

## Monthly Report – August 2021

### Proposed River Gradings for 2022

The conservation status of salmon in inland waters was assessed by Marine Scotland for the 2022 fishing season. Under this system, rivers are assigned a grading based on the probability that egg deposition is sufficient to maintain adult returns. This conservation limit is estimated for rivers with active salmon fisheries and uses rod catch data combined with local or regional data on adult sizes, ages, and sex ratios. The conservation limit is estimated over a rolling five-year period and rivers are categorised as: Grade 1 where there is an 80% or greater chance that they will meet the required egg target, Grade 2 where there is between a 60% and 80% chance of meeting the target, and Grade 3 where there is less than a 60% chance of meeting the target.

Only the Allt Graad, Alness, Balnagown, and Conon are assessed within the Cromarty district. The proposed gradings for the 2022 season are shown in the table below, alongside the gradings for the previous five-years. The consultation on the proposed gradings opened on 11<sup>th</sup> August, with a four-week period during which representations or objections could be lodged.

River	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Proposed 2022
Allt Graad	1	3	3	3	3	3
Alness	1	3	1	2	1	2
Balnagown	3	3	3	3	3	3
Conon	1	1	1	1	1	1

No changes were proposed for the Allt Graad, Balnagown, and Conon. However, Marine Scotland proposed that the Alness River is lowered from Grade 1 to Grade 2 in 2022. This decision is heavily influenced by rod catches in 2020 that were affected by Covid-19 restrictions on angling, and a voluntarily closure of part of the river by Alness Angling Club to protect salmon stocks at risk of increasing water temperatures and red skin disease. Accordingly, the Board submitted an objection to the proposed downgrading, citing these as contributing factors to the low rod catch in 2020 that would have prevented the river attaining Grade 1 status in 2022.

### 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 die in the river after spawning and release nutrients.

The work on the Blackwater is part of a PhD project that ties in with a longer-term study on nutrient enrichment across the Conon catchment. A total of 12 sites were surveyed in August to investigate how fish numbers and sizes are affected by the addition of artificial nutrients.



The results from 2020 suggest that previously reported effects of enrichment are not consistent between locations, and that further work should be undertaken before it can be considered a useful local management tool.

### **SISI**

Deirdre was joined by Matthew Purcell in August as part of a UHI work-placement. Matthew assisted Deirdre in tackling the large amount of Himalayan balsam in the district. A public event was hosted on Dunglass Island to grow the SISI volunteer network.

New volunteers were also recruited and provided with mink rafts in August. This ensured that widespread monitoring was in place during the main migration period of young mink. Removing invasive mink from the Cromarty district will protect native fauna including fish, water vole, and ground-nesting birds.

### **Bailiff Report**

Board staff continued with fishery protection patrols across the district throughout August. These were carried out at varying times of day and night. The number of observed and reported rod and line incidents increased as the month progressed. In total, eight incidents involving 17 people were dealt with. Warnings for fishing without permission were issued in all cases.

A joint fishery protection patrol involving Board staff and Police Scotland took place at the end of August.