



ANNUAL REPORT

COMBINED ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
AND THE NITH CATCHMENT FISHERY TRUST

2025





The **Nith District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB)** is constituted under the Salmon Fisheries Legislation commencing in the 1860s as subsequently amended and presently stated in the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 as amended. The Nith Board is empowered under fisheries legislation to do such Acts as it considers expedient for the protection, enhancement and conservation of stocks of salmon and sea trout and the general protection and enhancement of the fishery itself.

The Nith Board’s principal objectives are therefore to preserve, protect and enhance stocks of migratory salmonids in the Nith catchment and to preserve, protect and enhance the fishery. Its principal areas of jurisdiction comprise the principal River System of the River Nith and all its tributaries including parts of the Solway Firth.

The Board financial year runs from 1st December to 30th November in any given year.

The Nith Board for the year comprised: -

Chairman	Mr Percy Weatherall (PW)	Cowhill Estate
Lower Proprietors	Ms Anna Austin (AA) Mr Ivor Hyslop (IH) Mr Tom Brown (TB)	Caerlaverock Estate Dumfries and Galloway Council Drumburn Estate
Upper Proprietors	Mr Peter Landale (PL) Mr James Hunter-Paterson (JHP) Mr Nick Wright (NW) Ms Anna Fergusson (AF) Mr David Kempself (DK) Mr Richard Gladwin (RG) (retired) Mr Mike Keggans (MK) Mr Matthew Law (ML)	Dalswinton Estate Barjarg Closeburn Castle Fishing Buccleuch Estates Limited D & G Angling Association Blackwood Estate Upper Nithsdale Angling Association Portrack Estate
Upper Co-optees	Mr Thomas Florey (TF) Mr Raymond Mundle (RM)	Angling Representative Angling Representative
Lower Co-optees	Mr Ronnie Clark (RCI)	Netting Representative

Invitees

In addition to the elected Chairman, lower proprietors and upper proprietors, the Nith Board has invited representatives from the Scottish Environmental Agency (SEPA) and NatureScot however in recent years SEPA and NatureScot no longer have officer time available to fulfil these invitations.

Staff

- Mr Roderick Styles – Clerk
- Mr Jim Henderson – Fishery Director
- Mr David McMichael – Water Bailiff
- Miss Morag Maguire – Fishery Biologist

The Nith Board met on: -

- 16th January 2025 – Board meeting.
- 24th April 2025 – Annual Qualified Proprietors Meeting followed by Board meeting.
- 7th August 2025 – Annual Public Meeting followed by Board meeting.
- 23rd October 2025 – Board meeting.

Board members attendance at Board meetings

Dates	PW	AA	IH	TB	PL	NW	AF	DK	RG	TF	RM	JHP	RC	ML	MK	% attendance
16/01/25	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	66%
24/04/25	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%
07/08/25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	86%
23/10/25	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	64%

Minutes from these meetings can be found on the Board website - [NDSFB meeting agendas \(river-nith.com\)](https://www.river-nith.com)

Complaints

There were no complaints received during year 1st December 2024 to 30th November 2025.



The **Nith Catchment Fishery Trust (NCFT)** is a Scottish Registered Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee which was formed in 2009 to conserve and enhance all native freshwater fish and their habitats located within the inland and coastal waters of the River Nith catchment within the jurisdiction of the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board. The Trust works closely with the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board to conserve freshwater fish and their habitats. Part of the Trust's remit is to educate and increase awareness of the aquatic environment.

The aims of the Nith Catchment Fishery Trust are:

- To advance environmental protection and improvement by conserving and enhancing all species of freshwater fish and their environs within the River Nith catchment, for public benefit.
- To advance the education of the general public through raising awareness of aquatic ecosystems including their fauna, flora and economic activity within the River Nith catchment.

The Trust financial year runs from 1st January to 31st December in any given year.

Trust Directors

Mr Percy Weatherall (PW) – Chairman
 Mr Jim Henderson (JH)
 Mr Mathew Law (ML)
 Mr David Kempel (DK)
 Miss Freja Grant (FG)
 Mr Thomas Florey (TF)
 Mr Finlay Thomson (FT)
 Mr Gordon Kerr (GK) – retired 23/04/25
 Mr Kevin Corder - retired 23/04/25
 Mr Robert Schiller – retired 23/04/25

Staff

Ms Debbie Parke - Operations Manager/Biologist

The Trust Directors met on: -

- 15th January 2025 – Trustee meeting
- 23rd April 2025 – Annual General Meeting followed by Trustee meeting.
- 6th August 2025 – Trustee meeting.
- 22nd October 2025 – Trustee meeting.

Trustee attendance:

Dates	PW	JH	GK	KC	FG	TF	DK	RS	FT	ML	% attendance
15/01/25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		89%
23/04/25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	70%
06/08/25	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	100%
22/10/25	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓				71%

Nith Catchment Fishery Trust is a Registered Scottish Charity. Charity no. SC040908. Company no. SC366067.
 Registered Office: 37 George Street, Dumfries, DG1 1EB. Registered in Scotland

Chairman's Foreword

As I reflect on the previous twelve months on our river, the season of 2025, I have just recently attended the opening ceremony for the new fishing season, and I am heartened by the enthusiasm of the attendees. Despite reduced catches of salmon and sea trout, many keen anglers continue to pursue the "king of fish" on the beats of the Nith. It is frustrating for us all involved in the management of our river via our Fishery Trust or our Board, not to be able to identify a single cause or reason for lower numbers of fish in the river. I wish I knew in order that we may address the issue.



In the spring of 2025, I accompanied our staff in attending the annual conference of Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS), held in Perth. The keynote speech for the conference was delivered by the First Minister of Scotland, John Swinney. From his comments I concluded that he is both aware and concerned on a national level about the declines in fish numbers across Scotland. We here on the Nith are pursuing the fishery management action of restoring riparian habitat to future proof our spawning tributaries to enable them to continue to sustain stocks of salmon. I was encouraged that this is the correct management action having attended the FMS conference, as all the larger rivers are pursuing this goal.

It seems to me that every time I switch on the television a climate change story is being discussed in some location across the world and the issues of climate change impact on our river adversely. As I walked the banks of the Nith throughout the year, there were many occasions when the river appeared little more than a trickle, fishing was impossible. Conversely, during the latter part of the year floods seemed to be the order every week and I feared for the security of salmon eggs having been laid in the riverbed gravels. The salmon is a survivor, but you can't help but wonder, what will this creature have to face next.

I can assure you all that your Fishery Trust and your Fishery Board will continue to do all within their means for salmon and sea trout within our river.

Tight lines for 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E.P.K. Weatherall'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

E.P.K. Weatherall
Chairman

Fishery Directors report

The working year of 2025 was as unique as every other year that I have been in place on the River Nith. The prevailing weather presents challenges that we have not encountered previously. Drought conditions prevailed for many weeks in 2025 resulting in poor fishing conditions with very few anglers even attempting to cast a line. Fish were seen coming in on the rising tide, some would slip over the Caul, but most were ebbing back to the estuary with the receding tide only to return when the next tide rose. Such circumstances present specific issues in fishery management terms; fish can succumb to silt clogging their gills and being predated by other species. Thankfully, the drought broke before this occurred and losses were minimal.



Fish catches during 2025 were not spectacular, salmon figures were down on those recorded during 2024, and in no small way, the drought conditions contributed to this. Anglers just did not fish in the stale low flow conditions. Sea trout figures were slightly increased during 2025; however, very few dedicated sea trout anglers now fish our river during the evenings.

We had a very busy year supporting industry, who were involved in construction projects with the potential to adversely impact on our river. We are very involved in collecting aquatic data to monitor the impact of many projects and conducting fish rescues when it is necessary to enter the aquatic environment to conduct engineering procedures. One such project during 2025 was the Whitesands Flood Protection project that we are supporting by providing aquatic data. This has involved us in conducting electrofishing surveys from Castledykes, upstream to Nunholm. This work is being conducted to establish robust baseline data which can be compared with future surveys, thus an assessment of any impacts in the aquatic environment can be made. The information is of value to the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board, Dumfries and Galloway Council and the construction companies involved. Some of the preliminary results have been fascinating. There were salmon and trout as expected but, in addition, there were some of the largest populations of eels and lampreys in the town section of the Nith.

The wind farming industry continues to thrive in the River Nith catchment, and this takes a large quantity of time from the staff monitoring the aquatic data gained from the many surveys conducted throughout the year. We undertake the collection of aquatic invertebrates and fish surveys, and this provides a catalogue of environmental data to enable our fishery managers to assess environmental performance throughout the catchment. This is a very important resource for the river to have and acts as a baseline of data should the worst ever occur in the form of an environmental incident.

