



**SEPTEMBER 2012**

**1. What is Nith DSFB?**

It is the managing organisation created and given its powers by the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries (S) Act 2003 to deal with what can be simply described as the protection and welfare of salmon and sea trout in all waters within the catchment of the Rivers Nith and Cairn.

The people on the Board are a mixture of owners of angling beats, netting fisheries, anglers and netsmen. These Board members hold office for three years and then give up office so that elections of new Board members can take place. The Board members give freely of their time to ensure that the best possible effort is put into preserving and protecting the health of the river system and its salmon stocks. They are not paid for the work that they do.

Without exception all Board members are anglers or netsmen who want to ensure that the salmon and sea trout stocks in the river system are protected and as productive as possible. They want to see as many fish in the river as possible, whether they be juvenile fish still to go to sea or adult fish returning from the sea to spawn. They have as much of an interest in this as any angler or netsman who fishes the river

**2. Who can become a member of Nith DSFB?**

Anyone who owns salmon fishing can offer themselves up for election to the Board at the time of the elections. Anyone who is an angler or netsman who wants to be part of the Board and has the support of other anglers, netsmen and the owners who have been elected at the first part of the election process can become a Board member.

**3. What do the Board employees do?**

The Fishery Director follows the Board's instructions to carry out the Board's duties under the legislation. His job is very varied.

- He has to negotiate with Open Cast Coal Mine Companies, Area Planners, SEPA, SNH, Scottish Water, wind farm and micro hydro companies and any other person or organisation that wants to do something that might have a bad affect on the water in the river system which could kill salmon and sea trout and what young fish feed on.
- He is trained and qualified with a number of qualifications covering the science of salmon and sea trout management. He carries out work with the Fishery Trust Biologist to improve the habitat surrounding and in watercourses throughout the river system for the benefit of the young salmon and sea trout that live the first part of their lives in the river.
- He is involved in various projects run locally and nationally dealing with research into what happens to salmon and sea trout at sea and attends conferences to find out what is being discovered by experts about where salmon and sea trout go when they are in the sea and what might be affecting them while at sea.
- He represents the Board as a management executive at the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards, the organisation that speaks to the Scottish Government about all Scottish Fishery Board concerns.
- He represents the Board on the Celtic Sea Trout Project which has been set up by Bangor University, Wales to try to find out where young sea trout go to feed when they leave their birth rivers in the countries surrounding the Irish Sea and go out to sea.
- He organises and goes on patrol with the Bailiffs to try to prevent poaching in the river.
- He does other jobs on the instructions of the Board, the details of which can be provided if asked for.
- He organises and runs the Board's salmon and sea trout hatcheries.

The Bailiffs work with the Fishery Director on bailiff patrol work to protect the river from poaching. In addition they help with the habitat enhancement work and the hatchery operations.

#### **4. How does the Board pay for the work and wages?**

The Government does not pay for salmon and sea trout fishery management.

The owners of the fishings are responsible for paying to the Board their individual shares of what the Board has estimated it will cost to pay for work and wages in each forthcoming financial year. Some proprietors pass the responsibility on to their tenants.

The Board also makes money through income earned by the Fishery Director from engineering projects in the river system. The Fishery Director examines the project site and gives a written report and advice on what will be needed to prevent damage to fish and charges for the service.

This consultancy income has resulted in annual refunds of assessments to owners/tenants of 30% on average over the last few years. There are few Boards in Scotland that have the facility and ability to provide this protection for their rivers and collect income from it. Without this income and the refunds given the assessments payable by owners and clubs would be much higher.

#### **5. What types of salmon and sea trout are in the river system?**

##### **a. Juvenile Salmon**

This age classification of salmon encompasses salmon hatched from ova (alevins) either naturally in the river system or from the Board's salmon hatchery, or salmon parr of an age class of 1+ t 2+ years with occasional 3+ year old parr. These juvenile fish hatch and grow in the river until they migrate to sea as smolts at around two to three years of age.

