**Senior Biologist update** RW 15 September 2023

This update summarises key work tasks completed since the last update 1 June 2023. The focus of the last three months has been to complete the fish-habitat-in-relation-to-the dams (hydro-morphology) surveys on the Farrar and Beauly (June-July) and carry out electrofishing (NEPs and Farrar genetics) July-present.

**Beauly Fishery Board**

**Vehicles-** Delay expected for Nissan Townstar delivery, lease extended for existing SK70 XLC truck into November.

**H & Safety**- Pregnancy RA complete (30 Aug). Got stranded on Inchmore island (Farrar) due to generation, emergency SSE control room number now saved in staff phones for emergencies only.

**Staffing-** Paid intern Victoria Kowalska (Biology student at Stirling, and Farrar resident) helped with the fish habitat surveys, completed 12 July. The Ness board kindly lent their trainee, Calum Kitching to us 3 days a week to enable us to complete the majority of the NEPs efish survey work, we await an invoice.

Senior biologist maternity cover recruitment complete. Two interviews were conducted and Anthony Watkins is due to start with us 25 Sep. Ant has many years’ experience working for SEPA as their north Fisheries Biologist and we are very lucky to have recruited him! 😊 A laptop has been purchased and new email address (Ant@beaulyfisheryboard.org) have been set up.

In terms of Seasonal Bailiffing, following George’s departure, Bob Smart has been covering weekend evenings. Need to discuss staffing for next year.

**Policy docs**- Awaiting input to ‘DRAFT Staff, Volunteer and Board member manual V1’ from board members and Alastair.

**FMS/ SFCC**- Annual subscriptions paid (we are members of SFCC through NBFT).

**Future**: AW’s training requirements will need to be approved. SFCC committee meeting 5 Oct. Sign-off of Staff, Volunteer and Board member manual.

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

Volunteers have been involved with the Fish habitat walkovers (Calum, Steve, Lawrence) and electro-fishing surveys (Jenny, Diane, Steve, Sean and Naomi).

**Moy**- We hosted a stall at Moy game fair with West Sutherland and Ness board. Thanks to West Sutherland Fisheries Trust for providing the marquee (4-5 Aug). This provided a good opportunity to chat to local anglers and interested folk about our work and recruit a couple of volunteers.

**Proprietors**- Emailed out proprietors 17 July with a general update (included fish counts, bailiffing, fish and habitat surveys, smolts, adult sampling, staffing, links to pink salmon and fish disease reporting apps, angling and temperature, and Moy).

**Facebook**- Trudi is now a facebook admin. A couple of rod caught fish pics posted (by Mike? and Ali) but more would be good.

**Future:** End of season drinks (all anglers, proprietors, ghillies) planned for Friday 20th Oct. Louise hoping to draft Oral History report (as a volunteer).

**Monitoring Methods**

As with previous years the end of June was dry and hot. Beauly was on [SEPA water scarcity](https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/water-scarcity/previous-water-scarcity-reports/) ‘Alert’ between 1 June-7 July, dropping to ‘Early warning’ on 14 July and back to ‘Normal’ conditions from 21st July. The rest of the summer has generally been showery (compared to previous years which have seen very low water levels as a norm).

**Smolt monitoring**- Thousands of smolts spotted downstream of Kilmorack dam 3 June, whereas last smolt detected at Grant’s pool on 19 May- suggests possible delay in smolt migration navigating slack water behind dams and we should request that Phase 2 smolt flows be in place for longer next year (Phase 1 flows for smolts were 1 April-31 May with Phase 2 in place between 24 April-26 May).

Box traps now back at Corff (Strath Conon box traps now with Conon). 6ft RST trap back at SSE Muir of Ord’s depot.

**Fish Counts-** None available due to transition to AI (except Beannacharan). FSN attended Fish counter event in Pitlochry (18 Aug). Analysis of Beauly fish counts (comparing AI results to previous counter figures) to be done by SSE and results to be provided from November. Result for Shin dam showed an undercount by mk12s of 41%. Aiming for ‘Real time’ access (24hr delay).

**Electro-fishing**- to date the Farrar genetics sampling is complete and 27 out of 30 NEPs sites have been done. Due to complete the final 3 sites next week with help from the Ness. FMS have put in a funding bid to include new electro-fishing kit for the Beauly (plus a set of volunteer waders). We await the outcome.

**Fish habitat/ substrate walkovers**- Walkovers complete for Farrar and Beauly. Most data has been entered by Victoria but still a bit to go. Gradients for each section need calculating and reports are due to be written. Unlikely to get funding for a shared project officer to tackle the lack of sediment management at the dams (with Ness and Conon) through NRF unless hang this on a specific restoration project.

**Adult sampling project**- We heard late from MS that this sampling project was going ahead (5 July). The LBFS ghillies have been collecting samples (we need measurements from >60 salmon). We wait to hear how FMS would like us to invoice for ours and LBFS time. This work should be feeding into the Conservation grading.