In closing, I would like to thank all of those who pick up the phone and call in an incident. Sometimes it may be a trivial matter, but we need to know about it.

Jim Henderson
Fishery Director

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Cover photo: Large eel captured during survey of the Crawick Water

THE RIVER NITH CATCHMENT

Vital Statistics

The total catchment area is 1596km² which includes the main stem River Nith, its tributaries, coastal burns and connected still waters.

The length of the main stem of the River Nith is 98km from source to estuary.

Fish Species Present

- Atlantic salmon
- Sea trout
- Brown trout
- Grayling
- Pike
- Eel
- Lamprey
- Minnow
- Stone loach
- Stickleback
- Tench
- Perch
- Bream
- Roach

Salmon and Sea Trout Fishery

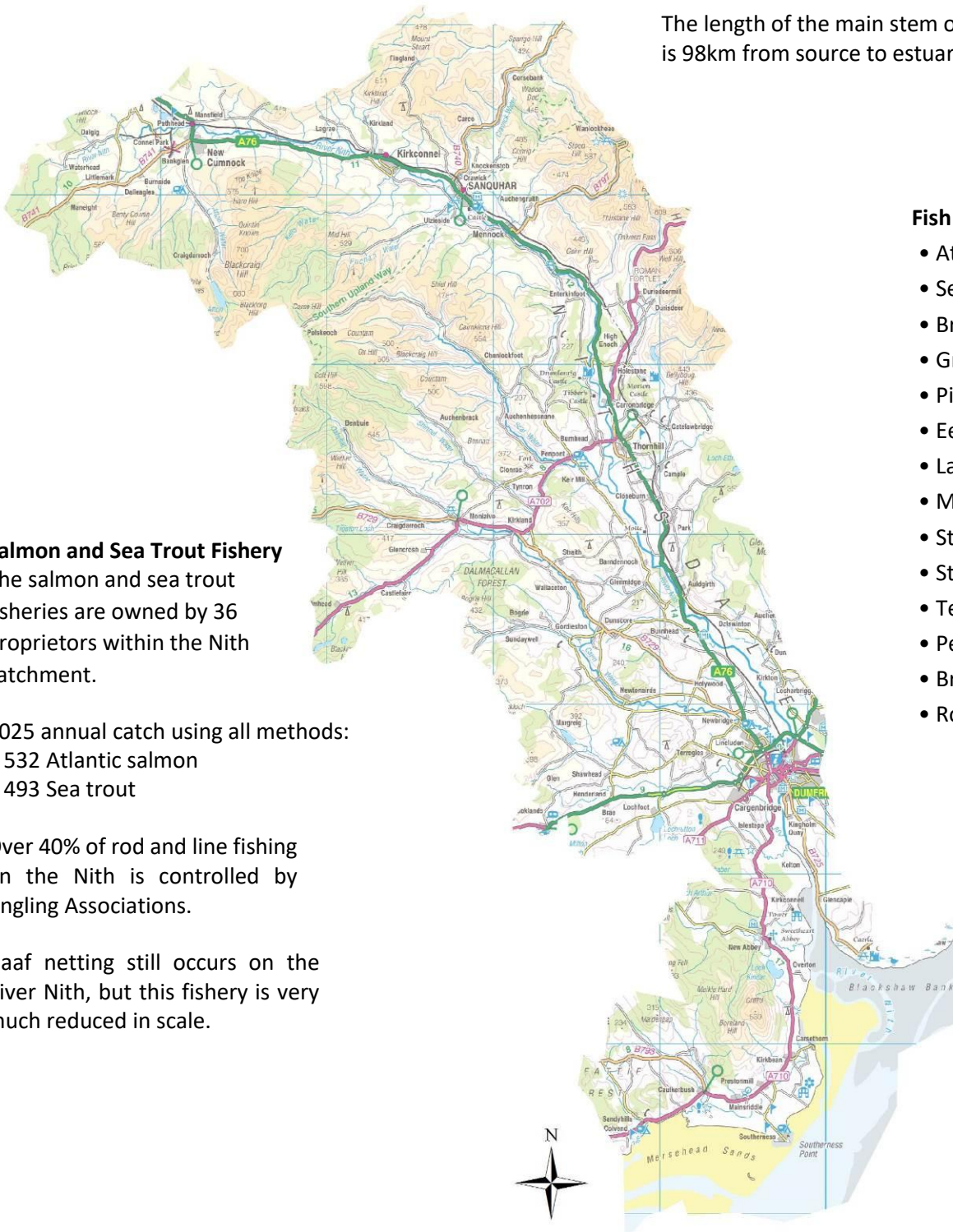
The salmon and sea trout fisheries are owned by 36 proprietors within the Nith catchment.

2025 annual catch using all methods:

- 532 Atlantic salmon
- 493 Sea trout

Over 40% of rod and line fishing on the Nith is controlled by Angling Associations.

Haaf netting still occurs on the River Nith, but this fishery is very much reduced in scale.



Other Fisheries

The Nith also has healthy brown trout and grayling fisheries which are owned by landowners throughout the catchment. There are also a number of still water trout and coarse fisheries within the catchment. Sea fishing is popular at the quay at Glencaple and off the coast.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023 - 2028

The Board and Trust have been working on a new Fisheries Management Plan to cover the period 2023 - 2028. The production of this plan is supported by the Scottish Government and forms one of the many fisheries management plans which cover most of Scotland. The plan lists historic actions and management of salmon and sea trout within the Nith catchment. In addition, the plan outlines the current status of our fish stocks and the planned actions which we intend embarking on to protect and enhance those stocks.

Unlike previous plans, this plan is web-based, designed to adapt to change and will enable us to review the outcomes of our work on an annual basis. The plan can be seen here - [Scotland's Fishery Management Plans \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).

Proposed Management Actions



Action 1 - Climate Change and Habitat Degradation

The River Nith Fisheries Team are working towards making our rivers more resilient to changes in the climate and to tackle the biodiversity crisis. This includes actions such as planting native trees along the riparian zones of rivers to help shade the water, stabilise banks and restore natural functions to many of the watercourses within the Nith catchment.



Action 2 - Illegal Exploitation

NDSFB will maintain a qualified team of water bailiffs that enforces Scottish fisheries legislation throughout the Nith catchment to ensure that stocks of Atlantic salmon and sea trout are not illegally exploited. We will continue to react to all incidents of breaches of fisheries legislation.



Action 3 - Scientific research and monitoring

The Board and Trust will continue to conduct monitoring of aquatic species of flora and fauna throughout the Nith catchment and use this as a means of measuring the health of our watercourses. We will participate in national surveys and projects to improve our knowledge and in the furtherance of management of salmon and sea trout.



Action 4 - Water quality and quantity

As part of our monitoring throughout the catchment, we will continue to monitor and extend our ability to detect influences which may impact adversely on aquatic species. This work will be conducted to assist the regulatory body (SEPA) to monitor the watercourses within the Nith catchment.



Action 5 - Invasive Non-native Species

The Board and Trust recognise the importance of preventing the influx of invasive non-native species (INNS) into the catchment and apply the ethos of "prevention is better than cure." The Board and Trust will offer advice on preventative measures to avoid the spread of non-native species and within our capabilities, treat INNS when possible.



Action 6 - Predation

Wherever salmon are present, either in the marine environment or in the freshwater, predators exist to feed on them. During these times of salmon in crisis, it is very important to ensure that any predation is kept to a level which does not put the future existence of salmon in jeopardy. Nith District Salmon Fishery Board apply for licences from the Scottish Government to enable them to take actions against certain species that would otherwise be illegal.



Action 7 - Raising awareness and education

Raising awareness of environmental issues surrounding aquatic environments and techniques used to restore watercourses to a more natural, sustainable state, is an important aspect of the work of the Board and the Trust.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN



Action 8 - Barriers to fish passage

Access to spawning areas is of paramount importance for salmon and sea trout to complete their life cycle successfully. There are few obstructions to fish passage in the Nith catchment and those that exist are largely natural waterfalls. The Board and Trust are currently working to remove known man-made barriers.



Action 9 - Stocking

The Board recognises the contribution that hatchery produced stock can contribute to fisheries management, in appropriate circumstances. The Board will continue to operate its hatchery facilities to best practice and in accordance with licence conditions.



Action 10 - Disease and Fish Health

Disease can have a severe impact on fish stocks if undiscovered/undiagnosed. Nith Catchment Fishery Trust and Board react to any reported incidents of unexplained fish deaths, often reported by anglers. Promotion and use of the reporting apps developed by Fisheries Management Scotland assists in gaining a national awareness of any potential outbreaks.



