



## River Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board

Clerk: Anthony Laing Administrator: Valerie Wardlaw  
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### Minute of the Annual General Meeting (Annual Public Meeting)

Held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021 virtually at 11.30am

**Present:**

Anthony Laing -(Chairman)  
 Alasdair Laing  
 Julie Balgonie  
 Andrew Howard  
 Colin Cawdor

Mark Laing  
 Graham Bell  
 Richard Benyon  
 Robert Hoskin

**In attendance:**

Sean McLean (Head Bailiff),  
 Alister Taylor (Bailiff)

Robert Laughton – Director, FNLRT  
 Valerie Wardlaw – Administrator, FDSFB

A	Item	Action
1.	<b>Apologies:</b> Alex Leven, Ewen Brodie, Tony Watts, Toby Metcalfe	
2.	<b>Minutes of AGM held on 17th August 2020</b> Minutes were approved.	
3.	<b>Matters arising</b> RL still to meet Alex Leven at Glenferness to survey the JK- RL will contact AL. RL has not progressed a tagging project with anglers to assess exploitation of fish due to Covid restrictions. He will consider implementing a project for next year. RL has not been able to gain evidence from SEPA to see if there are any changes in the comparative speeds of the river rising and falling since the peatland drain blocking projects were implemented in the upper catchment due to the complexity of the river systems.	<b>RL/AL</b>  <b>RL</b>  <b>RL</b>
4.	<b>River Reports</b> <b>Chairman-</b> Anthony Laing The Annual Report for the Findhorn DSFB for 2020 is available from the website <a href="#">here</a> and is well worth reading as it contains interesting information. The 2020 season was disrupted by Covid restrictions and so the catch data are not an accurate reflection of the health of the river. However, the consensus is that there is a decline in numbers of fish returning to the river. The board has therefore decided to put more resources into looking at the science behind the decline in fish numbers by altering the roles of the bailiffs. The bailiffs will in future spend a greater proportion of their time supporting scientific data collection and conservation projects, whilst retaining a proportionate time for anti-poaching activities.  Two major projects were also cancelled due to Covid restrictions- the National Electrofishing Programme and the Atlantic Salmon Trust’s smolt tagging project.  Anthony thanks the Bailiffs, Sean McLean and Alister Taylor, and the FNLRT Director Bob Laughton for all their hard work over the year.	

