

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
ON
24 SEPTEMBER 2021
THE TRAINING SUITE, DRUMLANRIG CASTLE

PRESENT

Percy Weatherall (Chairman)
David Kempself – Dumfries & Galloway Angling Association
Peter Landale – Dalswinton Estate
Freja Grant – BEL
Richard Gladwin – Blackwood Estate
John Charteris – D&G Council
Robbie Cowan – Caerlaverock Estate
Peter Hutchison – Douglas Hall Fisheries
Tom Brown - Arbigland
Nick Wright – Angling Rep

IN ATTENDANCE

Roderick Styles – Clerk
James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)
Deborah Parke – Nith Catchment Fishery Trust (FB)

The Chairman welcomed all present.

1. APOLOGIES

Thomas Florey
Anna Ferguson/BEL, albeit that Freja Grant was accepted in substitution of Anna Ferguson.

2. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

There were none.

3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 30 JUNE 2021

The Chairman asked for acceptance. There was unanimous approval of the Minutes.

4. MATTERS ARISING

FD reported on the Wanlock Habitat Scheme now being underway. In fact, whilst previously approved Board expenditure up to £5,000 had been permitted the final cost was in the order of £3,000 with the balance to be kept for tree planting.

5. RIVER REPORT

FD reported on a busy year. At the start of the year there had been preparation for an undertaking of the smolt tracking project for 6 to 7 weeks in the Spring.

There had been commercial work undertaken for the Board.

There had been involvement on behalf of the Board in respect of electrofishing work for the Glasgow to Carlisle railway line upgrade.

There had been electrofishing for NEPs programme (National Electrofishing Programme) completed the previous week with results having been sent to Marine Scotland on time and in accordance with the contract specification.

Scottish Government (SG) wanted to have adult salmon made available for examination, so salmon had to be caught up from the River along with other major rivers throughout Scotland. However, and in common with other Scottish rivers, there are no real numbers of salmon within the river yet because of the drought and general lack of water during the course of the Summer.

The Chairman reported on the unusually dry year. FD responded that the last time a drought of this nature had occurred was in 1984. FD had been worried about fish mortality because of the drought but was pleasantly surprised at the resilience of the fish in the river.

The Dalgig Burn is sustaining salmon and sea trout as was discovered by electrofishing. It is to be hoped that there shall be rain soon. Other rivers throughout Scotland with earlier season closure would have suffered badly as a consequence of drought. There were plenty of fish in the Nith estuary. There had been seal monitoring on 21 September. Four seals had been seen at the mouth of the estuary. FD reported on having applied for a Seal Cull Licence but SG had refused it.

SG suspects that as a consequence of likely Catch Statistics Returns for this season the river will be Category 3 next year.

Robbie Cowan and Tom Brown reported on pods of dolphins having been seen off Heston Island. Schools of white bait and a sail fish had been seen.

FD advised that he was concerned about seal predation as a result of salmon build up in the estuary because of the drought.

Peter Landale spoke to the Suspects Framework Data Model being built up. When collected and collated, it will hopefully allow management to have more weight to add to a discussion about permitting control of seals and other predators.

FB reported that she had been carrying out crayfish trapping. There had been the odd report of crayfish having been seen at Kingholm Quay. Social media reported the sighting of one at the Academy Bridge in Dumfries. As a result, FB had set traps and has now caught a crayfish at the Academy Bridge i.e., above the caul. It is not known if this crayfish has arrived from the population in the Cargen Water or from elsewhere.

The Chairman asked for any questions on the report.

Peter Hutchison asked about “show and tell” on the smolt tracking project.

FD reported that having convened Coastal Communities meetings at Glencaple and Colvend to inform the public about the Smolt Tracking Project on the Nith that despite the terrible weather there had been interest from the public.

Peter Landale asked how NEPS programme had fared for the 27 sites.

FD reported on it being conducted in 2019 but missed in 2020 because of Covid. SG picks on areas not often seen or examined. For example, electrofishing had been carried out at Gateslack. Salmon and trout were present in the stream which had never electrofished before.

Peter Hutchison asked for a timeline from Marine Scotland/AST on the results of the smolt tracking project.

FB replied that reports will come back eventually but that he was not permitted to divulge any results until approved to do so. Peter Landale confirmed that with no data released for the pressures tool there is no management plan yet in place.

6. NITH CATCHMENT FISHERY TRUST

The Chairman reported on a well attended meeting at Blackwood. Electrofishing had been good because of low water conditions. The smolt tracking project and Fishing for the Future Project had been discussed. It seems to be a very successful project.

