

## **Monthly Report – January & February 2021**

### **Contin Hatchery & Stocking**

A total of 963,838 salmon eggs were collected during the adult fish trapping operation in Winter. These have been incubating in our flow through hatchery in Contin with Fishery Officers doing daily checks, removing any background mortalities. When the salmon eggs eyed at between 220–250-degree days, the eggs were then “shocked”. This is a process where the eggs are given a mild physical shock, which allows us to remove any “blind” (unfertilised) eggs prior to stocking. The first batch of eggs stocked out had low incubation mortalities of 2.7%.

Stocking of the Blackwater started in February, with eyed ova being placed into artificial redds dug in the riverbed. After the successfully switch in stocking regime in 2021, stocking is taking place at the eyed-egg stage. This allows alevins to hatch into a natural river environment where they are immediately exposed to factors that are key to their survival. After a very mild January with an average water temperature of 5°C, the first eggs are expected to hatch by the end of February. Continued wet and unsettled conditions have hampered egg stocking so far, with board staff taking every opportunity of dry and low water conditions to plant eggs.

### **Smolt Tagging, Tracking and Survival**

Salmon smolts captured at the Achanalt and Meig traps are transported and released below Tor Achilty to improve poor survival rates associated with dam passage. The Meig traps are Rotary Screw Traps (RSTs) which capture a proportion of the smolts on their migration. A feasibility study was conducted in 2021 to investigate if it was possible to install a wolf trap, which would facilitate the capture of the entire run of smolts on the River Meig. Unfortunately, the conclusion of the report highlighted unsuitable hydrological conditions. The board have looked into alternative methods of improving capture efficiency of the existing RSTs. The Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust is now funding the installation of two motors to the existing RSTs. These motors will be activated in low water conditions, causing the RST drum to rotate at a rate of at least 6 revolutions per a minute. This should improve the capture efficiency of the RSTs under low water conditions, improving smolt survival rates. These upgrades are due to be installed insitu by Mid-April in time for the 2022 smolt run.

Following trap and trucking procedures, smolts have been historically released during daylight hours. In recent years there have been concerns regarding the susceptibility of smolts to visual predators (e.g. trout and pike). In 2021, the Board along with SSEN and the University of Glasgow conducted a Day Versus Night Release Trial, where approx. 3000 smolts were PIT tagged and released during the day or released at night in a timed-release floating cage. This trial will be repeated in 2022. In March, Anglian Electrical will be upgrading the PIT Tag Decoder in the Borland fish lifts at Torr Achilty and Meig dams to ensure the detection of returning grilse that were PIT tagged in 2021.

### **Scottish Angling National Development Strategy (SANDS).**

A SANDS regional working group (East Highlands) was formed between the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board, Ness District Fishery Board, Beauly District Fishery Board and The Findhorn and Nairn District Fishery Board. It is hoped that this will foster the promotion of angling and funding sources for angling across the East Highlands.



### **Pollution incidents**

The Board responded to two pollution incidents in February.

The board were contacted by SEPA in relation to a fuel incident on the lower River Peffery. An illegal activity led to fuel entering the watercourse and saturating the surrounding soil. A walkover survey was conducted to determine if there were any direct ecological impacts. Fortunately, wet conditions diluted the pollutants and there were no direct visible ecological impacts.

The Board were informed of illegal waste disposal adjacent to a water course, with visible siltation of a stream. A SEPA enforcement officer investigated the site and the board highlighted issues of special concern, including local knowledge of protected species in the vicinity. A clear up of the area was underway within a week.

### **SISI**

The Fishery Board has advertised for a seasonal projected officer with the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative. The successful applicant will work a 5-month contract between May 2022 to September 2022. This post is funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and NatureScot through the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative.

### **Bailiff Report**

With the opening of the salmon fishing season in the district, fishery officers have increased the number of patrols. Fishery Officers responded to an incident of suspected illegal fishing in February.