**River Director-** Robert Laughton- presentation [here](#)

- RL informed the Board that the 2020 season started well with a salmon caught on the opening day, and early season fishing was good. However subsequent catches were affected by Covid restrictions and are less meaningful due to reduced angler effort.
- **The 2021 season catches** are positive to date. The Spring Run was later this year, but the catches were good. Currently more fish are being seen in the river and grilse numbers have improved. There have been no reports of diseased fish. The Scottish Government's Conservation Status grading for 2022 has been published and the Findhorn remains Grade 1. The Conservation model is still based on catch data (2020 catches will not be used). However, the government has funded a third year of juvenile fish surveys and that data should start to be included in the river grading model. The National Electrofishing Programme (NEPS) postponed in 2020 is going ahead this year; the sites surveyed to date are showing good healthy juvenile fish stocks. RL will also be surveying 30 core juvenile fish sites on the Findhorn to give a baseline population distribution and density information.
- **Atlantic Salmon Trust Moray Firth Tagging Project-** this went ahead after being postponed in 2020, with the addition of a mobile receiver array to track smolt migration further north in the Moray Firth. SM & AT installed the acoustic receivers in March and have recently recovered all the receivers including two lost in 2019. The smolt trap was operational from April to the end of May, except for five days in May when high flows and woody debris blocked the trap. The high flows also meant the river was wider and the trap was less efficient at capturing smolts. 622 smolts were captured and 93 tagged and data from the receivers is being analysed by the AST with preliminary results due in the next month. The AST think the higher flows allowed smolts to migrate to sea with fewer losses than reported in 2019. The AST project is likely to continue in 2022. This smolt data will be very useful in future to defend any restrictions on A96 bridge or other developments.
- **Invasive plant control** in 2021 has gone well with Giant Hogweed treated from Coulmony to the A96 with the support of volunteers and landowners. The Muckle Burn & Mosset Burn have also been treated, with the Mosset showing great improvement from dense infestations to single plants after nine years of treatment. RL reported that farmers along the Mosset are now undertaking some GH treatment themselves. No GH was seen in Altyre along the Mosset for the first time in nine years. The Scottish Invasive Species Initiative is continuing until October 2022.
- **American Mink-** sightings much reduced this year with one capture on the Muckle Burn. Any mink sightings should be reported to James Symonds (07493 272898) as soon as possible, as mink disperse looking for new areas in August and September.
- **Management Plan** for the river is published on our [website](#) any comments or thoughts are welcome. Climate Change- river temperatures of 20°C and above will increase fish mortality, so Marine Scotland have developed a map identifying upper catchment tributaries at risk of increased temperatures. With support from Fishmongers Company Ltd the FNLR Trust is developing a riparian reforestation initiative to increase shading to reduce water temperatures and increase bank protection. RL is working with Cawdor Forestry to scope reforestation options in Glenmazeran and several other areas in the upper Findhorn catchment are being considered.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Riparian damage-</b> a number of river works have been done poorly, without licence and at the wrong time of year. All have been reported to SEPA, who have not concluded any cases against the farmers to date.</li> <li>• <b>Schools-</b> all sessions still on hold until restrictions lift. There are discussions about a Scotland wide project to encourage young people into angling.</li> </ul> <p>Finally, RL gave a huge thank you to all those who supported the FDSFB and FNLRT work on the river.</p> <p>Richard Benyon thanked Alasdair Laing for helping develop riparian planting initiatives and he hopes any project that is implemented in Glenmazeran can act as an exemplar for other estates to copy. He has been concerned about temperature levels in the Mazeran Burn. RL will send RB the Riparian planting options report asap.</p> <p><b>Head Bailiff-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sean Mclean reported that much of April and May were spent operating the smolt trap. The bailiffs did see a good run of fish during late May &amp; early June, followed by a good grilse and salmon run from late June.</li> <li>• Poaching incidents have increased this year with information passed on to Police Scotland. Barbed ripping hooks were found and there have been reports of anglers fishing on Sundays. The bailiffs have checked numerous fishing permits in the Angling Association waters and so hope their visitor numbers are up this year. Permits for fishing Findhorn Bay have also been checked and are much increased, with good numbers of sea trout and finnock reported. Patrols on the Lossie have also been undertaken, funded by the Lossie DSFB.</li> <li>• NEPS- the bailiffs are helping RL with the juvenile surveys this year, whilst continuing poaching patrols. Alister Taylor completed his EF training, (and herbicide spray training). The bailiffs have been impressed by the juvenile numbers they are seeing but are concerned by the lack of shading in the upper river catchment.</li> </ul> <p>Anthony Laing thanked Sean and Alister for their excellent efforts during this season.</p>	RL
5.	<p><b>Consideration of Accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021</b></p> <p>The Accounts are still being drafted and will be circulated and uploaded to the website once the board has approved them. The board is anticipating an £18k surplus for 2020 due to the cancellation of projects and increased income from the Job Retention Scheme while the bailiffs were furloughed. This surplus is being used to offset some of this year's costs. The board reduced the levy from 46p in the £ last year to 42p in the £ this year and is anticipating a £11k loss for the year.</p>	VW
6.	<p><b>Projects for 2021/22</b></p> <p>Covered in the River Director's report</p>	
7.	<p><b>AOCB</b></p> <p><b>Predator control</b> Graham Bell asked about the licence for piscivorous birds- SM confirmed the FDSFB has a licence which is implemented in winter &amp; spring. The licence is invaluable in protecting juvenile fish stocks. Regular bird counts are undertaken and used to support the annual licence application. It would help if any sightings of mergansers or goosanders are</p>	ALL

	<p>texted to SM/AT/RL with photo, numbers, and location. A What's App group might be the easiest way for people to report sightings- RL/SM will look into this.</p> <p><b>A96 bridge crossings-</b> Forres AA met with Dave Gowans of Transport Scotland to raise their concerns about the proposed new bridge crossings. There will be additional piers in the river and disruption to AA beats during construction. GB was also concerned about pearl mussel habitats as no surveys have been done in the Findhorn recently. RL confirmed that he already commented on the proposed bridge crossings on behalf of the FDSFB but there would be further opportunity to comment as more detailed proposals become available. He would enquire with the developers if pearl mussel surveys had been completed.</p> <p><b>Lochindorb Pike-</b> Alasdair Laing asked if there was any method for estimating the pike population in Lochindorb as numerous salmonids are being seen going up the Dorback to spawn upstream from Lochindorb. RL said that there is no easy solution; to estimate pike numbers would require a few years of tagging &amp; returning captured pike. The consensus is not to try and reduce specific life stages of pike as this often has a worse impact on predation of salmonids. Pike appear to have wiped out the trout populations in Lochindorb. Pike are unlikely to colonise the mainstem of the river as they prefer low flow lochs and pools, and spates will wash them out.</p> <p><b>Findhorn DSFB representation-</b> Anthony Laing stated that the Findhorn DSF Board lacks representation from the upper river. Could everyone try and encourage upper proprietors to take up the vacant seats on the Board, or alternatively, they can mandate their land managers/factors/gamekeepers etc to represent them. It would be very helpful to have the views of more upper proprietors represented, especially as the board is encouraging habitat improvements in the upper catchment.</p>	<p><b>SM/RL</b></p> <p><b>RL</b></p> <p><b>ALL</b></p>
	<p>Anthony Laing thanked the Findhorn DSFB staff, Sean McLean and Alister Taylor, and the FNLRT staff, Robert Laughton and Valerie Wardlaw for their good work during the year.</p> <p>Anthony also thanked everyone for participating in the meeting.</p>	