

FNLRT Progress Report 03.2022

R. Laughton, 05/12/2022

The following report provides an update on activities from 16th August 2022 to 30th November 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 fully re-opened with staff present on most days, although some home working is still undertaken.

Staff Changes:



After nine years of outstanding service Valerie Wardlaw (centre) decided to leave the Trust and Claire Walker (right) took up the Administrator role from the 22nd of August.

James Symonds (SISI Project Officer) also decided to move on to the Cromarty Trust and take on the role of Fisheries Officer. Elise Cox who has been a regular volunteer and spent two seasons with the Trust was promoted into the Project officer role.

Table 1: Summary of funding bids submitted during August to November 2022.

Funder	Management Plan Target	Description of the bid	Decision	Amount Expected or Awarded
Scot Gov: Just Transition Fund	1.1 Climate Change	To develop forestry plans with proprietors in for the upper Findhorn catchment and rejuvenate riparian forest to ameliorate the effects of rising water temperatures	Successful	£970,000
LNER: Customer and Community Investment Fund	1.1 Climate Change 4.6 to 4.11 Fish and River Data	Gathering ecological baseline data and fostering river stewardship in the Upper Findhorn Watershed	Due in March 2023	£75,000
Highland Council: Nature Restoration Fund	4.11 Data on aquatic species	Freshwater Pearl mussel survey of the River Findhorn	Unsuccessful	£25,000
NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund	1.1 Climate Change 4.6 to 4.11 Fish and River Data	Riparian woodland creation and determining the status of Freshwater Pearl Mussels within the Findhorn.	Due in December 2022	£140,000
NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund	3.3 INNs control	Three-year extension to SISI control project, prepared and submitted by Callum Sinclair (Project Manager)	Due in December 2022	tbc
NatureScot/FME: Working with Rivers graduate placement scheme	1.1 Climate Control or 3.3 INNs control	Submitted expression of interest for two placement posts, one successful.	Due in January 2022	£6,500
FMS: Fisheries Management Plan Storybook	All	Development of online version of fisheries management plan	November 2023	£4,000

Other funding bids currently being developed, INNs control using pigs on Kellas Estate, variety of projects based around the River Lossie are being discussed with a local distillery company.

1. Climate Change

So far three funding bids have been prepared to develop climate change resilience work (see Table 1). So far the Just Transition bid was successful gaining £970k for the Trust to progress work on rejuvenating riparian forests in the upper catchment. Considerable planning and work will be required

to deliver the project since the time scale is only 18 months up to April 2024. A sub-group has been established to help deliver the project and we are developing a budget and targets for year 1. Improving our internal management systems such as accounts, timesheets, etc is underway and job descriptions for project staff and consultants are also being prepared. Alasdair Laing has made initial contact with several upper proprietors and estate staff and early feedback is encouraging. Elle and I attended the Scotland the Big Picture conference in Perth and a range of related workshops and meetings have also been attended.

We have developed a project name for this area of work, the [Findhorn Watershed Initiative](#), (FWI) and this will include the range of projects developing on climate change issues but will also broaden out into other areas as it develops.

We have also been successful in gaining a graduate placement (Table 1) and a further meeting on the details of this placement will take place on 13th December.

2. River habitat and Land Use

A9 Tomatin to Moy: No further developments.

A96 Dualling: No further developments

[Clashgour Windfarm](#): Planning permission granted in October and I have had initial discussion with developers on monitoring plans.

[Rothes III](#): Planning permission granted in October.

[Carn Duhie Windfarm](#): Revised plans for 16 turbines submitted but Highland Council raised an objection triggering Public Enquiry.

[Lethen Wind Farm](#): No further correspondence.

[Kellas Wind Farm](#): Application for planning being developed.

[Ourack Wind Farm](#): Further comments submitted during July.

