

FNLFT Progress Report 03.2019

R. Laughton, 27/11/2019

The following report provides an up-date on activities from 31st July 2019 to 27th Nov 2019. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Tables (1 to 7).

Overall Management: I started work on reviewing and re-writing the river management plans for the Trust the rivers. An initial outline vision document was circulated at the last meeting and some comments have been received. Mark and I also had a very useful meeting with Andrew Wallace and Luke Cummin from the Tweed Forum to look at catchment management approaches and how that has developed in the Tweed and how this approach could be suitable for our area. I've also had a good look through other Trust/River plans including the Dee, Spey, Deveron etc. There is a considerable bit of work to do on this and I had hoped to progress more rapidly but it will be the main focus of work over the winter months. Memorandums of Understand are also been prepared for the Trust and both Boards and will be circulated shortly.

Equipment: The L200 Pick-Up has finally bit the dust! After 12 yrs and 150,000miles the latest report from the garage indicated that the prop-shift required replacement and a range of other major repairs were likely, well over the value of the vehicle! So I'm currently looking into a replacement potentially through a leasing scheme, estimated cost is around £300 per month but some further research required.

Our computers have also reached the end of the life, both run on Windows7 which will lose support in January and Valerie is looking into replacements.

1.1 Environment - Marine Environment/ Marine survival

AST Missing Salmon Project: Receivers have been uplifted and AST are now analysing the data for the tagged smolts.

Sean and I attended a meeting in September to review preliminary results, which indicated around two thirds of smolts were lost between tagging at the traps and passage through the river to the sea. The results from the Findhorn are still being analysed in detail but are showing a similar loss rate despite the smolts only having to swim 8km to reach the Moray Firth. The reasons for these losses are unclear but will include predator effects from birds, fish and mammals, some natural losses due their transition into sea water and other potential effects as yet unknown. The smolt tagging project will continue on the Moray Coast Rivers, including the Findhorn, in 2020 to repeat the numbers of smolts tagged and to examine the reasons for these losses in more detail.

To achieve this the AST has secured sufficient funds to continue the project. For the Findhorn this will provide funding for 50 smolts with the Findhorn Board again agreeing to cover the costs of an additional 50 tags. Board and Trust staff time will be provided to operate the smolt trap, collect data, tag smolts and assist with the placement of receivers. The trap will be install at Red Craig in early April 2020 to allow a direct comparison with the 2019 data.

For further details/updates on the AST Missing Salmon Project, [click here](#).

1.2 Environment Freshwater and Land Use

Findhorn-Lossie: A96 Dualling: Hardmuir – Fochabers Section: A joint bid with Brian Shaw (Spey) and Chas Emes (Aquaterra) to undertake the fish/habitat/invertebrate sampling at each of the river crossing points for the Findhorn, Lossie and Spey was prepared and submitted to Mott MacDonald Sweco in early August. Our bid was the only one submitted. A single tender cannot be accepted by Scottish Government so a different approach was explored with SWECO. This has resulted in Brian Shaw (Spey), myself and our support staff being incorporated into the SWECO environmental team to deliver the habitat, fish and invertebrate surveys and provide advice regarding the development of the dual carriageway. Start-up meeting is scheduled for 29th November with surveys likely to start in early 2020.

Findhorn: Tomatin Railway Viaduct Protection: Extensive river works proposed by Network rail to protect foundations of viaduct pillars were received in early summer 2019,



Installing the portadam around the right bank pillar of the Tomatin railway bridge, Sept 2019

Comments and concerns on the design and disruption were raised by SEPA and the Trust. Further revision of proposals were received in August with the new proposals and design more acceptable to SEPA hydrologists and the Board/Trust. This delayed works until mid-September.

Works entailed the installation of a portadam around the north pillar on the left bank, pumping water out of the dammed area to create a dry operating area, removing existing bed material to repair the pillar foundations and install rock protection. The pillar on the left bank was tackled this year while the right bank pillar will be addressed in 2020.

Sean, Donnie and I met with the engineering team from AMCO-GIFFEN on 5th September to discuss set-up arrangements, fish rescue and fish passage concerns. Edward Usbourne also attended to discuss fishing concerns.

Initial site works started on 9th September although high flows did hamper progress. Indeed the site proved a challenging one for the contractors, installation of the portadam progress well but getting a good seal on the rough boulder substrate was very difficult. This led to drainage difficulties but eventually a “dry” work site was achieved.



Inside the portadam area FNLFT staff, Craig Galbraith and Chris Cowie, undertaking

The Trust completed a fish rescue within the dam area and transfer into the main stem on the 19th September. Siltation controls were also in place throughout the construction although occasional periods of silt release and colouration of the water were evident these were addressed quickly by the constructors. The works were completed by early October.

Sean and Donnie developed an excellent working relationship with Jamie Tervet (AMCO-GIFFEN) and maintained regular visits to the site to ensure no disruption or blockages to fish passage were created. The works were completed in early October and the contractors are to be commended for completing an excellent job in very difficult conditions.



