

June 12, 2020

TO:

Doug Donaldson, Minister FLNR
Carole James, Minister of Finance
Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism
Jennifer Davis, Director, Fish & Aquatic Habitat Branch
Paul Rasmussen, Assistant Deputy Minister FLNR
John Krebs, Regional Manager FLNR

We are a dedicated group of East Kootenay Angling guides who have been community based, small business operators, and are currently suffering from the economic out fall of the Covid pandemic. Please understand, as independent business owners, are not used to hand outs, stimulus packages, etc. and are happier working and looking after ourselves and our employees. It is unfortunate that the Covid pandemic has shut down to our ability to operate our spring seasons and now into our main summer season. It has become difficult to sit idle when we watch other industry being handed money and our requests for relief have gone unanswered as individuals. Well, we have united and as a group, we are asking that **Rod Day fees, tenure fees and licencing fees be forgiven for the current and following seasons.**

News this week of the USA Canada border closure extending until July and rumor that it will remain closed until September has deflated many outfitters aspirations of being able to salvage the losses taken up to this point. US clientele make up the majority of the guided anglers around 75% and in one case 100% of their business is from the US. With the USA border being closed we will experience an immediate loss of between 60 to 100% of our business customers being denied access to our services. Replacing these clients with locals will be challenging for numerous reasons. Firstly, US clients spend approximately 40% more on a daily basis than do Canadian clients. Having this group prevented from coming into Canada by a federal government decision and supported by the provincial government directly put responsibility on them. Secondly the uncertainty of a border decision prevents outfitters from canceling the US bookings prematurely until a decision is made. Most US clients want to come on their trips. So, booking Canadians into spots held by US anglers cannot happen until we are certain the US clients cannot come, and their trips are canceled. Keep in mind most outfitters were over 85% booked by March 1st

The request of relief of payment of these fees is relatively insignificant in relation to the revenue stream of the province, or in comparison to the value of many stimulus packages given to industry. However, it is of great value to the outfitters individually, who could definitely use this retained money now, as opposed to prepaying 45% of the rod day fees as is currently required.

The argument that many outfitters have paid their rod day/licence fees in advance is not relevant as some did so before March 13th fully anticipating having a normal year. Some have paid because of the fear on not getting their guide licences issued. Also, others paid because they are intimidated by the ministry because of the control they have on permits and rod days and licence issuing. In the East

Kootenays it is well known that licence issuing, permit applications and rod day transfers rarely go smooth or in a timely manner. Another issue to discuss at another time. Many of these payments already made were done on credit cards, utilizing lines of credit, or borrowed moneys because there was the anticipated influx of trip deposit money that has almost completely stopped since March.

The fact that an outfitter with a high percentage of out of country clients that have spots filled on their calendars cant make the decision to cancel completely with the intension of marketing the newly vacant spots to Locals and other Canadians because we don't know if the border extension will continue beyond announced dates.

Refunding deposits is a serious financial hit and moving these bookings to the following season is an option but it will prolong the financial suffering. Outfitters rely on deposits to get them through the slow periods to pay staff, attend trade shows, Market their experiences the offer and be able to take bookings and plan for the next season. The moved trips will reduce the new money from coming in prolonging the economic hard ship.

Now is the time outfitters would normally be taking the balance payments of the trips they have booked for the season. With all the uncertainty this cannot happen as we need to be fair to our may trusted and repeat clients. Now is not the time to be doling out fees to government who has made decisions beyond our control and is directly affecting our ability to operate. **Now is the time for government assist us with relief of rod day fees, land tenures and licencing fees resulting in a direct stimulus helping us survive through the financial disaster caused by the Covid pandemic and the governments management of it.**

There is obviously a disconnect from Government to our industry and region. Deferrals of fees do not help. Stimulus helps. It is time to let small tourism-based businesses get back to work. Government cannot continue supporting workers and not supporting business. Workers will need a place to go once the worker support is gone.

We can recover quickly if we are allowed to!

Representing 91% of the allocated guided rod days in the East Kootenays;

Paul Samycia, Elk River Guiding Company

Louis Musso, Ultimate West FlyFishing

Gordon Silverthorne, Kootenay Fly shop

Sam Medcalf, Elk Valley Bighorn Outfitters

Kelly Laatch, St Mary Angler

Andres Gonzales, Andres Fly Fishing

Kim Sedrovic, Fernie Wilderness Adventures

Bill Wilcox, Lost Creek Angler

Jeff Mironuck, Home Waters Guide Service

Jason Smith, Kootenay Troutfitters

Vic Bergman, Crowsnest Angler

Nathan Kelly, Kimberly Fly Fishing