



Arctic Development

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The "interim Report Management Plan For
The Great Bear Lake Fishery"***

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POSITION PAPER

GREAT BEAR LAKE LODGES
On the " INTERIM REPORT
MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE
GREAT BEAR LAKE FISHERY"

Page

INTRODUCTION	1
AGENCY GOALS	2
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES	3
FISHERY MANAGEMENT ISSUES - Domestic Fishing	4
Lodge Access Sports Fishery	5
Itinerant Sports Fishery	10
Commercial Fishery	11
Management of Resource Use Conflict	13
-- Management Plan and Land Claims Negotiations	14
SUMMARY	15

I. INTRODUCTION

The "Position Paper" on the "Interim Report Management Plan for the Great Bear Lake Fishery" is documented by Qaiivvik Ltd. on behalf of the Great Bear Lake lodge owners and the Travel Industry Association of the N.W.T. Although there are many issues concerning the future of Great Bear Lake in relation to the sportsfishing lodges, we have attempted to keep our comments and format within the context of the "Interim Management Plan".

The lodge owners of Great Bear Lake lodges appreciate this forum as a means of replying to the draft "Management Plan for the Great Bear Lake Fishery". The comments in this "Position Paper" are those of the lodge owners and generally those of the TIA of the N.W.T.

Although we were led to believe differently, we find that the people of Fort Franklin did not instigate the study for Great Bear Lake, but are responding to the study the same as the lodges. The Management Plan was initiated by the Department of Fisheries in conjunction with the N.W.T. Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

The lodge owners were solicited for their comments verbal and written during the fall after which a rough draft was submitted to them before the Nov/84 Travel Industry Association meeting in Fort Smith. At that time, the lodge owners met with Ben Hubert, the consultant for the Ft. Franklin Hand. The meeting, primarily to discuss the "Interim Report Management Plan for the Great Bear Lake Fishery" as well as the overall views of the lodge owners of those of the Fort Franklin people on the future of Great Bear Lake, was very positive.

A second draft of our "Position Paper" was then circulated to lodge owners for final comment.

Qaiivvik Ltd. wishes to thank Jamie Mac Kendrick, Department of Economic Development and Tourism; Bill Tait, Manager, Travel Industry Association; and especially the lodge owners themselves for their contributions.

(AGENCY GOALS

As four of the five operational lodges on Great Bear Lake are owned by Canadian%, we cannot argue with the goal of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; that "the fish resource of Great Bear Lake make their largest contribution to the economic and social welfare of Canada subject to the requirement of resources being conserved. "

We strongly feel that as Canadians, we have developed and are continuing to develop our lodges as an economic and social contribution to the NWT, but, more importantly? to Canada.

We are concerned that any or all programs or department= relating to the fishery are efficient and the the fishery itself is efficient and profitable both economically and socially.

Continued liaison between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the lodge owner%, people of Fort Franklin and other government departments is essential.

FISHERY...MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES'

Little can be said about established fishery management principles as outlined in the initial section of the interim report.

F-I, SHERY MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Domestic Fishery

The current informal agreement between Fisheries and Oceans and the people of Fort Franklin regarding use of resources for domestic use is, in our view, satisfactory. We would stress, however, observation of the areas used by the lodges so as to keep overlap use to a minimum.

We do not expect an increase in 'Fort Franklin's domestic needs and assume that no other NWT community would fish Great Bear Lake for domestic purposes - due strictly to location.

Subsidized fishing, whether domestic or commercial, is not, we feel, the approach to take.

Monitoring of the domestic harvest could "only assist in the long term management of Great Bear Lake. This, we assume, would be accomplished with minimal effort.

Lodge Access Sports Fishery

In choosing between a choice of:

- i) whether to manage for a maximum yield of larger fish, or
- 2) maximum sustainable fish (more, smaller fish)

we feel that management for yield of larger, i.e. trophy fish, is essential.

We are concerned that the reference to choice of management strategy for fishing quality may adversely change the number of anglers, fishing effort, and total lodge harvests.

Our #1 concern is the present and future condition of the fishery resource on Great Bear Lake. This has been, and will continue to be, foremost in our minds. To overfish any part of the lake would, in the medium and long term, be a detriment to our own business. We need a continued healthy resource; it is essential to our staying in business! We not only require a healthy resource, we more specifically require a healthy resource of large trophy fish. For many years now, our lodges have co-operated fully with the Federal Dept. of Fisheries on any program which will tell us more about our resource and any program that allows for lower catch and possession limits. One lodge has a policy in effect now of no fish taken except for shore lunches and lodge meals. Great Bear Lodge, for example, in 1934 took a season total of 300 fish, 70 of which were trophies. Approximately 2,000 lake trout were, however, caught and released every week during the eight week season.

