

Cromarty Firth District Salmon Fishery Board

Meeting Report

Meig Smolt Trap

The Meig project successfully managed to capture 5408 smolts, possibly around 1/3rd of the run based on the Rotatory Screw Traps only being around 30% efficient. Out of the total smolts captured 1497 were PIT tagged for monitoring.

The barrier itself had mixed results and the water levels were very low during April and May which meant it was not able to operate at its optimum efficiency. When working it would divert more smolts down the smolt channel but if the water was too low the capture rate in the channel and main river was around 50/50. Alastair Stephen is writing up the project and will discuss the results in more detail at the Board meeting.



Acoustic Barrier in place April 2019



Smolt channel with rotary screw trap and box traps,

Bran Trap

Water levels at the smolt trap on the River Bran remained very low until almost the end of the May. During this low water period very few fish entered the trap and by the end of the month just 1835 had been caught, of these 983 were PIT tagged. Like the fish caught on the Meig all were released below Tor Achilty dam. The Bran trap was closed on the 10th June.

Junior Angling

The first junior angling day was held in June with Board staff assisted with the event at Tarvie Lochs. It was another successful event with all 8 attendees catching a fish.

Alness Smolt Capture – PhD project

Unfortunately this project was postponed due to the high water levels in March and a second attempt may be made next year. The project aimed to look at how smolt survival differs when they have to travel through a loch and where they don't.

Bailiff Duties

Bailiffing patrols on foot, sea kayak and canoe continued throughout the district during May with the main focus being on the Conon, Alness and Cromarty Firth. One minor incident was dealt with by a warning being issued and one item of fishing tackle was found hidden in bushes which was handed to Police Scotland. Several reports were received during the month regarding illegal fishing for freshwater fish. Patrols targeting this were undertaken in the western part of the Conon district. One person was reported to Police Scotland for a fishing offence and a number of items were seized as evidence.

Regular contact has been maintained throughout the month with the local Police Scotland wildlife crime officer on a number of issues.

Sawbill counts were undertaken on the Conon and Alness during May and these have been submitted to SNH.

The tree seeds collected from within the district last autumn were sown at the end of April. The cold and wet weather during May slowed their germination and by the end of the month just a small number of alder seedlings had appeared.

Loch na Croic

The screens at Loch na Croic have been dropped and the fish pass at Rogie falls has been reopened. SSE have fitted new fencing and a walkway across the top of the fish pass which has made the opening and closing of the pass easier for Board staff.

'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 first phase of the project has now been completed and the AST are waiting to take the listening stations back in for analysis.

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

The riparian project is now moving forward and Lynn McKelvey has been seconded to UHI for 3 days a week to help pull together a frame work and funding proposal. This arrangement will last for around 3 to 4 months and is being supported by the Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust. At the end of the secondment it is hoped that a submission to the SSE community fund will be made which would provide the majority of the funding for the project to move forward.

Board re-structuring

Tony Donnelly has been appointed as the new Fishery Director and he will be joining the Board from the River Annan. Tony will be introduced to the proprietors at the Board meeting on the 28th June but will not start work until the 4th of July.

A number of other changes have been made to modernise and reflect the work being done by the Board. New positions have been created and filled for 'Fishery Officer' which is aimed at conservation and enforcement, unlike a tradition Water Bailiff which was aimed at enforcement. Rikki and Martin were successful in being recruited for the new posts internally but Peter has left the Board. Overall the staff levels have reduced to reflect work being carried out and finances.

To reflect Edwards changing role he has a new job title of Operations Manager rather than Head Bailiff. The Clerk continues to oversee management, budgets and compliance.

SISI progress

The SISI project is continuing this year with spraying of non-native plant species around the Balnagown, Peffery and Conon catchment. The numbers of Giant Hogweed and American Skunk Cabbage plants have continued to decline, but treated sites will be re-visited, and if necessary sprayed again later this year to ensure the progress made so far is maintained.

The mink raft work will continue as will volunteer days but the Board will not be employing a seasonal project officer, this position is funded by SNH as part of the project but given the management required and the changes to the Board it was collectively decided that this would be postponed until next year. However, treatment of invasive species continues.

Reports of diseased fish in Scotland

Reports of small numbers of fish exhibiting signs of bleeding and/or ulceration are being caught in Norway, Ireland and Scotland. These symptoms have been reported as being mainly along the area on the belly of the fish between the head and the tail. At the moment what is causing this trauma is unknown. Samples are being taken by the Fish Health Inspectorate and tests are ongoing. If you encounter a fish exhibiting these symptoms please contact the Fish Health Inspectorate immediately. If possible, the fish should be kept alive until the duty inspector has provided advice as to the appropriate course of action.

It would be advisable, if you do catch and land one of these fish, to follow normal biosecurity protocols and to disinfect your fishing tackle, landing net, waders and fishing jacket.

So far two salmon have been seen, one on the River Alness which was affected by saprolegnia fungus and one on the Bran which exhibited a red belly, the latter is being sampled.

19/03/2019
NJW, EMSR



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