**Temperature monitoring**- A third logger has been ordered (£115) to commence monitoring winter temperature downstream of Kilmorack dam to assess if fish pass operation should be extended into December.

**Predation**- Bird licence return submitted by AS. No birds were shot Oct 2022-May 2023 despite having a licence to shoot 2 Goosander and 1 red-breasted Merganser. Supporting information for upcoming licence submitted to cover Oct 2023-May2024. Roles clarified with LBFS ghillies.

**Future**: Handover meeting arranged with SSE and Ant to discuss various topics (11 Oct). Awaiting smolt numbers at dam gate slots for this year. Smolt data entry to be checked, 3 year review of monitoring to be written discuss with board. AW to do Efish data entry. AW to install temperature logger downstream of Kilmorack dam. Download and calibrate the Glass and Farrar temperature loggers. Resolve SFCC data exporting issues with SFCC. Still need to determine if NatureScot will pay for invertebrate sample analysis (APEM quote of £4850-7307ex VAT) under ‘code of translocations’. AS+ JB to replicate aerial photos via drone to support fish habitat reports.

**Work Plan Progress to address the Pressures**

A link to the Storyboard Fishery Management Plan (Phase 1) is [here](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e2200f33a0af4ee28cc0c075094660d4), and has been put on the website.

**Estuarine Netting**- update to be provided by Frank

**Smolt passage**- see smolt monitoring.

**Invasives (INNS)/ Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI)-** All invasive control work in the catchment is funded through SISI. All SISI files now available to Trudi our project officer (shared with Ness and Conon). The latest claim covering April-June was submitted and NBFT have been invoiced for BFB’s share.

Himalayan Balsam- Beauly Balsam Basher meeting 19 June. Most balsam on the Lower Beauly has been picked thanks to the work of Trudi and our volunteers e.g. NatureScot staff balsam bash at Ferry Field (9 Aug). This is the 3rd year of control and we are seeing results! I’ve been out focussing on balsam at Wester Lovat with volunteer Steve.

Japanese Knotweed -Acquired Naturescot permission, AMW Partnership successfully treated the JK from Ferry point- estuary over the course of 2 visits (31 July-4 Aug + 7-8 Sep). This work will be paid for thanks to Highland Nature restoration Fund.

Registered with DEFRA as an organisation that applies herbicide (19 June).

Mink- AS handing over Remoti unit monitoring to Trudi. Several going off, but no mink captured so far.

**Development** Response to Balnalick/ Glenella Forest Plan received (29 June).

**Predation**- FMS have put in a funding bid to include 1 Acoustic deterrent device (worth around £6,000) and Canadian canoe for deployment for seal scaring on the Beauly. We await the outcome.

**Pink salmon**- Redds spotted by LBFS ghillies and destroyed after clarification with NatureScot about the difference between Sea lamprey redds. 2 on far side of Groam, 2 in Greenback Downie, 1 tail of Groam.

**Beavers**- Any application to NatureScot is likely to be deferred by FLS to allow for further consultation. Feedback on NatureScot’s Environmental Assessment submitted.

**Future**: Depending on the outcome of the fish habitat reports and discussions with SSE, there could be an opportunity for SSE to work with Breedon Aggregates (who will have green aims) to deliver suitable substrate to the river downstream of the dams. Next year we will employ the same contractor to do follow-up treatment of JK on Lower Beauly (funded by SISI). Meeting to be arranged with Nith DSFB with Frank and Mike to get advice on how to get the most from future SSEN developments. Remoti units to be labelled.

**Incidents:** 2 dead adult fish on Home beat (seemingly healthy, 2 June).

**SSE** - Misge works occurred 5 June-24 July. No fish or flow issues were experienced. General lack of updates from SSE.

Benevean dam valve repair (Affric, 6 September) resulted in compensation flow shut off for 1.5hrs. SSE had a fish rescue team on site in case of any stranded fish. Flow did not stop during the works.

Kilmorack dam flows at compensation for SSEN maintenance (4 Sep-8 Sep). No communication received ahead of this outage. Discuss with board.

Following concerns from LBFS about low flows at the beginning of the season downstream of Kilmorack an FOI was submitted to SEPA. No breaches have been recorded by SEPA at Kilmorack. See **Appendix** for their response.

**Written outputs:** Updated FMS’s hydro impacts table (6 June), [Beauly-Blackhillock 400kV SSEN consult](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ab3ot2x61fRY2vplxnyp5w-rmDzRX8-3/view?usp=sharing) (8 June). Supporting information for bird licence (30 June). [Beaver Environmental Assessment response](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RHwu48JNurcT3goThyddFODR4QrnyHIs/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=111856563076557309316&rtpof=true&sd=true) (11 July), [Proposed 2024 Conservation grading response](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18YeHJocVVHs6wPoDVAI5ID548rzKK9z3/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=111856563076557309316&rtpof=true&sd=true) (1 Sep).

