**Biologist update** RW 18 March2022

This update summarises key work tasks completed since the last update 30 Nov 2021. Dec-March’s focus has been on reporting on the 2021 EFish and Smolt work, finalising the H+S manual, drafting the Fishery Management Plan and supporting data entry work by AS. Monthly team meetings occur between Jock, Ali and me.

**A Better BFB**

**Kit**- Small bits of kit have been procured ahead of the smolt run e.g. smolt dye-marking kit. The Cromarty Firth Board has offered us their kit for a tiny sum so this will be a good back-up kit for the next year or two before we get a new set of kit. The plan is to get a light lithium battery to reduce the weight of the current kit for 2022. Our kit is still with Fraser being assessed. A second screen was bought for Ali for his data entry work over the winter. **Vehicles** both vehicles passed their annual services.

**Office accom**- JM, JB, NC scoured Beauly 10 Jan. Found a suitable but expensive option at Aird motors but since then LBFS have agreed we can improve and lease out the Corff building. Met TW to explain the spec c9 Feb. TW liaising with contractors, JM and NC. Freezer clear out organised by GA.

**H & Safety**- Greens of Haddington signed off H+S manual (22 Feb). Will review on an annual basis.

**Staffing**- Trainee Fisheries Officer: Funding from NatureScot agreed and recruitment complete for 3 days per week 28 March-17 June. We are looking forward to Louise joining us. She has experience of working outside and is an Anthropologist so will be well suited to helping us with the smolt work, hydromorph walkovers and Oral history project.

-Seasonal Bailiff: We were lucky to get 2 applicants who fitted the criteria. Bob did well at interview and will be joining us for the season.

**Fishery Management Plan**- Drafted

**Future**: The draft FMP will be out for consultation to various stakeholders once the board has had a chance to look over it.

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

**Annual Public Meeting** and Xmas drinks held 8 Dec at Lovat Arms hotel. LBFS ghillies, JB, JM, AC attended. We updated those present with the board’s work over the previous year and a half and accounts.

**Trout and Salmon magazine**- we had a small bit in February’s edition.

**Furthering our understanding**

**Electro-fishing-** The 2021 EFish surveys have been QCed, reported and analysed see [2021 EFish report](https://beauly.dsfb.org.uk/files/2022/03/Beauly-Electrofishing-report-2021.pdf) on website. Historic site and 2021 NEPS data was entered into the SFCC database by AS. There will be no NEPS this year so we need to discuss a strategy for 2022 e.g. option a) take the opportunity to use UHI interns/ vols to investigate the hydro-morph pressure, re-visit historic sites, look at the coastal burns. B) see if there is any contract work and employ a contractor to help. C) do no EFishing this summer and instead focus on working with landowners, invertebrate sampling, walkover surveys (plenty to do!)...

**Smolts**- Final version of report produced after info provided from SSE, see [2021 Smolt report](https://beauly.dsfb.org.uk/files/2022/03/2021-Smolt-report.pdf) on website. Smolt box-trap sites identified upstream and downstream of Beannacharan dam. Licence application submitted to MS. Smolt trap due to be delivered 23 March.

**Adult fish**- MS reported initial findings of National adult sampling project at SFCC biologists meeting. Visited coastal netting stations with AS 25 Feb.

**Drone work**- myself, AS and JB met 1 March and conducted a test survey flight using Mapsmade Easy and MapPilotPro app.

**Temperature loggers**: Data downloaded from both loggers, re-calibrated and now back in the river.

**Invertebrates**: Fed back on the SFCC invertebrate monitoring method.

**Future**: NEPS EFishing is not on this summer. National plans for EFishing may be put together by FMS, otherwise it would be a good opportunity to investigate the hydro-morph pressure, survey the coastal catchment (not covered by NEPS) or consider contract work if this is offered (as well as Farrar genetics project). We will likely have to use an intern/ volunteers to get summer EFish work done. **Smolts**: Will be using the 4ft RST from SSE, a box trap from StrathConon estate and a box trap from Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries for April-May. Installation planned for 1 April. JB and AS are aiming to do a drone survey to look at substrate on Rivers Affric and Cannich before trees come into leaf- this should be seen as a trial. I need to experiment with stitching the images together in MapsMadeEasy. **Invertebrates**: Invertebrate (more than just fish food) monitoring may commence this year to look at food availability to juvenile fish.