The Fishery Director and Trust Fishery Biologist have electro fishing statistics on a very large number of sites throughout the river system gathered and updated for over twenty years which show healthy sustainable populations of juvenile salmon of all relevant age classes within the river system.

##### **b. Juvenile Trout**

The fishery scientists believe that all trout in the river system are brown trout and that adult sea trout that return to the river system are brown trout that have migrated to sea. It is not yet established beyond doubt why some brown trout should migrate to sea, but one popular theory is that they do so because there isn't enough natural feeding in the river system to support all the brown trout that are born in it.

##### **c. Spring Salmon**

The spring run of fish into the Nith system fell away many years ago. In fact there has been evidence over the last 2-3 years that the number of spring fish has increased, both as a result of new fish caught and returned in spring months and as a consequence of coloured fish having been caught in the late summer.

##### **d. Grilse**

Grilse are salmon that have migrated to sea from their river of birth and returned to breed after one winter at sea. Historically grilse started to arrive in numbers in the Nith system from very late June onwards. In recent years the grilse run has arrived later in the year and in reduced numbers.

##### **e. Autumn Salmon or multi sea winter fish**

These are fish which have spent more than one winter at sea, are generally larger than grilse and usually arrive in the river to breed in autumn.

**f. Sea Trout**

These are the adult brown trout that have migrated to sea and then returned to spawn. They are made up of herling or small fish that could be thought of as the grilse equivalent of the sea trout population and larger fish.

**6. How good is the River System for numbers of Salmon and Sea Trout?**

The answer to this question is in two parts:-

**Juvenile salmon**

The water quality in the whole river system varies and is affected by agriculture, forestry, other land use, pollution, whether one off incidents or diffuse and various other factors. SEPA classify the waters as generally excellent –A1 or good – A2.

The Board has been gathering electro-fishing data collected by its Fishery Director and staff (who are qualified to the Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre standard) for the last twenty years. The sites, which are revisited and added to every year show healthy populations of all age classes of juvenile salmon throughout the river system. As would be expected there are variations from year to year, depending on weather and water conditions but generally speaking the stocks of juvenile fish are good.

**Adult salmon**

Since the start of the collection of catch statistics by Government in 1952 the system has produced returns of salmon that have varied between 1,500 and 4500 fish per annum. The average return over the last ten years has been 3350 per annum. The numbers and types of salmon vary from year to year and scientists believe that there are cycles where numbers go up and down. The statistics show that the system is one of the ten most productive salmon rivers in Scotland and at times has been the fifth most productive river in the country.

**7. What has happened to the numbers of salmon and sea trout returning to the river in the last few years?**

The run of adult fish from the sea into the river system over the last few years has become later and later, notwithstanding the amount of water from generally wetter summers that has been available to allow for fish to run.

In addition the age class of returning fish has changed from less grilse to more multi sea winter fish. By the very nature of this age class of fish they are fewer in number because they are longer at sea and therefore face more of a mortality risk by being there.

The grilse run has reduced substantially in recent years in many rivers throughout Scotland including the Solway rivers. This is not a phenomenon that is confined to the Nith system. Press articles are appearing in local and national newspapers concerning the lack of returning adult salmon to the Cree, Bladnoch and Annan. Concerns have been expressed throughout Scotland over the last few years about the reduction in the numbers, size and poor weight condition of grilse returning to Scotland's rivers.

The scientific thinking behind the lack of grilse and the higher proportion of multi sea winter fish is that global warming may have contributed to the quarry feed species upon which sea going salmon depend moving further north, as a consequence of which sea going salmon are either not finding feeding where it should be and suffering mortality as a consequence or they are staying out at sea longer.

The cause of mortality of grilse is not as a consequence of anything that has happened in the river system. Nor is it confined to the Nith system.

