



FNLRT Progress Report 03.2023

R. Laughton, 15/11/2023

The following report provides an update on activities from 20th August 2023 to 15th November 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
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
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
Marine Scotland National Electrofishing Programme Scotland (NEPS)	4.6 to 4.11 Fish and River Data	Electrofishing sites across the Findhorn. Nairn and Lossie	Successful	£15,099
Nairn DSFB	4.6 to 4.11 Fish and River Data	To conduct juvenile fish of survey of the river Nairn	Successful	£4,100

1. Climate Change

[Findhorn Watershed Initiative](#)

Nature Recovery:

- Glenmazeran – EA met with Edward and Murray, several areas have been identified for the project and Cawdor Forestry will assist with the relevant applications to Scottish Forestry for implementation in Spring 2024.
- Glenkyllachy – Proposals for additional native woodland area alongside the Estates current Scottish Forestry proposal have been agreed and GH is developing costings and agreements with the estate.
- Coignafearn – the FWI continues to nurture a positive rapport with the estate with emphasis on the high integrity approach the FWI is taking.
- Dalmagarry – meeting with Alan Hodgeson completed leading to some encouraging discussions.
- Dalmigavie – proposed schemes waiting on finalising deer management strategy.
- Tomatin – two of the three schemes proposed are going to be taken forward with assistance from Cawdor Forestry.
- Balnespick – further meeting with James Beatie indicated they are happy to allow a scoping exercise of the burn (Allt Bruachaig)
- Moy – email exchanges taking place proposing fencing schemes.
- Cawdor – Philip Arkell at Cawdor has been helpful in reviewing and feeding back on the landowner MOU. The proposed scheme at Drynachan is progressing well.

Contractors and Ecological Baseline work:

Deer management strategy – the strategy is nearly ready to circulate, and a collaborative deer count is being arranged. EA and GH met with Dougie Campbell from the Deer Management Group and a written follow up outlining the FWI position will be drafted. It is hoped the creation of a catchment deer forum will improve communication with the Deer Management Group.

Seedling survey completed on Coignafearn during September by Guy and team of contractors and volunteers. The results will provide baseline data for mapping future regeneration. The results can be registered with the Woodland Carbon Code and the information for how to do this has been given to Kenny at Coignafearn. Plans are in development for a similar seedling survey with Cawdor for Drynachan.

Findhorn Bay – EA will be putting together a project brief for expanding the FWI into Findhorn Bay for funding application purposes. AW and JW both have useful contacts that they will pass on to EA. AL observed that the Bay is suffering from a significant build-up of silt. RL indicated that this is partly due to erosion and the lack of large spates on the river. EA plans to consult with Alison Baker at the Atlantic Salmon Trust and Crown estate tenants of the shore/seabed which could lead into a Findhorn Bay funding bid.

Connected Communities:

Community Engagement Program – All three partnerships are ramping up their programs. Raghnaid and Mairi have held a walk and ceilidh in the upper catchment which was very well attended. Wild Things have started the community education program with local schools and groups. In tandem with Findhorn Bay Arts and artist has been commissioned to explore the community connections with the river.

The Strathdearn community has indicated a willingness to collaborate on some community engagement events in the future.

Community Benefit – EA attended a conference at the Green Finance Institute. In time the project aims to create agreements with local community development charities to help them facilitate community benefit. EA has also started to contact local catchment businesses to begin fostering those relationships.

Regenerative Rural Economy:

Discussions are underway with Zulu Ecosystems exploring natural capital opportunities and services. A MoU has been drawn up and further meeting to discuss a potential working relationship will take place on 24th November.

Publicity

Two promotional films regarding the initiative have been completed by the Just Transition Team, Scottish Government and Riverwoods initiative, both films can be viewed on YouTube and the links are below -

[JTF Film](#)
[Creating Riverwoods](#)

We will also be at the [Logie Christmas Market](#) during Nov/Dec come and you can find us on the [Findhorn Bay Arts](#) stall so come and have a chat.

Follow the progress of the Findhorn Watershed Initiative by clicking [here](#).

2. River habitat and Land Use

[Clashgour Windfarm](#): Water, invertebrate and fish monitoring programme developed with the Hutton Institute was approved by developers, contract being developed with monitoring likely to start in Jan 2024.

[Rothes III](#): Some initial correspondence with Natural Power regarding monitoring plans.

[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: Repair works have been completed this week using a water jetting technique. Sean and Ali maintaining regular visits to monitor works.

Forres WWTW New Access Bridge: Works completed to a high standard and new bridge in operation. Sean Mclean and Alister Taylor maintained regular site visits to monitor works.

Flichity Bridge Replacement: Plans for the bridge replacement have been revised and works will be delayed until 2024.

Elgin Flood Scheme: Sediment removal from higher flow relief channel upstream from Pansport bridge, Elgin, have been submitted to SEPA for a CAR licence. Effects on fish populations will be minimal but comments on the proposal will be submitted in the next few days.

Dallas Sub-station: Re-channelling of the Snaosean Stripe to prevent erosion undermining Dallas Sub-station started in October 2023 and is nearing completion. A fish rescue was completed on the original channel prior to the works in early October by Sarah Hadfield, Alister Taylor and Sean McLean

3. Biosecurity and INNs

INNS Progress Report (from Elise Cox SISI Project Officer)

Himalayan Balsam: All our Himalayan balsam control efforts were concentrated on the river Nairn this year. SISI Project Officer Elise was joined by six volunteers for a total of 35 hours of control over a combined four kilometres of river. These efforts were supplemented by volunteers and staff from the local community group [Green Hive](#), who also carried out regular balsam removal sessions throughout Nairn during the season.