Action 11 - Developments

Development, such as road, rail, public utilities, forestry, local authority projects, renewable energy projects and their associated infrastructure has the potential to impact negatively on the aquatic environment and the species that reside within. The Board and Trust will work to advise development plans and proposals throughout the catchment which could potentially impact on the water environment.



Action 12 - Lobbying

The Board and Trust recognise the importance of lobbying political support for our fisheries management work and to ensure that the water environment and fisheries issues are held high on the political agenda. Accordingly, political leaders and representatives on a national and local level will be invited to attend appropriate events to maintain an awareness of issues



Electrofishing team surveying the River Nith at Martinton Railway Bridge, Nunholm

Conservation Regulations 2025

All Scottish salmon rivers are assigned a Conservation Categorisation, which previously was a grading from 1 to 3; this has recently been updated to provide clarity, by grading rivers with a “Good”, “Moderate” or “Poor” conservation status. The definition of these Categorisations is provided in the box below. The River Nith was assigned a “Poor” conservation status for 2025 which means that all salmon must be released.

Category Good (G)
Previously Grade 1

At least an 80% mean probability of conservation limits (CL) being met in the last 5 years. Exploitation is sustainable and therefore no additional management action is currently required.

Category Moderate (M)
Previously Grade 2

60-80% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years. Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation; mandatory catch and release will not be required in the first instance, but this will be reviewed annually. Where a Board does not exist, assistance in plan formulation will be offered to those responsible for local management.

Category Poor (P)
Previously Grade 3

Less than 60% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years. Exploitation is unsustainable and mandatory catch and release (all methods) for 1 year will be required. Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation.

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD CONSERVATION POLICY Conservation Category “Poor” - No Salmon to be Killed

<p>Statutory Regulations</p> <p>Fishing seasons Rod and Line 25th February - 30th November Net 25th February – 9th September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No fishing for salmon or sea trout on Sundays by rod and line No fishing for salmon or sea trout from 6pm Friday to 6am Monday by net No salmon to be killed within the Nith catchment. <p>It is illegal to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliberately attempt to foul hook fish or to take fish which have been foul hooked i.e. those not hooked in the mouth. Kill kelts, smolts or parr. Take unclean or unseasonable fish being baggots, highly coloured, black or red fish and fish about to or in the process of spawning. Sell salmon or sea trout which have been caught with rod & line. Use natural shrimps or prawns on any part of the river upstream of the Kingholm Gates at the bottom end (tidal area) of the Dumfries Town Fishings. Fish for any fish without written permission (or permit) from the beat’s owner or his representative. Fish with any form of salmon roe. Fish with a “fixed line.” Use gaffs, tailers or knotted mesh nets. <p>All fish caught must be recorded with the beat proprietor with the exception of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Kelts, i.e. fish that have spawned. During spring only, sexually mature fish that have not yet spawned. <p>Breach of any of the above could lead to criminal prosecution, seizure of fishing equipment and vehicles.</p>	<p>Nith Voluntary Regulations</p> <p>The Board notes the existing voluntary catch and release practices for sea trout on many beats throughout the Nith catchment.</p> <p>The Board recommends that if sea trout are to be taken, the following guidance should be adhered to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All sea trout under 10” and over 3 lb must be returned. Sea trout retained should be limited to no more than 1 Sea Trout in any day. Barbless hooks be used when the intention is to Catch & Release. Foul hooked fish i.e. those not hooked in the mouth, must be returned to water. Ripe or darkly coloured fish should be returned to the water. If in doubt, RETURN it! Fish being returned to the water should not be handled by the tail or gills and should be released as quickly as possible. Remove the hook with forceps and return the fish facing upstream and gently support it until it swims away. Fish being retained should be killed as quickly as possible using a priest or appropriate instrument. <p>General Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect boundaries between adjoining beats. Anglers must show permits, tackle and catch to Bailiffs, Police Officers or other anglers if requested. Anglers under 12 years of age should be accompanied by an adult when fishing. <p>Methods & Equipment</p> <p>Do not use sweep nets, ground bait or rod rests. Do not fish from trees, bridges, etc. or use assistance from anyone in such a position. The maximum permitted line breaking strain for all types of fishing should be 15lbs.</p>	<p>Spinning and Bait fishing</p> <p>Bait/spinner must be kept moving through the water at all times. The maximum permitted hook size for bait fishing will be No 4.</p> <p>Fly Fishing</p> <p>Fly hooks or tubes should be properly dressed with a coloured body and a reasonable quantity of hair/fur/feather in proportion to the hook size. Anglers should not use weights or lead-core lines of any kind when fishing with the fly. No retrieve, other than slow hand-lining should be made until the cast has been fished out.</p> <p>General Conduct</p> <p>Always fish in a sporting manner. Give consideration to anglers on the opposite bank. Fish down through pools in rotation, taking at least one full step between casts. Avoid unnecessary wading or any avoidable disturbance to the water. Always respect the environment, wildlife, other anglers and members of the public. Do not park vehicles so that they obstruct gateways or cause a hazard on the roadway. Remove waste nylon and personal litter from the riverbanks and parking places. Follow the Country Code. Always respect farm animals and crops. Do not light fires or allow dogs to roam free. Always be conscious of and alert to hazards and look after your own safety and the safety of other anglers.</p> <p>Report strange goings-on immediately to: River Enforcement Staff - 07785 743663 Police – 101</p>
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Catch and Release Guidelines can be found on the River Nith website www.river-nith.com/conservation-policy

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Salmon and Sea trout catch data for 2025

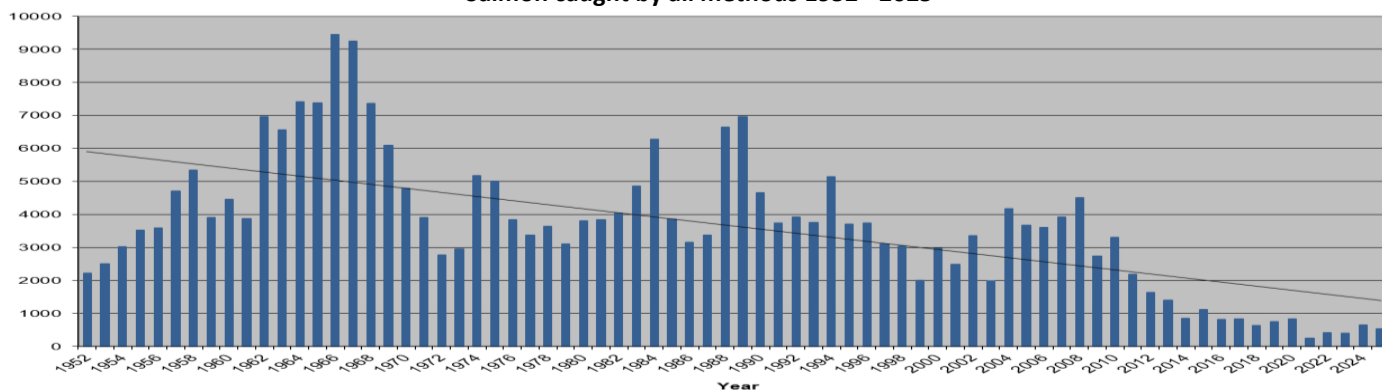
The catch returns submitted by rod anglers on the Nith in 2025 showed a decrease in the number of salmon caught with 469 salmon and grilse being caught, compared to 605 in 2024. The nets reported an increase in the number of salmon caught; likely due to the low water conditions at the start of the summer being conducive to catching salmon using traditional haaf nets. Overall, the number of salmon and grilse caught was reduced on the previous year. The catches for the last two years have been higher than the five-year average which indicates some improvement.

The number of sea trout caught in 2025 is slightly improved on that of 2024, for both the net and rod fisheries. However, catches are still lower than the five-year averages, indicating a continuing downward decline in sea trout stocks.

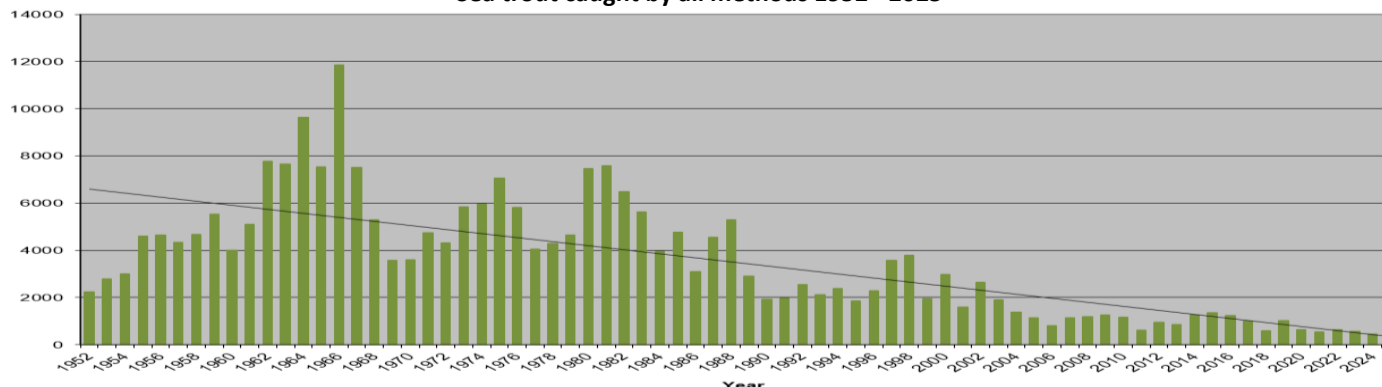
It must be borne in mind that none of these figures are normalised by fishing effort, so it is very difficult to show the true picture of stocks. We would like to highlight the importance of anglers submitting accurate catch data, as this is used by Scottish Government to set the conservation category for all rivers.