Lhanbryde Burn – Kirkhill Bridge: Fish survey completed in September; excellent numbers of juvenile trout found around the bridge site. Report completed and submitted to Moray Council bridges department (costs: £1375). Further discussions with Kim McGowan (Moray Council Bridge Team) indicate the bridge replacement will be complex so further work on design and installation are currently being developed. No date for the works to commence has been confirmed.

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 held in April. A few revisions to the plans were incorporated and a fish rescue was completed on 23rd August. Works are complete.

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



Ali Taylor standing at the upper edge of a spawning area on the Mosset Burn just above Invererne Road bridge. The area contained one large redd created by a large sea trout or a salmon and two smaller redds created by trout.

site due to water supply pipes and other utilities. In addition Scottish Water and their contractors indicated that Network will preventing access across the rail tracks to the sewage works. So Scottish Water are seeking approval to start the bridge works in early 2023. In general, we advise contractors to carry out river works from the end of May through to the end of September to avoid disturbance to spawning fish and the period when eggs and alevins are within the substrate.

However, in this situation we have been contracted to examine the area upstream and downstream from the bridge crossing to determine if there is any spawning taking place. Redd counts have been carried out during November and December and so far all spawning activity is upstream from the proposed crossing area, no redds have been found within the proposed site. Counts will be completed in December and a report submitted to Scottish Water. Given the lack of spawning within the proposed bridge area and the limited works proposed within the channel there should be little danger to fish within the area. However, I have also proposed a fish transfer when works commence to remove and relocate any fish within the bridge crossing area.

Cloddach Bridge: Bridge closed to road traffic during the summer but problems for fish passage remain due to undercutting of the bridge apron. I applied and received a licence to transfer salmon over the partial obstruction using hand nets on behalf of the Elgin AA. However, this is proving tricky and not a satisfactory long term solution. I've written to Moray Council regarding the longer-term plans for the bridge and its removal. So far no reply!

Dallas Sub-station: SSE have developed plans for re-channelling a small burn which is causing erosion at the Dallas substation. Works are well planned and when I inspected the burn no spawning redds were found in the area. The burn was surveyed back in 2014 and only a few trout were present near the mouth. So unlikely to be any significant effects on fish populations although again a fish rescue and transfer was proposed to the contractors. However, Dallas Estate have not been made fully aware of the works and I have been in contact with their factor to provide an update. I've also advised SSE to fully discuss the plans with the estate and also inform the estates further downstream prior to any works commencing.

Mains of Moyness Water Supply Upgrade: Reviewed plans to upgrade the pipework and install an access culvert across the Coachan Robbie, which drains into the Muckle Burn. The burn is very small <0.5m wide and there were no concerns regarding fish spawning in the culvert area. Works commenced this week and Sean, and Ali inspected the culvert crossing and silt traps which were all installed to a good standard.

3. Biosecurity and INNs

SISI Project:



Ali Taylor and Bob Laughton operating the 400l spray tank on Japanese knotweed. (photo Owen Moodie)

Attention switched to Japanese Knotweed control during Autumn. Progress was good with the Nairn and Findhorn (above A96) completed. Work was also began to gather pace on the Lossie, with a significant area of JK treated on Kellas this year. This was aided by the use of a large 400l pressure tank sprayer which allowed a much larger area to be sprayed in a shorter time. Brokentore, upper Bogside, Cloddach and Wester Manbeen were also treated and we are beginning to see gaps in the JK coverage at last. Brokentore and Wester Manbeen are particularly pleasing with JK

reduced to a few limited areas after 2-3years of treatment.

The work was funded through SISI with additional funding provided by Crown Estate and Moray Estate. I am also very grateful for the considerable help provided by volunteers and estate staff.

Elise has also maintained and expanded the mink monitoring raft and trap network and installed more Remoti monitoring units on a number of traps of the traps. The Remoti units link into our mobile phones and when a mink is caught in the trap it send a sign. Its lead to a quick success with two captures in the last month. Both in traps operated by Sean and Ali. The first was on the coast and the second on the Lossie near Wester Manbeen. The latter was particularly pleasing since it had been spotted a few days earlier by a local resident.