Japanese Knotweed: Although our Japanese knotweed control season suffered some setbacks due to the stormy conditions in Autumn, we still managed to achieve a comprehensive control program. Approximately 155 hours of control were completed at strategic sites across the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie



with the help of 10 volunteers. JK control was completed on the Nairn from Howford Bridge to the river mouth. On the Findhorn from Daltulich Bridge down to the A96 bridge. JK is greatly reduced on both rivers in these sections. Plans were in place to tackle the JK downstream from the A96 but sadly the stormy weather prevented this.

JK infestations along the Lossie are particularly

dense but significant progress was made on Kellas Estate this year with all the JK from the Ford to the fishery was tackled this year. This was made possible by using 400l pressurised spray tank from Kellas Estate. This approach allows large stands of JK to be tackled more efficiently particularly where vehicle access is available. Volunteers and Contractors from Moray Conservation Services tackled any remaining areas with backpacks and stem injectors.



The pressure tank approach was also used through Mayne Farm to Palmers Cross, Elgin. JK treatment was also completed at Brokentre and Wester Manbeen where JK has been greatly reduced and further progress was made on the heavy infestations at Bogside.



The 400l pressurised tank in action on Kellas Estate and Palmers Cross.





Captured mink from Fogwatt.

Things have been relatively quiet on the mink front over the past couple of months, with a marked decrease in sightings being reported. However, we have remained vigilant with our network of volunteers monitoring their rafts for any signs of mink, as well as maintaining several remotely monitored traps in key locations around the catchments. Our patience was rewarded with

the capture of a mink by one of our volunteers near Fogwatt earlier in the month. This brings the total for 2023 up to 9 mink (3 from Fogwatt, 5 from Wester Manbeen and 1 from the Muckle Burn).

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

Jane Hamilton (SISI Communications Officer) has continued promoting the initiative throughout the summer through a variety of social media platforms and also compiling data on volunteer effort and opinion. She also helped to organise and deliver the SISI Conference in Aviemore during September which was attended by over 100 delegates. The conference was a great success with key updates on progress in Scotland provided by all the SISI project officers and a variety of speakers from around the world provide highly informative talks on other non-native species control.

Jane has also compiled an entries to the NatureScot Helping it Happen and the [RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards](#). I'm delighted to say the Initiative won the [Helping it Happen Award](#) with Jane and project officer Mark collecting the award in October. We await the results of the Nature of Scotland competition. Follow the initiative at <https://www.invasivespecies.scot/>

4. Fish and Fisheries

Catches 2023: Spring salmon catches for the Findhorn were disappointingly low and although fishing conditions improved later in the season the catch for salmon and grilse is 818 and 92 sea trout with one estate still to submit data. Catch and release rates remain high for salmon and grilse at 93% and 73% for sea trout. Although not the lowest catch on record it continues the declining trend in recent years.

Fish Disease: Peiter van West and his team at Aberdeen University was successful in securing funds for a PHD to study the new variant of Saprolegnia. A student to undertake the study has been appointed and a meeting with river/Trust biologists to review sampling strategies being arranged by FMS>

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



Bob and Tom Hockenhall preparing to descend to the NEPs site at the upper end of the Cro Clach in very wet conditions, 24th Sept 2023. (photo Sarah Hadfield)



Sarah Hadfield, Alister Taylor and Clare Walker measuring the catch from a NEPs site, August 2023.

NEPS 2023: The programme got off to a flying start with 22 sites completed by the end of August. September was wet leading to higher river levels unsuitable for electrofishing. However, the last 8 NEPs sites were completed successfully before the end of September. Student intern, Sarah Hadfield then compiled all the data before the end of October deadline.

Upper Findhorn Survey: Eight sites completed but wet weather and high flows prevented the completion of the survey.

Nairn Survey: Twenty-four sites were completed on the Nairn. The last site at Aberarder was just too high to fish safely! Sarah compiled the data, conducted initial analysis and the draft report. Initial impressions indicated that juvenile salmon densities were good particularly in the mainstem. Juvenile salmon were also found above the Cawdor weir confirming the adults are getting through the fish pass successfully. Trout were more dominant in the tributaries and densities were also encouraging. Eels also appeared at more sites this year and numbers also seemed better than previous surveys. A summary of the findings has been sent to Jon Gibb and the Nairn Board. Some additional data analysis is required to compare the current data with previous surveys and then the final report will be submitted by the end of November.



Tom Hockenhall with a fine eel captured in the burn above Loch Duntelchaig.

My thanks to Sarah Hadfield, Tom Hockenhall (UHI), Dylan Cross (Abdn Uni), Alister Taylor (FFB), Clare Walker (FNLRT), Elise Cox (SISI), David Bowie (NDSFB), Roddie Forbes (NDSFB) and Charlie Black (Nairn AA) for all their help with the electrofishing programme.

Protection of Fish Stocks: Sawbill licence was obtained in October and will be implemented and managed by Sean and Ali. First sawbill count was completed on the 9th of October with a surprising number of mergansers recorded! Next count 13th December.

Poaching Control: Sean and Ali have commenced regular patrols around the Findhorn and Lossie.

5. Marine and Inshore Environment

No further work.

6. Education and Awareness

Schools Go To Fish: Jack Farge (Wild Things) have started the educational programme with local schools funded through Just Transition.

I contacted Heldon Community Council to confirm that finding is still available for Alves, Dalles and Mosstowie Primary Schools and the good news is that it is! Plan to start this in Spring next year with Wild Things.