FB reported on the previous involvement of Border Lines Angling to promote angling effort on the River Nith. However, Border Lines’ staff would stop offering tuition because of a combination of Covid and the age of the Border Lines’ staff. As a result, application had been made to the Holywood Trust. Funds being used for Border Lines will be used to employ an Angling Development Officer. Ideally, one person will be involved but depending upon the quality of the applicant two may be taken on. A £5,000 shortfall in funds will be covered by the Trust.

The Chairman advised that he felt that Fishing for the Future must be encouraged.

Peter Landale reported on the Smithsonian Institute creating a database with Atlantic Salmon Trust and Wild Salmon Centre in the Pacific north-west using education as a “Citizen Science” project which would be very good.

The Chairman reported on other elements of business covered including signal cray fish and Trust finances, which are in a good condition.

FD had reported on the Smolt Tracking Project. Fishing for Future continues with good external funding for it. The National Electrofishing Scotland Programme has been arranged by Marine Scotland and administered to by FMS, with the Board supplying data from Nith sites from July onwards. This is important work which provides information on the state of salmon stocks within the Nith system. Non-native invasive species were discussed.

7. GLENMUCKLOCK PUMP STORAGE SCHEME

It was decided to defer discussion on this subject, pending presentation later in the meeting.

8. SMOLT TRACKING PROJECT

FD reported on receivers having been sent to Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) for analysis. AST has offered to analyse the data from the Board's additional remaining four receivers which will provide for continuity of approach in interpreting the results from all receivers. It is likely that results will be available in the Spring of 2022.

Peter Landale reported on the data perhaps giving rise to controversial results, given the smolt traffic that moves up the west coast of Scotland and the presence of the Fish Farming Industry on this coast. Apparently, Glasgow University will be analysing the results.

Peter Landale reported on two projects being smolt route traffic and Nith in-river information. Hopefully the Board's information will be available soon.

Peter Landale reported that analysing of the results is important to determine where problems are to try to identify what to do to improve matters.

9. UPPER NITHSDALE RESTORATION PROJECT

FD reported on the summer meeting with the Chairman, Peter Landale, the Clerk and representatives of SEPA and the Tweed Forum.

Flowing from that meeting, the impression that had been given to Board Members was that electrofishing in the area of river affected by the restoration works would be funded by the project. It had been agreed at the meeting that Mr Horrill from Tweed Forum would meet to discuss future survey works.

Mr Horrill had visited the Blackwood Hatchery wanting to know whether and how the Board would become involved in the project. FD had pointed out that the Board had a statutory duty to oversee the restoration work to ensure that it was carried out without damage to and for the benefit of the River System but that the Trust would carry out the survey work if instructed. FB had produced an estimate for the survey work for habitat analysis and electrofishing analysis.

Peter Landale confirmed having attended the meeting. He had been disappointed at what he had seen. He offered an apology for previous comments made in connection with the apparently encouraging nature of the project. He felt that the whole project had clearly not been planned through.

10. ADULT SALMON SAMPLING

It was observed that this had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

11. SEPA PROJECT AT WANLOCKHEAD

FD reported on the black tail arising from localised poisoning of the river. SEPA were now involved to survey heavy metals at Wanlockhead.

12. SEPA ATTENDANCE TO POLLUTION INCIDENTS

FD reported on an incident at Polbower Burn. A CAR Licence had been provided for materials in the culvert to be removed. FD reported that he had to report a pollution incident to SEPA at 5pm on a Friday night. The SEPA Officer had advised that she would not get sanction from SEPA to attend on her own alone. Consequently, FD had dealt with the incident.

There was an incident at Muirfoot Burn. Because of the dry year the farmer had created a dam to water his cattle. He had been told to take it down but had not been prosecuted.

Richard Gladwin reported that he had called SEPA concerning digging in the river. The response that he had got from the SEPA Officer was that it must have been licensed.

General dissatisfaction with SEPA's performance has been raised with FMS as late as 21st September. Similar experiences were being noted by Boards throughout Scotland. The matter has been raised at higher level.

13. ELECTROFISHING BACKPACK

The Clerk raised on behalf of FD the requirement to replace the electrofishing backpack which after many years' service had become irreparable. The Board gave sanction for the backpack to be purchased at a price of £6,000.

The Clerk asked for sanction to sue a Proprietor who had failed to respond to repeated requests for settling previous years assessments. The Board agreed to provide the sanction.

Save for the presentation hosted by Buccleuch Estates Limited in respect of the Glenmuckloch Pump Storage Scheme, the formal business of the meeting closed.