

## **Monthly Report – April 2023**

### **Fisheries Management Plan and Story Map**

As part of a national project with Fisheries Management Scotland, we have generated a fisheries management plan and interactive map which highlights many of the key pressures on Atlantic Salmon and our management priorities for the district. We expect these maps to be published in due course and will direct you to them once publicly available. The format is far more immersive than previous management plans and provides an excellent overview of the work that is being done throughout the region.

### **Smolt Tagging and Transport**

The start of April sees us turn our attention to the start of the smolt run. Having installed 2 rotary screw traps on the Meig and opened the wolf trap on the Bran towards the end of March, we commenced our 'trap and truck' smolt operation from the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

This year sees us repeating the day vs night release trial on the Meig smolts. We hope to ascertain whether smolts released at night have increased survival over smolts released during the day. By implanting PIT tags in to the smolts, we will monitor which fish return as adult salmon over the next few seasons. The results of this experiment will be used to inform wider fishery management practice wherever smolts are manually transported past man-made standing waters and dams.

We had a strong early run of smolts on the Meig traps with good flows and more than 2,000 fish trapped and trucked downstream to continue their journey to the sea. With a drop in both river level and water temperature, numbers slowed towards the end of April but rainfall and rising temperatures are forecast for the coming week, so we expect numbers to pick up again going into May.

Numbers have been relatively low on the Bran to date with no apparent early run, it may be that the smolts are waiting for a significant rise in water before migrating in earnest through the loch directly upstream of the trap. We will report more fully on the runs in the May report.







### **Bird Counts**

The team undertook two bird counts on the Conon and one on the Alness during April. Numbers were slightly higher than last year, but the majority of the birds were seen in the estuary. Management is in progress, under licence. The team are also employing scaring tactics in the mornings and evenings when the smolts are most vulnerable to predation.

### **Corriefeol Fish Pass**

Several large boulders have been restricting salmon access to the fish pass at Corriefeol for some time. Towards the end of April, the team employed a Tirfor winch to move these boulders in to the main channel and dramatically improve access to, and through, the pass.



### **Egg Boxes**

Following the stocking of the Blackwater in March with the new 'eco egg-boxes' the team were keen to monitor their effectiveness in terms of durability and ease of alevin escapement. We therefore placed an egg box in a typical redd and have monitored it regularly since then. During the first visit at the start of April the box was holding up well to the instream



environment and the eggs appeared ready to hatch. The box was visited again on 25<sup>th</sup> April and we were pleased to see that every egg had hatched and left the box successfully. The box itself was still intact but showed visible signs of starting to breakdown.



#### **Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI)**

We are pleased to confirm that Trudi Clarke has joined the Board as the new SISI project officer. This is a 3-year post, during which time she will split her time between the Cromarty Firth, Ness and Beauly catchments. Having a full-time project officer for the next 3 years is a huge plus as it will allow her the time to properly foster relationships with volunteers, land managers and the wider community and progress INNS control across the region.

If you would like to get involved in plant or mink management please contact Trudi directly via email on [Trudi.Clarke@cromartyboard.com](mailto:Trudi.Clarke@cromartyboard.com)



#### **Bailiff Report**

Patrols looking for those who fish illegally were carried out throughout the month at varying times. A total of 5 persons were removed from the River Alness for fishing without permission. These patrols were carried out on foot as well as by canoe.

Last summer board staff were joined by a film crew and the local wildlife crime officer on a patrol of the River Conon looking for those who fish illegally. This was for a documentary series about policing in the Highlands and Islands. The episode appeared on BBC 2 recently and highlighted the issue of illegal salmon fishing as well as the excellent working relationship we have with the Police Scotland WCO.