

FNLFT Progress Report 03.2020

R. Laughton, 23/11/2020

The following report provides an update on activities from 8th August 2020 TO 23RD November 2020. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Tables (1 to 7).

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.

MoA's: Memorandums of Understand have been circulated to both Boards. MoU approved by FFB at Nov meeting. Lossie Board to meet on 1st Dec 2020.

Management Plans: Further draft of management plan for Findhorn and Lossie completed And MOUs for both Boards.

1.1 Environment - Marine Environment/ Marine survival

AST Missing Salmon Project: 2021 Smolt Tagging: AST are progress plans for 2021. Tagging will follow similar approach to 2019 with 100 smolts tagged and released in the Findhorn and similar numbers in the other Moray Firth rivers. Trust/Board staff will carry out the tagging procedures on their respective rivers and a refresher course on tagging technique is planned for Jan/Fen 2021. Bob, Sean and Alastair will operate trap and tag, Mirella should be back to assist.

The trap will be re-install at Red Craig in early April 2021 which would allow a direct comparison with the 2019 data.

A search for the missing three 2020 receivers was conducted with AST staff in August and one was successfully retrieved. The other two were lost although they may wash up somewhere on the lower river! Receivers will be re-installed in early 2021 and are revising locations.

Work to provide additional data for the project has also begun, Sean and Ali have begun collecting scats from predators such as sawbills, cormorants, otters and seals. This data will be analysed using genetic techniques to determine the make up of their diet.

There is also a request to collect salmon heads from dead kelts after spawning. This is to assist with the development of a pilot project using ecogeochemistry to assess migration patterns from isotope ratios and other internal markers. Please report any dead kelts to Sean or I and we will collect the head and relevant data.

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: Electrofishing survey of each burn was completed in August/Sept 2020 and all data compiled and analysed during October. Currently preparing a report on the findings The surveys will assist with the design of the river crossings.

Cloddach Bridge: The centre channel underneath Cloddach bridge is in poor condition with a deep undercut at the upstream end and during low flows will fish passage. A letter was sent to Moray Council raising concerns.



Photo 1: High flow at Cloddach bridge 2020-10-05



Photo 2: Cloddach Bridge medium flows 2020-10-09

Further visits were undertaken Sept/Oct by Sean, Ali and I along with members of Elgin AA. Fish were observed building up below the bridge in early October raising concerns that fish may not reach their spawning areas so a licence to assist Elgin AA members to hand net fish and transport them over the bridge apron was applied for and received. Thankfully, October was wet with several sizeable spates



Photo 3 and 4: Cloddach Bridge centre channel low and medium flows. A few salmon were observed ascending the channel lip during a site visit on 9th Oct 2020.



and further visits to the site with Elgin AA members indicated that fish were ascending the obstruction at medium to higher flows although it was difficult for them. The preferred route seemed to be the right-hand channel (Photo 1 and 2), some fish were observed ascending through the centre channel on 9th October and medium flows (Photo 4), while the left channel was impassable.

Further pictures and video were collected and preliminary discussions with Daniel Prentice (Moray Council) have taken place and a site meeting has been arranged for 1st Dec.

Bantrack Bridge: Consultation on works at Bantrack Bridge on the River Divie were held with SEPA and the contractors during August. Concerns were raised regarding the timing of the works, which were planned for Oct/Nov, at spawning time. However, the majority of works are on the bridge and not in the water so there would be little effect on migrating and spawning fish. There is a small scour repair required for the left bank abutment. A site visit indicated no spawning gravel in the immediate area of the proposed works and although there is a holding pool for fish, spawning should be complete by December so any impact on salmon will be minimal. Works began in October and Sean and Ali have made regular site visits and report that the works have been carried out to a very high standard.



Repair works underway at Bantrack Bridge River Divie Oct 2020. (Photo Sean Maclean)

Corrievorrie Burn: New bridge was installed on the Corrievorrie burn during summer 2020 and bridge a good clear span design and were works completed with little disturbance to the burn.

Burnside Bride: Works planned for replacement bridge at Burnside on the Black Burn (Lossie) planned for mid-November. The old concrete bridge collapsed in 2017 a temporary bridge platform was installed. The current arrangement is causing a constriction to flow leading to debris build ups and blockages and the temporary platform requires an upgrade for heavy quarry traffic.



