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**Biologist update** RW 10 Sep 2021

This summarises key work tasks completed since the Annual report submission June 2021. June-September’s focus has been on recruiting contractor and intern and delivering the National Electro-fishing Programme (NEPS). Time has also been spent setting up the National Adult sampling with the LBFS ghillies. Further analysis has been done of the smolt data with SSE. Autumn priorities will involve finalising the H+S manual and drafting the Fishery Management Plan. Monthly team meetings occur between Jock, Ali and myself.

**A Better BFB**

**Kit**-Shortly after we commenced Electro-fishing the kit failed. Luckily the Conon were kind enough to lend us their back-up kit whilst ours was being fixed. It is planned to pick up a set of kit donated from an LBFS member over Xmas so we have a back-up kit for ourselves. We do have a set of serviced bankside kit so should never be totally stuck.

-Smolt rescue kit procured (paid for by SSE).

**Procurement**- Kit was bought for the National Adult sampling project (i.e. fish holding tubs, measuring tape, fish weighing scales/ slings). A field laptop was purchased to enable more speedy data entry which has proved useful so far.

**Office building**- Following a visit with NC, a quote was received from Scott Johnstone 15 July to refurb the Corff building to a minimum standard to host board staff with a potential start date of Jan 2022. Alternative options are also being considered e.g. renting off Lovat estates, portacabin etc.

**Staff-** Lynn started as a contractor with us 13 July for 3 days/ week to complete NEPs surveys and help put the basic building blocks in place to help us start riparian tree planting. Intern Karla has given us 2 days a week to help us with NEPS.

**H & Safety**- All of us attended first aid courses during spring/ before commencing EFishing. Draft H+S manual has been produced by Greens of Haddington. Still pending amendments. Lateral flow testing occurs before vehicle sharing.

**LBFS**- Following the change from 2 to 3 fish lifts per day at Kilmorack and Aigas dams, a letter requesting better communication/ consultation from the board was received. We now provide board members with the minutes of our team meetings and hope this improves this relationship going forward. The Chairman of LBFS was contacted for a chat and there is a good relationship between board staff and the LBFS ghillies.

**Future**: H+S manual review is priority post-EFishing as is Fishery Management Plan writing (see Action Plan and Operational Programme).

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

**UHI-** Melanie Smith Chat (25 June) to initiate contact. Vicky Pritchard (RLI) and Eric Verspoor visited to discuss Farrar genetics project (16 Aug).

**Facebook page-** Some good engagements e.g. elver video. Removed a post regarding potential mis-handling of fish.

**Future:** Volunteer BBQ to be hosted by us (16 Sep).

**Furthering our understanding**

**Electro-fishing-** Have completed 27 out of 30 NEPs sites so far, will focus on historic sites to the end of September to provide a baseline for management changes. Sites are well distributed across the catchment and have included the mainstem Glass for the first time.

-Fry for the Farrar genetics project are being gathered at NEPs sites. This work aims to see how the relative number of adult spawners varies over time and to highlight spring fish occurrence.

**Fish count validation**- Fish count validation work on the dams has not occurred yet as planned.

**Hydromorphology**- A short walkover was done downstream of Cannich and combined with a lack of salmonid juveniles, highlighted the lack of suitable spawning substrate present.

**Beavers-** Met with Rob Needham (7 July) to visit the South Clunes site, contacted SNH to ask about potential best practice mitigation measures on beaver dams if necessary in the future.

**Temperature-** See ‘Incidents’, See ‘Trees’.

**-**We downloaded the logger data at the top of the Farrar. Temperature (in the shade) had reached 19.9°C on 20 July.

-SEPA data has shown temperatures got up to a high of 21.7°C at Erchless gauging station on 22 July.

-NJ kindly lent us a temp and Dissolved Oxygen (DO) probe during the hot weather in July. It was intended to get out over the summer to see how temp and DO varied across the catchment and in relation to the dams. Unfortunately due to existing work commitments it was not possible to get out at short notice but it is hoped to do this work in the future. GA used the probe to take measurements downstream of Kilmorack dam.

**Future:** A **brief** summary report will be provided of the summer’s electro-fishing work as the focus needs to be on getting the FMP written.

**Improving ecosystem processes**

**Consults-** Responded to Glass Riparian woodland consult (9 July).

**Smolt run timing project**- Had a meeting with SSE (6 Aug) to review the 2021 smolt run and plan 2022 work. Various options considered. Looking likely to refine the A. Deabhag trap with potential box trapping on the Farrar above and below Beannacharan dam (if suitable sites are found).

**Trees-** Lynn is working to see what deciduous riparian tree planting opportunities might be available to us to help keep rivers cool in the catchment (based on the Scottish Temperature Monitoring Priority map). She is putting the basic building blocks in place so we can start to encourage landowners to manage their land better for fish and biodiversity.

**Invasives-** All invasives work is funded by SISI.

Himalayan Balsam: Myself and Steve (lead Beauly Balsam Basher volunteer) carried out a kayak survey of Him Bals distribution on the Lower Beauly (9 Aug). The Beauly Balsam Bashers have done an amazing job at removing balsam from the key areas this summer. This has been a successful partnership project with Lovat estates. The Beauly Balsam Bashers have been nominated by SISI as a ‘Story of Hope’ ahead of the Copenhagen climate summit, this may mean that we/ they get into the evening Herald but we shall see... 😊.

Mink: Ali continues to support the mink volunteers.

**Future**: We hope to organise an evening with all landowners from the high risk temperature areas to highlight why planting riparian trees can benefit fish, themselves and biodiversity as a whole. It is intended to get Guss from Riverwoods, Alan McDonald from trees for Life and Wester Guisachan estate to give brief talks. Jap Knotweed work (led by Ali with Steve) will be carried out Sep-Oct in a top-down catchment direction. Continued support to the Beauly Balsam Bashers over the next 3 yrs. Smolt run timing work.

**Incidents:**

**1-5 July:** 3 dead adult fish were found over 4 days on the lower river. 1 had net marks, 1 had net marks and predator damage, the 3rd was frozen so further analysis was not possible. Temperature readings were taken at 7 locations on the middle-lower Beauly and varied between 16.3-17.2°C It is thought that warm water temperatures had exacerbated their respective predicaments. It appeared to be slightly cooler above Aigas dam but further monitoring is necessary.

**2 Sep**: Pink Salmon caught at Fly pool. Ali reported to FMS. Will be sending this fish off for research purposes. Salmon roll now available to ghillies for dead fish bagging. Thought to be the first recorded on the Beauly.

**Written outputs:** Annual report and Smolt run initial summary (2 June), LM’s draft workplan, SSE Smolt meeting minutes to JM. Docs for September board meeting (Smolt report, Temperature and trees, Why NEPs, Action Plan).

**Meetings/ phone calls:** Melanie Smith (Director of Research at UHI, 25 June),SSE liaison meeting (12 July), Eric Verspoor (Genetics researcher RLI, 16 Aug). SEPA- good catch up chat with AS about smolt monitoring and general river (19 Aug).

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| **Lynn assessing habitat at an electro-fishing site on the U. Misge (top of Farrar).** |