**Meetings/ phone calls**: Joe Gibbs (Belladrum estate) 21 June, Alison Baker (Restoration Director AST) 12 Aug, Cairngorm National Park South Clunes Beaver visit (22 Aug), Green Finance meeting with Paul Sizeland (FMS) and Brian Shaw (14 Sep).

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| **23 Aug. Volunteer Jenny, and Cal processing fish amongst midges after a Farrar NEPs efish survey** |
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**APPENDIX**

Freedom of Information Request: 29 June 2023

“Hello SEPA,

Following on from queries made by proprietors on the river and ongoing low flow events, the Beauly Fishery Board would like to request information regarding:

1) Whether SSE has breached any licence conditions since 27/11/2020 (when a similar information request was made- attached) regarding flows downstream of Beannacharan, Aigas and Kilmorack dams (licence CAR/L/1011467, or any others relevant).

2) What penalty occurs if a breach happens? This may vary according to the nature of the breach.

3) In the previous FOI request (attached) it seems that numerous significant breaches occurred in 2012 at the top of the catchment. Do you know how this was resolved? Was this resolved with a lower compensation flow agreed for the Misge or less abstraction? I have been told previously by SSE that a lower flow has been put in place down the Misge as there was too much flow going down it originally (and from general observations this seems to have benefitted the river i.e. there is usually more than enough water flowing down it, so if there used to be more this can’t have been a good thing). I can see from the CAR licence that the abstraction rate appears to have changed in 2019 but I am unclear if this would have resulted in more or less flow going down the Misge.

Any help appreciated.

Thanks,

Ruth”

Response from SEPA: 31 July 2023

1) There have been no compensation flow issues identified regarding flows downstream of Beannacharan, Aigas and Kilmorack dams or any other relevant dams since 27 November 2020. One issue was identified with freshets at Beannachran dam - please see details below. - Beannachran freshets o 2020 - no compliance issues o 2021 – The first 2021 freshet was released early in error due to change in freshet agreement dates between 2020 and 2021. The issue was identified on the morning of the missing freshet and SSE provided the required freshet one day late compared to the 2021 freshet schedule. SSE amended the relevant work instructions. o 2022 – no compliance issues.

2) The freshet issue in 2021 was resolved promptly in line with SEPA requirement for operators to comply with licence conditions and take action to address issues. We are developing a new approach to compliance assessment - Performance Assessment Scheme - which will replace the Compliance Assessment Scheme that operated until the Covid-19 pandemic. Further information can be found at [www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/authorisations-and-permits/performance-assessmentscheme.](https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/authorisations-and-permits/performance-assessment-scheme/)

3) We do not hold any information on how these breaches were resolved. Regulation 10(4)(a) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs) applies.

Misgeach compensation flow, as detailed in the authorisation issued on 9 November 2006, was carried over into licence CAR/L/1011467/V2 issued 27 June 2008. There has been no authorised change in the compensation flow, so this has not been a factor in resolving the number of breaches in 2021.

The decision document for Licence variation CAR/L/1011467 V2 VN02 includes the text below which provides context to the issues identified in 2012 regarding overabstraction at Misgeach Power Station. Over a number of years as part of ensuring compliance, SSE have been audited by SEPA. Following these audits, a number of follow up actions were identified including some licence variations. ln addition SSE own internal compliance work have identified some inconsistencies where complying with one condition of licence, could potentially result in automatically breaching other licence conditions. ln June 2019 SSE applied for a number of administrative variations to seven licences to correct or amend licence conditions. This application relates to the Beauly Hydro Electric Scheme and the compensation abstractions from Misgeach Power Station. Misgeach Power station is fed from two aqueducts (East and West), any excess water collected from these aqueducts is fed into Loch Monar. The power station then feeds the compensation flow to the Uisge Misgeach and the River Farrar. The maximum rate of allowable abstraction is stated in table 3.1 of the licence as 1.2m³ / second or 103,680 m³/day. This amount allows SSE to deliver the required compensation flow at Misgeach of 90,921 m³/day. However, this rate does not allow for abstraction to meet the required flows at Farrar Weir of 136,383 m³/day. When assessing the application, it was noted that the requested figures did not match the co-ordinating officers understanding of the aim of the application and the figures were challenged with the applicant. SSE re-examined the figures and requested that the maximum rate of abstraction be increased to 4.2 m3/sec. The explanation behind this, was the figures in the application were accidently copied from the Ness licence application. The turbine at Misgeach was recently overhauled and the maximum abstraction rate was found to be 4.2 m3/sec, well above the maximum allowable abstraction in Table 3.1 of 1.2 m3/sec. lt was agreed that the application be amended to reflect the maximum possible abstraction from the refurbished turbine. A copy of the variation is attached. This has been redacted in line with Regulation 11(2) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs).