

This update summarises key work task progress and completion since the last update 27 November 2024. The focus of the last three months has been to prepare and submit the seal licence application to Marine Directorate, start writing the electrofishing report to include 2023 and 2024 data, and to update our Fishery Management Plan with costings and to make our priorities clearer. A drone flyover was completed for the R. Beaully in relation to sediment management but not for the Farrar so far. Work is needed to surmount a technical hitch related to flying autonomous surveys. Engagement with SSE on the sediment management and smolt project work is on hold with Ross Glover moving jobs within SSE, so we are waiting to engage with his replacement. The focus of the next 3 months will be to write the electrofishing report, prepare for smolt run monitoring and electro-fishing, and carry out piscivorous bird surveys.

1. Governance/ organisation

Xmas gathering on 18th December attended by LBFS ghillies, Pete, Dennis and Jim. A good chance to catch up before Xmas.

Staffing:

- Seasonal Bailiff – Reece anticipated to start 1 April-end Oct. – **Action now: HH to prepare contract**

Policy docs: Update required on progress of 'DRAFT Staff, Volunteer and Board member manual V1' review **Action: HH.**

Facilities:

- RW's phone contract ended in January and AS and RP have issues with their mobiles. **Action HH** to get new contract.
- Petty cash card required for staff **Action: HH.**

H+S:

- AS attended first aid refresher in January. RW attended first aid training 24-26 Feb. RP due to attend first aid training. **Action: AS to book.**
- Lifejacket servicing complete (AS), Electro-fishing kit due annual service. **Action RW.**
- Drone RA complete

Budget/ finance: 2025 Budget meeting attended 31st Jan. Still a bit short for 2025 but hopefully contract work (SSEN OHL, Farrar Vista project) will come through in 2026. NEPs highly unlikely to happen in 2025. NatureScot may pay for monitoring in relation to anticipated beaver release.

- Meeting with Paul Sizeland, FMS (8 Jan) to ensure that either we or they can be listed as an approved supplier for SSEN.

Vehicles: Nissan Townstar van arrived 3 Dec without roof rack as requested. HH looking to future lease of nearly new truck to replace Black truck **Action HH to get roof rack and sort new lease.**

FMS: See [The Sway](#) newsletter for a summary of FMS activities.

- FMS are recommending that all boards and trusts update their [catch and release policy](#) to voluntarily releasing 100% of fish. FMS are recommending we take a lead on this rather than being forced to accept a possible statutory, legally binding 100% release policy that may come in the future. A voluntary change to all board conservation policies would strengthen FMS's negotiating power when it comes to protecting Salmon and implementing the [Wild Salmon Strategy](#).
- Attended annual SFCC biologist's meeting 5-6th February. Really useful to see what other boards and trusts are up to.
- Annual DSFB survey completed summarising the work we completed in 2024.
- Biosecurity measures to supply disinfectant / sprayers/ posters due to be received by end of March.
- Wish list of enforcement kit submitted (AS reviewed).
- FMS member's meeting 20 March, Perth [book here](#) (free), dinner evening of 20th [book here](#), **FMS conference 21 March, Perth, [Book here](#) (£45)**

NBFT: With Neil Cameron wanting to step down as Chair, there are changes afoot. Get in touch if you want to be involved.

Training: RW passed the basic drone competence required set by the Civil Aviation Authority, and now has a Flyer and Operator ID to be legally allowed to carry out drone survey work, using the DJI MavicPRO drone donated to the board by Jim. RW to do A2C of C training this year, to increase competence. **Action: RW.**

Future: Order 3x signage for Lovat bridge turn off so folk can find the office.

2. Work Plan Progress to address the Pressures (*=priority)

Fishery Management Plan: A link to the Storyboard Fishery Management Plan (Phase 2) is [here](#). A mid-period review is currently underway. Pdf has been updated and Actions are now costed **Action: RW to update Storyboard and make edits based on board feedback.**

***Bailiffing:** See AS' quarterly report. AS attended FMS Fisheries Enforcement Seminar 27th February, Dunkeld.

***Sediment management:** Quote requests sent to 3 hydro-morphological companies (CBEC, Kaya, Envirocentre). Advice requested on appropriate substrate input methods/ locations for the Beaully and Farrar. Costs are expected to be £15-£25,000. This may be partially funded through NBFT, SSE community fund or SSE themselves. SSE are due to feedback on the two Hydro-morphology reports once Ross's position has been filled. Reports will need updating based on feedback. Thanks to those who have responded to the Doodlepoll to visit the Conon sediment management Project in May.

***Smolt passage:** Smolt protocol for 2025 was thoroughly updated in November, awaiting draft from Naveed.

- Meeting attended with SSE and SEPA (20 Feb) to agree data requirements to show adherence to smolt protocol. Pending line manager approval, NB to provide data for 20 April-7 June 2025 summarising '% available hours run' (Y axis) for each hour of the day and night (X axis). This will show what % of time the turbine was running for each hour across the 24hr period. This should show the G1 turbine being run more of the time than G2, and also (depending on whether generation has occurred at Fasnakyle during the day), generation at night. This will not show us the actual amount of generation at each turbine due to commercial sensitivities, but this may become more relevant if we conduct a smolt survival study in relation to different turbine loadings. **Action RW to chase NB.**

A summary of what we know about our smolts and smolt mitigation so far:

	Max number trapped in gate slots	Peak at gate slots	Peak fortnight	Smolts captured	Enhanced flows	Monitoring/ mitigation	Issues
2018	10,000						
2019	964					Brushes installed at G1s	
2020	310				?	Brushes fitted to G2s as well, flow regime improved	
2021	152	26-27 May Aigas	20 April-5 May	15 April-12 May	22 April- 1 June	UPPER CATCHMENT: Fasnakyle 4ft	
2022	307	30 May- 1 June Aigas	19 April-1 May	3 April-6 May (128 caught at Fasnakyle 4 April)	25 April-28 May	UPPER CATCHMENT: Fasnakyle 4ft and box traps Farrar	
2023	219	30-31 May Aigas	22 April- 7 May	28 March-19 May	27 April?-?	LOWER CATCHMENT: 6ft at Erchless wide	
2024	500	25May-3 June? Aigas	25 April-8 May	3 April-15 May	22April-end May	LOWER CATCHMENT: 6ft at Erchless, late to start trapping	Outage of G1 turbine at Aigas, 13-31st May. Numbers had dropped subsequently by 4th June.
Comment	Low numbers except 2024 when outage at Aigas	Consistent dates	Quite consistent, slightly later in lower catchment		Earlier implementation looks slightly better		

***Predation:** The seal licence application with [supporting info](#) was submitted on 30 January we are waiting to hear whether we will be granted a seal management licence. The application highlighted the disproportionate impact seal predation is having on the spring run of fish, at spawning time, and on the summer run. A response from Marine Directorate is expected at the end of March. As highlighted in the previous update, it was confirmed that if successful the licence would apply at the earliest from January 2026.

- Use of the Acoustic Deterrent Device continues, although low water recently has meant the last reported seal was 14 January.
- Seal licence review comments due to be submitted to Marine Directorate by 5 March.

Invasives (INNS)/ Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI):

- Following Trudi's annual review (23 Jan) a work plan is now in place for 2025 and Trudi has increased mink trap Remoti coverage to coastal areas. **Action Trudi** to show RW and AS trap locations and tender for JK contractor work.

Development/ consultations:

- Lower Beauly OHL fish data sent to WSP. Need to invoice (have been waiting for new bank account details), **Action RW**.
- Beauly substation (Fanellan) data sent to WSP. Invoice, **Action RW**.
- Spittal-Loch Buidhe OHL fish data sent. Invoice, **Action RW**.
- Attended Ballach/ Erchless windfarm consultation event, EnergieKontor (Kilmorack).
- SSE Farrar Vista project response submitted. No assessment for migratory fish made. Pertinent to E Deanie burn and Beannacharan burn following a quick visit. Opportunity to improve attraction flow in E Deanie burn as a biodiversity enhancement measure (in line with FMP objectives). This is also on SEPA's hydro-prioritisation list but with 'measure not required' assigned as not a long enough reach (450m) to benefit in a national context.
- Am yet to respond to Beauly BESS consultation. **Action: RW**

Hydro: Attended FMS Hydro group meeting (10 Feb). Biologists from across Scotland heard an update from SEPA as to progress made with their hydro review. It was suggested that the review should not just be a review of classification failures but also should include a higher level review to incorporate shared national issues including that relating to a lack of sediment management at large hydro as many in the 'virtual room' share these problems but these are not necessarily highlighted through WFD failures but can be addressed through licencing updates thereby preventing these issues becoming WFD failures in the future.