Elise has also recruited several new volunteers and expanded the raft network on the Spey. Three mink have been captured on the Spey this year. Please continue to report any sightings.

Elise and I has also spent quite a bit of time bring all the treatment data into a better shape. This had slipped quite a bit in the last year but all plant treatment and volunteer time data is now up to date. Similar all the data on mink trap/raft locations and active volunteers is also up date.

Jane Hamilton (SISI Volunteer and Communications Officer) has settled well into the post regular posts across various social media, a range of treatment case studies have been completed, a winter newsletter was published and filming of control techniques was completed at a number of locations including Kellas during October. A particular highlight was finally completing the schools film project! The schools film project was badly interrupted by the Covid outbreak but their results can finally be seen on the SISI web site at <https://www.invasivespecies.scot/>

A funding bid to the Nature Restoration Fund (Table 1) was prepared and submitted by Callum Sinclair (Project Manager) to continue and expand the control project for another three years. We should know the outcome in early December.

4. Fish and Fisheries

Catches 2022: Catch returns for the Lossie and the Findhorn are presented in Table 2.

Table 2	Salmon and Grilse	Sea Trout
Lossie	15	29
Findhorn	764	127

Both rivers catches should be treated as an interim total since a few estates and fisheries still have to report their data. However, catch data from both rivers are very low which reflects the poor fishing conditions due to the hot dry summer and prevailing low flows.

Despite losses to disease in May spawning numbers appear to be good with salmon observed cutting redds in many tributaries.

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.

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 scales from 14 salmon and grilse were collected. This reflects the low catches for the season due to the prevailing low flows. Other rivers experienced similar issues. However, the scales have been submitted to Marine Scotland and we await the results.

An additional 41 scales were collected from diseased salmon earlier in the year and a further four scales samples were collected by anglers from finnock in Findhorn Bay.

My thanks to Sean and Ali who collected most of the samples and to the anglers who submitted samples.

Juvenile Surveys

Findhorn Mainstem Survey 2021:

Findhorn mainstem survey started on 9th August and 19 sites were completed between Findhorn Bay and Tomatin. The low flow conditions allowed the deeper and faster flowing areas to be accessed but river temperatures were approaching 20^oC on a few occasions making us reconsider whether it was suitable to carry out electrofishing. Initial findings are presented below in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Juvenile salmon CPUE in the mainstem Findhorn 2022

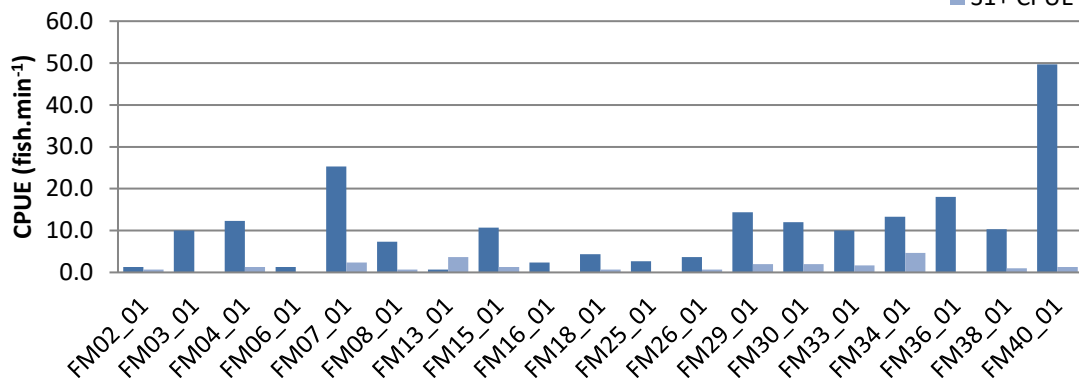
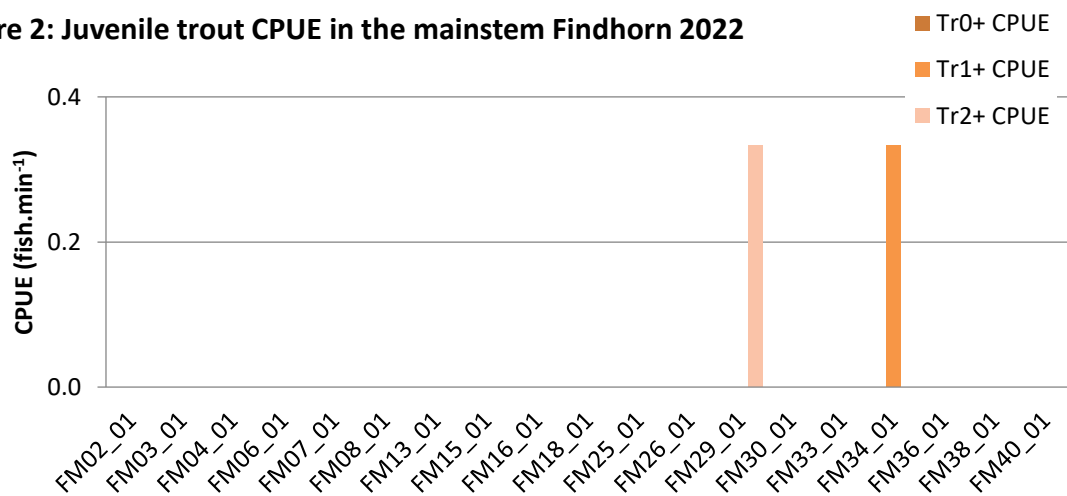


