

Monthly Report – June 2022

River temperature monitoring

Staff took advantage of the low early summer water levels to retrieve and re-deploy our entire network of river temperature loggers across the catchment. This has involved forays into the upper reaches of the Meig and Blackwater throughout the month. All loggers were found to be fully operational, and data was retrieved successfully, giving confidence that they will be working during the summer season, a time where their readings will be of maximum importance with regard to identifying trends of warming in the catchment.



Riverwoods

Momentum gained from the Riverwoods film and the Riverwoods initiative has led to discussions with neighbouring fishery boards regarding identifying priority areas for riparian tree planting within the catchment. Board staff met up with members of the Kyles of Sutherland fishery board and the project manager of the Tweed forum to visit some small riparian tree plantations and to talk about how best to move forward with tree planting for the benefit of Atlantic salmon populations within our rivers.

We also visited several of our small bankside tree plantations to check on the growth of trees and to retrieve any lost tree tubes and stakes. With more extreme weather events, droughts and heatwaves, it is vital that we identify key areas for tree planting to ensure juvenile habitat remains safe for our Atlantic salmon and trout.



AST conference

The Atlantic Salmon Trust hosted a two-day international workshop in Edinburgh which was attended by our Biologist. The event brought together leading experts and fishery managers on Pink Salmon and Red Skin Disease from across the UK and Scandinavia, with the aim to collate existing information these two threats pose to wild Atlantic salmon, highlight gaps in our understanding and identify how to best protect this threatened species.

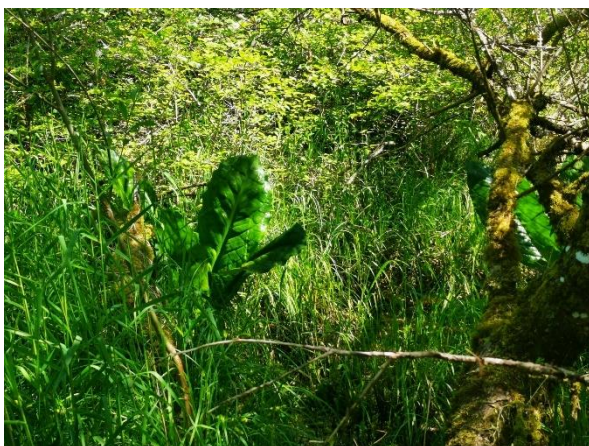
With red skin disease reported on two rivers in the catchment in the last three years, it is imperative that we stay alert to this threat. We were directly involved in discussions on how best to monitor and study this yet unknown disease which is affecting our fish and have offered to provide support wherever possible. We have circulated the latest information and field guides to all ghillies on the river. This information is also available on request from the board.

Since June we have had four reports of Atlantic salmon with red skin disease in the river. Board members have removed three fish showing signs of red skin disease and the fourth which was still alive was held until a member of the fish health inspectorate could come to site to take samples. We hope to have the results from this fish in the coming weeks.

INNS

The SISI Project Officer re-joined CFFB at the start of June and took up responsibility for invasive non-native species control within the catchment. With assistance from CFFB staff, first rounds of treatment of Giant Hogweed were completed across multiple sites, including the Balnagown, Kilmuir Bay, Tarbet Mains and the Peffery. At all sites, density of plants appears reduced on last year, and the majority of plants were small-to-medium sized.

American Skunk Cabbage control was also started on several sites on the Conon and in Brennachie Forest. As per the Giant Hogweed, it appears that fewer mature plants were found this summer compared to 2021. There are still areas of American Skunk Cabbage to control, and this will be undertaken at the start of July. DAFOR (invasive species abundance) surveys were also completed across almost all sites within the catchment, providing an easy way to compare the effectiveness of the treatment that has taken place over the course of the project.





Recruitment of volunteers to assist with plant control work also began at the start of June, with opportunities posted on the UHI Job Site and on the Highland Environment Forum. In addition, several Balsam Bashing events were posted on the SISI website for July. This has resulted in several new volunteers signing up for the SISI project.

Survey Work

The board have had a steady stream of enquiries for survey work to establish baseline data on fish populations at numerous renewable energy development sites. We are working closely with independent hydro developers and estate owners to make sure any proposed works have a minimal impact on natural salmonid populations within the district. We continue to provide advice and encourage discussions on all aspects of in stream work in our rivers. Electrofishing surveys are set to begin from 1st July 2022.

Bailiffing Report

Patrols looking for illegal fishing continued throughout June with staff covering the rivers and coast on a daily basis across the board's area. Patrol times were varied with day and night shifts carried out. Although no one was found during these patrols board staff gathered information which indicated that persons were fishing without permission on two of the rivers within the district. In response to this a joint patrol with Police Scotland was carried out in one of the areas of concern. This resulted in one spinning rod and reel being found hidden beside the river. This was retained by the Police. We are fortunate to have a good working relationship with Police Scotland and are grateful for the ongoing support they provide in tackling illegal fishing.