



Minute of Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust (FNLRT) Annual General Meeting

Venue: The Long Room, Logie Steading

Date: 25th November 2024 7:00pm

Present: Mark Laing (ML), Jamie Whittle (JW), Campbell Ross (CR), Crinan Dunbar (CD), Alasdair Laing (AL), Sean Mclean, Alister Taylor, Seymour Monro (SM), Michael Barron (MB), Rodger Dowling, Andrew Howard (AH).

In Attendance: Robert Laughton (Director) (RL), Clare Walker (Administrator) (CW), Elle Adams (EA), Guy Harris (GH), Elise Cox (EC).

		ACTION
1	Welcome and Apologies Apologies from: Alex Leven, Alec Rose, Charlie Black, Roy Dennis, Andrew Wallace, and Fiona Strachan of the FNLRT Board and apologies were noted from several FNLRT members and supporters. ML opened the AGM by welcoming everyone present and thanking them for coming.	
2	Minutes of AGM held on 27th November 2023 Approved	
3.	Matters Arising None	
4.	Board Elections One third of the board must retire at each AGM in rotation. This year Mark Laing, Alasdair Laing, Roy Dennis and Alex Leven are due to stand down. JW agreed to Chair following ML's retirement. All four Board members due to retire expressed an interest in standing for re-election. MB proposed that ML, AL, RD and AL be re-elected, and the motion was passed. ML was appointed Chairman and JW handed proceedings back to ML for the remainder of the meeting.	
5.	Financial Update & Fundraising a. <i>Consideration of Annual Accounts for Financial Year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 -</i> The annual accounts for the year end 31 st March 2024 have been approved and are available on the website. The accounts required an independent audit which was completed. The accounts show a surplus of £206k compared to £18k the previous year. However, £157k of this relates to funds FNLRT is due to receive from Chivas Brothers Limited over a three year period from this year (2024). Taking this into account the surplus for the year was around £49k. FNLRT continues to manage large pots of grant funding from a variety of sources to help it carry out its project activity. This has been a period of rapid growth for the Trust, and it remains a priority for further funding to be sourced to ensure that the momentum gained in recent years is maintained to fuel the fantastic work being achieved among all of FNLRT's projects. ML thanked CW and the FNLRT staff team for their hard work over the previous year.	
6.	FNLRT Review RL gave a brief update on FNLRT activity over the previous year noting:	

- Salmon and Grilse catches improved this year following 2 poor years. Sea Trout catches were down. Conditions are good for spawning with positive reports from the upper catchment.
- Conservation grades remain the same for all three rivers. The reclassification of Atlantic Salmon to endangered is likely to affect fisheries management going forward.
- Continued awareness raising of biosecurity and tightening of controls needs to continue.
- Contribution of water samples for the saprolegnia research program with Aberdeen University continue. Early indications are that there is a new, more virulent strain.
- A general juvenile survey of the Lossie was carried out this year. Trout distribution was good but there was a drop in salmon distribution. When carrying out surveys of some obstructed burns for a windfarm contract a number of unique trout populations were discovered. These have been isolated from the rest of the river and will be genetically unique to those burns – it is important that these vulnerable populations are protected.
- A report has been published by the Scottish Government on an investigation into the genetic distribution of Spring and early running grilse. On the Findhorn the report indicates that the upper reaches are primary sources of Spring salmon but also that the Divie/Dorback are important tributaries for Spring salmon. This data is reinforced by scale reading within FNLRT's own data collection.
- RL will be retiring in March 2025, he took the opportunity to thank all of FNLRT's supporters over the course of his time with the Trust and his wider career in fish conservation.

Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI)

EC gave a presentation on the activity of the SISI project over the course of the year:

- *Giant Hogweed* – poor weather affected control but still managed to reach all control sites
- *Himalayan Balsam* – control is mostly focused on the Nairn in collaboration with Greenhive. The seed source has been identified and landowner permission has been secured to tackle it next season.
- *Japanese Knotweed* – poor weather made conditions difficult but good progress was made on priority sites, most of which are on the Lossie.
- *American Mink* – a record breaking year for captures with 24 mink being trapped and humanely dispatched. Most of these were on the Nairn but a few were on the Mosset Burn and Lossie. The trap network has increased this year with many catches coming from newly trapped areas. Forres Men's Shed helped to build new rafts for the project and the volunteer network is up to 33 across the 3 rivers.
- EC and SISI seasonal Project Officer Gareth Meadows took part in a number of engagement events this year and facilitated the training of 7 volunteers in the safe use of pesticides. EC thanked all the staff, volunteers and project supporters with special thanks going to Gareth Meadows for his work as Seasonal Project Officer. ML added his thanks to EC for her hard work on the SISI project.

Findhorn Watershed Initiative (FWI)

GH and EA gave a presentation on the progress made on the FWI:

- The focus of the project has been in the upper catchment so far, but the project is beginning to move downstream
- 27 landholdings engaged, 18 woodland and river restoration schemes currently in development, representing 40km of potential woodland shading.
- FWI Deer forum launched
- Project beginning to move downstream, including looking at water quality and seagrass mapping in Findhorn Bay
- The project has piloted a range of approaches to nature connectedness and development of a thriving nature based economy.

RESEARCH

RESTORE

EDUCATE

	<p>SM praised the work of the FWI and how the outcomes will help increase salmon numbers but asked how increasing predator numbers can be mitigated. CR underlined the need push FMS to lobby for policy change. RL confirmed that all measures which are able to be taken are utilised to control predators, including bird licenses and using acoustic seal deterrents. The current policy within Government is unlikely to change at present so we have to continue with the measures available, continue to collect and report data on predator numbers and strive to improve habitat to increase salmon numbers, making the population more resilient to predation.</p> <p>AH asked for clarification on whether woodland creation schemes are paid for by the FWI or the Forestry Grant Scheme and who gets credits for any biodiversity net gain from these. GH and EA explained that the FGS has funding constraints which mean that not all schemes are eligible, in these cases the FWI can fund any gaps, and many schemes end up being a combination of funding. The landowner MOU's contain clauses around nature finance and shared revenue potential.</p>	
8	AOCB None raised.	
11	Date of 2025 AGM 24 th November 2025	
	Mark Laing thanked everyone for participating in the FNLRT AGM with particular thanks to the FNLRT staff team and Robert Laughton who has been pivotal in the success of FNLRT during his time as Director.	

The meeting closed at 8:30pm