Year	Salmon and Grilse				Sea trout and Herling			
	Rods (C&R%)	Nets (C&R%)	Total	5-year average	Rods (C&R%)	Nets (C&R%)	Total	5-year average
2016	655 (100%)	163 (100%)	818	1166	866 (78%)	348 (40%)	1214	1119
2017	695 (89%)	133 (70%)	828	1004	768 (83%)	214 (12%)	982	1127
2018	520 (91%)	110 (54%)	630	849	479 (78%)	111 (26%)	590	1077
2019	586 (93%)	158 (73%)	744	828	845 (83%)	157 (31%)	1002	1027
2020	764 (100%)	63 (100%)	827	769	557 (81%)	68 (40%)	625	883
2021	181 (100%)	71 (100%)	252	656	418 (89%)	125 (36%)	543	748
2022	365 (100%)	49 (100%)	414	573	523 (92%)	112 (27%)	635	679
2023	331 (100%)	58 (100%)	389	525	457 (85%)	95 (24%)	552	671
2024	605 (100%)	36 (100%)	641	505	397 (93%)	35 (34%)	432	557
2025	469 (100%)	63 (100%)	532	446	399 (84%)	94 (48%)	493	531

Salmon caught by all methods 1952 - 2025



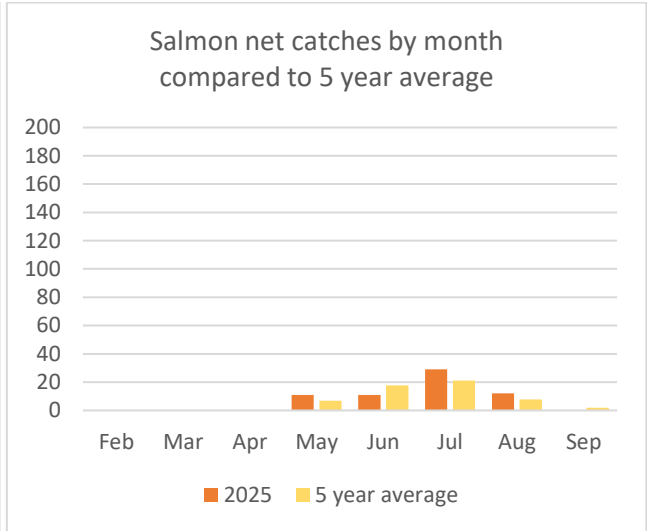
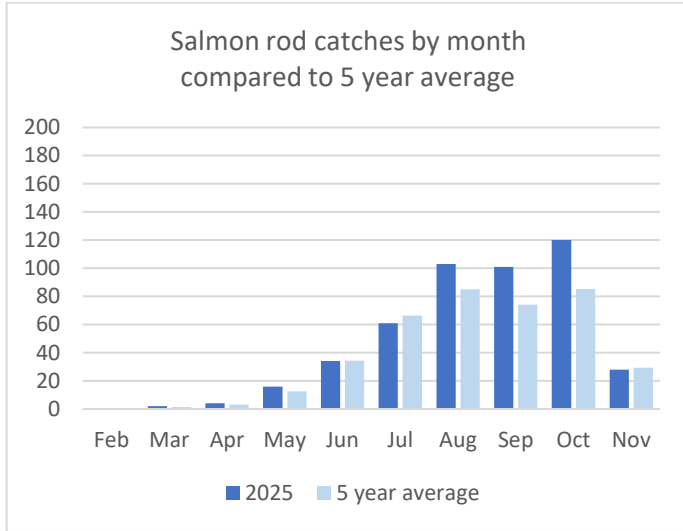
Sea trout caught by all methods 1952 - 2025



STOCK ASSESSMENT

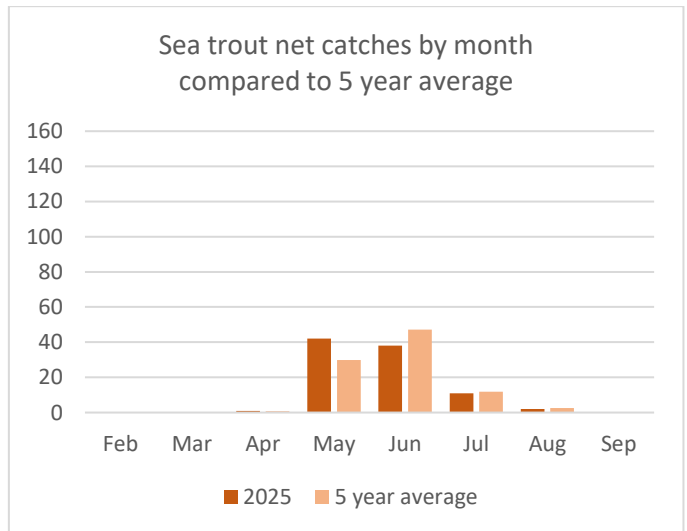
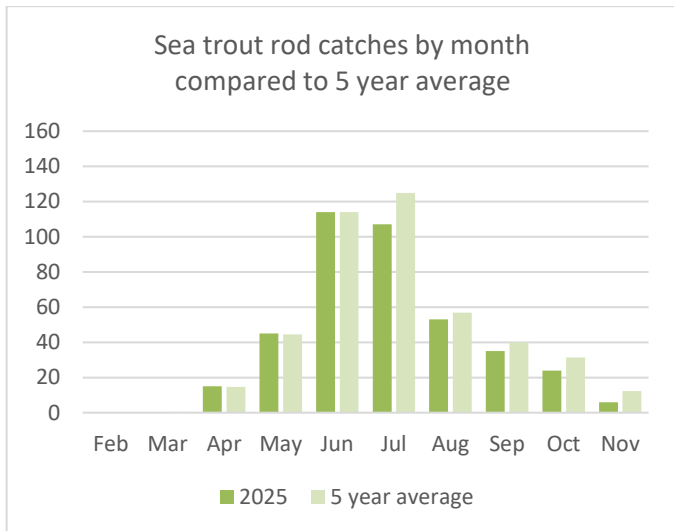
Salmon and grilse catches in 2025

The number of salmon caught per month during 2025 followed similar patterns to the previous five years. The majority of salmon were caught in August, September and October by rod and line. There was an increase in the number of salmon caught in October compared to recent years. The haaf nets caught most of their salmon in July. All salmon were released in accordance with the Scottish Government’s conservation regulations.



Sea trout catches in 2025

Sea trout catches by rod and line peaked in June and then slowly decreased through the season. The number of sea trout caught each month was equal to or below the 5-year average. The haaf nets caught the majority of sea trout in May and June. It should be noted that in 2025, sea trout were allowed to be taken but it was disappointing to note that only 84% were released voluntarily by the rod fishery and the majority of those taken were by one or two beats, with all other beats achieving 90-100% catch and release.



ACTION 1 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Climate Change and what it means to Nith

Weather patterns are changing in Scotland. Our traditional climate has altered to one of extremes at both ends of the spectrum. During the summer months we suffer from severe drought episodes which render some of the smaller spawning tributaries incapable of sustaining populations of fry and parr at densities which they previously did. Those juvenile fish that do survive are forced to live in water temperatures that are beyond the tolerance levels for salmonids. This obviously has a knock-on effect in that, those tributaries impacted, produce fewer smolts which results in fewer adult salmon returning to our river. Conversely, when the rain does come to our catchment, the current weather patterns dictate that we are faced with extreme flood episodes, often repeated on a weekly basis. These floods put pressure on the spawning tributaries by washing out the spawn in the gravel, thus reducing the number of juvenile salmonids being produced.

