



River Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board

Clerk: Anthony Laing Administrator: Valerie Wardlaw
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Minute of the Board Meeting

Held on Monday 15th November 2021 virtually at 10.30am

Present:

Anthony Laing -AnL (Chairman)
 Alasdair Laing- AIL
 Julie Balgonie- JB
 Andrew Howard- AH

Mark Laing- ML
 Graham Bell- GB
 Alex Leven- AL

In attendance:

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

Robert Laughton (RL) – Director, FNLRT
 Valerie Wardlaw – Administrator, FDSFB

A	Item	Action
1.	Apologies: Tony Watts, Colin Cawdor	
2.	Minutes of Meeting 9th August 2021 Minutes were approved.	
3.	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>Bailiff contracts have been reviewed and will be signed before the end of the year.</p> <p>Muckle Burn riparian damage- RL has not had any updates from SEPA about requirements to repair damaged sections of the river. AIL requested that RL keep pressure on SEPA to conclude any enforcement actions and to ask them for regular updates on the situation.</p> <p>Sawbill What's App group- RL/SM/AT to set up a What's App group for keepers etc to notify ad hoc sightings of sawbills on the river.</p>	<p>RL/SM/ AT</p> <p>RL</p> <p>RL/SM/ AT</p>
4.	<p>Budget & Finance</p> <p>Budget Update- VW circulated an updated budget and cashflow forecast for this financial year. The variance from the approved budget is due to a decrease in income from the JRS as the bailiffs returned to work full time when the river reopened. In addition, there has been increased expenditure due to increased insurance costs and the production of the river signs. There is a deficit of circa £12k forecast for the year end in January.</p> <p>Budget for 2022-2023- a draft budget for next financial year has been circulated which includes the 1.25% increase in employer NI contributions and the £4K small business Employer NI allowance from government. A levy set at £0.49 in the £ would result in a £2k deficit for the year. The Board approved the budget and approved the setting of the levy at £0.49 in the £. GB asked how this levy compared with other rivers in Scotland; AIL thought the levy was in the lowest 25% of levies set by other DSFBs. AIL will check with FMS to confirm if information on other levies is in the public domain and can be shared with GB and the rest of the board.</p> <p>Investment Portfolio- AnL has spoken to Rathbones about the management of the investment portfolio as the £240k fund currently generates an income of £4k a year, which is the fee Rathbones charges for the management of the portfolio. Rathbones suggested it could be moved to a type of account which costs less to manage. AnL also felt that too many</p>	<p>AIL</p>

	<p>funds were being invested in and reducing these to circa 10 Investment Trusts might also reduce fees. AIL suggested a lower management cost alternative would be to transfer to investment in tracker funds. AH suggested he could look at the performance of investments under his control as a comparison. AnL to forward the Rathbones information to AH. All agreed that the profit being eaten up by fees was not a sensible situation.</p>	<p>AH/ AnL</p>
5.	<p>River Matters Conservation Code 2022- The Board approved the Code unchanged from last year. There was a discussion about advising against fish handling, in particular taking fish out of the water for photographs, but it was felt the current code included that information. Biosecurity- nothing to report. RL advised the board that the SISI project would be making biosecurity one of its priorities next year. H&S- RL advised the Board that First Aid training would be organised in the new year for the Bailiffs as their current certification has expired.</p>	<p>VW SM/AT VW/RL</p>
6.	<p>Head Bailiff Report 2021 Catch Returns- SM has received all but five catch returns from proprietors. The draft salmon and grilse catch was 1164 of which 697 were salmon (34 retained- 95% release rate), 467 Grilse (78 retained 83% release rate). 127 sea trout were caught on the river and an additional 52 sea trout and 190 finnock in Findhorn Bay. The Findhorn AA have had a big increase in anglers this season with a large number of permits sold. The trend this season is similar to the previous few years with a strong run of salmon in spring but lower numbers of grilse in the summer. AIL made the Board aware that catch returns are likely to become digitised in future to make them more accessible and available throughout the season. However, the method of capturing the information is likely to prove problematic to develop. Good catch data is essential for the informed management of the river, especially as catch numbers are used in the Conservation Limits model for grading rivers. The bailiffs have had a busy year, starting with staffing the smolt trap in the spring, followed by summer patrols to check angling permits as there were numerous visitors this year. In the autumn they helped RL with the NEPS juvenile fish surveys and additional regular Findhorn surveys. The bailiffs continue to report any poaching related information to Police Scotland through the non-emergency 101 line, which helps the police build up a picture of incidents in the area.</p>	
7.	<p>FNLRT Director Report RL reported that the 12 sites identified for juvenile fish surveys under the NEPS scheme were all completed, and data sent to Marine Scotland for analysis. In addition, RL/SM/AT electrofished 34 regular Findhorn sites for which there is data from previous surveys going back to 1997. RL will be identifying age classes from the scale samples and compiling a report for the board over the winter. Salmon were found at the majority of sites and with good densities, but RL will compare results with surveys from previous years to give a balanced picture. The key productive tributaries for salmon stock- the Mazeran, Moy, and Kyllachy Burns, and the Dorback, Divie and Muckle Burns all showed good stocks of juvenile fish. RL said that SM and AT undertaking the EF training and developing their survey skills and expertise was a very positive development. RL felt the support of the bailiffs in undertaking the juvenile surveys was beneficial not just for data collection,</p>	<p>RL</p>

	<p>but also for networking with keepers and estate workers in the upper catchment.</p> <p>Riparian woodland development- Fishmongers Company funded a project at the beginning of the year to identify key areas where rising water temperatures will impact on salmon survival. The Upper Findhorn Catchment was identified as a critical area for planting riparian woodland to provide shading to reduce water temperatures, in addition to increasing habitat biodiversity. Glenmazeran Estate has been approached to develop a tree planting project, but further discussions are needed to identify potential sources of funding and confirm the scale of the project. RL would like to broaden reforestation to other areas such as Kyllachy, Coignafearn and Dalmigavie.</p> <p>AST Smolt tagging project- SM/AT organised the recovery of receivers, (including finding one lost in 2019 with extractable data), and the AST staff are now analysing results. Initial results indicate a mortality rate of 50% in river similar to the 2019 findings. RL will be having discussions with AST shortly to progress the study into 2022. It is likely work will focus on predation and identifying other in-river causes of mortality.</p> <p>Predation- a licence to control sawbills has been granted. RL/SM/AT continue to organise regular sawbill counts and have discovered a (possibly) resident group of goosanders in the upper river near Kyllachy. Please continue to report any sightings to RL as they are submitted with the licence application. RL will contact Roger Knight about seal licences, but any control is unlikely in future.</p> <p>INNS- SISI project to continue to October 2022 with the emphasis on developing a policy for continued control beyond the end of the project. All areas of treatment planned for this year were completed except for a patch of JK in Altyre due to the weather. Mink are still being seen along the coast, with two captures this year, and one sighting at Kyllachy.</p> <p>GB- A96 Dualling- asked if anyone had any updates on whether this development is likely to go ahead. AH confirmed the Inverness to Nairn section is still going ahead but will try and find out about the remainder of the A9 and A96 dualling projects.</p> <p>GB- Sawbill licence- is it possible to increase the number controlled? RL explained the licence awarded was usually for 10-15% of sawbills found in regular counts. Counts are showing a decline in numbers of sawbills apart from in Findhorn Bay. RL reiterated that ad hoc information of sightings out with the official counts is useful so please send him the information.</p> <p>GB- What is the future of the smolt trap? RL confirmed he is waiting to hear from the AST about their proposals for 2022, but the board could install the trap to gain more information on populations themselves, without tagging.</p> <p>GB- Pink Salmon- RL confirmed that there is a pink salmon reported from the Findhorn on the FMS website but has no further information about it.</p>	<p>RL</p> <p>RL</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>RL</p> <p>AH</p> <p>ALL</p>
8.	<p>Catchment Developments No updates. The micro distillery at Altyre was granted planning permission.</p>	
9.	<p>AOCB AnL- has approached Edward Greenwell at Dalmigavie to try and fill the three vacant seats for Upper Proprietor Representatives on the Board. Two keepers are prepared to be mandated to represent their Upper Proprietors, David Paton (Dalmigavie) and Murray Wilson (Glenmazeran). The Board approved these additions to the Board and Anl will formally invite them to join as mandatories. In addition, the Board asked AnL to approach Edward</p>	<p>AnL/ VW</p>

	<p>Usborne to ascertain if he was willing to fill the final vacant seat for Upper Proprietor Representatives.</p> <p>SM- asked the Board about the possibility of buying a defibrillator for the Bailiff vehicle as they are often in remoter areas where they might be able to help in an emergency. The Board discussed the issue and felt that from their experience of the deployment of defibrillators, the likelihood of an incident happening when the bailiffs were near enough to be of use was very low. The Board will keep it under review but felt it was not likely to be an effective use of resources.</p> <p>GB- a Forres AA member thinks the river signs promote swimming in the river and asked for a response from the Board. The signs were intended to encourage consideration of other river users and the sharing of the river across activities. All agreed that there was less antisocial behaviour on the river this year. AH said that they had no similar concerns and they have not had complaints from anglers about other river user behaviour this year.</p> <p>AH asked about the Missing Salmon Project aims next year. RL thought the focus would be on the 50% loss before smolts enter the sea and a greater focus on investigating predation. The AST are still collecting carcasses for analysis of bird diet. However there does not seem to be a greater loss in the Bay where bird predation pressure should be greatest. Smolt mortality due to the tagging process does not seem to be the problem. The AST wish to find out if the 50% mortality has always happened or if it is a new phenomenon. AH asked if water quality data was being collected and if trends in this data showed any correlations with smolt mortality. RL suggested that the recent dry springs might retard the migration of smolts, so they are subjected to longer periods of predation.</p>	
10	<p>Dates of 2022 Meetings May 23rd 10.30am Board Meeting August 8th Board Meeting followed by AGM November 14th 10.30am Board Meeting.</p>	
	<p>Anthony closed the meeting and thanked Sean McLean, Alister Taylor, Bob Laughton and Valerie Wardlaw for all their hard work during the year.</p>	