

FNLRT Progress Report 02.2023

R. Laughton, 20/08/2023

The following report provides an update on activities from 1st March to 20th August 2023. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Plan 2021-2026.

Table 1: Funders and Grant Summary	Management Plan Target	Description of the bid	Decision	Amount
Scot Gov: Just Transition Fund	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
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	Successful	£75,000
NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund	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
NatureScot: Nature Restoration Fund	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
NatureScot/FME: Working with Rivers graduate placement scheme.	1.1 Climate Control and 3.3 INNs control	One graduate placement post for FNLRT	Successful	£8,645
FMS: Fisheries Management Plan Storybook	All	Development of online version of fisheries management plan	Successful	£4,000
Baxter Foundation: Pigs versus Knotweed	3.3 INNs Control	Using pigs to control Japanese knotweed trial on Kellas Estate	Successful but declined	£1,500
Moray Estates	3.3 INNs Control	Continuing control of GH and JK on Moray Estates at Bogside and Darnaway	Successful	£3,450 £800
Crown Estate	3.3 INNs Control	Continuing control of GH and INNs at Wester Manbeen	Successful	£2,760
Moray Council	3.3 INNs Control	Continuing control of INNs across Lossie and Findhorn	Successful	£10,000

1. Climate Change

Findhorn Watershed Initiative

Following actions completed or area underway,

- Just Transition Funding, NRF, LNER funding secured(see Table 1),
- Steering group formed and met regularly,
- Project Officer, Guy Harris appointed,
- Electric car, Skoda Enyaq purchased,
- Successful landowner meetings held with 10 upper proprietors,
- Riparian woodland plans developing with 6 landowners,
- Further discussions with Duncan Bryden regarding community wood development plus fish data report prepared,
- Scotland the Big Picture commissioned to supply photography,
- Riverwoods film evening held at Tomatin Community Hub,
- Ten contract tenders awarded all completed and submitted to NRF fund, payment approved,
- Working with Rivers Graduate, Sarah Hadfield appointed for six-month placement,
- Water temperature monitoring network installed in the Findhorn,
- Office space expanded, new accountants appointed, and XERO software installed, project management software reviewed,
- Discussions on payment and invoicing procedure completed with NRF and JTF to improve cashflow,
- Cashflow and budget continually revised,
- Communications officer post advertised, and applicants interviewed, appointment shortly,
- Joint schools initiative developed with Wild Things, launched shortly,
- Findhorn Bay Arts project plus other arts-based initiatives developed and commissioned,
- A wide range of other relevant meetings, workshops, site visits and seminars attended.

Further updates provided by Elle Adams and Guy Harris at the Board meeting.

2. River habitat and Land Use

Clashgour Windfarm: Water, invertebrate and fish monitoring programme developed and submitted to developers, awaiting approval.

Roths III: No further correspondence.

Carn Duhie Windfarm: No further correspondence.

Lethen Wind Farm: No further correspondence.

Tom nan Clach Extension: No further correspondence.

Kellas Wind Farm: No further correspondence.

Ourack Wind Farm: No further correspondence.

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, Sheet piling along both riverbanks to construct bridge supports completed by April, developers are awaiting delivery of new bridge platform. Sean Mclean and Alister Taylor maintained regular site visits to monitor works.

Dallas Sub-station: Re-channelling of the Snaosan Stripe to prevent erosion undermining Dallas Sun station was proposed for early 2023. However, works have been delayed due to planning discussions with Moray Council.

Inverbrough Bridge: Bridge platform installed in April and works completed.

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. Works will start in October 2023.

3. Biosecurity and INNs

SISI Project:

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

SISI Project Officer: Elise Cox has been busy on GH control during the last four months primarily on Giant Hogweed but also Himalayan Balsam. Student intern Sarah Hadfield has also been assisting with the control efforts.

