2 The Tagish River Habitat Protection Area

SHORELINE, WATERFRONT USE AND ACCESS

Background: The Steering Committee has heard multiple concerns from Tagish residents regarding the shoreline, water use and access to the Tagish River. Use of ATVs and other vehicles in the river bed and along the shoreline have a high likelihood of affecting habitat and disturbing wildlife. There is a 30 metre setback from the ordinary high water mark inland that is an official public waterfront reserve, which should be free of private decks or buildings. Property owners are required to obtain a water lot lease in order to construct a private dock.

Interests: Those interested in this topic include Tagish residents and non-residents that use the shoreline, property owners that may or may not have a dock and/or boat, and those that want to enjoy being on the river without a powerboat.

30m Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) and Public Access

The Issue: Public land (below and above the OHWM) is blocked by lot owner improvements in front of their dwelling, preventing public access along the top of the bank of the river. Vegetation has been removed, bringing erosion concerns. The existing public access easements are overgrown and not marked.

Why this is an issue: The occupation and modification of the 30 m setback, meant for public access along the waterway, is not available for that purpose without crossing docks, decks and developed lawn area. This functionally prevents public access to the area.

Opportunities to move forward – what we've heard:

- Remind lot owners that they are not permitted to build or place infrastructure items in the setback area.
- Discuss and describe with property owners and public shoreline users the existence of this setback, and the access opportunity that it enables, so that everyone may enjoy and use the banks of the river.
- Clear and mark the existing public access roads and walkways in the area to allow public use of the river bank.
- Other (please include opportunities you think would mitigate the issue):

Docks

The Issue: There are both authorized and non-authorized (no lease in place) docks in the river throughout the planning area. There are 56 docks along the Tagish River, with only 5 having been issued a water lot lease to construct.

Why is this an issue: Docks can damage fish and wildlife habitat if they are built using hazardous materials, inappropriate design, block access to portions of habitat, restrict the flow of water through habitat, cover the bottom of the waterway, change aquatic plant growth, affect spawning habitat, or create the need to remove shoreline vegetation that is crucial in maintaining shoreline integrity.

For example, the techniques used to install concrete pilings can result in the destruction of aquatic vegetation in the area surrounding the dock. Vegetation is less likely to regenerate in the area surrounding a piling, as well as immediately under a dock, as the presence of the dock shades it out. Reducing the amount of light available to aquatic vegetation even by small amounts can have detrimental effects on their ability to survive. Spacing between planks on docks between one to two inches has little effect on allowing light through. Docks less than 30 – 40cm above the waterbody have the most significant effects on shading out vegetation below. Concrete pilings do have the potential to affect waterbody currents, creating a reduced flow immediately surrounding the dock, contributing to erosion and sedimentation around the structure. Hazardous materials used to construct docks have the potential to leach into the water, damaging habitat and water quality.

Opportunities to move forward – what we've heard:

- Recommend floating docks (docks that are not permanently affixed to either the bed of the water body or the foreshore) to improve access, as they do not impede use of the shoreline.
- Recommend communal use docks, to reduce the number of permanent docks, thereby reducing their impact to habitat.
- Have dock owners obtain the correct authorization for their dock, to ensure they are built to standards that reduce their effect on habitat.
- Have unpermitted docks removed, and look to other options for property owners to access their boats and the river. By centralizing the activity, a reduced impact on habitat along the shoreline would be realised.
- Other (please include options you think would mitigate the issue):