Angling: FMS Updated [Catch and Release guidance](#) now on our website, copies available in LBFS huts. **Request from Ali if you want any.**

Beavers:

- NatureScot are currently processing an application to release beavers to G. Affric by FLS. NatureScot may fund fish survey monitoring in 2025 (c£4,000).
- Engagement with planned beaver release to Abriachan by Abriachan Forest Trust, attended consultation event (12 Feb). Location is at the top of Moniach burn (coastal burn) and near the top of Belladrum catchment. Have suggested potential monitoring, and need for beaver dam checks at key fish migration periods.
- Trees For Life employ Beaver Officer Tobias to protect trees, remove dams etc. **Get in touch if you need any practical help in relation to beavers.** You are legally allowed to remove dams if <2 weeks old.
- Site visit to R. Cannich to hear proprietor concerns. Emailed NatureScot re-highlighting/ emphasising the need for licence conditions to protect Black burn (Culburnie burn tributary), and Allt Coillte (a key burn providing spawning substrate to the lower R. Cannich).

Barriers: Funding found (OpenRivers) for removal of large weir in Glen Cannich (Liatric weir) to enable brown trout migration. Details emailed to landowner, but might be an SSE asset (!)

- Possible deculverting of Bridgend burn project through Beauly Community Trust to reduce flooding, and improve sea trout migration and habitat. **Action RW** to request details from Lovat estate.

Diffuse Pollution: At the end of December the bottom of the River Beauly under Lovat bridge ran like hot chocolate (i.e. cloudy as opposed to the usual clear water we are used to). This was due to the heavy rain we had, however it highlights the problem of poor land management and run-off coming from farms and crofts. This can have an impact on the fish using those burns. At the same time we are seeing a drastic decline in sea trout numbers. Belladrum sub-catchment is the sea trout's main area for spawning. It is difficult for farmers/ crofters to access funding to make the positive changes they need to make. To help fix this, I would like to identify the farms/ crofts with problems and apply to the Wild Fisheries Fund for money for fencing and solar powered pumps to keep livestock away from the burns. This is already in our Fishery Management Plan, and has been done similarly in Ayrshire. **Are you happy if I put this in the Action Plan for this or next year?**

3. Monitoring Methods

Conservation grading: The consultation report of the proposed 2025 river gradings is [here](#). MD are reviewing evidence provided where proposed gradings were challenged. For the Beaully the proposed grading is Good (equivalent of Grade 1), however we queried why the % chance of meeting the egg requirement in 2023 had dropped to 62.31% when rod catch above Aigas had actually been quite good. We asked why this was e.g. to do with a lack of fish count data, or late catches on the Farrar. Finalised river gradings are not available yet. I have contacted MD requesting an update.

Smolt monitoring:

- Smolt monitoring planned to occur for a shortened 2.5 week period this year to see if improvements to trap efficiency can be made at Erchless using the 6ft trap. This will guide whether we can carry out a PIT tagging or acoustic tracking study in 2026. PIT tagging could be used to assess adult return rates in relation to set turbine loads (>1,500 smolts). Smaller number of smolts would lend itself to acoustic tracking (with predator tags) to assess smolt behaviour in relation to the dams (including Farrar). SSE would have to lead and fund this type of project. Further discussions about a potential study are on hold until Ross's replacement is in post.

Fish Counts/ SSE:

- Bigger AI harddrives installed at Aigas and Kilmorack 17 Feb. The Mark14s are in place at Beannacharan (no AI planned for 2025).
- Aigas counts processing (400hrs of video) on hold until Ross's replacement is in post.
- Powerstation outages planned at Culligran 16th June-22nd August, Fasnakyle beginning of March, Aigas 30th June-4th July, Kilmorack 7th July-11th July (tbc if generation will be affected yet at Aigas/ Kilmorack).