Giant Hogweed Summary:

River Nairn: All GH treated from Cawdor to Nairn Harbour, with support from Cawdor Estate, Kilravock Estate and Green Hive volunteers. The Auldearn Burn from the A96 to the confluence with the Nairn plus the area around Sainburys and the Industrial Estate was also treated.

Findhorn: All GH treated from Logie Bridge downstream to the A96 was treated. In particular we hit the area along the Dalvey drains early this year with contractor Mark Whitten (Groves Forestry) which proved successful.



SISI Project Officer Elice Cox operating the pressurized tank a highly effective weapon to tackle Giant Hogweed.

From the A96 downstream Wild Things continued control on the right-bank, and we began control along the left bank from Mundole downstream to the Findhorn back-run. In this area we used a 400l pressurised tank hired from Kellas Estate. This proved highly effective and allowed a much larger area to be tackled in a shorter time.

We were also delighted with the progress made by Network rail along the rail between Brodie and Forres. Contractors were employed to tackle this badly infested section and they made a fantastic start. We treated all the adjoining areas in the fields alongside the railway and hopefully this will see a concerted control approach over the next few years. My thanks to Mark Allen (Network Rail) and the contractor team for an outstanding start.

Muckle Burn: GH treatment was completed from Earlsmill to Dalvey and densities of GH along the Muckle are now beginning to improve considerably.

Mosset Burn: GH treatment completed from Sourbank at Rafford and the Kennels in Altyre downstream to the confluence with Findhorn Bay. This was the tenth year of treatment along the Mosset and GH has now declined to Rare status with no GH plants observed in Altyre and upstream from Mannachie Mains Farm.

Lossie: GH treatment was completed through Kellas Estate, Brokentore, Bogside (MorayEstate), Wester Manbeen (Crown), Brucelands Farm and through Elgin (Moray Council). In general, good progress was made with GH densities dropping considerably from Kellas through Bogside. Wester Manbeen is proving difficult to crack, with growth rates here very high this year and although the area of GH has been reduced in the last three years there are still two areas of very high density. GH density in Bogside is declining slowly but sadly we were unable to treat the GH on the opposite bank this year



Upper photo shows the Railway line at Greshop Industrial Estate on 29th June 2022 with no GH treatment; lower photo shows GH after treatment by Network Rail contractors, 17th June 2023.

so have lost some ground this year. However, the pressure tank was used at Brucelands Farm and worked well, so will be utilised more extensively next year.

Very positive discussions were held with Kellas Estate regarding JK control for using iron age pigs. Support for the project was secured from the Baxter Foundation but sadly due to the sudden death of Gordon Robertson, the estate factor, the project was not initiated.

Our thanks to all the proprietors, landowners, contractors, companies and especially all the volunteers who help with the control efforts.

