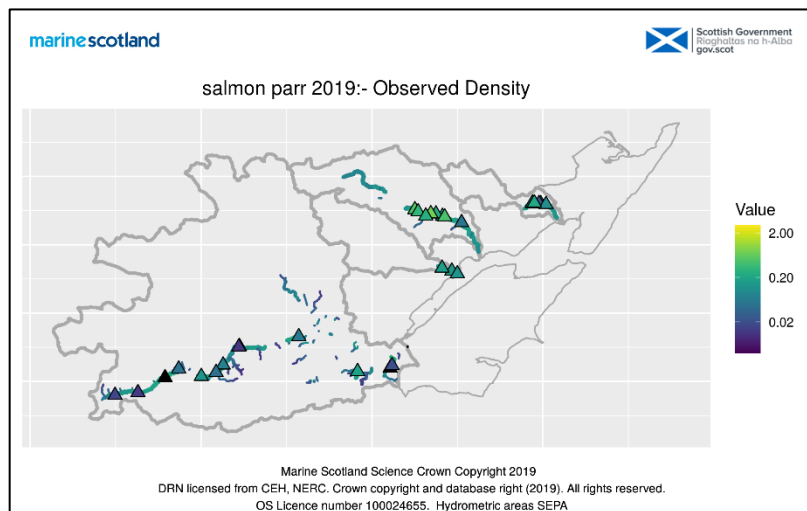


Monthly Report – July 2020

National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland Report

In July, Marine Scotland Science published a report on the results of the 2019 National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS). The report provides an assessment of the status of juvenile salmon stocks in Scotland and offers a complementary approach to the adult-based Conservation Limits and river gradings.

In 2019, 30 sites were electrofished on the Conon, Alness (Averon), Allt Graad (Glass) and Balnagown. The results suggest that the Cromarty district has good numbers of salmon parr (achieving Grade 1 status) but poor numbers of salmon fry (Grade 3). This is unsurprising for fry given the low adult numbers in 2018. Based on the juvenile assessment method, all



rivers in the Cromarty district would be classed as Grade 2 for 2020. For comparison, the current adult-based assessment method classes the Conon as Grade 1, the Alness as Grade 2, and the Allt Graad and Balnagown as Grade 3.

The report and online tool can be viewed at: <https://data.marine.gov.scot/dataset/national-electrofishing-programme-scotland-neps-2019>

Red Skin Disease

An adult salmon exhibiting signs of red rash, bleeding and ulceration was removed from the Alness River in the last week of July and transported live to Aberdeen to undergo extensive



testing by the Fish health Inspectorate. Several more dead salmon with similar symptoms were later removed from the Alness River. As river levels are currently low and the water temperature is increasing, Alness Angling Club have taken the decision to cease fishing from the weir down to the road bridge.

At present, the Alness is the only river in the Cromarty district where affected fish have been caught. Anyone observing or catching a fish displaying signs of a red rash or ulcerations should contact the Board. Numbers of diseased

fish are being recorded and tissue samples will be taken from moribund fish for analysis by Fish Health Inspectorate.

Electrofishing Surveys

Electrofishing surveys are underway to determine the health of juvenile fish stocks in the district. A total of 13 out of 43 sites were surveyed in July, with the remaining sites expected to be completed in August. Thanks are extended to the various estates and landowners that have granted access to the Board to allow this work to take place.

River Meig Smolt Trap

It is challenging for salmon smolts migrating down the River Meig to successfully navigate Meig dam. To increase survival of smolts, a rotary screw trap (RST) has been used on the river as part of a trap-and-truck strategy to transport juvenile fish beyond the dam. However, the capture efficiency of the RST is highly variable and strongly affected by river levels. To maximise the number of smolts captured, a demountable Wolf trap (similar in construction to the Achanalt trap) is being designed by SSE. In July, the Board met with SSE at the proposed site on the River Meig to discuss the logistics of installing and operating the trap. The Board will work closely with SSE and will provide important insights into trap construction.

Dalmore Weir

On July 20th, work began on the Dalmore weir in Alness to improve upstream passage for salmon and sea trout. The Board met with the engineers and contractor on-site to ensure that the approved plans including extending the fish pass and filling the step would be implemented. Board staff undertaking fishery protection duties also provided invaluable advice to the contractors, leading to improved flow conditions at the weir during a period of particularly low river levels.

Invasive Species

At the start of July, Fishery Officers aided local landowners in continued efforts to remove and eradicate giant hogweed within the Cromarty Firth catchment as part of the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI). The density of giant hogweed has been greatly reduced at the isolated patch on the River Peffery and along the Balnagown River. A previously unknown mature stand of giant hogweed was discovered along the Cromarty Firth at Nigg Bay, spanning over 1 km. On discovery, it was noted that the plants were close to setting seed. Due to the mature state of the plants and the high density, physical removal of the stands was required.

Bailiff Report

July saw Fisheries Officers responding to eight incidents involving a total of 16 individuals. These primarily constituted individuals spinning in fly-only waters and individuals fishing without permits.