

## FNLRT Progress Report 01.2023

R. Laughton, 06/03/2023

The following report provides an update on activities from 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022 to 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Plan 2021-2026.

Table 1: Funders and Grant Summary	Management Plan	Description of the bid	Decision	Amount
<b>Scot Gov: Just Transition Fund</b>	1.1 Climate Change	To develop forestry plans in the upper Findhorn catchment and rejuvenate riparian forest to ameliorate the effects of rising water temperatures	Successful	£970,000
<b>LNER: Customer and Community Investment Fund</b>	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
<b>NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund</b>	1.1 Climate Change 4.6 to 4.11 Fish and River Data	Riparian woodland baseline monitoring scheme and determining the status of Freshwater Pearl Mussels within the Findhorn.	Successful	£138,114
<b>NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund</b>	3.3 INNs control	Three-year extension to SISI control project, prepared and submitted by Callum Sinclair (Project Manager)	Successful	£2.08M FNLRT £237,494
<b>NatureScot/FME: Working with Rivers graduate placement scheme.</b>	1.1 Climate Control and 3.3 INNs control	One graduate placement post for FNLRT	Successful	£8,645
<b>FMS: Fisheries Management Plan Storybook</b>	All	Development of online version of fisheries management plan	Successful	£4,000
<b>Baxter Foundation: Pigs versus Knotweed</b>	3.3 INNs Control	Using pigs to control Japanese knotweed trial on Kellas Estate	Decision 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023	£2,800
<b>Moray Estates</b>	3.3 INNs Control	Continuing control of GH and JK on Moray Estates at Bogside and Darnaway	Successful	£3,450 £800
<b>Crown Estate</b>	3.3 INNs Control	Continuing control of GH and INNs at Wester Manbeen	Pending	£2,760
<b>Scottish Marine Environment Enhancement Fund (SMEEF)</b>	5.0 Marine and Inshore Environment	Findhorn Bay ecosystem restoration: development phase	Unsuccessful	£25,000

## 1. Climate Change

### Findhorn Watershed Initiative

Following actions completed or area underway,

- Just Transition Funding and NRF secured, LNER funding pending (see Table 1),
- Steering group formed and has met twice,
- Successful landowner meeting held in London, five upper catchment proprietors attended,
- Follow up meetings held with two landowners,
- Meeting with Duncan Bryden regarding community involvement and community wood development,
- Meeting with Tomatin distillery regarding riparian woodland development,
- Publicity and strategy review meeting held with Scotland the Big Picture,
- Riverwoods film evening with the Findhorn Heritage Society at Milnes Inst, Findhorn,
- Contract tender documents completed for the JT/NRF project, these will be issued on 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> March a to invite applicants,
- Electric car quotes secured, Skoda Enyaq preferred option, and discussions on payment procedure underway with JT team,
- Project Officer post advertised, and interviews completed, successful candidate will attend FNLRT meeting and before confirming appointment,
- Working with Rivers Graduate posts advertised and two students interviewed, successful candidate will be appointed on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March,
- Office space expanded, new accountants appointed, and XERO software installed, project management software reviewed,
- Discussions on payment and invoicing procedure completed with NRF to improve cashflow,
- Cashflow and budget revised,
- A wide range of other relevant meetings, workshops and seminars attended.

## 2. River habitat and Land Use

**A9 Tomatin to Moy:** Dualling contract not awarded.

**Clashgour Windfarm:** Planning permission granted in October, and I've had initial discussion with developers and the Hutton Institute, Aberdeen on developing a 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.

**Tom nan Clach Extension:** EIA reviewed mitigation measures for fish populations incorporated.

**Kellas Wind Farm:** Application for planning being developed.

**Ourack Wind Farm:** Further comments submitted during July.

**Lhanbryde Burn – Kirkhill Bridge:** Further discussions with Kim McGowan (Moray Council Bridge Team) indicate the bridge replacement will be complex so further work on design and installation is underway. No date for the works to commence has been confirmed.

**Forres WWTW New Access Bridge:** Works started in February 2023, site meeting with developers (ESD Joint Venture) held on 27<sup>th</sup> February. Sheet piling along the riverbanks to construct bridge supports will start in early March. Having reviewed plans there is currently no requirement for a fish rescue.