**Improving ecosystem processes**

**Invasives (INNS)-** SISI site codes updated and submitted to SISI so reporting can be through an app. SISI are looking to extend the project to March 2023 and then apply for funding to continue INNS work in the longer term. This is likely to involve a Project Officer shared between us, Conon and Ness.

Mink- AS continues to support the mink volunteers.

**Riparian Trees**- Our main tool for buffering the effects of climate change in the catchment. A Riparian Tree talk, ‘Trees, Fish and Carbon Credits’ was hosted by BFB at the Lovat Arms hotel on 10 Feb. JM introduced it and we spoke about the impact of temperature on fish. Russ Jobson (Riverwoods) and Francis (SSEN Transmission) spoke about potential funding options and support (FGS, Carbon credits, Trees for Life project officer) for land managers for riparian tree planting/ regen. 22 folk from 3 catchments attended as well as Deer management Group folk. A good evening with discussion afterwards. The event was recorded and is available to watch here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cPdXHvrZd7SnsQLjTxXi7eAr2eDjf3Nc?usp=sharing>

11 Feb myself and Russ went to look at a few potential sites up on Braulen estate.

**Seal licensing**- MS have said that they will consider applications for seal control for the purpose of conserving salmon and sea trout if there is sufficient evidence of impact in the river and all other mitigation measures have been considered. Please share the seal reporting app with anglers/ ghillies etc: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dknjOEIZYSDQ3As9FT-r0O2TCiJbN1Fm/view?usp=sharing>

**SSE**- in a recent update from SSE it turns out the 3rd lift per day at Aigas and Kilmorack dams, although operational has not been transferred into the CAR licence yet and this will be done in due course with SEPA.

**Future**: **Coastal netting** meeting needs re-organising with Ness board. **INNS**: Beauly Balsam Basher co-ordination meeting planned for April. Continued Japanese Knotweed and Skunk Cabbage control work in future years. **Trees:** Communications will continue with Braulen estate and other landowners to encourage them to consider tree planting. We will work with Trees for Life’s project Officer. Training 31 March. Riverwoods film launch [20 May, Drumnadrochit](https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/event-registration/rw-drum/104). **Seals**: Plan is to improve reporting of seal ingress with anglers and ghillies, use a paint ball gun as a deterrent, ensure LBFS ghillie is trained in seal marksmanship over the summer. If a problem is found then we can go from there. **Barriers**: Debris fish barriers need removing ahead of fish spawning time, however the cost of training staff to do chain-sawing in water, kitting them out with PPE, a chainsaw and attending refresher courses etc is likely to be expensive i.e. £1,500-£2,000. The board need to consider how we can do this in the long run e.g. contractor?

**Incidents:**

**24 Jan:** SEPAreport of foam in Allt na Glaich burn (trib of Bella) on Sat 22 Jan. We attended on Monday 24 Jan. No dead fish or obvious pollution, residents unaware. Possibly due to road re-surfacing at the time.

**Written outputs:** 2021 EFish report, 2021 Smolt report, Draft FMP. FMS Women in science piece. Fish count email to proprietors, general update email to proprietors. FMS 2021 river report, FMS 2021 Board Questionnaire. HEF BAP review.

**Meetings/ phone calls:** Internal draft budget meet 2 Dec. Braulen estate meeting 14 Jan.FMS Seal licensing meet 25 Jan.SFCC biol meet 2-3 Feb, presented work summary. NE SANDS (angling development) meeting at Logie Steading 4 Feb agreed to be part of steering group. FMS hydro meet. SISI meet. Organised ‘Fish, Trees, Carbon Credit talk’ 10 Feb. Glass Syndicate virtual meeting about flows 24 Feb. Drone test flight 1 March.

For consideration:

We are experiencing hikes in fuel costs and materials, we will do our best to make trips as efficient as poss (at least we will be able to vehicle share more easily this season as COVID restrictions ease), but there may have to be more cost savings or income searching.

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| **Netting station at Alturlie point visited with Ali 25 Feb** |
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