In addition there is also serious concern among marine scientists that young salmon are being inadvertently caught by fishing boats in nets as part of bi-catch when these boats are fishing for other quarry species.

As regards sea trout there is no firm evidence as to what is having an impact on their numbers. What is noticeable is that larger brown trout are now becoming apparent in the river

system and recent electro fishing results have shown a marked increase in the presence of juvenile brown trout in certain parts of the river system, hopefully the recruitment population of greater numbers of sea trout in years to come.

It is very much hoped that good information will come from the results of phase I of the Celtic Sea trout project. Apparently there have been some remarkable discoveries that have been made regarding the genetics of different populations of sea trout in our rivers and in the Irish Sea and it is hoped that these results will be published within the next year.

#### **8. What is the Board doing about it?**

The Board continues to try to do all that it can to protect adult salmon running the river system by:-

##### **Preventing Poaching**

The Board utilises a scheme of employed Bailiffs and volunteer Bailiffs, all of whom are qualified to the Institute of Fisheries Management and Government approved standards, having undertaken the training and sat the examinations in order that they can carry a Government approved warrant card allowing them powers of arrest. At the moment the Fishery Director, the Fishery Biologist and two seasonal Bailiffs are involved with bailiff patrol work, supported by a volunteer Bailiff trained to the IFM required standard.

At times of not less than three months of each of the last three seasons the Bailiff force patrolling the river has been not less than five in number and at times as many as seven. This compares favourably with other rivers throughout Scotland. In addition these Bailiffs are equipped with up to date equipment including night vision equipment, secure (as these things can be) back to back radios, private limited number disclosure telephones and a Landrover Defender twincab.

The Senior Bailiff resigned from his post recently for personal reasons. The Board is taking steps to advertise the post so that a suitably qualified person can be put in post as soon as possible.

In addition the Board enjoys very good relations with Dumfries and Galloway Police, maintains contact with the Wildlife Liaison Officer and has its Fishery Director attend with Police Officers to deal with training and cooperation in respect of Night time patrol operations. On occasion over the last few years police officers have worked with the Bailiff force or have cooperated in joint operations in respect of suspected poaching activity.

In one season approximately twenty three years ago forty nine nets were seized and numerous convictions obtained, this involving a bailiff staff of one full time bailiff and two seasonal bailiffs. A concerted and sustained effort went into dealing with poaching. The scale of it reduced over the years. It will never be eradicated completely. The same poaching crews still attempt it, but they are fewer in number, are generally late 40's in age or older and no younger generations have come through to trouble the river. Poaching is far less of a problem than it used to be. However it is still treated seriously and at this time of year night time patrols take place on every night that water conditions would permit poaching activity.

All anglers are encouraged to get in contact with the Board to provide any information that they can about where they believe that poaching is taking place so that it can be prevented whenever possible.

##### **Catch and Release.**

The most effective way of making sure that there are as many juvenile fish as possible to migrate to sea is to return as many adult fish that are caught as is possible.

Recent statistics published by ASFB show that the Nith system is the second worst river in Scotland regarding the number of fish caught by rod and line and not returned to the River, despite the Board's published policy on catch and release in its recently modernised Angling Code. The Board continues to try to put across the message to all anglers on catch and release to attempt to maximise the numbers of adult fish available to spawn and naturally

regenerate the wild stocks of juvenile fish in the river so that they might migrate to sea and return as adults.

**The Board's jurisdiction extends for only a short distance into the Solway Firth. It has no legal jurisdiction in matters of the high seas, therefore it can do nothing about what happens to salmon and sea trout at sea beyond keeping itself informed about the research that is going on in relation to salmon at sea and attempting through ASFB and other similar organisations from North Atlantic Salmon producing nations to limit the impact of commercial, illegal and inadvertent taking of salmon and sea trout by high seas nets.**

**9. What can I do to help?**

- Follow the catch and release advice of the Board.
- Tell the Board about poaching, pollution and anything else that you find that could have a bad effect on the river system.
- Lobby your MSP to support initiatives to provide for research and conservation of wild salmon stocks.
- Lobby your MSP to encourage the restriction of high seas and mixed stock interceptory salmon netting and the use of multi monofilament gill nets.
- Lobby your MSP to provide for effective compulsory methods of control of the salmon farming industry regarding the control of sea lice, pollution and escape of farmed salmon.
- Lobby your MSP to endorse the board as a statutory consultee in respect of any plans that might have a bad effect on the river system.