Sean Mclean and Alister Taylor will maintain regular site visits to monitor works. Downstream proprietors and farmers have all been informed of works.

**Dallas Sub-station:** Re-channelling of the Snaosan Stripe to prevent erosion undermining Dallas Sun station. Further onsite meeting with SSE, Cairn Engineering and Dallas Estate on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 to discuss and agree work program. Comments on fish provided and quote provided for fish rescue prior to water transfer into new channel. Contractor obtained CAR licence obtained in late February re-channelling works will commence shortly.



*Photo 2: Novel technique used by contractors to minimise bed disturbance on the Allt Bruachaig, during construction of the new bridge at Inverbrough, Jan 2023. (photo Sean McLean)*



*Photo 2: Supports for the new bridge at Inverbrough constructed from [EuropeBlocks](#), Jan 2023. (photo Sean McLean)*

**Inverbrough Bridge:** Support walls installed during January 2023 (Photos 1 and 2). Bridge design was prepared by Frank MacCulloch (Arvikaconsult Ltd) and so far the work has been excellent. The bridge platform should arrive in April 2023.

**Flichity Bridge Replacement:** The Flichity Bridge on the B951 road in the upper Nairn catchment requires replacement to support [Aberarder](#) windfarm traffic. Comments and surveys of the Flichity Burn were completed between 2015 to 2019 but project has been delayed for several reason. SSE have purchased the proposed wind farm and have agreed to upgrade the bridge, further comments on the works and a fish rescue quote has been provided on behalf of the Nairn Fishery Board. No date for the works to commence so far.

### 3. Biosecurity and INNs

#### **SISI Project:**

A funding bid to the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) (Table 1) was prepared and submitted by Callum Sinclair (Project Manager) and was successful in securing £2.08M to continue and expand the initiative from April 2023 to March 2026.

The majority of the grant will cover staff salaries, Elise Cox will become full time project officer for the FNL area and Jane Hamilton, will be retained as Volunteer and Communications Officer (VCO). Contractors are reduced but will still allow us to target some of the worse areas and FNLRT costs, mostly management are covered to around £2.5k per annum. Table 2 provides a breakdown of costs per year for 2023 to 2026. Equipment, roundup, training and a vehicle will also be supplied.

Table 2	NRF Award	NRF Award	NRF Award	Total NRF
Item	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Funding
<b>FNLRT</b>	£2,443.00	£2,543.00	£2,648.00	£7,634.00
Project Staff (PO and VCO)	£70,926.51	£74,478.34	£78,205.26	£223,610.11
Contractors	£2,083.33	£2,083.33	£2,083.34	£6,250.00

The emphasis in SISI phase two will be to continue control across existing areas and expand into the lower Findhorn, Muckle and Lossie to Elgin. To develop landowner agreements to maintain long-term control. Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and mink remain the key targets although we will also include skunk cabbage.

Elise has been working on landowner agreements over the winter and these have either been agreed or are pending with five estates. Elise has also prepared contractor tenders which will be issued shortly, and Moray Estate have also confirmed work on Bogside, Lossie. Crown Estate will hopefully confirm Wester Manbeen shortly. This will allow us to target contractor work more efficiently this season.

A further six volunteers were trained in safe application of herbicides (PA1/6AW) during spring, and we hope to run another course in March.

Very positive discussions were held with Kellas Estate regarding INNs control for 2023 in December we also discussed controlling JK using iron age pigs. A small trial a few years ago proved successful and we are keen to scale it up! I've submitted several funding applications but to date no success. The Baxter Foundation have accepted a full application which will be reviewed at the end of March. I'm considering an alternative approach "Sponsor a pig"!



*Photo 3: Mink captured at Wester Manbeen Feb 2023 (photo Ali Taylor)*

Elise with considerable help from Sean and Ali, has increased the mink raft and trap network over the winter. [Remoti](#) units have been installed on many traps which connects to our phones and if a trap is sprung then we can go and investigate. This reduces the amount of visits required to a trap, saving fuel and staff and volunteer time. Over the last four months 5 mink have been captured, one on the coast and four on the Lossie at Wester Manbeen. An Elgin AA angler reported a mink sighting near Wester Manbeen/Mayne Farm via Fred Rhind at the Lossie Board meeting in November. Sean and Ali installed a trap within 24hrs which led to a quick captured and the other three were captured soon after.

