

FNLFT Progress Report 02.2020

R. Laughton, 10/08/2020

The following report provides an update on activities from 17th Feb 2020 to 7th August 2020. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Tables (1 to 7).

Overall Management:

Coronavirus: FNLFT/SISI Staff: Following Government guidelines on Coronavirus the Trust office was closed in late March, Bob, Valerie, and Vicky all working from home. Office remains closed.

FFB Staff: Sean received medical advice to completely isolate during outbreak and was furloughed from April to the end of July. New assistant bailiff Alistair Taylor joined the staff in February. Alistair was also furloughed for April but returned to patrols in early May.

SISI Staff: Mirella Toth joined as seasonal Project Officer and will assist James on the Spey and FNLFT area.

MoA's: Memorandums of Understand have been circulated to both Boards.

Management Plans: First draft of management plans completed for both Findhorn and Lossie circulated to Trust Board members for comment. Web site also re-organised to include all reports and project descriptions updated.

1.1 Environment - Marine Environment/ Marine survival

AST Missing Salmon Project: The 2019 report for the Findhorn was published in February and in summary indicates that of the 100 salmon smolts tagged, 53 reached the downstream receiver at the estuary mouth, and 40 smolts reached the array offshore from Spey Bay, a survival rate of 53% and 40% respectively. Results were similar for the other Moray Firth rivers, with an average of 49% of the smolts reaching the sea from freshwater. After leaving the river the majority of salmon smolts headed east to the North Sea, while sea trout smolts opted to migrate within the Moray Firth. The full report on the Findhorn smolts can be download [here, M19 Findhorn AST Smolt Tagging Report 2019](#)

2020 Smolt Tagging: AST have funded the training of Trust/Board staff to carry out the tagging procedures on their respective rivers. To achieve this considerable training was required to meet the Home Office Licence requirements and pass the exams. Bob and Mirella Toth (seasonal volunteer) successfully completed the course in February allowing them to tag smolts. The course was completed at SCENE Loch Lomond and we will be under the supervision of Prof Colin Adams from Glasgow University for the duration of the project.

Trap Location: There is considerable value in moving the trap further upstream to gather information on smolt passage through part of the Findhorn gorge and a number of potential sites were viewed across a range of flows early this year, however, a suitable location which was safe to work in was not found. Plans were made to re-install at Red Craig in early April 2020 which would allow a direct comparison with the 2019 data.

Receivers were installed by Bob, Mirella and Alistair in late March but due to the Coronavirus outbreak the project was cancelled in April and postponed until 2021. Receivers were uplifted by Sean and Ali, 5 were retrieved but three are still missing and a further search for them will be carried out this week.

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: River habitat survey for the proposed A96 dual carriageway was completed in March. Seven crossing points on the Findhorn and six on the Lossie were surveyed and the data was compiled by early April. A report will be submitted this month. All survey work on the site was stopped in April but I expect this restriction to be lifted very shortly allowing electrofishing survey of each burn to progress in August/Sept 2020. The surveys will assist with the design of the river crossings.



Portadam installed around left bank pillar June 2020.



Large geotextile bags used for silt control.

Findhorn: Tomatin Railway Viaduct Protection:

Works to repair the right bank pillar commenced in June. The repairs to the right bank pillar foundations followed a similar approach to those in 2019 with a proportion of the riverbed dried using a temporary portadam to give access to the foundations. The riverbed around the pillar was cleared and rock armour installed. Booms to contain floating material and any oil leakage were installed and a water from the site was pumped through a very large mesh bag to minimise silt input this year rather than using silt curtains. A fish rescue and transfer completed on 11th June and approximately 30 salmon and trout were re-located.



Fish rescue underway.

Cloddach Bridge: I've made several visits to the bridge during differing water flows to view the channel underneath the bridge. Its now in very poor condition with a deep undercut at the upstream end. During low to medium flows I think this would affect fish passage. Draft letter has been approved and sent to Moray Council raising concerns.

Clashgour Windfarm: Public enquiry set to start in August.

Carn Duhie Windfarm: attended online update on plans for development.

