

Monthly Report – April 2024

The 2024 Smolt Run

The 2024 smolt run sees board staff pioneering several new approaches in the hope that they will aid successful migration of smolts to sea. These projects are running in conjunction with our established trap and truck operation for which we are releasing all non-tagged fish under the cover of darkness.

Smolt Trap Efficiency Trial

In 2023, with the low flows experienced through May, trap efficiency was often negatively impacted as the traps failed to rotate at a suitable speed, on occasions stopping completely. This year the Board have deployed two ton rock bags instream which effectively funnel water over the drum of the rotary screw traps, increasing both velocity and the proportion of the water column which is interrogated. It is hoped that this arrangement will keep the traps fishing effectively through a variety of river heights which, in turn, should see an increase in our capture efficiency. We will report on the projects success at the end of the smolt run, but current catches do look promising.



Smolt Guidance System – Loch Meig

Working in partnership with SSE and Whoosh Innovations inc. (Seattle) we have successfully deployed a smolt guidance system on Loch Meig. This system has been developed by Whoosh Innovations, a company that has created multiple novel solutions to aid in fish passage such as 'The Salmon Cannon'. With extensive lab trials in the states, this is the first 'real world' application of the system and depending on results may have the capacity to facilitate smolt passage through reservoirs in Scotland and further afield.

The system is essentially a submerged electric fence that works on a similar principle to electrofishing but instead of attracting fish towards the electrode it repels them. The

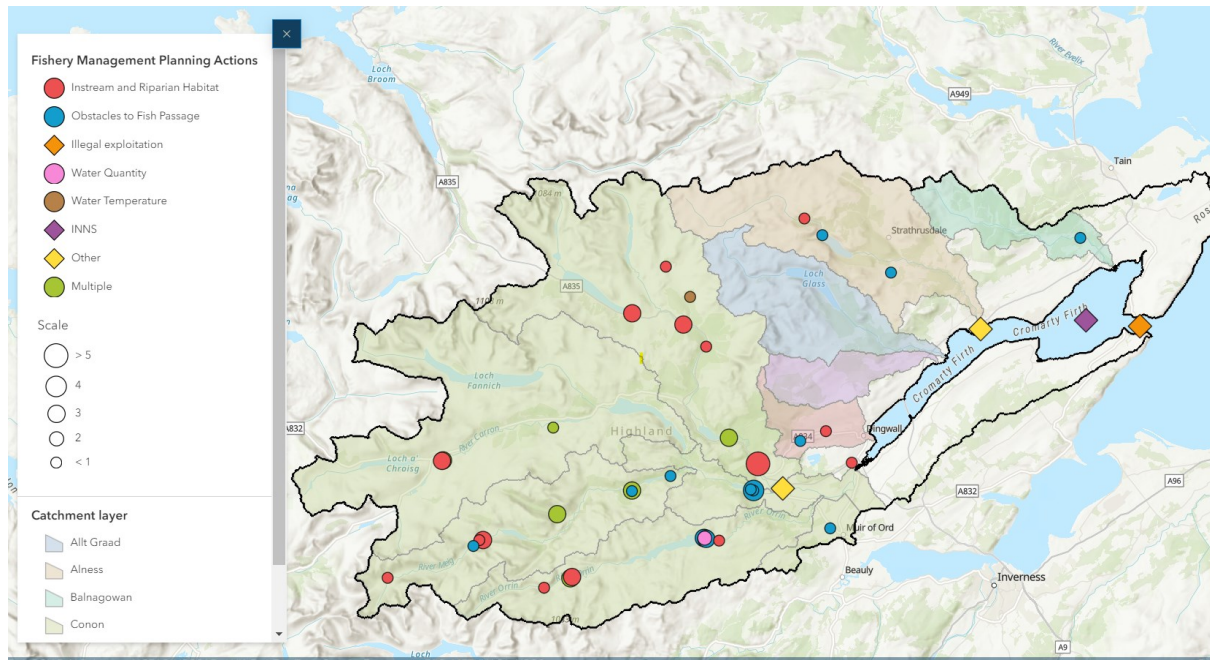
electrodes are suspended from a floating boom that stretches from the smolt screens (escapement point) across the loch, in a upstream direction, to the far bank. The electrical field produced will, in theory, guide the fish towards the escapement screens and also prevent them from getting to the dam wall, turning around and getting lost in the loch.

As part of this study, we have constructed a second night release cage, which will allow smolts sufficient time to recover and to travel during the hours of darkness. The deployment of the guidance system involved a huge collaborative effort and would not have been possible without the support of Loch Achonachie Angling Club and Strathconon Estate. Results to follow.



Fisheries Management Plan

We are pleased to confirm that the second phase of our fishery management has now been published. The management plan link is available on our website homepage. Or for those reading digitally (<https://arcg.is/1TyHSK>). The plan encompasses all aspects of fishery management within the district for 2023-2028. We hope that with the support of The Trust, local landowners, proprietors and SSE, we will deliver the bulk of this plan over the next four to five years.



Open Rivers – Marybank Weir

The Marybank weir on the Balnagowan presents the largest obstacle to upstream migration of anadromous salmonids on the river. Electrofishing sites upstream of this weir have shown lower than expected densities of Atlantic salmon and often a total absence. In order to improve access to the upper river The Board, after an initial expression of interest acceptance, have submitted a full application to the Open Rivers Programme. If successful, we will look to commence works over the summer, opening up the river in time for the 2024 spawning season.

Bailiff Report

Patrols looking for illegal fishing were carried out during April; these patrols were carried out at varying times, seven days a week. During one early morning patrol a small net was seized from the River Blackwater. The latest Scottish Government wildlife crime report (link below) showed that illegal fishing remains the most reported wildlife crime in Scotland and the discovery of the net highlights the importance of regular enforcement patrols across the district.

[Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-crime-in-scotland-2022/pages/10/index.aspx)