Jane has busy promoting the initiative over winter through a variety of social media platforms and also compiling data on volunteer effort and opinion. She also compiled an entry to the CIEEM environmental awards on behalf of the project, we await the results!

Follow the initiative at <https://www.invasivespecies.scot/>

#### 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
<b>Lossie</b>	15	29
<b>Findhorn</b>	853	131



*Photo 4: Forres AA president opens the 2023 season with a dram of Ben Romach whiskey at the Stoney Pool.*

Both rivers catches should be treated as an interim total since a few estates still have to report their data. However, catch data from both rivers are 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.

**Adult Scale Sampling Programme:** No results from the 2022 scale sampling programme so far. Ali Taylor completed the scale reading training course at MS Freshwater Lab, Pitlochry.

## Juvenile Surveys

**NEPS 2021 Survey Report:** The National Electrofishing programme Scotland report for the 2021 juvenile survey was published in February. For the full report [click here](#).

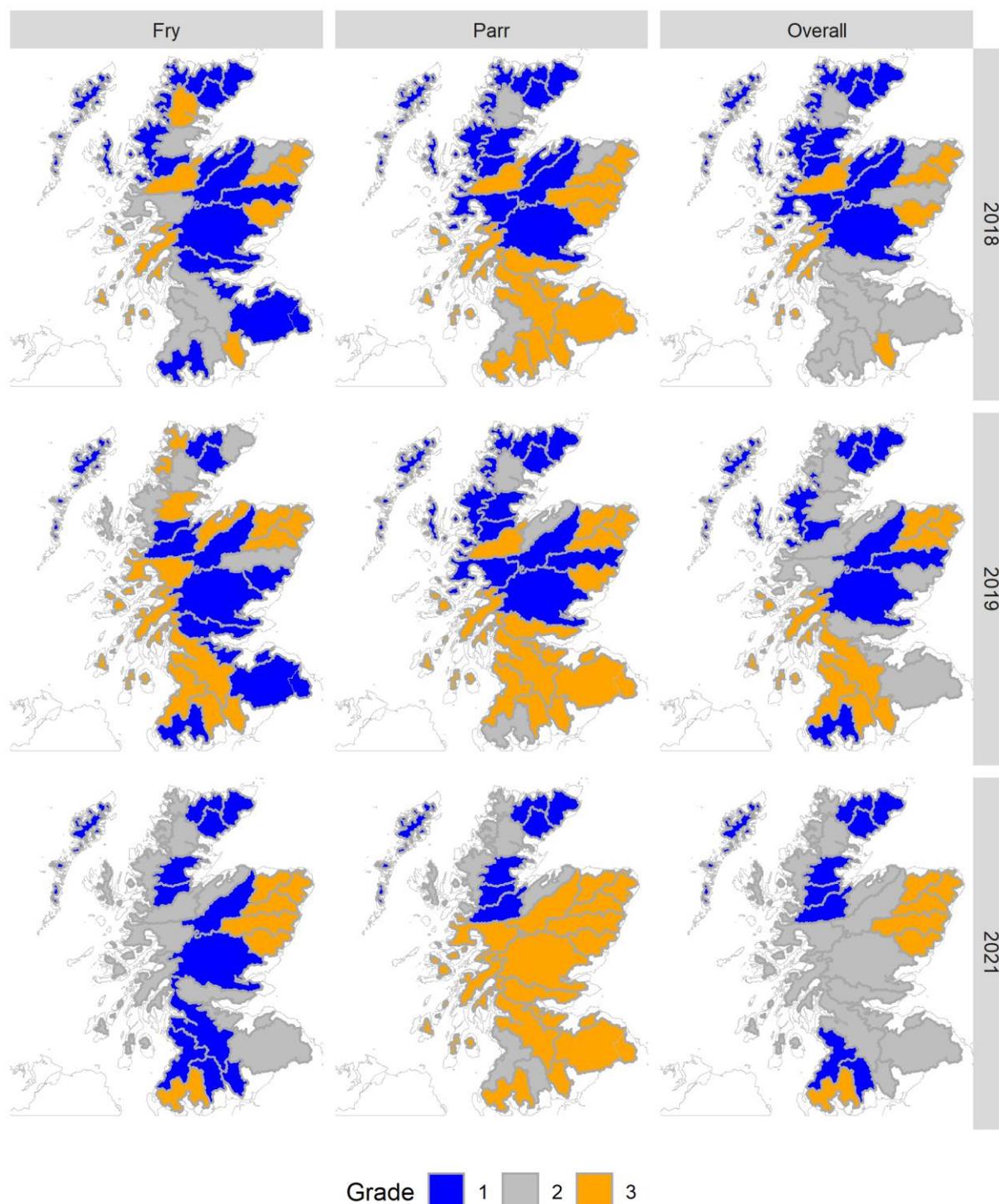


Figure 1: NEPS survey results for Scotland 2018 to 2021. from Malcolm et al 2023.

The initial NEPS survey in 2018 indicated the FNL area was Grade 1 for salmon fry and parr while the two latter surveys indicated a drop to Grade 2 (Figure 1). For Scotland over all salmon parr numbers

decline from 2018 to 2019 while salmon fry numbers have improved in 2021. At a national scale trout fry and parr densities have declined between 2018 and 2021, although densities in 2019 and 2021 remained broadly comparable ([Malcolm et al 2021](#)).

**Protection of Fish Stocks:** Data was analysed from the 2022 counts and submitted for a 2022-23 licence which was successful. Control will be organised over winter and spring by Sean and Ali.

A sawbill count was organised by Ali during February 2023 and further counts will take place during 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.

**Salmon Pressures:** Information was supplied to Scottish Government through FMS to develop models on the pressures affecting salmon throughout Scotland. This data has now been compiled by SFCC into pressure maps which can be explored by [clicking here](#).