Figure 2: Juvenile trout CPUE in the mainstem Findhorn 2022



Salmon 0+ were found at all 19 sites (Figure 1) with a mean CPUE of 11.4fish.min⁻¹, salmon 1++ were present at 13 sites with a mean CPUE of 1.3fish.min⁻¹. Trout were present at only two sites, eels at five sites and minnows at two sites.

This is the first time we have carried out a mainstem survey and so there is no previous data to compare with. However, it does indicate the mainstem is an important rearing area for juvenile salmon. In particular the site at Tomatin (FM40_01) produced very high numbers.

Similar surveys have been carried out on the mainstem of the Spey and the results are similar with the mainstem producing good numbers of salmon but few juvenile trout.

Protection of Fish Stocks: 2021-22 sawbill licence was completed and licence has been received. Control will be organised over winter and spring by Sean and Ali.

A sawbill count was organised by Ali during November 2022 and further counts will take place over winter and spring. My thanks to all the estate staff who help with the counts and to Roger Knight (Spey Fishery Board) in compiling the licence application.

Poaching Control: Sean and Ali continue regular patrols across the Findhorn and Lossie (under contract to Lossie DSFB). A number of incidents were dealt with. They also completed training in dealing with aggressive behaviour and applying hand cuffs.

Riverwatch meeting was held in November giving the bailiffs from all the Moray Firth rivers a chance to exchange information with Police Scotland wildlife crime officers. I also attend the joint Partners Against Rural Crime and Partnership Against Wildlife Crime meeting in October and raise awareness of bailiffing and poaching control.

Tomatin Distillery: During a fish rescue on the Allt na Frithe (Free Burn) in May this year we recorded the instream temperature at 19.7°C while in the neighbouring burn the Allt Neacrath the temperature was much lower at 10.0°C. The uplift in temperature is coming from the discharge of warm cooling water from the Tomatin Distillery. Although this is only a spot check further enquiries indicated that the distillery is having problems reducing the temperature of its discharge. I conducted a quick analysis of the fish number above and below the cooling water discharge and also compared with the Allt Neacrath. The data indicates that fish numbers below the discharge are well below expected levels. Anthony Laing (Findhorn Board Chair) have written to the distillery manager expressing our concerns and to seek a meeting to address this issue.

5. Marine and Inshore Environment

I've had some discussions with a number of Trust biologists, and our local MSP on Moray Firth fishing activities. Preparing letter 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)

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