Silt booms downstream from the rail-bridge.

A few issues arose through the process however, with concerns raised by proprietors upstream regarding the timing of the works and its potential effect on salmon runs and angling. Despite the high water throughout the season angling catch in the upper reaches was poor during September, which is normally a good month. Whether the works contributed to this is difficult to determine but at no point in the construction was there any blockage to fish passage. It also became evident that upper proprietors had not been fully informed regarding the works. Although Network rail had informed the proprietors adjacent to the bridge this could be significantly improved. Indeed initial consultations with the Board could have also been better. As plans develop for the right bank pillar I will be pressing Network rail to improve this aspect of the process.



Pillar with completed protection.

Findhorn: Moy Estate Access Track: Advice on fish passage, culvert design and burn crossing provided to estate. Site visit to be arranged in December/January to view burn crossing locations.

Lossie: Dallas Estate bank protection on Lossie: Advice provided on best time for works to be completed.

Lossie: Bank protection on small tributary beside SSE Substation near Dallas: Advice provided on fish present in the burn and best time for works to be completed.

Lossie Black Burn Tyre Dumping Incident:



Tyres dumped in the Black Burn, Sept 2019.

During September a substantial amount of tyres were dumped into the Black Burn about 1km downstream from Pluscarden Abbey. Marcus Walters (Deveron Trust) and local farmer reported it to the Trust and I inspected the site shortly afterwards and reported it to SEPA and Corskie Farms who farm the surrounding area.

Valerie posted the incident on Facebook and the local press also covered the incident and this raised a lot of local interest and several offers of help to remove the tyres. However, no culprit was caught! A potential day for tyre removal was organised with volunteers and prior to that Marcus revisited the site and made the surprising discovery that all the tyres had been removed! There were some vehicle tracks on the banks but after a few enquires we are no wiser as to who retrieved them!

2. Adult Salmon and Trout Escapement, Exploitation And Conservation

Catch Data: 2019 Catch data Findhorn and Nairn both reported good spring salmon catches. Catches of salmon and grilse lower during the summer. Provisional figures for Findhorn 1342 with a few estates still to submit data.

Linkwood Burn: Linkwood weir fish pass installed.

Cawdor Burn Weir: Plans to install new fish pass completed and provisional date for installation is August this year although this has been delayed.

Fish Counters: Exploring fish counter options with Trittech for both the Findhorn and the Lossie, however, progress stalled in this area with Trittech staff member who was leading the development of the fish counter has recently left the company.

Lossie Tagged Salmon: Fred and Willie reported adult salmon in the Lossie with white tags, two spotted at Cloddach and two at Calcots. Two other salmon were observed with a green and a blue tag. The fish were not caught so numbers were not determined but after some enquiries it is likely that these fish may have been tagged in the Spey as part of a study into catch and release. During the season ghillies along the Spey have been tagging any caught salmon and grilse with tags to determine if they are recaptured a second time and where. Looks like a few preferred the more gentle waters of the fast flowing Spey! If you find a dead kelt with a tag please retain the tag, record details of the fish, length, sex, location and a photo is also very helpful then and return the tag and information it to me or Brian Shaw over on the Spey.

Lossie Redd Count: Water levels and colour have not been ideal for red counting but I managed to gain some information on Friday 22nd. I walked the stretch through Mayne Farm and although the water was pretty black approx. 6-8 redds were observed. A further one was found at Torcastle Bridge near Dallas and three complete redds were also observed in the Auchless Burn.



3. Juvenile Salmon and Trout Distribution and Abundance Data

National EF Survey Scotland (NEPS): FNLFT commissioned to complete Findhorn, Lossie and Beaully sites (Total 54 sites).

Training of summer EF personnel (Chris Cowie, Fin Cowie, Nancy Davies, Mirella Toth, Craig Galbraith, Colm Wickham) was completed in August and although high river flows prevailed through the summer all sites were completed a week before the 30th September deadline. All data was entered into the Marine Scotland FishObs database by the end of October deadline. Iain Malcolm and his team have begun analysis of this year data and initial results expected around Feb 2020.

Initial findings indicated good distributions of salmon and trout in both rivers and densities were also good. The survey of the Beaully indicated very good numbers of salmon and trout. One surprise this year and it came from the last site on the Belladrum Burn on the river Beaully where we capture a river lamprey. Only the second one I've seen in over thirty years!



River lamprey from the Belladrum Burn, River Beaully.

Although it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to complete the sites the electrofishing model created by MSS for the NEPS study is working well for the Lossie and Findhorn although additional sites would be an advantage for the Findhorn. It seems highly likely that this will become the longer term approach for supplying data for the river grading model so I am considering using his approach as the standard for future electrofishing surveys of the two rivers.

4. Protection of Fish Stocks

Sawbills: Further count were completed on 16th October led by Sean and Donnie with help from various keepers and volunteers. Data was compiled in November and next count is scheduled for December 17th.

Licence for 2019-20 was received from SNH via Roger Knight (Spey). Sean is organising control measures. As always volunteers are welcome to help with counts and any ad hoc sightings are very useful data in support of our licence application. Text/email any data to Sean or I.

