

Cromarty Firth District Salmon Fishery Board

Meeting Report

Junior Angling

There were 5 junior angling club days with 3 cancelled due to bad weather conditions, there was an average of 15 children per event. The encouraging observation was the number of parents wanting to get involved. Lynn and the Board would like to thank the Evanton, Loch Achonochie, Alness and Dingwall Angling Club members for giving up their time to help supervise children and parents. Without them the days would not run as smoothly.

In addition to the junior angling there were also 5 school visits this year, with a total of 144 pupils participating.

Electrofishing & Fish passes

Over the last few months staff worked whenever possible between the rain to complete 47 fry index and 30 Government electrofishing sites, mainly during August. Interim results indicate that the coastal burns remain healthy but recruitment has been limited in upper sections of the Conon catchment in 2017 & 2018. In September electrofishing surveys were carried out on the Allt Graad to assess juvenile salmon and trout populations. The last of the timed electrofishing sites within the Conon system were also completed.

In August due to heavy rainfall and flash flooding staff have been checking fish passes to ensure there are no blockages. Adjustments needed to be made to the Corriefeol fish pass sluice to ensure adequate flow is available down the channel.

Bailiff Duties

Patrols targeting illegal fishing continued across the district throughout the summer. A Joint patrol with Police Scotland was carried out on the lower reaches of the Conon in September, targeting those fishing without permission. New maps of the River Conon showing the locations of the main salmon holding pools have been mapped and are now available for each shift at Dingwall Police station to view.

The dam count at Tor Achilty by the 29th September was 552. This is the 3rd lowest count to the end of September in the past 10 years, but ahead of 2018 count of 292. The 5yr mean to the end of September is 988. The rod catch on the main beats of the Conon appears to be slightly ahead of last year's total.

Loch na Croic

Preparations are being made to open up Loch na Croic for the broodstock season. Proposals are being considered for fitting a screen over the water intake to prevent leaves and debris entering the pump and to reduce possible blockages in the pipe. The intention would be to have the loch monitored remotely in a similar way to the hatchery rather than having a person on site 24 hours a day.

The Bothy at Loch na Croic has failed a water sample test and it may be too costly to install a new water supply, for the time being the bothy will be used as a welfare facility but not for accommodation.

'Missing Salmon' Project

SSE & Board staff assisted the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) with their 'Missing Salmon' project. As part of the project, staff had to provide 100 smolts measuring a minimum of 130mm from the Bran trap. The AST managed to tag 99 before they had to stop on the 3rd May. The listening devices have now been collected and AST are analysing the data, the Cromarty is the last district to be analysed so it is hoped that this will be available shortly.

Fish capture and tracking

The Ness DSFB, Marine Scotland Science and University of Glasgow are undertaking additional acoustic tracking of adult salmon captured at Chanonry Point this year. Board staff assisted with the placement of receivers in the lower reaches of the Conon, Skiach, Allt Graad, Alness and Balnagowan. The aim of this project is to find out where fish caught at Chanonry point end up.

Piscivorous bird licence

Roger Knight, Director of Fisheries, at the Spey Fishery Board has kindly coordinated the submission of the Piscivorous bird licence for the Moray Firth area as there may be changes ahead in the way data is collected and submitted, which may make submissions easier, it was felt submissions as a group was stronger. Edward collated the Conon and Alness bird counts in support of the application.

Alness Weir

A successful meeting was held with Dalmore Distillery, SEPA, the Board and the Alness Angling Club. Dalmore have instructed a survey to be carried out of the weir with a meeting in December to discuss possible solutions. Timings are designed to tie in with allowing sufficient time to get a CAR licence, if required, and to ensure work is carried out when the works are least likely to affect fish.

University of the Highlands and Islands – Riparian tree planting and Nursery

The riparian project is continuing to move forward and it is anticipated that UHI will be making an application to the SSE sustainable community fund by the start of January, the funding may provide sufficient resources for a project officer to be employed to bring the project forward.

SISI progress

The SISI project has continued this year with spraying of non-native plant species and in particular there has been a focus on non-native plants on the Rivers Skiach, Balnagowan, Peffery and Ussie burn.

Reports of diseased fish in Scotland

Reports were received of a number dead and dying salmon being found in the River Alness. Regular searches were made of the river for these fish with the vast majority found in the lower reaches. By the end of July a total of 15 dead salmon had been removed with a small number of moribund fish additionally seen. The Fish Health Inspectorate and Fisheries Management Scotland were informed and given details of all fish recovered. All the salmon found exhibited the same symptoms of reddening along the belly with saprolegnia fungus affecting large areas of the fish. Symptoms are similar to those affecting salmon on other rivers across Scotland, but despite tests on those fish no cause for the disease outbreak has been identified. Indications are that the problem peaked in early July and affected fish that survived are now recovering.

24/10/2019

NJW, EMSR, AD



Regular updates on Board activities can be found on Facebook at: *Cromarty Firth Fishery Board and Trust*, or on Twitter @*cromartyboard*