New bridge over Corrievorrie Burn. (Photo Sean Maclean)



Burnside Bridge on the Black Burn, showing collapse concrete bridge and temporary bridge platform.

New structure is an open span bridge and will be higher and wider allowing more flow to past during spates and reducing localised flooding and debris build ups. Timing of works during spawning runs is not ideal, however, the only in river works are to lift out the old concrete bridge so any effects on salmon and trout spawning will be negligible. After discussion with Tarmac, the farmer Mr Yool and SEPA the scheme was approved.

Clashgour Windfarm: Public enquiry results still to be published.

Carn Duhie Windfarm: plans for development being updated.

2. Adult Salmon and Trout Escapement, Exploitation and Conservation

2020 Catch Data: Although a good part of the early season was lost due to COVID-19 19 lock down restrictions, Fishing on both the Findhorn and Lossie was relatively good when it recommenced. Catch data is being collected, with approx. 850 salmon and grilse and 85 sea trout reported from the Findhorn so far, a number of returns are still to be declared. Data for the Lossie will be available in January 2021.

Linkwood Burn: Electrofishing was carried out at two sites on the Linkwood above the two new fish passages. No juvenile salmon were recorded but juvenile trout numbers were high indicating sea trout are likely to be accessing the area.

Focus is now moving to the next two barriers at Longmorn and Glen Elgin distilleries and cbec have produce a scoping report on the best options for improving them. I discussed the report with cbec and await the next version.

Cawdor Burn Weir: Works were completed in July and the new fish pass installed on Cawdor Burn weir. The fish pass received a battering from the spates in October but adult salmon in good number have been reported above the fish pass which is great news.

3. Juvenile Salmon and Trout Distribution and Abundance Data

National EF Survey Scotland (NEPS):

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.

Due to COVID-19 19 the 2020 survey has been postponed until 2021 but to date there is no confirmation that it will go ahead.

4. Protection of Fish Stocks

Sawbills: Further count were completed on 20th October 2020 with mergansers present in the Bay and lower river. Licence received from SNH for scaring and control for Findhorn and Lossie from 1st Oct 2020 to 31st May 2021.

Next count 8th Dec 2020 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 me.

Mink: Mink sightings low during summer and autumn but a few reported along coast. James Symonds (SISI) maintains traps and rafts.

Control of Invasive Non-Native species

HLF SISI Project: Japanese knotweed (JK) control begin in September and with the prevailing mild weather was continued into early November. Good progress on control was made across all three rivers although sadly volunteer help was reduced.

River Nairn: JK was treated on both banks of the mainstem from Howford Bridge downstream to the harbour in Nairn. Additional JK treatment was carried out in Kilravock Estate.

River Findhorn: JK treatment was completed from Upper Altyre to the A96 bridge. Although with no raft trips this season some may have been missed in the gorge section, sadly we were unable to visit Lethen and Glenferness as planned.

River Lossie: A significant effort was made on Kellas this year with all JK from the Ford to the bridge at the fishery treated. This was completed with funding from EB Scotland and within the SISI project. Treatment was carried out by Estate staff, FNLFT staff, SISI staff and a local contractor. Brokentore Estate was also completed. Lower Wester Manbeen was also treated with support from the Crown Estate.

Treatment was carried out using foliar spray and stem injection using Round Up. I am grateful to Eddie and Hammy at Kellas Estate for using their pressurized tank which allowed much more area to be treated, to James Symonds (SISI) and Mirella Toth (SISI) for all their hard work in difficult circumstances this year. The initial results are good, but the full results of the treatments won't be clear until next autumn. Meantime a revisit to areas treated in 2019 indicated that good progress is being made, selection of before and after photos below.



JK Treatment at the Altyre lower hut, 2018 to 2020.



JK treatment beside Whiterow Road Forres 2019-2020.



JK treatment at the Carding Mill, Longmorn Burn 2019 - 2020



IJK treatment at the Glen Elgin Distillery Weir 2019-2020.

Treatment of Skunk cabbage in the Dallas pond and Doual Burn was also planned but not completed due to lack of time, I hope to pick this up next season.

Keep up to date on SISI project at www.invasivespecies.scot

5. Habitat Management

Habitat surveys for A96 completed and report underway.

6. 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. However due to coronavirus restrictions all projects were suspended. Still not clear how best to complete these projects.

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