Seals: Drone surveys were completed in February, data compiled and aiming to review data in early 2020. We remain part of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan.

Mink: James Symonds (SISI) has expanded the mink monitoring raft and trap network considerably particularly within the Nairn, Muckle Burn, Mosset and Lossie. Over 20 mink have been caught and dispatched this year, with the majority still being caught along the coast. Three more unusual captures were also recorded, two polecats and a ferret!

Control of illegal fishing: Regular staff meetings and discussions on work programs continued with Sean and Donnie. Monthly reports prepared by Sean and circulated to respective Boards. Donnie Mackenzie complete another season on the Findhorn and Lossie and proved to be an extremely competent and respected bailiff. In addition he was a considerable help predator control, smolt trap operation and also with the schools fishing days. Don has indicated to the Board that he has decided not to take up the post next season and the Board are looking into a replacement. My thanks to Donnie for all his help and support throughout the last two seasons.

Control of Non Native species

HLF SISI Project: Focus switched to Himalayan Balsam (HB) and Japanese knotweed (JK) during summer and autumn.

James Symonds and Scott Galbraith led several successful days of treatment on HB across the three rivers. Of particular note was the clearance of several hectares of HB from the lower Nairn using a combination hand pulling and bush-cutters. To achieve this they teamed up with local volunteer group Green Hive.

Japanese knotweed was also tackled across all three rivers with the following sections completed; lower Nairn, Findhorn from Daltulich to A96, Lossie main stem at Kellas and Brokentore and the upper Linkwood Burn. Spraying and injection is being used by a combination staff, volunteers and contractors. Good progress is being made.



Altyre hut prior to injection of Japanese knotweed, Sept 2018. Altyre Hut in October 2019 one year after Japanese Knotweed, a much improved view plus the new decking helps!

We were also excited by a new approach being tried at Kellas Estate this year with pigs being allowed to graze areas of Japanese Knotweed. Initial results look very promising.

My thanks to James and Vicky for all their efforts to ensure the SISI project progress rapidly this year and to all the proprietors, farmers, contractors, staff and volunteers who have helped with INNs control. Keep up to date on SISI project at www.invasivespecies.scot

Wester Manbeen Project: Control of Japanese Knotweed and a final spray of Giant Hogweed was completed at Wester Manbeen, River Lossie, by contractor, Angus Dixon (Groves Forestry) during October.

New Funding for Lossie INNs Control: Valerie submitted and successfully secured addition funding to continue our INNs control programme on the River Lossie in 2020. The £20k funding is from EB Scotland and will be used to continue the control of Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed from Kellas to Elgin.



Pigs- an alternative control technique for Japanese knotweed being tried at Kellas Estate. The area in the foreground has been grazed by the pigs during 2019, and little or no knotweed is left, while in the background the knotweed has been left untouched.

5. Habitat Management

Mosset Burn Survey: Tommy McDermott (Trex Ecology) completed walk over survey of lower Mosset in July and submitted his report in September. The report is excellent and very comprehensive. The Forres Community Council who supported the study have completed comments and the report will be circulated to stakeholders for comment before the end of November. The burn is complex with a number of large habitat issues to be addressed, such as flooding control, embankments, siltation and blockages to fish passage. The reports offers some insights and potential approaches to these issues and represents a good starting document. Discussions will be held in the New Year regarding next steps.

Black Burn, Lossie: Valerie and I are still considering developing habitat improvement ideas and looking into potential funders.

6. Management of Other Species



Pink Salmon: The 2019 invasion of pink salmon failed to materialise. With reports across Scottish rivers much less than in 2017. However, one dead pink was retrieved from the Findhorn near the Gordons pool and there was also reports of spawning pinks also in the Stoney area during early August. No reports from the Lossie.

7. Education and Publicity

Schools Go To Fish 2020: The Strathearn Community Fund (£743.00) and the Rothes WF (£4125.00) funding applications have both been approved for 2020. Dallas, Mosstowie and Alves Primary schools will be supported by the Rothes WF fund and all three schools have been contacted and are due to start the project in January. Additional support through SISI has also been allocated to Mosstowie to create a range of films and other material. Strathearn School will be contacted in December.

Events: Moy Game Fair: Vicky, James, Scott and I all attended the Moy Game Fair and managed a stand with the West Sutherland and Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust. Visitor numbers were generally good with numerous enquiries about fisheries and non-native species control.

Events: "Discover Moray's Great Places Heritage and Culture Symposium" Guided River Walk: Helped to lead walk along Findhorn at Logie with artist, Mark Zygadlo, Kresanna Aigner (Findhorn Bay Arts) and UHI Arts students to discuss structure and natural history of the river and consider potential for installing the river organ as part of the 2020 Findhorn Bay Arts Festival.

Auction 2020: Valerie and I are gathering lots for the second FNLFT Auction. The online auction will go live on 20th Jan 2020 and any ideas/contributions of lots would be very welcome.



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