

FNLRT Progress Report 02.2022

R. Laughton, 18/08/2022

The following report provides an update on activities from 18th March 2022 to 16th August 2022. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Plan 2021-2026.

Coronavirus: FNLRT/SISI Staff: We continue to follow Government guidelines regarding Coronavirus. The Trust office has re-opened with RL and/or James Symonds present on most days, although a mix of home working and using the office will continue for the foreseeable future.

Staff Changes: After nine years of outstanding service Valerie Wardlaw decided to leave the Trust. Claire Walker will take up the Administrator role from the 22nd of August.

1. Climate Change

Glen Mazeran: Options for re-creating riparian woodland have been developed with Steve Conolly (Cawdor Forestry) and submitted for consideration. Discussions are stalled at the moment while the Estate consider their future management strategy.

The Fishmongers Company-Small Grant: (£2k) Using his I have teamed up with Elle Adams (LivingAlive) to facilitate discussions with upper Findhorn proprietors to determine the interest for establish more extensive riparian woodland and increasing shading of the river. A presentation to the Findhorn Board AGM produced a good response and we are now setting up meetings with some upper proprietors to discuss further.

Two funding bids have been prepared to the Just Transition Fund (£140k) and LNER Customer and Community Investment Fund to develop the initiative. The JTF proposal seeks to develop engagement with the landowners further and create a development officer post and support. The LNER fund seeks to develop a monitoring programme to provide baseline data on the current status of upper river through community engagement.



Kenny Graham (Coignaferan Estate) showing members of the Findhorn Fishery Board peatland restoration methods.

Elle and I are also considering a bid to the Nature Restoration Fund. However, the next key step is to meet with landowners through August/September and gauge support. We also attend the Monadhliath Deer Management Group meeting on the 17th August which proved to be very informative and also receptive to our riparian forestry ideas, further comments will be forwarded to the group to incorporate into their next management plan.

2. River habitat and Land Use

A9 Tomatin to Moy: No further developments.

A96 Dualling: Attended online workshop organised by Jacobs Consultants to review the proposed A96 road corridor and submitted comments regarding watercourses, bridges etc in May.

Clashgour Windfarm: still seeking planning.

Carn Duhie Windfarm: Revised plans for 16 turbines submitted but Highland Council raised an object triggering Public Enquiry.

Lethen Wind Farm: No further correspondence.

Kellas Wind Farm: Comments submitted in March 2022.

Ourack Wind Farm: Further comments submitted during July.

Lhanbryde Burn – Kirkhill Bridge: Site visit to view bridge and discuss repairs held with Kim McGowan (Moray Council Bridge Team). Bridge platform is deteriorating through erosion and wear and tear. The abutments are still in good condition so initial plan to remove old platform and replace with a new one. However, furthermore detailed inspections are required. Fish and habitat requirements were discussed, and a fish survey of the area was considered desirable. Purchase order for works has been received and we are arranging a suitable date.

Lossiemouth New Footbridge: Construction of the new footbridge in Lossiemouth completed and officially opened by Mhairi Gougeon (MSP) on 31st May.

Miltonduff Distillery: Potential new locations for abstraction / discharge pipes for the Miltonduff Distillery are under consideration. A fish habitat survey is required to identify important habitat features was commissioned by Chivas Brothers Ltd. The survey was completed, and report submitted in June 2022. (Costs £1943.50)

Dalmagarry Burn Rail Bridge: The existing scour protection under the bridge is disintegrating and may affect the bridge foundations, plans for repairs were reviewed and a site meeting with the contractors help in April. A few revisions to the plans were incorporated and a fish rescue was also incorporated. Purchase order for the fish rescue has been raised and date for the rescue will be 23rd August. Works will commence shortly afterwards.



Scour protection under the Dalmagarry rail bridge requiring repair



Fish rescue underway at the Brodie Rail Bridge June 2022.

Muckle Burn Brodie Rail Bridge: The existing scour protection under the bridge is disintegrating and affect the bridge foundations, plans for repairs were reviewed and a site meeting with the contractors help in March. Portadams were used on the site to create a dry working area and then a

protective mat was laid on the riverbed and pumped full of liquid concrete. When the concrete mat was dry the riverbed was reinstated. The technique allows substrate to move through the area and creates no issues with fish passage. Two fish rescues were carried out prior to the works.

Forres WWTW New Access Bridge: Reviewed plans for new access bridge over the Mosset to the Forres WWTW. Good design incorporating an open span bridge, so no fish access issues. However, the bridge is to the north of Forres rail bridge and there are considerable engineering difficulties on the site due to water supply pipes and other utilities. I attended a meeting with contractors last week and discussed timing of works and fish rescue.

Allt na Frith (Freeburn) Bridge Replacement: Improvements to the bridge over the Freeburn in Tomatin as part of support work for the A9 dualling programme were commissioned in early 2022. Strengthening and repairs to the bridge supports along with a new footbridge was required and some work within the watercourse to provide a temporary work platform was necessary. I discussed repairs with the contractors (Wills Bros) and agreed a fish rescue which was carried out on 10th May with Sean and Ali.