**10. How do I find out what the Board does for the River System?**

The Board operates a web site on which is published the Board's activities in trying to protect the river system.

The Board publishes an Annual Report which is sent to all salmon fishery owners and clubs and associations and which details the activities of the Board in the previous year. The Board actively encourages the circulation of the Annual Report to as many people as possible and publishes extra copies of the report for this purpose.

When it is required the Board will write to proprietors to advise them of matters of importance that have arisen.

The Board attends the Galloway Game Fair and has Board members and staff present to answer any questions put by members of the public.

The Board releases its staff to attend meetings and advise about the Board's management of the river when requested to do so.

The Board has representation amongst its members of owners of salmon fishings and four out of the five angling clubs and associations. The Board conducts its business at meetings held at least four times a year and employs sub committees to look at matters as required.

This year the Board appointed members to sub committees to look at (1) bailiff manpower, equipment and methods of operation and (2) hatchery operations. As a consequence of these sub committee meetings the Board changed the emphasis of its Bailiff operations to provide for more night time patrol operations and to reduce hatchery effort for future seasons on the basis of a change in Government policy on hatchery operations.

Because the Board meets in full form four times a year the minutes of its meetings cannot be published until the minutes of the previous meeting have been approved by the Board at its next full meeting, usually three months later.

The Board observes the Code of Good Conduct produced by ASFB. By the very nature of how the Board conducts business some of what it does has to remain confidential to comply with laws such as the Data Protection Act. Nevertheless the Board also relies on its members

to report back to anglers, clubs other owners and any other interested parties in respect of what it is important to inform people about.

It is clear to the Board that this information isn't getting to as many people as it should and that there is a delay of three to four months before the minutes of the previous meeting showing what the Board has decided to do for the management of the river can be published. The Board has decided to appoint a person to provide information about what is decided by the Board that is of interest to people who have an interest in the river. The Board intends to try to have this information published on the web site and sent to all owners and clubs for the interest of the people who fish on the river as soon as possible after a Board meeting has taken place.

**11. How do I raise matters that I am concerned about with the Board?**

- If you own fishings you should contact the Chairman or the Clerk, addressed to the Clerk whose address is published on the website.
- You can post your questions by e mail to the web site.
- For those who don't use computers the Clerk's address is 37 George Street, Dumfries DG1 1EB and his telephone number is 01387 267222.
- If you are a member of a club or association then the best way is to raise your concern with your Board Representative or the owner from whom you rent your fishings or if you feel that your enquiry is not being properly dealt with by that route you can contact the Board in the ways suggested above.
- All enquiries will be dealt with as soon as possible although some have to be taken to Board meetings for investigation and Board approved response.

In recent weeks the Board has responded to all enquiries made direct to it promptly. In one case where concern was expressed about a perceived lack of juvenile fish in a certain part of the river the Board asked the Fishery Director and the Trust Biologist to attend with concerned anglers to electro fish the water in question. The staff provided the electro fishing analysis, were able to ease the concerns expressed and took a question and answer session which was well received by the concerned anglers.

The Board will not enter into debate and correspondence through the letters page of the Press or through internet forums. There is little point in raising complaints through these media if there has been no attempt to raise the matters direct with the Board through any of the above channels.

The Board will readily release its staff for similar meetings if requested and given reasonable notice of the subjects that are to be raised with the staff

It is hoped that this is of help in relation to what the Board does and how it functions.