The Board and Trust have embarked on an ambitious restoration project which seeks to restore the riparian habitat that fringes the sides of our most productive spawning tributaries, to ensure that they are future proofed against the extremes of climate change. This project involves fencing off the riverbanks in order that grazing stock cannot consume the riparian vegetation. Native broadleaved trees are then planted and maintained to establish a vegetated riverside corridor. The purpose of this is to provide shade to reduce water temperatures and provide riverbank stability via root structures, enabling the banks to withstand the force of flood events. The vegetated corridors on the riverbank produce more insect populations, thus food for juvenile salmonids, cover for fish and respite from predation. Furthermore, the leaf litter turns to detritus for aquatic invertebrates, which are also a food source for young fish.

This project, which generally increases the biodiversity of large linear sections of the River Nith catchment, is of interest to Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) who seek to ensure that their construction projects associated with the energy network infrastructure does not result in a net loss of biodiversity. Consequently, SPEN have partnered with the River Nith fishery organisations, which has resulted in mutual benefits being delivered on the ground.



Upper Scaur Water where water temperatures are a concern



Healthy brown trout threatened by increasing water temperature

ACTION 1 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Carco Crawick Habitat Scheme

The most recent phase of the Crawick habitat scheme was conducted during 2025. This phase sought to build on the previous works which have been carried out over a three-year period. The 2025 scheme was focused on the farmlands of Carco Farm, owned and farmed by the Robertson family. Mr and Mrs Robertson farm the land adjacent to the Crawick Water and are aware of the interaction of land and water, and the benefits of a buffer strip between the agricultural land and the river. Fencing off the riverbanks is a good idea for the river, but the agricultural stock still require access to the water. This problem was overcome by the inclusion of a solar water pump at Carco.

The Carco riparian project was entirely funded by Scottish Power's Use It or Lose It fund. SPEN are able to offset their Biodiversity losses resulting from their construction of electricity infrastructure within Dumfries & Galloway by supporting suitable projects that balance or improve on any biodiversity net gain. SPEN's staff participated in planting 3.5 hectares of native trees at Carco in 2025.



Left to right: Riparian trees planted on the Crawick Water at Carco, staff from SPEN planting trees as part of a volunteer day, Debbie presenting the owner at Carco with a solar water pump to supply his livestock, SPEN volunteers after a day planting trees.

ACTION 1 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Reuse and Recycle

An important part of our work involves planting trees throughout the river catchment. This is conducted to improve the riparian habitat along the banks of spawning tributaries. This in turn improves the habitat for spawning fish and makes the tributary more productive. However, once planted, many people fail to return to the site to manage the trees or to collect the original shelter frames. Shelter frames are designed to split and fall off the tree when it attains a certain size, however this often fails to happen, and the trees are strangled by the tree shelter. Our fishery staff remove all redundant tree shelters, refurbish them and reuse on additional riparian sites. This is the ultimate recycling project that does result in environmental benefits for our catchment.



Staff removing tree shelters



Recovered tree shelters being reused on a new habitat scheme

River Nith Tree Nursery

A tree nursery has been constructed at the fishery office at Auldgirth. The nursery is used to propagate native trees of Nith providence, destined for the many habitat schemes throughout the Nith catchment. By producing our own trees, we are able to protect the biodiversity of the River Nith catchment and ensure that the trees that we propagate are capable of withstanding the weather conditions experienced within the catchment.

Often the remnants of ancient trees are still clinging on in hard-to-reach areas of our tributaries. Sheep often consume these trees when they can access them. By us harvesting some of the seeds from these trees, we are in effect retaining the ancient seed base and true Nith catchment stock.



Crab apple seedlings



Harvesting native tree seeds for the nursery

ACTION 2 - ILLEGAL EXPLOITATION

Thermal equipment

Our staff are qualified fishery enforcement officers with a knowledge of the law relating to salmon and sea trout. Thankfully incidents of poaching in the River Nith catchment are few in number today, however, they can never be eliminated completely. Fishery enforcement work has become more technical. The equipment used today to search for and capture perpetrators of fishery crime is “hi tech” and includes thermal binoculars and thermal drones. Our staff are equipped with body worn camera equipment to gather the important evidence to present to the court in any future prosecution case.



Image from the thermal binoculars

Fishery Management Scotland were successful in obtaining funding for some specialist enforcement equipment for its members through the Scottish Governments' Marine Fund Scotland during 2025. This equipment included thermal binoculars, a thermal drone and body worn photographic equipment.

ACTION 3 - SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Environmental DNA and what it can tell us about the Nith

Our Fishery Biologists possess a wealth of knowledge about the many species that reside within the aquatic environment of the River Nith catchment, all of which is catalogued in our databases. However, with 1596 Km² of catchment to work in, it is impossible to have knowledge about all areas and species. That is where the technology of eDNA comes in to assist.

When any animal moves through the environment that it is living in, it is constantly leaving genetic markers of its presence. Faeces, skin cells, mucus and other biological material are constantly being shed from all living creatures, and this material can be analysed to identify the presence of that species.

To gain a sample, a quantity of water is collected and forced through a filter medium. Once sufficient water has been forced through the filter, the sample is “fixed” in a preservative and posted to the laboratory for specialist analysis, which identifies the presence of species in the sample.

This technology is good for indicating presence/absence of a species but will not predict population densities or age class of individuals. Following a positive result, the Biologists are tasked with the job of establishing the strength of that population. The Nith Catchment Fishery Trust has incorporated eDNA sampling into their education program, so school-aged children get an insight into technology and environment working together.

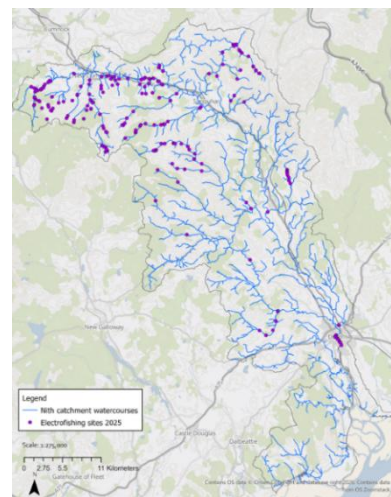


Taking an eDNA sample

ACTION 3 - SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Juvenile salmonid surveys 2025

Every summer the Nith Board and Trust monitors juvenile salmonid populations throughout the Nith catchment by means of electrofishing. These surveys are conducted between June to September, once the fry of the year have emerged out of the gravels and a large enough to be able to identify if they are salmon or trout. These surveys provide vital information to enable managers to identify downward trends in fish populations and take action to identify the cause.



The Board and Trust conduct electrofishing for many different reasons, including monitoring construction works, annual monitoring, Scottish Government contracts, assessing barriers, and quantifying the impacts from pollution. Water temperature data, conductivity and pH are recorded along with available instream and riparian habitat during electrofishing surveys. In 2025, 207 sites were surveyed throughout the catchment. Ten of these sites are annual monitoring sites that have been surveyed every year since 2014. This provides us with long term trends in spawning success. The results from the 2025 sentinel sites are present below and the fry densities for each site since 2014 can be found in Table 3.2. It can be seen that the majority of sites surveyed contained “Good” to “Moderate” numbers of salmon fry, indicating that spawning was successful at those sites in the autumn/winter of 2024/25. The only anomaly was in the Mennock Water, where salmon fry numbers were significantly reduced on previous years. However, there was very good conversion to parr which may have contributed to the lower numbers of fry present.

Table 3.1 Electrofishing results for the ten sentinel sites in 2025

Watercourse	Site code	Location description	Easting	Northing	Sampling date	Salmon fry (/100m ²)	Salmon parr (/100m ²)	Trout fry (/100m ²)	Trout parr (/100m ²)	Other species present
Nith at Nith Lodge	Nith001	Downstream of Nith Lodge, New Cumnock	253723	609301	20/06/25	39.29*	4.12*	6.74*	12.89*	SL
Nith at Boig Road	Nith008	Upstream of Boig Road Bridge, New Cumnock	259460	613834	19/08/25	20.44*	11.14*	4.83*	2.22	SL, M
Nith at Guildhall	Nith027	Upstream of Guildhall Bridge, Kirkconnel	271986	612341	19/08/25	72.03*	9.20*	12.50*	4.98*	SL, M
Afton at Blackcraig	Aftn0001	Upstream of Blackcraig Bridge	263164	608033	20/08/25	94.98*	26.27*	17.58*	8.79*	-
Cairn at Wallaceton	Carn025	Downstream of suspension bridge at Snade Mill, Wallaceton	284623	587197	22/08/25	57.84*	4.02	0.00	0.00	SL
Craigdarroch Water	Cgdr015	Upstream from bridge at Ballinnie	273398	591002	22/08/25	8.00	0.00	28.01	0.00	-
Crawick at Spango	Craw0001	Downstream of Spango Bridge	282207	617710	23/06/25	251.47*	12.70*	1.26	0.00	-
Mennock at Glenim	Menn0001	Upstream from Bridge to Glenim Burn	283787	609803	25/06/25	9.93*	17.34*	20.61*	6.31*	-
Scaur at Glenwhargen	Scar0001	Downstream or Bridge at Glenwhargen	275 911	602987	20/08/25	48.87*	7.06*	0.00	0.00	-
Cample at Kirkbog	Camp0001	Downstream of bridge at Kirkbog Farm	287165	594055	19/08/25	257.83*	17.06	35.34*	0.00	SL, M

* Calculated using Zippin's estimate of density. All other densities are minimum densities.