Fish rescue underway on the Freeburn, 10th May 2022.

Very few fish were caught. The burn temperature was several degrees higher when compared to a similar burn the Allt Neacrath also in Tomatin. Our juvenile survey in August 2021 also produced very fish and it is likely that the warm water discharge from the Tomatin distillery is affecting fish survival. Sean has reported the matter to SEPA and spoken with the distillers. We plan to return in August to conduct a more rigorous fish survey and pursue the matter further.

3. Biosecurity and INNs

SISI Project:



SISI seasonal Project Officer Elise Cox (right) with volunteer Louise ready to tackle GH.

Giant hogweed control has been the main target over the Spring and early summer. Progress has been good with the Nairn, Findhorn (above A96), Muckle and Mosset Burn all being covered. Work was also completed on the Lossie from Kellas to Wester Manbeen with additional funding provided by Crown Estate and Moray Estate.

Densities of GH are declining across these areas with several areas on the Mosset now clear of the plant for a second year. Some problem areas still exist, the drain at Dalvey was re-opened and left untreated for two years and has become a very dense infestation. Control on the Lossie is improving each year but there are still a number of dense areas requiring attention. James Symonds is working on landowner agreements across the rivers to facilitate longer term

management of the plant.

My thanks to all proprietors, staff, contractors and volunteers for the help with GH control.

Skank cabbage is being reported from a number of areas across the three rivers, a new infestation came to light near Dunlichity on an upper Nairn tributary. A site inspection is required but we have had initial talks with the proprietors to implement control.



Figure 1 Large stands of skunk cabbage were present around Dallas pond and becoming problematic and also spreading down the outflow into the Doual Burn and Lossie, May 2021.

Control of SK in Dallas Pond started last year with help from Tom Bagley. We returned this year to find the density of plants was significantly reduced, a drop from >100plants to around 20 around the pond and most of these were in small ones. These were all sprayed with roundup and we expect to have the pond cleared within the next couple of years. Spraying with roundup when the plant is in full growth works well. The plant has also colonised the Doual Burn and I revisited the upper section and again found a big drop in plant numbers after last years treatment. The

remaining few plants were re-treated. The lower half of the burn is proving more problematic, although it is a small burn its heavily modified with very steep banks and muddy substrate it's also heavily overgrown with reeds making access very difficult. An earlier visit to treat the SK is planned for next year.



Dallas Pond with area of skunk cabbage before treatment in May 2021 and after treatment in August 2022.

Elise has has been busy through August completeing INNs plant surveys and completing Hamlayan Balsam bashing on the Nairn with volunteer groups from Green Hive. James and I will be preparing plans for Japanese Knotweed shortly.

James has also maintained the mink monitoring raft and trap network with a number of sightings reported and tracks evident on the mink rafts and one capture. Additional volunteers have been recruited and the raft network expanded. Please report any sightings.

Callum Sinclair (SISI Project Manager) is working on an extension to the project funded through the Nature Restoration Fund and I attended the meeting to prepare an expression of interest on the 15th

August. This will be submitted by the 2nd Sept and if successful preparations for a full funding bid will begin.

Jane Hamilton (SISI Volunteer and Communications Officer) has settled well into the post and promoting the project. A recent highlight was a ministerial visit by MSP Lorna Slater [click here](#), James Symonds was also interviewed by BBC Alba and Mark Purrmann-Charles was also featured on ITV giving the initiative excellent exposure. Jane maintains regular posts across various social media, Keep up to date on SISI project at www.invasivespecies.scot.

4. Fish and Fisheries

Catches 2022: Spring catches on the Findhorn started well and salmon also appeared to be well spread throughout the river.

Conservation Grades: Marine Scotland has undertaken an assessment of the conservation status of salmon in inland waters in Scotland for the 2023 fishing season. The outcome of that assessment, including proposed gradings for rivers and assessment groups in 2023, is available on the [Scottish Government website](#). The Findhorn and Nairn retain Grade 1, Lossie remains at Grade 3.

Anthony Laing (FDSFB), Sean, Ali and I convened a meeting with Forres AA, Findhorn Angling Club to review the Findhorn Conservation code. After discussion a revised version has been drafted and is with the Board for approval.



Salmon with advanced fungal infections on the Divie, June 2022.

Fish Disease Outbreak: Reports of dead and poorly salmon began filtering through in early May. This increased during June after discussions with Estates proprietors, anglers and others, our estimate of losses is between 300 to 400 fish although very difficult to put an accurate figure on it.



Figure 2 Fish Health Inspector team sampling salmon on the Divie, June 2022 (photo Sean Mclean)

The fish all showed white patches of fungus which is likely to be *Saprolegnia* which occurs naturally within the river. Outbreaks have occurred before, 2017 was the last one, and these outbreaks tend to occur during late April and early May, although the *Saprolegnia* is present in the river all year round. This was a little different with fish reported from the full length of the mainstem as far up as Coignafearn, whereas in previous outbreaks have been limited to Cawdor downstream.