From recent Federal Fisheries findings, the stock of Great Bear fish are in good shape, primarily due to decreasing pressure by our lodges. If any change of direction were suggested, we would support decreased overall fishing pressure on Great Bear Lake to ensure stocks of trophy trout indefinitely.

No additional lodges or camps should be allowed on Great Bear Lake (EM cept ing Sat -Tu ' 5 potent ial). As stipulated in the Interim Report and by the Commissioner in the 1960's, there is no area for future expansion for either outpost camps or lodges. Although the lake is large, the lodges are presently spread around the lake so as to fully utilize the resource potential. An increased number of fishermen on the lake could have an effect on the resource as well as the marketability of the product.

The prime attraction for the market is "wilderness trophy fishing"; it is critical that the wilderness aspect remain intact. Any new lodges, camps or even out-fitting operations would be a detriment to the concept of fishing in a wilderness situation,

For years there has been a verbal agreement as to areas each lodge will fish. The area of general interest to the people of Fort Franklin has also been understood. However, to alleviate any chance of fishing area disputes, it is a suggestion to clearly define those areas.

We agree that any future sports fishery development on Great Bear Lake should be kept within the confines of the existing licenced lodges, including Sah-Tu. However, there are a number of options for interested parties to become involved in the sports fishery on Great Bear Lake:

1. purchase outright of any existing facility;
2. purchase part of an existing facility; or
3. joint ventures.

We encourage and support local Dene groups, especially from Fort Franklin, Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake, etc., to become increasingly involved in the sports fishery in terms of employment (guides, cooks, cleaners, assistant managers, etc.), and also in terms of ownership.

There is an acute lack of understanding of the lodge business, primarily by Dene people, but also by government officials. Many non-lodge people understand the lodge business to open July 1 and close at the end of August"; few comprehend the marketing, booking, ordering, expediting and so on that takes place the balance of the year.

With respect to employment, some lodges do employ a large number of Dene staff, while others do not. Success with native guides, cooks and various other staff has not, in some areas, been good, and for a variety of reasons. We are, however, willing to take on a larger percentage of Dene staff if Government provides some concrete assistance in terms of specific program funds for us to do our own guide training programs. All lodge owners do have some form of guide training/lodge introduction but additional "awareness", "hosts", "introduction to tourism", "first aid", and other programs would do a great deal to assist lodges in hiring locally and maintaining a higher percentage of NWT staff.

The needs of the North American sports fishing market do change slightly from year to year. The lodge owners and Federal Fisheries should maintain close contact to ensure fish resources and marketing techniques coincide. We must give the sportsfishing market what it wants!

We should emphasize that the reason for the success of our lodges is due not only to excellent Trophy Wilderness Sportsfishing but also to the service and hospitality of all staff shown to the sport fishermen -our guests. Return customers and word of mouth advertising, from past customers is critical. We strive to keep all customers as satisfied as possible. We cannot afford to have problems with inhospitable? careless and unreliable staff.

Some of Great Bear lodges hire mostly Dene staff primarily from Fort Franklin and Fort Good Hope, others have a few or no Dene whatsoever. All lodges have, however, given local Dene first chance at jobs over the years, and hired Dene with varying and sometimes limited success. Whoever is hired, our "quality" reputation ie. foremost in our mind.

We agree that there is a need to manage the resource for both:

- 1) Resource revenues; and
- 2) Employment and regional incomes.

Although as private lodges we operate, as any business does, for a profit, we do recognize the need for increased local employment and benefits. These benefits should, however, be earned, i.e. meaningful employment, not subsidization.

We are totally against measures such as increased fishing licence fees, trophy fish royalties, and negotiated fishing leases, as suggested if management was for strictly "resource revenues".

On the other hand, managing strictly for "employment and regional incomes" is of little relevance to a sports fishing lodge being operated as a small business seeking a profit.

The average marketing expenditure per year for each of the Great Bear lodge% is now in the area of \$35,000. For five lodges a 1984 net figure of \$275,000 is more than 1/2 of the total TravelArctic budget to be spent on the whole of the N.W.T. for the same period. As the lodges have been operating for fifteen years, the amount of promotional/marketing efforts, goodwill, word of mouth and repeat customers to the NWT as a direct result of Great Bear lodges has been considerable. No other single (or combined) component of the travel industry in the NWT has brought such extensive business to the north over the years.

The majority of all lodge expenses, except for air-lines, marketing and some key staff wages, are spent in the NWT.

Contrary to popular belief, the lodge businesses, even the long established lodges in Et-eat Bear, are not large "profit makers". In the 1960's, profits could be made with the lodges at 60-70% capacity, but in the 1980's with escalating expenses, profits are usually only made if occupancy rates are 90%+ - an extremely difficult challenge in today's competitive industry.

Regulatory mechanisms are required for the long term life of the fishery; however, we do not wish to become entangled in an ever-increasing number of regulations and regulatory bodies.