Key to other species: E – Eel, M – Minnow, SL – Stone Loach, L – Lamprey, SB – Stickleback, G – Grayling, F – Flounder, P – Pike.

Key to classification of salmonids per 100m²

absent	very poor	poor	moderate	good	excellent
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Table 3.2 Salmon fry densities at all sites surveyed 2014 to 2025

River	Site no	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Nith	Nith001	9.00	65.00	12.68	130.75	192.00	47.38	14.62	148.08	24.15	38.00	24.48	39.29
Nith	Nith008	6.00	17.00	3.70	33.96	79.25	2.50	3.27	0.00	10.74	38.61	14.87	20.44
Nith	Nith027	30.00	45.00	20.35	44.09	223.85	106.12	145.74	149.25	50.48	109.37	34.37	72.03
Nith	Nith010	3.00	8.00	8.58	14.66	55.10	4.44	7.94	16.67	1.36	0.91		
Afton	Aftn0001	31.25	20.05	12.50	245.00	195.00	109.41	63.15	179.75	33.04	86.55	179.81	94.98
Cairn Water	Carn025											66.09	57.84
Craigdarroch Water	Cgdr015											5.45	8.00
Crawick	Craw0001	17.00	38.00	49.00	110.14	283.56	55.94	148.00	33.52	36.87	75.51	136.80	251.47
Mennock	Menn0001	5.00	69.00	8.34	222.68	88.00	69.08	47.34	280.73	112.17	23.54	72.49	9.93
Scaur Water	Scar0001	44.00	9.00	16.65	27.60	97.28	36.90	27.95	84.96	3.34	72.33	11.19	48.87
Cample Water	Camp0001	64.00	25.00	5.04	135.71	327.24	265.52	233.71	653.13	130.30	107.26	31.67	257.83
Dalwhat Water	Dalw001	0.00	0.00	0.00	39.48	2.74	0.68	0.00	7.86	0.00	0.00		
Average of all sites		20.93	29.61	13.68	100.41	154.40	69.80	69.17	155.39	40.25	55.21	57.72	86.07

ACTION 3 - SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Surveying for aquatic invertebrates

In addition to conducting electrofishing surveys, aquatic invertebrate samples are also taken. The type and abundance of aquatic invertebrates present in a watercourse can provide detailed information on water quality. We conduct sampling twice a year, once in spring and again in summer/autumn.

In 2025, fisheries staff collected 246 aquatic invertebrate samples from various locations in the Nith catchment. The sampling process involves a quick three-minute kick sample, which is preserved and later analysed in the lab to identify to family level using a microscope. This information is then analysed using the River Invertebrate Classification Tool (RICT) which assigns a classification by comparing those aquatic invertebrates found to those predicted to be present. This technique allows classifications to be assigned in line with those used in the Water Framework Directive.

The results from all the samples taken in 2025 showed that 86% of the samples had a "Good" to "High" classification, 10% were "Moderate," and 4% were "Poor or Bad," with the lower classifications linked to poor instream habitat in tributaries.

Aquatic invertebrate samples are also taken from 10 annual sentinel sites for comparison. The results are shown in Table 3.3 and indicate healthy invertebrate populations and "Good" to "High" ecological status at all the sites.

Aquatic invertebrate classifications - all samples

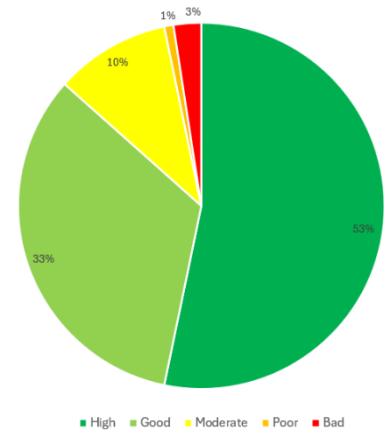


Table 3.3 Aquatic invertebrate results for ten annual sentinel sites

Site	Site code	Spring Sampling				Summer Sampling			
		Sampling date	WHPT ASPT Abundance	NTAXA	WFD Classification	Sampling date	WHPT ASPT Abundance	NTAXA	WFD Classification
Nith at Nith Lodge	Nith001	08/05/25	6.98	17	Good	20/06/25	7.46	20	High
Nith at Boig Road	Nith008	19/05/25	6.33	18	Good	19/08/25	6.58	18	Good
Nith at Guildhall	Nith027	30/05/25	7.35	25	High	19/08/25	6.53	23	High
Afton at Blackcraig	Aftn0001	08/05/25	7.58	16	High	20/08/25	8.35	19	High
Cairn at Wallaceaton	Carn025	19/05/25	7.72	23	High	22/08/25	7.07	22	High
Craigdarroch Water	Cgdr015	19/05/25	7.55	14	Good	22/08/25	6.95	15	Good
Crawick at Spango	Craw0001	28/04/25	6.74	28	Good	23/06/25	7.98	12	Good
Mennock at Glenim	Menn0001	28/04/25	8.07	19	High	26/06/25	7.58	19	High
Scaur at Glenwhargen	Scar0001	06/05/25	7.41	19	Good	20/08/25	7.36	25	High
Cample at Kirkbog	Camp0001	19/05/25	7.33	26	High	19/08/25	7.11	19	High

WFD Five Stage Classification System

High Ecological Status	No or minimal change from natural condition
Good Ecological Status	Slight change from natural condition
Moderate Ecological Status	Moderate change from natural condition
Poor Ecological Status	Major change from natural condition
Bad Ecological Status	Severe change from natural condition



Dixidae from the Diptera family



Kick sampling for aquatic invertebrates

ACTION 4 - WATER QUALITY

Pollution incidents

Whilst undertaking their everyday tasks, fisheries staff are always alert to potential sources of pollution which could impact on the water quality within the Nith catchment. The most common causes of pollution within the Nith catchment are from:

- the discharge of raw sewage during periods of heavy rain when outdated Scottish Water sewage systems are unable to cope.
- runoff from silage effluent where storage facilities are inundated with surface water.
- the application of slurry at inappropriate times i.e. prior to heavy rainfall.
- raw sewage entering watercourses from malfunctioning private septic tanks.
- forestry extraction resulting in sediment loaded run off.
- insufficient water management infrastructure during construction activities.

Any incidents that are detected are reported to SEPA and we would encourage any members of the public to report these incidents directly to **SEPA's Pollution Hotline - 0800 807 060**.

During 2024, the NDSFB reported five incidents of pollution to SEPA.

Glenesslin Burn pollution incident

A number of pollution incidents are reported to the NDSFB each year. One such incident which was investigated by us in 2025 was on the Glenesslin Burn. Whilst the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is the appropriate body to investigate any pollution incidents in Scotland, we, as fishery managers, become involved where fish have been killed.

The circumstances of this incident involved a faulty septic tank overflowing into the Glenesslin Burn. This resulted in the death of fish in the immediate area near to the discharge. Water flows at the time of the incident were low and accordingly the toxicity of the input was greater, which resulted in the death of fish. This incident illustrates the importance of contacting SEPA if an incident is ever witnessed.



Dead fish in the Glenesslin Burn

Sewage entering the Glenesslin Burn

ACTION 5 – INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Riparian Invasive Plants

Our Fishery staff continue to treat Invasive Non-Native species (INNs) of weeds throughout the catchment. We used to be fully funded to carry out this task, but funding was withdrawn and our ability to conduct this work has been reduced. However, we gained the appropriate qualifications expertise and equipment to be able to deal with this increasing problem and we try to do what we can to limit the spread of these plants. It is worth noting that Giant Hogweed can be detrimental to humans because its sap can cause burns to skin, which are sensitive to sunlight. Japanese Knotweed can be very destructive to buildings and infrastructure, and Himalayan Balsam can completely drown out the native plant life on our riverbanks.

Recognising that we have the requisite skills to control these invasive species, commercial contractors often call upon the services of our staff to deal with issues in advance of them conducting construction contracts. Contractors are often obliged to treat and remove any INNs in advance of digging in a location where they are known to exist. Our fishery staff always refer to the problems of INNs when being consulted about planning issues throughout the Nith catchment. By doing so, we can ensure that further spread is avoided.

