

Monthly Report – September 2020

Cromarty Firth SSE Tour

SSE invited members of the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board and staff on a two-day guided tour of the Conon catchment in September to explain the network of hydropower dams and existing mitigation measures that are in place to ensure fish passage around obstacles. The tour provided a history of hydropower on the River Conon and focussed on the location of key infrastructure and fish passes, movement of water between systems, and SSE's fish counting facilities. During the tour, future improvements to mitigate hydropower impacts were presented and discussed.

The Board and staff would like to extend thanks to Alastair Stephen and Andy Jacobs from SSE for the informative and enlightening tour. The close working relationship between the Board and SSE is vital for the continued protection and improvement of fish stocks in the district.

Nutrient Enrichment Project

Board staff assisted the University of Glasgow with a project to understand the potential impact of nutrient enrichment on juvenile salmon on the upper River Blackwater. Upland rivers are typically considered to have relatively low nutrient status, due in part to changes in landuse over time (e.g. reductions in riparian woodland) and declines in the number of adult fish that could die in the river post-spawning and release nutrients.

Board staff electrofished 12 sites in September to determine how fish numbers and sizes were affected by the addition of artificial nutrients. The species composition and number of invertebrates (prey for salmon) were also surveyed. This work adds to a long-term study suggesting that nutrient inputs can increase the size of juvenile salmon, while maintaining densities (numbers per square metre) at a site. This has the potential to increase smolt size, which is shown to improve sea survival. However, there is a trade-off as fish that grow faster also smolt at a younger age and are paradoxically smaller. Further work in this field is anticipated for future years.

Dalmore Weir

Work at the Dalmore weir on the Alness River was completed in September following the infilling of step on the face of the weir. In total, the works took approximately nine weeks to complete and involved extending the fish pass, infilling the step, and placing large boulders on the west side of the weir. Fishery Officers were instrumental in providing advice to the construction staff to ensure that fish passage was maintained throughout the period of works.



Bailiff Report

September saw Fishery Officers responding to seven incidents. One incident involved the use of an illegal net at the mouth of the Alness River. The net was reported by a member of the public and two Fishery Officers responded immediately and removed the net. The incident was reported to Police Scotland and the net was retained as evidence while the investigation is ongoing. In response to the incident, Police Scotland carried out plain-clothed and uniformed foot patrols of the area and will return in October to carry out joint patrols with Cromarty Fishery Officers. The close working relationships between Fishery Officers and Police Scotland are important for protecting fish stocks in the Cromarty Firth district.

A separate incident involved a Fishery Officer responding to reports of an individual fishing without permission on a river in the district. The individual was detained under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 for committing a Section 9 offence by being in possession of an instrument used to illegally catch salmon.