

Monthly Report – August 2020

Red Skin Disease

Following reports of adult salmon exhibiting signs of red rash, bleeding and ulceration in the Alness River in July, more salmon were found dead in the river in August and removed by Fishery Officers. Reports of dead or dying salmon had declined by the end of the month with very few fish observed displaying signs of infection. The cause of the infection remains unknown.

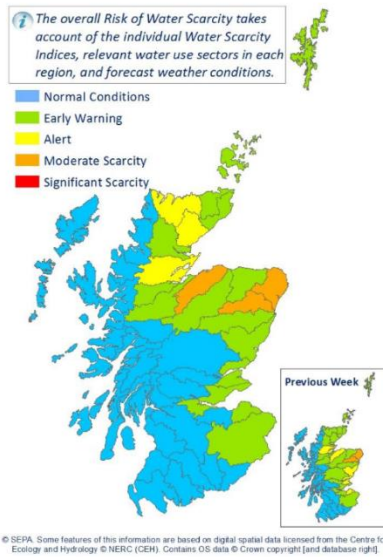
A joint statement was released by the Board, Novar Estate and the Alness Angling Club to clarify the situation, and angling was able to resume between the weir and the A9 road bridge before the end of August. Importantly, large numbers of unaffected salmon were observed returning to the river, and juvenile surveys conducted throughout the Alness catchment in 2018, 2019 and 2020 show high densities of juvenile salmon, suggesting the river is otherwise healthy and productive.

The Board would like to thank Novar Estate for their assistance in removing and disposing of the affected salmon.

Electrofishing Surveys

Electrofishing surveys were continued in August to determine the health of juvenile fish stocks in the district. To the end of August, a total of 36 out of 43 sites were surveyed, with the remaining sites expected to be completed in September. Thanks are extended to the various estates and landowners that have granted access to the Board to allow this work to take place.

Water Scarcity & River Levels



SEPA continued to publish weekly Water Scarcity Situation Reports throughout August, and rivers in the Cromarty Firth region have remained on 'Alert' level for most of the month.

Very little rain fell in the area over the month of August, and relative to historic rainfall amounts, is classified as dry. SEPA is monitoring the situation closely and coordinating steps to manage water resources in line with Scotland's National Water Scarcity Plan.

The latest information can be found at:
www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/water-scarcity/

Achanalt Smolt Trap

SSE are implementing a project to automate the way in which the Achanalt barrage on the River Bran operates to maximise the number of juvenile salmon caught during the smolt run. A meeting was held with SSE at the smolt trap to discuss how this could be achieved by optimising the water management at the site through improved gate control. The Board will monitor river levels at the smolt trap during spring 2021 to provide data to inform future management of the barrage gates.

Atlantic Salmon Trust – Moray Firth Tracking Meeting

Staff met with the Atlantic Salmon Trust to discuss the Board's involvement in the Moray Firth Tracking project for 2021. Salmon smolts will be tagged with acoustic transponders and monitored as they migrate downstream through River Conon. The project aims to determine where and why Atlantic salmon smolts are dying as they migrate down the River Conon, through the Cromarty Firth, and for the first 100 km of their oceanic migration. The project is the largest of its kind to be undertaken in Europe and includes seven of the major rivers that drain into the Moray Firth.

Dalmore Weir

Several meetings took place with project managers at the Dalmore Weir in August to ensure that works to the weir were carried out appropriately and in full to improve fish passage after construction. It was agreed that the entire length of the step on the face of the weir would be filled once the extension to the fish pass was completed. Fishery Officers continued to monitor and provide guidance to the contractors throughout August.

Bailiff Report

August saw Fishery Officers responding to five incidents involving a total of eight individuals. These have primarily constituted of individuals spinning in fly-only waters and individuals fishing without permits.