will be set up on Alberta.ca to share progress and information publicly, along with information being shared on My Wild Alberta Facebook.
- Members will abide by the collaborative working process of the Working Group.
- Members who believe that they are no longer able to participate in good faith, based on the Terms of Reference, are expected to voluntarily withdraw from the Group. An alternate will be chosen to participate in their place by their organization or by AEP.
- The Department reserves the right to dismiss Working Group members who do not abide by the Terms of Reference and intent of the process.

To ensure an effective and workable committee, the Working Group will have a maximum of twelve members. Working Group invitees will include:

1. The City of Cold Lake
2. The M.D. of Bonnyville
3. The Cold Lake Chamber of Commerce
4. Beaver River Fish & Game (representing the Alberta Fish and Game Association)
5. The Cold Lake Fish and Game Club
6. A local angling guide to represent the viewpoint of the guiding community
7. A local angling expert with strong connections to the provincial angling community
8. Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation
9. Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
10. 2-4 members of the local angling community, including perspectives of both summer and winter anglers.

9.0. Meetings and Process

- The AEP Planning Team anticipates holding four meetings with the Working Group over a period of three to four months in the fall of 2022.
- Meetings will be held on an agreed upon schedule and will, depending on the circumstances, be held: in-person, online, or a combination of in-person and online.
- A facilitator will chair meetings.
- The AEP Planning Team will set the agenda and add items at their discretion. In advance of each meeting, agenda items will be solicited, and an agenda and associated materials will be emailed. A rough outline of the plan for meetings is as follows:
 - Meeting 1: Introductions, review Terms of Reference, provide an overview of the current lake trout status information, and discuss next steps including criteria for regulation suggestions.
 - Meeting 2: Members present regulation suggestions, group discussion.
 - Meeting 3: Present and discuss the results of models and review.
 - Meeting 4: Summarize and group recommendation of final options
- Although consensus is desired, it is not required. All input will be considered in decisions made by the department.
- The Working Group will dissolve with the completion and submission of recommendations for final potential regulation options to AEP.
- The Working Group will have the opportunity to provide feedback on this process and their experience through a private survey.

10. Alberta Environment and Parks Planning Team Role

The AEP Planning Team consists of Fisheries Management staff including fisheries biologists, and Education and Engagement staff. The AEP team will:

- Provide accurate, timely and understandable information to Working Group members such that they can contribute informed advice and recommendations to the planning process.
- Listen carefully to the advice and perspectives of members, and where feasible, incorporate advice into the planning process.
- Chair and facilitate Working Group meetings.

- Provide a public summary report.
- The final recommendations for regulation change will be sent to the Working Group prior to the launch of the public engagement.
- Provide an opportunity for Working Group members to evaluate and provide feedback on the process/committee itself.