American Signal Crayfish

Since the population of American signal crayfish was confirmed in the lower section of the River Nith, fisheries staff have been monitoring their upstream colonisation. This was traditionally done using two types of traps: a baited trap and a refuge trap. Whilst both are effective, the refuge trap has the benefit of being able to be set and left, without having to check it every day. This is because the crayfish are not “trapped” in it but can come and go as they please. This trap is good for checking the presence/absence of crayfish.

During the summer of 2025, refuge and bait traps were set in the Nith between Nunholm and Castledykes to establish the abundance and location of crayfish throughout this section. This survey was commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway Council to inform works on the Whitesands Flood Protection Scheme.

In addition to trapping, we also utilise eDNA sampling to detect if crayfish are present in a watercourse. This allows us to monitor large portions of the catchment very quickly and has a much better detection rate than other types of mechanical surveying, such as trapping.

Any sightings of crayfish should be reported to the Nith Catchment Fishery Trust. Please remember that it is illegal to trap or be in possession of crayfish and it is illegal to release them back into the wild, if caught. If they are inadvertently caught, they must be killed immediately at the site of capture.



Treating Japanese Knotweed at Troqueer



Giant Hogweed on the Whitesands



American signal crayfish in the town water



Refuge trap for crayfish

ACTION 6 – PREDATION

Predation of our fish stocks is an important issue given the current pressures that both salmon and sea trout face. We simply cannot afford to lose large numbers of fish to excessive degrees of predation. Our fishery managers take the appropriate, legal actions to minimise losses to predation and incorporate management actions that ensure the safety of fish whilst they are in our river system. So, what steps do we take? We have a licence to shoot specific species of fish-eating birds at appropriate times of the year. However, this is not the panacea to all predatory bird issues. One of the most favoured areas of our river, by fish eating birds, is the Caul and Whitesands. This is a highly public area and not suitable for shooting. In areas such as this we use non-lethal bird scaring equipment to move the birds on and reduce the predation.

Mink predate on salmon and sea trout and this often occurs in the upper, spawning tributaries of our river. Spawning fish ascend these relatively small watercourses during spate conditions; when the flood waters recede, fish are often stranded in shallow pools and are predated by mink. To reduce the mink population in the catchment our fishery staff conduct a trapping program. This starts in the winter months of each year, the theory being that we want to capture mink before they breed, thus have a greater impact on their numbers.

Whilst it can be frustrating to see fish predators on the riverbank, there is usually some action that we can take to ensure that they do not excessively impact the salmon and sea trout stocks in our river. Those of us involved in fisheries management consider the changing climate and the increasing water temperatures around the coast of Scotland and what this means for predation. An example of this is the increasing number of Sea Bass around our coast, which predate on salmon smolts. We hear more about the presence of Bluefin Tuna off our coast and killer whales, raising the question of, what impacts species such as these will have in future years?

ACTION 7 – RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Getting Young People into Angling

Encouraging young people to try angling is an important part of the Fishing for the Future project, a project that the Trust and Board has been running for the last couple of decades. Fisheries staff run two Angling Taster Days every year to give young people and their parents the opportunity to try fishing for the first time. The taster day teaches them how to set up a rod and cast it, before spending the afternoon fishing for rainbow trout.

For young people that find they have been “hooked”, they can join the Nith Young Anglers Club. This is a club of up to 20 young people who wish to learn more about different types of fishing and gain experience. Six fishing days are organised every year and include fishing for trout, salmon/sea trout, pike, sea fish, coarse fish and grayling. Local venues provide fishing and we provide the equipment and the guidance. Dumfries and Galloway Angling Association and Drumlanrig Estate very kindly provide season tickets for the participants, allowing them to fish the river. These are very gratefully received and have encouraged many young anglers to head out fishing.



Fishing for rainbow trout at Slatehouse Loch



Carp fishing at Gorsebank Farm, Dalbeattie

ACTION 7 – RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Fishing for the Future project

During 2025, the Nith Catchment Fishery Trust delivered a full and varied programme of education and engagement activities across the catchment. This included primary and secondary school sessions, university engagement, Nith Young Anglers activities, angling taster days, and wider community involvement. The work met the agreed outcomes and, in many areas, exceeded expectations due to strong demand from schools, community groups and families.

Primary school sessions

We delivered our Clean, Cool Waters programme to a range of primary schools, including:

- Caerlaverock Primary School (P1–7)
- Dunscore Primary School (P5–7)
- Kelloholm Primary School (P4/5)
- Closeburn Primary School (P1–7)
- Closeburn House School (mixed age group)

Sessions followed the established three-part structure, introducing pupils to Atlantic salmon and their lifecycle, climate change impacts, and the importance of riparian trees. These sessions concluded with a field trip to a local watercourse, where pupils carried out kick sampling, explored aquatic invertebrates, and planted the trees they had been growing in school.

Several schools also took on the management of classroom aquariums containing salmon eggs. Pupils were able to observe the full early development cycle, which generated a great deal of excitement and led to thoughtful questions about river health and species survival.

Secondary school sessions

We worked with two secondary schools during 2025:

- Sanquhar Academy – S3 Biology Group
- Wallace Hall Academy – S3 Environmental Science Group

Both schools took part in the “Sampling Techniques”, “Fish Dissection” and “Trees, Fish and Climate Change” sessions. Fieldwork included electrofishing demonstrations, aquatic invertebrate sampling, and eDNA collection. A follow-up classroom session several weeks later allowed pupils to examine their sampling and eDNA results.

Students from the University of Glasgow, Dumfries Campus came out for a day to learn about the impact of climate change on the aquatic environment and to assist with planting trees along the Crawick Water.

The Fishing for the Future project is funded by The Holywood Trust and the Misses Robinson Charitable Trust, and we would like to thank them for their continued support, without which this project would not be possible.



Invertebrates under a microscope



Kelloholm Primary School tree planting on the Crawick



Wallace Hall Academy students taking eDNA samples



Planting trees with students from Glasgow University

ACTION 7 – RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

The Nith Fisheries staff attended and ran a number of events throughout 2025 to raise awareness of the aquatic environment and demonstrate the work of the Trust and the Board. Below is a summary of some of the events, meetings, conferences and training courses attended by staff during 2025:



River Opening Ceremony at DGAA Carnsalloch



Nith Young Anglers presented with season tickets



First Minister, John Swinney at FMS Conference

Events held/attended

River Opening Ceremony at Carnsalloch
Galloway Country Fair
Holywood Trust Spring Gathering
Torthorwald Fair
Hoddam Castle Pass it on Day
SPEN volunteer tree planting day

Meetings and conferences attended

NDSFB Board meetings x 4
NDSFB Qualified Proprietors Meeting
NDSFB Annual Public Meeting
NCFT Trustee meetings x 4
NCFT Annual General Meeting
FMS Member's meeting
FMS AGM
SFCC Biologist's meeting
FMS conference
Bailiff's Conference
IFM Annual Conference

Training completed

SFCC Team Leader Refresher Course
Extended Riverfly Scheme Training
FBA Invertebrate ID for Biotic Assessment
IFM Water Bailiff Qualification
Otter Survey Qualification

Education sessions

Secondary school education sessions x 6
Primary school education sessions x 13
Glasgow University Tree Planting Day
Nith Young Anglers fishing days x 6
Fishing Taster Days x 2
Six-week intern from Glasgow Uni
One-week work placement



Fisheries Tent at Galloway Country Fair



Work placement out with survey team



Fishing Station at Pass it on Day

Outreach

Over the course of the year, the Fishery Board and Trust attend many events throughout the region. The purpose of this is to engage with the public and inform them about the work that our organisations do and the efforts that we go to in an attempt to protect and restore fish and their habitats throughout the catchment of the River Nith. The hope here is, that if the public gain knowledge about the aquatic environment and the issues that many of our species are faced with, they will ultimately care about them. At these events we often speak to anglers who have a vested interest and are naturally engaged in the subject, but it is heartening to see the level of interest and concern that members of the public have for our aquatic environment.



Torthorwald Fun Day

ACTION 8 – BARRIERS TO FISH PASSAGE

Forestry/River Interactions

One of the simplest most effective fishery improvements that can be conducted is to ensure that our spawning fish get the opportunity to get access to their spawning grounds and go on to spawn. That sounds simple and commonsense, however, many of our tributaries are tree lined and we have a very active forestry industry throughout the Nith catchment. Trees are good for rivers and water quality generally, but when they fall into the watercourse or the branches enter the rivers, they can form an impassable barrier, which can deny access to fish trying to get to the spawning grounds. An important task for our staff is to ensure that free passage to the spawning tributaries is maintained at all times.



