

## **Monthly Report – August 2023**

### **National Electrofishing Program Scotland (NEPS)**

After a very busy July Board staff finished surveying all NEPS sites by mid-August. Overall, the randomly generated sites fell in favourable habitat and juvenile densities were generally good. One aspect that was particularly interesting was the huge variation in fry size across the catchment. At one site on the Meig, the average fry size was just 48mm whereas fry at a site in Strathvaich had an average length of 66mm, an increase of 40%.

Water samples were collected from each NEPS site, and it will be interesting to see what information we get back from the freshwater lab in Pitlochry due course. Data from NEPS will be available on the website when it is published.



### **Trex ecology surveys**

Board staff worked alongside staff from Trex ecology consultants to continue the monitoring work on the Allt Graad. This work is to assess what, if any, impacts the Blackrock hydro scheme is having on juvenile densities in the river. Whilst we wait for the full report from Trex ecology we can confirm that juvenile densities are generally good on the river. One site fished produced over 400 salmon (fry & parr) during the 3 passes, with a healthy split between age classes.

### **Habitat Restoration Projects**

An application to the Nature Restoration Fund has been drafted as a joint bid with Lockett Agri-Environmental which will allow us to look at re-meandering the lower Ussie, an important nursery habitat for salmonids. There is also potential to investigate rewatering of the original Loch Ussie outflow.

The Orrin gravel reintroduction project is ongoing. SSE have agreed to underwrite the project and the board are looking at securing a suitable gravel source. We await a meeting with SSE renewables who will be constructing windfarm access roads next year adjacent to one of the proposed sites to see if any joint effort could be made to improve the habitat or mitigate against the construction.

### **SSE Conference on AI Fish Counters**

The board were invited to attend a conference in mid-august, hosted by SSE, to learn more about the next generation of AI fish counters. Historically, the resistivity counters installed at Tor Achilty, Meig and Luichart fish passes have been considered 95% accurate. However, the most recently installed resistivity counters, the Mk12, have been undercounting since their installation in 2018. SSE are currently working their way through the data but, after initial analysis on one of the counters on the Shin, it has been confirmed that that particular counter was undercounting by 41%. Whether the undercounts in our district were as high remains to be seen but 30% would be an reasonable assumption at present.

The new AI counters have been proven to be >95% accurate. SSE have confirmed that the AI counter is now installed in Meig dam and that it will be fully operational for next season and the Luichart AI counter will follow in due course. Now that the first AI counters are operational commissioning new counters will be a more streamlined process. The lifts in Tor Achilty are not, unfortunately, suitable for an AI counter and so will receive an updated resistivity counter, the Mk14. The Mk14 is currently being developed and, whilst accuracy is low now, further development in the coming months will see the Mk14 ready to roll out.



## **Bailiff Report**

Patrols across all the rivers in the district continued during August looking for those fishing illegally. During these patrols a total of 6 persons were found to be fishing without permission and removed. In one other incident a male was reported to Police Scotland for an offence under the 2003 Act as well as one other non-fishing related matter.