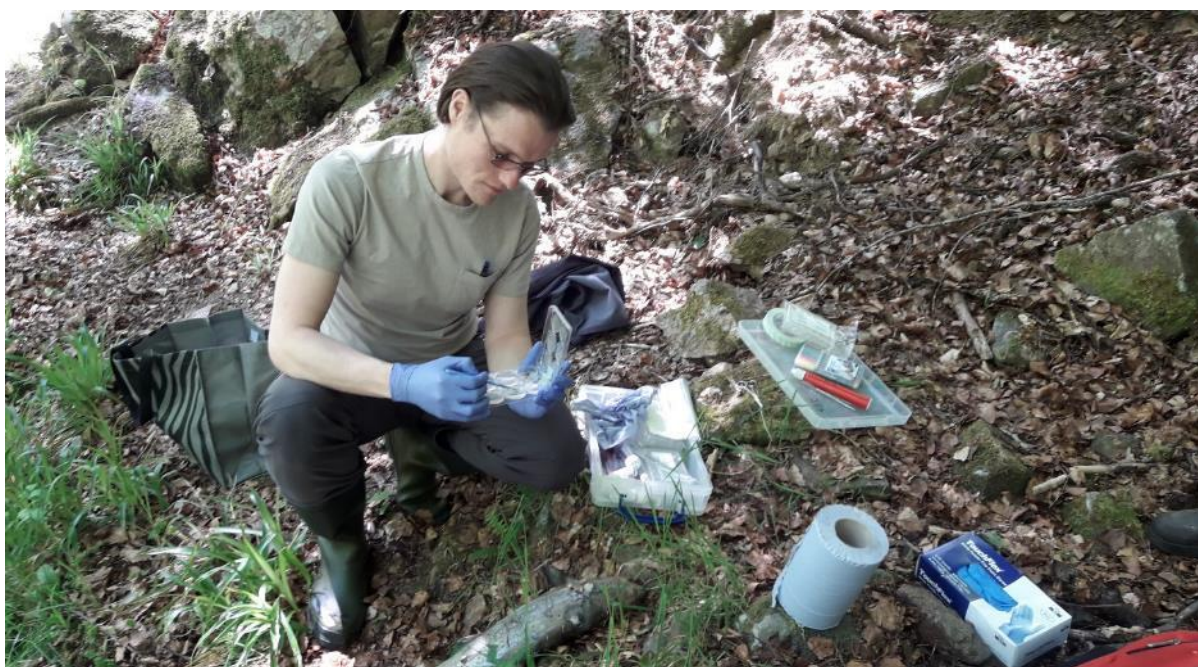
Mink: Elise has continued to maintain the mink raft and trap network. Over the last four months a further 5 mink have been captured bring the total to 10 for 2023 so far.

Jane has busy promoting the initiative throughout spring 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; however, we did not gain the top award but were highly commended!

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

4. Fish and Fisheries

Catches 2023: Spring salmon catches for the Findhorn were disappointingly low and with low flows during most of May and June catches did not improve. In addition, a further outbreak of disease spread through the Findhorn salmon stock leading to considerable losses.



Collecting tissue samples from infected salmon on the River Divie for Saprolegnia, June 2023.

Tissue samples were collected from several infected salmon on the River Divie for analysis by Prof Peiter van West and his team at Aberdeen University. Results confirmed the infection was a new variant of Saprolegnia which is more infectious than its previous forms. This outbreak was also reported from several other Scottish rivers and is extremely worrying. To address concerns Fisheries Management Scotland and Aberdeen University have raised funds from across the Fishery Board network to support a PhD study to understand the effects of this new Saprolegnia infection more fully and develop appropriate management actions. The Findhorn Board have provided funds to support the PhD.

Conservation Grades: Marine Scotland has undertaken an assessment of the conservation status of salmon in inland waters in Scotland for the 2024 fishing season. The outcome of that assessment, including proposed gradings for rivers and assessment groups in 2024, is available on the [Scottish Government website](#). The Findhorn and Nairn retain Grade 1, Lossie remains at Grade 3.

Juvenile Surveys

NEPS 2023: The National Electrofishing programme Scotland (NEPS) received funding for a further survey in 2023. Thirty sites are allocated to the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie and after staff training we commenced surveys on 1st August. To date 14 sites have been completed.

Upper Findhorn Survey: Due to start 1st September approx., 20 sites funded through LNER.

Nairn Survey: Due to start 1st September approx., 25 sites funded through NDSFB.

Protection of Fish Stocks: Data was analysed from the 2023 counts and submitted for a 2023-24 licence. We are awaiting the outcome.

Poaching Control: Sean and Ali have commenced regular patrols around the Findhorn and Lossie. Despite low runs of fish numbers of anglers visiting the river have been good and there has also been a number of poaching incidents.

5. Marine and Inshore Environment

Elle organised and completed a sea grass survey in Findhorn Bay, during May which was well supported, and the data was submitted into the national dataset.

6. Education and Awareness

Schools Go To Fish: Elle and I have discussed this with Luke Strachan (Wild Things), and he has agreed to take this forward through the Just Transition Fund. Further details to follow.

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