2. Adult Salmon and Trout Escapement, Exploitation and Conservation

2020 Catch Data: A fresh salmon was caught on the opening day on the Findhorn which is the first for many years, and this good start continued with a good number of salmon caught through February and March, several over 20lbs. Due to coronavirus restrictions angling closed on the river from the end of March to May. Angling recommenced in mid-May and has been fairly good with reports of salmon and grilse caught on the Findhorn. Encouraging reports of catches of sea trout on the Lossie have also filtered through.

Scottish Catches and Trends: Scottish Government released official 2019 catch data during April and although the 2019 salmon catch of 47,515 was better than the 2018 catch it was still the fourth lowest since records began in 1952. Sea trout catch for Scotland was 16,899 the third lowest on record. Catches of salmon and sea trout on the Findhorn showed a similar pattern with lower catches for both species. Full details of the Scottish data and Findhorn data can be accessed via our web site. <https://www.fnift.org.uk/2020/05/scottish-salmon-and-sea-trout-catch-statistics-2019/>

The latest Scottish Government statistics are an important source of catch data but I am disappointed to find the catches for the Rivers Findhorn and Lossie have been combined within the report. Although both Boards also collect catch data the official statistics are used for comparing longer term trends. We have raised this issue with Scottish Government scientists and FMS so that data for each river can be accessed in the future.



New weir and fish pass at Linkwood Distillery.

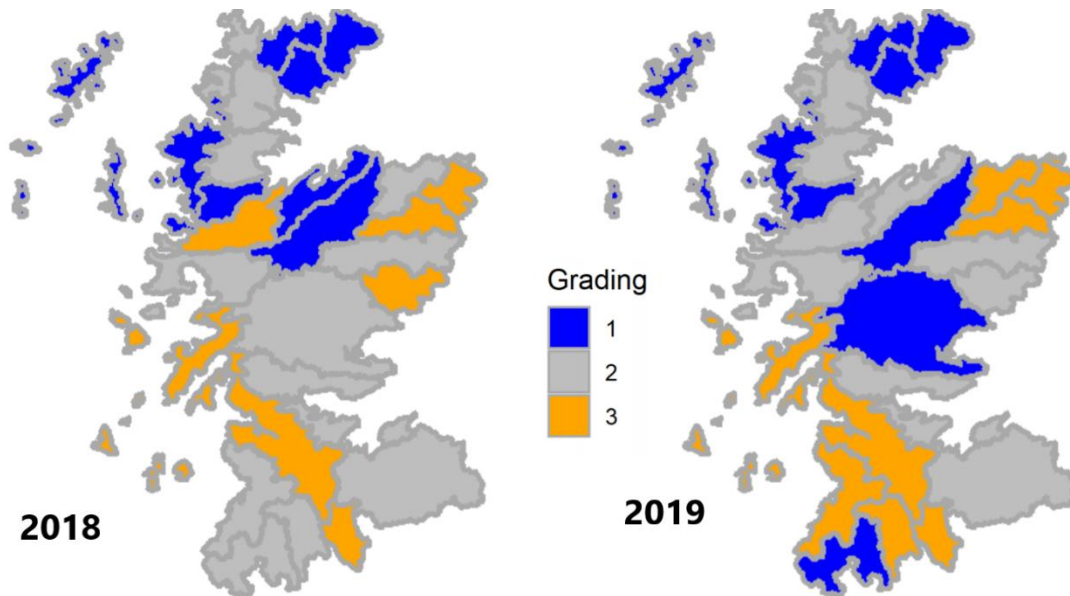
Linkwood Burn: Attended meeting to review progress during December 2019. Linkwood weir fish pass installed during 2019. A walk over upstream indicated large spawning redds were present from either sea trout or salmon. Good sign that fish were using the pass some electrofishing will be carried out in 2020 to deterring the juvenile fish present. Focus is now moving to the next two barriers at Longmorn and Glen Elgin distilleries.

Cawdor Burn Weir: Works completed in July and new fish pass installed on Cawdor Burn weir.

3. Juvenile Salmon and Trout Distribution and Abundance Data

National EF Survey Scotland (NEPS):

Figure 1: Overall salmon grades for Scotland 2018 and 2019 from NEPs survey data (from [Malcolm et al 2020](#)).