ACTION 9 - STOCKING

Euchan Salmon Restoration Project – Year 1

The Euchan project commenced in 2025 with the goal of restoring the salmon population in the Euchan Water. The Euchan flows from its source in the upper catchment, near the route of the Southern Upland Way, down the Euchan Glen, and enters the Nith opposite the town of Sanquhar. This is a medium-sized tributary with several “difficult” obstacles for migrating fish along its course. From time-to-time woody debris can impede the passage of fish in the lower sections of the watercourse. This has occurred on a number of occasions over recent years, and that has resulted in a significant decrease in adult salmon attempting to ascend the river. The Nith District Salmon Fishery Board has embarked on a project referred to as the Euchan Salmon Restoration Project, which seeks to restore the populations of salmon in the Euchan.

A limited quantity of salmon eggs are sourced during the spawning season, incubated in the Board’s hatchery, and the resulting fry are introduced into the Euchan Water in early spring. During the summer months the Euchan Water is surveyed by means of electrofishing and accurate data is produced. This exercise was conducted for the first time during 2025, and the survival of the first year’s fry was impressive. The plan is to stock the Euchan Water for a period of five years then stand back and continue to monitor to see if the populations of salmon can sustain themselves in the absence of intervention. This project is supported by Fishery Board members Raymond Mundle and Mike Keggans, who are always eager to attend and assist with the work.



Unfed salmon fry being stocked into the Euchan Water



Counting and measuring the fry later in the summer

ACTION 10 – DISEASE AND FISH HEALTH

Saprolegnia project update

In the winter of 2025, the Board and Trust received reports regarding fish with white patches on their bodies which were lethargic and swimming about in shallow water. These fish were infected with Saprolegnia, a parasitic freshwater pathogen that can infect the skin of salmon and trout. This is generally a secondary infection that targets any fish that have damaged skin, normally following spawning, and forms wool like patches of white to light brown growths on the skin.

In 2024, fishery staff took bi-monthly water samples to assist in research undertaken by the University of Aberdeen into Saprolegnia outbreaks and risk. These samples were analysed, along with others from rivers across Scotland.

The results so far have highlighted a strain of *Saprolegnia parasitica*, which is more aggressive and acts as a primary pathogen, suppressing the immune system of fish. Infection from this strain can result in 80-90% mortality of adult salmon; increasing water temperatures, resulting from climate change, have been linked to the increasing frequency of severe outbreaks.

It is more important than ever that strict biosecurity protocols are adhered to when traveling between watercourses. Currently, the Nith does not suffer from severe outbreaks of Saprolegnia, and we would like to keep it that way. Following Check, Clean, Dry advice is one of the best and easiest ways to ensure that pathogens are not spread from one river to another and we would urge all anglers to adhere to this advice before fishing.



Salmon with aggressive saprolegnia infection

STOP THE SPREAD

Invasive plants and animals can carry diseases that kill fish, and block waterways and banks interfering with fishing. They can be small and hard to spot so are easily spread on damp equipment and clothing.

Protect the environment and fishing you enjoy by keeping your kit free of invasive plants and animals.

Remember to check these places

- CHECK** your gear after leaving the water for mud, aquatic animals or plant material. Remove anything you find and leave it at the site.
- CLEAN** everything thoroughly as soon as you can, paying attention to nets, waders, and areas that are damp and hard to access. Use hot water if possible.
- DRY** everything for as long as possible before using elsewhere as some invasive plants and animals can survive for two weeks in damp conditions.

Watch out for

- QUAGGA MUSSEL
- KILLER SHRIMP
- FISH DISEASES
- FLOATING PENNYWORT

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs | Scottish Government | natural scotland | NNSS | ANGLING

Find out more about invasive plants and animals and how you can help to stop the spread at: nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry

ACTION 11 – DEVELOPMENTS AND WORKING WITH INDUSTRY

The Nith District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) is consulted in relation to an array of major construction projects that take place throughout the catchment. Some projects, such as renewable energy infrastructure, have to traverse our catchment, including any rivers they encounter along the route. This is required to effect the connection from the source of the electricity to the nearest electricity substation for onward conveyance through the national grid. The Board's input is sought in relation to preserving fish known to be present in the immediate vicinity of such river crossings, and accordingly, our fishery staff will provide comments to construction method statements to mitigate against any impacts on fish or their habitats. Having provided comments, the Board's staff oversee specific aspects of the construction works and perform fish rescues where mitigation alone cannot ensure the safety of fish.



SEPA Upper Nith Project

During 2025 our staff were called to attend an emergency on the River Nith. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) were conducting engineering operations on the banks of the River Nith, downstream of New Cumnock. This was the latest round of works that SEPA have been conducting over recent years to reconnect the river to the flood plain. Unfortunately, the works resulted in the entrapment of several fish in a minor tributary, which placed them in a position of danger. SEPA contacted Nith District Salmon Fishery Board who reacted timeously to rescue the fish, some of which were protected.



Fish rescue



Fish rescue in site of culvert installation

Services offered to construction projects.

The Nith District Salmon Fishery Board and Nith Catchment Fishery Trust provided a range of services to contractors and industry to assist in protecting the aquatic environment. These include:

- Fisheries surveys
- Fish habitat surveys
- Aquatic invertebrate surveys
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel surveys
- Otter and water vole surveys
- eDNA surveys
- Riparian planting schemes
- Development of Fisheries/Water Management Plans
- Advice and consultancy on mitigation in the water environment
- Production of aquatic survey reports
- Water quality analysis

ACTION 11 – DEVELOPMENTS AND WORKING WITH INDUSTRY

Sanquhar II Wind Farm

Sanquhar II wind farm is one of the largest wind farms in the River Nith catchment. The land footprint to this development straddles many tributaries, all of which are located within the greater River Nith catchment. Each tributary flows from hill ground, through forests, and down to join the mainstem river; these are important spawning habitats for salmon and sea trout. The management of Sanquhar II knew that they were going to have to construct a road across the Nith catchment to enable them to access their site and to convey equipment from one area of the wind farm to all other areas.

One of the most important salmon spawning tributaries in the Nith catchment is the Scaur Water. When the Sanquhar II project wanted to cross this tributary, they approached our fishery managers for advice. A fish rescue of the site was performed in advance of engineering procedures being conducted and all fish removed to a place of safety. Only then were the culvert sections craned into location. This major culvert installation was a complete success.



Right to left from top left: Over pumping of the proposed crossing site; sample of fish rescued from the site prior to works commencing; culvert sections being craned into place; riverbed being put back into culvert prior to water being reinstated.

ACTION 11 – DEVELOPMENTS AND WORKING WITH INDUSTRY

Crawick to Crawfordjohn Road Repair

During 2025 our fishery staff were involved in a project in the upper part of the catchment in the Crawick glen. The road, which runs from Sanquhar to Crawfordjohn, had suffered from a partial landslide and part of the carriageway had collapsed into the watercourse of the Crawick Water. As a consequence, traffic lights were installed and road traffic was restricted to single file over a section of the road. Dumfries & Galloway Council are the body responsible for repairs to this road and they consulted with the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) for specialist advice due to the proximity of the road to the Crawick Water, a known salmon spawning tributary.



Fisheries team engaged with D&G Council road repair on Crawick

Our input to the road repair project was to ensure that the repairs were carried out in a manner that was sympathetic towards the aquatic environment. NDSFB advised on the most suitable times of the year to conduct the work, avoiding the salmon spawning season. Prior to rock placement to shore up the riverbank, a fish rescue was performed, and a series of aquatic invertebrate surveys were undertaken, pre and post works, to enable an overall assessment of the works to be conducted. The assessment indicated that this project had minimal impacts on the Crawick Water and the species that reside within. This was a well-managed project and a credit to all involved.

Kettleton Water Works Refurbishment

Scottish Water were conducting works at Kettleton during 2025 to upgrade their water treatment facilities. The project involved significant earth works on a very steep slope at the Kettleton site, which was undertaken during one of the wettest spells of weather which our catchment had experienced for some years. The Nith catchment suffered from a succession of flood episodes, which proved problematic for engineering staff. Space was limited for storing foul site water and to enable the construction of settlement facilities to treat site run off. Nith fishery staff worked with Scottish Water's staff and their contractors, ESD, to ensure that no adverse impacts were created in the Kettleton Burn, which runs close to the Kettleton site. A full aquatic environmental audit was undertaken by our fishery staff which proved that no impacts were manifest on the watercourse.



Scottish Water's contractors attend electrofishing survey

Supporters of the Nith

The Board and Trust would like to express thanks to the following organisations and individuals for their support for the work that was conducted during 2025.



and to Blackwood Estate, Misses Robinson Charitable Trust, C & K Harvey and all the people that donated fishing tackle to be passed onto new up-coming anglers.