Rod catches:

- Have we received all 2024 rod catch data? **Action: HH.**

Electro-fishing:

- Electro-fishing report including 2023 and 2024 surveys is due. Awaiting benchmark data to be made available by Marine Directorate Science (expected end of March). **Action RW.**
- If funded by NatureScot will use a contractor, TFL beaver officer and volunteers to help. If not will use volunteers and TFL beaver officer. Hoping to survey the mainstem R. Beaully as barely any data, and to support future sediment management work. Moniac burn and Bruaich burn (in relation to beaver re-introduction). R. Cannich in relation to potential weir removal. Allt Coillte and lower R. Cannich in relation to beaver damming. Tarradale burn to see if used by sea trout. A few Glass mainstem sites to enable comparison with Farrar to assess hydro impacts. E. Deanie burn (SSE Farrar vista). *Future:* Breackachy (Ballach/Erchless windfarm). SSEN funded efishing on R. Beaully? AURIS site re-visit?
- 2019 NEPs data has not been entered into SFCC database and 2023 data needs correcting. This is will be a time consuming process.
- 2024 fry numbers likely to have been affected by high flows/ redd washout in Belladrum sub-catchment.

Predation monitoring:

Seals: Reporting of specialist seal presence continues in the [FMS reporting app](#). Laminated reporting app posters distributed to LBFS fishing huts.

Sawbills:

- The second 2024-2025 piscivorous bird survey was carried out 10th (AS) and 11th (RW) Feb.

Drone:

- Drone flyovers below Kilmorack dam and below Beannacharan dam are planned for early 2025 to assess sediment and redd distribution ahead of any improvements to sediment management. A flight of the Beaully, Kilmorack dam-Lovat bridge occurred (13 Feb) thanks to Gordon. This broadly shows substrate distribution which is a start but at 82m up, individual pebbles (and redds) were not visible. Having technical issues getting automated survey flight to work which would enable detailed mapping of the river-bed. Will try surveying the Farrar in March. A work in progress atm.

National adult Sampling: Due to invoice FMS once bank account set up. 70% due to got to LBFS. Likely to be funded again in 2025.

4. People: Community engagement, participation and heritage

Oral History Project: Report now complete and available on our [website](#) thanks to a lot of hard work by Louise!! Hoping to print 20 copies.

Website: Updated with Oral history project report and Catch and Release guidance

Social media:

- A couple of beaver related posts, the river opening celebration, and Oral history project.
- Whatsapp group for fish pics and availability for fishing- any progress? **ACTION: AS** in liaison with FSN.

Proprietors:

- SSEN funding details for trees and peatland restoration sent to landowners (31 Jan)
- Update prepared for BAC river opening day (10 Feb)
- Board progress update emails (16 Jan, 12 Feb)
- **Action RW** to ask if anyone fancies doing Buglife, '[Guardians of our Rivers](#)' invertebrate monitoring training.

Beauly Community Council: Site visit completed with Beauly Community Council and Highland Council, advice provided re bank protection to shore up existing but eroding path next to Bridgend burn.

Incidents: 14 Jan: Ardblair burn, track washout, G. Convinth. SEPA visited and farmer rectified poor drainage. This was result of extremely heavy rain at the end of December.

Written Outputs: Seal licence application, Beaver funding wishlist, Sediment management quote requests, Fishery Management Plan interim update. Oral History project report (Louise Senior), DSFB annual survey, Bailiffing review.

Meetings: FMS hydro group (17 Dec), Bailiff review (17 Dec), Paul sizeland FMS funding meeting (8 Jan). Trudi review (23 Jan), NBFT meet (30 Jan), SFCC biologists meet (5-6 Feb), FMS hydro meet (10Feb), Abriachan beavers (28 Feb), SSE/ SEPA meet re smolt protocol data (20 Feb). Hamish catch ups x 2.

This map doesn't look like much, but this is the first time Beauly smolts have been recorded out at sea!! The result of Marine Directorate Science conducting surface trawls and finding our Beauly smolts through matching up their genetics with parr samples we took in 2023. If we know where our smolts are we can start to protect them from Offshore Windfarm development.