Low flows, coupled with higher water temperatures seems to be a trigger, although river temperatures this year were not higher than normal. Low flows leads to spring salmon accumulating in the pools and without suitable water flows to continue their migrations they may get stressed and so infection can spread quickly, particularly if there is any damage on the fish, such as scale loss. Spring salmon also have quite loose scales so the fungus can get underneath them more easily than fish entering the river later in the year.

It's also possible that the fish have other infections which are affecting their health making them more susceptible to the fungal infection and with considerable help we managed to get five live infected salmon from the River Divie for sampling by the Marine Scotland Science Fish Inspectors.

We have received a full report on the finding. *Saprolegnia* appears to be the main cause of death, a range of other infections were also observed but it remains unclear whether there was any underlying condition affecting these fish and making them more prone to fungal infection.

An additional 26 dead salmon were also examined, measured, weighed, sex identified and photographed. Where the sex could be identified (22 fish) the majority were female (n=16 72%) meaning the loss of spring salmon represents a considerable loss of eggs. Scale data from the 16 fish

will also be used in the Marine Scotland Adult Scale sampling Programme and the head was retained from 14 salmon for further analysis of otoliths and eyes by Dr Anna Sturrock, Essex University.

Thankfully rain appeared leading to a welcome rise in flows in late June and numbers of infected fish declined sharply afterwards.

My thanks to the anglers who have alerted us to this problem and retained salmon for sampling and sent in pictures. We are particular grateful to Ewen Manson (Logie) for his help in capturing salmon for the Fish Inspectors.

Marine Scotland Adult Scale Sampling Programme: Sampling of individual adult salmon provides information on the length weight, sex and age of the fish and feeds directly into the assessment of conservation status of Scottish salmon stocks. Additional information on fish disease, growth and genetic information can also be obtained.

Marine Scotland is working closely with Fisheries Management Scotland and Fisheries Trusts and Boards to develop a national adult salmon sampling programme across Scotland. The programme will obtain valuable data on salmon entering Scottish rivers that can then be used in stock assessments.

The Findhorn has joined the programme in 2022 and data will be collected from salmon shortly after they enter from the sea, which will include the Forres AA, Darnaway, Altyre and Logie fisheries, during the remainder of the season. Data on date of capture, location, length, weight, sex, condition, will be collected along with a sample of scales. The scales will be stored in a paper packet for reading at a later date. Photographs of the salmon will also be collected where possible. Released and retained fish will be sampled.

Sampling will be largely undertaken by the bailiffs, Sean McLean and Alister Taylor, Bob Laughton (FNLRT) with anglers may also be trained to participate.

Juvenile Surveys

Findhorn Survey 2021: (34 sites) All juvenile scales have been read and data entered into the SFCC database by 25th March. Initial data analysis underway and a report should be available shortly.

Findhorn mainstem survey start on 9th August and 7 sites have been completed so far. The low flow conditions allowed the deeper and faster flowing areas to be accessed. Approximately 30 sites will be examined over August and September and will provide an indication of the distribution and abundance of fish with the mainstem.

I also plan to visit the Allt na Frith in Tomatin after our recent fish rescue produce very few fish.

Smolt Trapping and Tagging

Spey Tagging: Due to staff shortage on the Spey, I was contracted to assist with tagging on the river this spring. Tagging commenced in April and over 180 smolts were tagged by mid-May on two upper tributaries the Tromie and the Truim. Data on their movements and survival is being compiled and result should be available towards the end of the year. The tagging was part of the AST Moray Firth Tagging Project and the Marine Scotland Smolt Tagging Project. Contract £8k.

Findhorn Smolt Trap repaired by AJ Engineering, and we will develop a plan for 2023 onwards.

Protection of Fish Stocks: 2021-22 sawbill licence was completed, and data submitted.

Further sawbill counts were organised by Ali during March and May 2022. Data compiled and submitted to Roger Knight as part of Moray Firth licence application. Next count October 2022. My thanks to all the estate staff who help with the counts and to Roger Knight (Spey Fishery Board) in compiling the application.

Seal control licence was also applied for in February but unsuccessful and appeal was explored but not action.

Poaching Control: Sean and Ali continue regular patrols across the Findhorn and Lossie (under contract to Lossie DSFB) and have aided and guidance to new Nairn bailiff, Russel Baker. A range of incidents so far mostly anglers fishing without tickets, but two hardened poachers were caught in action and with the help of Police Scotland a case for trial has been prepared for the Fiscal.

5. Marine and Inshore Environment

Discussions with Alan Wells (FMS) and other river directors around the Moray Firth on inshore fisheries completed. Became members of the Our Seas Coalition. Valerie and I also conducted several searches into Moray Firth fishing activities. Preparing latter to Fisheries secretary.

6. Education and Awareness

Schools Go To Fish: I had an encouraging call from Heldon Community Council indicating that funding for a project with Alves, Dallas and Mosstowie Primary School which had been agreed prior to Covid was still available and I agreed to contact the schools in the first term of 2023 and plan to deliver the project. (Funds £4k)

Meeting with Ian Robertson ([SANDS](#)) and neighbouring Trusts on developing a Scotland wide angling structure was held in February. Inner Moray Firth group established to review angling initiatives and requirements in the area and report back to Ian. RL to chair group. However, this project has not continued.

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