Report for 2019 completed by Marine Science scientists. [Click Here](#) for copy. In general Salmon fry densities were lower in 2019 than 2018 across much of the country. Abundances were particularly low in north-east and west. Salmon parr abundances were more stable but declined particularly in the north and west.

For the FNL area this pattern was also evident with salmon 0+ dropping from grade 2 to grade 3 and salmon parr remaining at grade 2. For juvenile salmon overall FNL area is Grade 2 (See Figure 1).

Due to Covid 19 the 2020 survey has been postponed until 2021. However, I'm looking at how best to incorporate the NEPs approach into our routine surveys.

Surveys for 2020: Linkwood Burn to assess fish distribution now that two fish passes have been installed. Contract survey for A96 development.

4. Protection of Fish Stocks

Sawbills: Further count were completed on 24th March 2020 with goosander and merganser numbers low and limited to the Bay and lower river. Control of sawbills was suspended during April-May due to Corvid 19 restrictions. Count data analysed and submitted to SNH via Roger Knight as part of Moray Firth licence application. Licence received from SNH for scaring and control last week. Licence applies to Findhorn and Lossie from 1st Oct 2020 to 31st May 2021.

Sean will organise 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: Seal control activities were suspended during Covid-19 restrictions. We remain part of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan. New legislation changes on the control seals have come into effect with the control of seals around salmon fish farms now illegal. Currently its not clear how this will affect control of seals entering rivers.

Mink: Increase in sighting sof mink along coast and lower Nairn in the last month. James Symonds (SISI) and Mirella Toth (SISI) have responded to the increase through installation of traps and rafts.

Control of illegal fishing: New full-time bailiff Alister Taylor appointed on the Findhorn. Regular meetings with Sean and Alister will continue throughout the year.

Control of Invasive Non-Native species



Figure 2 |Particular thanks this year to Eddie Gormanley and staff from Kellas Estate for assisting GH control with his pressurised tank. This allowed much faster and effective spraying of densely infested areas.

HLF SISI Project: Despite coronavirus lockdown delaying our start we made good progress on Giant Hogweed control was made across all three rivers was made in 2020. Treatment of On the Nairn covered all the mainstem from Cawdor downstream to the mouth and the Aultdern Burn. Findhorn was completed from Coulmony to Forres although with no raft trip this season some may have been missed in the gorge section.

Muckle Burn was completed from Earlsmill to Brodie with several local farmers, Estate contractors, and volunteers also completing additional control around Dyke and Dalvey.

Mosset Burn was completed from sources at Sourbank Rafford and ALtyre downstream to the mouth.

Lossie was completed from Kelllas to Lower Wester Manbeen plus some additional treatment of GH at Sheriffmill was completed. Additional funds for control on the Lossie were secured from Crown Estates foir Westermanbeen and from EB Scotland.

Attention switches to Japanese knotweed in late August and skunk cabbage will also be tackled. Keep up to date on SISI project at www.invasivespecies.scot

5. Habitat Management

Habitat surveys for A96 completed.

6. Management of Other Species

No reports.

7. Education and Publicity

Schools Go To Fish 2020: The Strathdearn Community Fund (£743.00) and the Rothes WF (£4125.00) funding applications were approved for 2020. Mosstowie, Alves and Dallas Primary schools all completed their classroom talk. Date was still to be arranged with Strathdearn School.

The SISI project has visited Mosstowie to create a range of films and other material based on control non-native species. James and Vicky visited the school to start the project in February and it prompted great excitement.

However due to coronavirus restrictions and schools closing all projects were suspended. I'll be discussing how best to complete these projects with the schools and funders when the new term starts.

Events: "Findhorn Bay Arts Festival 21st 28th Sept 2020. Attended initial meeting in Findhorn and developing project funding bid with Kresanna Aigner And James Chitty to highlighting salmon and rivers as part of the September festival, but again due to coronavirus outbreak not clear if this will progress.

www.fnift.org.uk [Facebook](#) www.invasivespecies.scot