AS the future of the fishery resource is our #1 priority, we feel increased research, not just "creel census", should be initiated. Further discussions should be held between Federal Fisheries and our lodges regarding further in-depth research.

Itinerant Sports Fishery

There is presently very little itinerant sportsfishing ON Great Bear Lake, and we see no foreseeable increase in the next 10 - 20 years due to high transportation costs from communities with float planes. We would, however, expect the Departments of Economic Development & Tourism, Fisheries, and Renewable Resources, to continue pol'icing Great Bear Lake to ensure that "no illegal outfitting (i.e. paid fishermen flying in a 1-win Otter from Norman Wells) is allowed.

We feel at this time that any Canadian residents should have the opportunity of open access to sports fishing throughout the NWT, including Great Bear Lake; in ac'tual fact, however, we expect very few to take advantage of this on Great Bear Lake.

Commercial Fishing

From discussions with the Fort Franklin people and some Federal Fisheries contacts, we found that the development of a commercial fishery is not a priority project for that community, contrary to what is stated in the draft Management Plan.

The Fort Franklin people realize a commercial fishery is not economically viable and that it could, in the long run, seriously effect the fish stocks of Great Bear Lake. It seems that people outside of Fort Franklin have been more interested in a commercial fishery than the people in Fort Franklin!

It seems ludicrous to pursue the option of commercial fishing when:

- 1) the local people are not 100% in favour of it;
- 2) there is no "economic rent"
- 3) it is not a viable operation;
- 4) it adversely effects the already established economically viable sports fishing lodges, and will effect future development of Sah-Tu lodge; and,
- 5) there is limited information on the resource in the area of potential development.

It is a well-known fact that commercial fishing can, and will, ruin a sports fishing lake, the two are just not compatible. Numerous examples can be cited in northern Manitoba, central and northern Saskatchewan, Ontario as well as western Great Slave Lake.

Relocating suitable resources to competing uses is much simpler when the uses are limited. We would much prefer that the Fort Franklin people pursue the sports fishery either via Sah-Tu lodge, or in conjunction with one or more of the existing lodges than to pursue the commercial fishing option. In that way, economic returns can be realized while at the same time not adversely effecting the fish resource.

Great Bear Lake should be managed only for:

- 1) a domestic fishery for the Fort Franklin people; and
- 2) a sports fishery for the existing lodges, including Sah-Tu (Fort Franklin)

The Interim Management Report talks of assessing the benefits provided by a commercial fishery and goes on to indicate total benefits from Great Bear may be increased with a commercial fishery. The statement certainly contradicts other sections of the study that say commercial fishing is not economically viable. Why risk a valuable sports fishing industry for a non-viable commercial fishery?

Management of Resource Use Conflict

The Great Bear Lake lodge owners, being the primary source of economic contribution from Great Bear Lake resources, feel that we must have a say in both management and any resource use conflict. The "Interim Report Management Plan for the Great Bear Lake Fishery" was put together by four governmental agencies, while the actual resource users, i.e. lodge owners, people of Fort Franklin, were omitted from being.....directly involved in this process. We, as lodge owners, must have representation on any working group or advisory boards discussing the future of Great Bear Lake.

For purposes of management planning and resource use conflict, we suggest an advisory board consisting of one representative each from Fort Franklin, lodge owners, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Department of Economic Development & Tourism, Department of Indian & Northern Affairs, and the Department of Renewable Resources. This six person board would be responsible for all Great Bear Lake issues, the prime issue being the future of Great Bear Lake fish stocks.

Management Plan and Land Claims Negotiations

We agree that the fish resources of Great Bear Lake should make their greatest contribution economically and socially to Canadians - as present owners of the resource.

If, under the land claims process, someone other than "all Canadians" should own the resource, we ask that two points remain clear:

- 1) that the fishery resource and the future of it remains all-important;
- 2) that the existing lodge owners (as title holders or long-term lease holders) have long term established equity in their facilities, goodwill, and preservation of fish stocks of Great Bear Lake.

It should be noted here that some lodge owners have long-term leases while others have title or own outright their property on Great Bear Lake.

SUMMARY

In summary, we wish to emphasize our #1 concern is the present and future condition of the fishery resources on Great Bear Lake. We will continually strive to work with the people of Fort Franklin the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, and whoever else, to ensure fishery resources are maintained, and, if possible, improved. Management for a yield of larger trophy fish is essential. , ,

Economic and social benefits from utilization of Great Bear Lake resources should be developed primarily for Canadian%. Management of the resource can be for both:

- 1) resource revenues; and,
- 2) employment.

We support increased involvement by Fort Franklin in the sports fishing industry on Great Bear Lake, but are totally against any commercial fishing ventures.

The lodge owners look forward to an increasing responsibility in the management of Great Bear fishery resources.