**Poaching Control:** The angling season opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> February with the traditional ceremony at the Stoney Pool. Sean and Ali have commenced regular patrols around the Findhorn and so far no incidents to report. However, we were very disappointed to hear that two long term poachers who were caught and arrested in conjunction with Police Scotland officers were not prosecuted and only received a warning from the Procurator Fiscal. Sean is seeking a discussion with the PF to determine why such a lenient verdict was given.

**Tomatin Distillery:** A meeting was arranged with Tomatin Distillery (TD) on the 26<sup>th</sup> February to discuss thermal discharge issues. The distillery team outline the current actions they were taking to reduce the temperature of their cooling water discharge which included installing cooling towers this year. The FFB team outlined the problems with the temperature uplift in the Freeburn and its detrimental effect on fish populations. It was agreed to install a series of temperature loggers in the Allt na Frith Burn (Freeburn) to monitor river temperature. Fiona Birkenshaw (TD), Sean and Lai installed three loggers in the burn in early March and one in the nearby Allt Neacrath, an un affected burn for comparison. The loggers will remain in the burn to monitor temperature throughout the upgrade of the cooling tower and beyond.

I made a further visit to the Tomatin distillery site on the 24<sup>th</sup> February with Fiona Birkenshaw to discuss the potential for a tree planting project around the Freeburn. After a walk over the site we agreed the potential was very good and agreed to explore the developing a forestry plan within our Just Transition funding.

## 5. Marine and Inshore Environment

Elle and Roy developed a funding bid to SMEEF for a project within the Findhorn Bay reserve, looking at the potential for a sea grass restoration project and other activities but sadly this was unsuccessful.

There is currently a consultation open on [Scottish Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HPMAs\)](#) and I hope submit comments on this before the deadline on 20<sup>th</sup> March.

## 6. Education and Awareness

**Schools Go To Fish:** I haven't been able to progress this with our funding from Heldon Community Council (£4k) at Alves, Dallas and Mosstowie Primary Schools, partly due to the workload developing the FWI and also the schools being on strike. I plan to discuss options with the Heldon CC and the schools before Easter.

**UHI Talks:** Elise and I gave two talks as part of an open evening at UHI Inverness on 1<sup>st</sup> March. Both were well received, and Elise has followed up to arrange student group visits during the Spring.

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