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**Biologist update** RW 22 March 2021

This summarises key work tasks completed since the last written biologist update (13 Nov 2020). November- December’s focus was writing the Electro-fishing report, January’s focus was writing the biosecurity plan, February and March’s focus has been getting Ali Skinner up and running, some dam count validation and setting up and launching smolt trapping work to aid SSE’s flow regime for smolts during the smolt season (please see separate **Project Outline** document). The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was originally planned to be written over the winter-spring but this work has been put back in favour of improving smolt passage. It is important that the FMP is written so that we all agree on the board’s priorities. Key priority for end of March is completing the Marine Scotland Pressures work. Monthly meetings occur between Jock, Ali and myself. Monday morning meetings occur with Ali.

**A Better BFB**

**Kit-** Ali procured bailiffing kit. A set of weighing scales and 2 thermo loggers were procured for smolt project/ general monitoring in the upper catchment.

**Truck #2**- Ali’s truck arrived.

**Procurement-** Debit cards issued to help make the procurement process more efficient.

**Office building**- A meeting with the Architect in person and via Teams occurred with NC. The Ness board have removed their documents from the Corff building in preparation for works. The Architect has provided the plans.

**Staff-** Ali started 11 Jan. Bob Smart is recruited for Seasonal Bailiff as he can impart his existing knowledge to Ali.

**H & Safety**- Draft manual has been produced by Greens of Haddington. Pending amendments.

**Future**: Kit will be acquired for potential smolt rescue. Draft H+S manual to be reviewed by end of April. Bob to attend first aid course.

**People: Community engagement, participation and heritage**

**UHI-** advert posted on student forum as potential volunteer source. Would be good to help foster future fishery managers.

**Facebook page**: Ali is now an admin.

**Website**- AC and Marilyn introduced me to the website so I can make updates.

**Students:** Careers adviceprovided to 16 yr old. **Student Placement Query:** Contacted by Uni of Cumbria student.

**Future:** PVG checks as best practise for work with children/ youths in future. Best placed to host local students rather than those from further afield- opportunity for an electro-fishing assistant, data input, get landowners linked with grant funding to improve landuse…or employ a Project Officer?

**Furthering our understanding**

**Fish count validation**- 4 days have been spent so far doing fish count validation work, another 2 are needed. The purpose of this is to get a more accurate estimate of recorded fish.

**SSE**- A catchment intro was conducted with Naveed Bhatti 27 Nov (Environmental Advisor, North).

**FMS-** 2020 season update. Involved an initial look at rod catch data and dam count data. Long term data is archived.

**Conservation limits**- Stuart Middlemas MS provided information regarding Beauly Conservation limits.

**Low flows**- Recent low flows gave me a chance to get out and look at fish habitat from lower Beauly up to Tomich.

**Future:** Further validation work is needed when access to dams is possible to compare the recorded Vs actual numbers of fish ascending each fish pass. Possible NEPs work has not been confirmed yet. If this doesn’t happen then aim would be to assess U. Misge and A. Deabhag to confirm if at carrying capacity or not (advice would be sought from I. Malcolm). SSE Liaison meeting is planned for 26 March.

**Improving ecosystem processes**

**Smolt run timing project**- Rotary screw Trap sites were reccied on the Abhainn Deabhag and Farrar. Land-owner permission and licence gained, forms and RAs written, volunteer recruitment ongoing. Installed above Fasnakyle house 16 March. Delivery and 4ft trap provided by SSE (See separate **Project Outline** for more details). Original smolt project brainstorm with NJ and JM.

**Invasives:** The focus this year is on Japanese knotweed and skunk cabbage control as these involve licence applications etc. Local volunteers were co-ordinated to set-up the ‘Beauly Balsam Bashers’ with Steve North and Nicola Mackenzie being the main local contacts. A meeting was hosted and RA and Method statement written to enable their balsam eradication activities this spring/ summer.

**SISI**-Mink vols handed over to Ali.

**Future**: Smolt run timing project will hopefully involve the Farrar in 2022 depending on staff/ vol recruitment, need to install a thermo logger at top of Farrar. The Pressures database hosted by MS is to be updated by fishery managers across Scotland (deadline end of March). This funded work is being co-ordinated by FMS. Need to apply for Glyphosate licence from SEPA.

**Incidents:**

**14-15 Dec**: Draw down between Aigas and Kilmorack to search for body. Lamprey stranded.

**12-13 Jan**: Black burn running like hot choc (tributary of Bruiach burn). Forestry contacted.

**10 March** (ongoing): Severe cattle poaching of banks on Glass and middle Beauly. Reported.

**Written outputs:** Stocking brief (17 Dec), EF report (19 Jan), Smolt monitoring techniques v3 19 Jan), Biosecurity Plan (29 Jan), FMS 2020 update (4 March), Smolt run-timing monitoring project outline (22 March).

**Meetings/ phone calls:** Sawbill chat with BTO to inform our monitoring (10 Dec), Smolt project ideas meeting with NJ and JM (18 Jan),various SSE smolt project meetings and emergency smolt protocol meetings,SISI meeting(21 Jan),SNH beavers, SFCC biologists meeting (3/4 Feb), Wildlife crime meeting (17 Feb), SFCC member’s meeting (9 March), SFCC Drone survey group meeting (10 March), SSE Peter McInnes and Graeme Kilmorack (17 March).

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| **Smolt trap being delivered to Home pool, Fasnakyle house (Ali in foreground).** |
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