



This update summarises key work task progress since the last update 27 November 2025. The main tasks of the last three months have been to liaise with HNRf on our successful funding bid for smolt trap and truck kit/ purchase kit etc, refine the smolt trap and truck project (literature review, stats), submit an EOI to HIEF for funding for the decoder and PIT tags, write up the summers' electrofishing (into a report incorporating habitat, spawning and sediment management recommendations for KAYA consulting and LBFS), move forward with sediment management plans for the Farrar, and conduct drone surveys of the R. Beaully in relation to spawning. The focus of the next few months will be receiving and altering kit for the smolt work, carrying out the smolt monitoring, moving office, and recruitment of seasonal staff.

1. Governance/organisation

Facilities:

- Found a new office in Muir of Ord (at the Village hall) Lease needs signing asap. Kit can be stored on Lovat land in a container. Lease/ **arrangements need to be agreed asap to avoid the office move clashing with the busy smolt run period. Action: clerk.**
- Van recalled due to issue with back door. Booked in 20th Feb. Will hopefully put spare wheel on rim too.
- Received new drone with thermal vision from FMS 11th Feb. Once we have EC 785/2004 compliant insurance, this will improve our surveying capacity immensely and help with bailiffing (e.g. redd surveys) 😊 **Action: Clerk**
- Conference speakers/mic purchased to enable Lovat Arms hotel to host future hybrid meetings (For Annual Public Meeting).
- Vodafone very difficult to deal with and new phones required. Move to Giffgaff for SIM only contract and internet, so that any missed bills do not affect staff credit ratings. **Action: Clerk.**

H+S and training:

- RW completed e-learning training and assessment 16th Dec, and has attained CSCS green card to enable contract work for RSK biocensus in the summer. Seasonal efish help will also have to do this training.
- RW completed A2CofC drone training on 9th Feb to increase drone competence. AS to attend free A2 training in late May.

Budget/ finance:

- Income to be received from hosting a seasonal SISI officer in 2026 has been reduced from the c£4,000 anticipated to approx. £1,000
- Contract work planned for 2026 (Beaully- Peterhead OHL on behalf of rskbiocensus/ BAM nuttall/ SSEN) anticipated to be more than expected if it goes ahead: £12,850-19,100. Mostly coastal burns but some mainstem sites too. Potential for this to be extended to include monitoring associated with underground cabling at Black bridge (Lewis-Fanellan) and Black bridge re-build (Fanellan). All are SSEN transmission projects. Have requested this in recent meeting with SSEN re Lewis-Fanellan cabling.

Staffing:

- 4 month Seasonal SISI officer- recruitment required soon.
- We should hear about whether we have been successful in our Working with Rivers Trainee application at end of February. Funded by SSEN community fund, co-ordinated through FMS and NatureScot. The trainee would be hosted May-October to help deliver the smolt trap and truck trial and e-fishing. They would deliver some education to local schools too (efish demo, invertebrates).
- Pending budget sign-off, **contract needs to be drafted for Seasonal Bailiff asap. Action: Clerk.**

FMS: See [The Sway](#) newsletter for a summary of FMS activities. This includes updates on [future funding frameworks](#) for Fishery boards, [stocking advice](#), [predation](#), improvements to poaching fines.

-[FMS updated Governance Framework](#) for boards sent to all board members by AC.

-Support from SFCC received re ARCGIS and online Storyboard Fishery Management Plan issues (7 Jan).

-Attended and presented our work at SFCC Biologists' meeting 18-19th Feb. A good opportunity to share ideas with other Fishery Boards and Trusts.

-FMS hydro group met on 23 Jan- Heard SEPA's progress on hydro review. Re-highlighted to SEPA the multiple (solvable) impacts hydro is having on the R. Beaully, the struggle to secure funding from SSE to solve the problems, and need for more joined up thinking in hydro-review. R. Beaully is not included in the hydro review.

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

Our Fishery Management Plan is on the website ([pdf](#) and storyboard).

***Bailiffing:** See AS' report.

***Sediment management:** We hope to improve the resilience of the salmon population on the Rivers Farrar and Beaully below the dams by restoring salmon spawning beds and associated juvenile habitat.

Alasdair Matheson (SEPA Hydro-morphologist) provided comments following his visit on 7 Oct and acquisition of historic SEPA flow data from the Farrar. This advice has been forwarded to Culligran estate and is included in the Beaully efish report (for LBFS).

For the Farrar, if taking a 'suck it and see' approach, (topping up a pile of gravel periodically at the suitable location identified below Cave pool), then for a relatively small cost and pile of gravel (£500-1,000 for washed, rounded, local gravel from Ross' quarry, Urray) we could commence the improvement of Farrar juvenile and spawning habitat. This is pending proprietor approval, funding, a check with NatureScot regarding FWPM, and the completion of the correct SEPA permissions form.

For the Beaully, we await a visit from KAYA consulting, this work is now being funded and overseen by LBFS. **Action RW:** to provide efish/ habitat report with sediment management advice to inform KAYA and LBFS.

Action RW put a 'Catchment Sediment Management Plan' together for SSE liaison meeting, to improve our chances of harnessing funding from SSE or SSEN (on SSE's advice) for both Farrar and Beaully.

***Smolt passage:**

-The [project proposal for trial trap and truck](#) mitigation is on the website. The Highland Nature Restoration Funding application for £6,262.90 was successful for purchasing of Trap and truck kit. Kit is currently being ordered/ gathered. There will be a delay in receiving the air pump (HAILEA CP120 due to a supply issue).

-An Expression of Interest has been submitted to Highland and Island Environment foundation for £10,000. Match-funded with a Crowdfunding campaign we hope that £20-24,000 can be raised to fund the decoder and PIT tag cost, with proprietor contribution being the back-up. The PIT tag decoder order will have to be submitted by July to allow a 4.5 month lead in time for installation in December. Crowdfunding will require a significant amount of staff time. We will hear if we have been successful in our application around 9th March.

-[Literature review](#) completed for Trap and Truck mitigation. Suggests that adults that were trucked as smolts will find their way back to the river, but there is a risk (perhaps up to 20%) they will 'get lost' in the flowing bit between where the trap is at Erchless and where the water turns slack behind Aigas dam. Monitoring is therefore essential.

-Had a meeting with BioSS (Jackie Potts and Nick Schurch, James Hutton Institute) about the statistical analysis required to assess the effectiveness of the planned trap and truck mitigation (29 Jan). They confirmed doing the study over several years was preferable from a risk perspective, and they could do the data analysis for us for approx. a day's work (£1,300/ yr inc VAT), with £2,600 end of project (2 day's work). They recommended randomising the batches of smolts going into each treatment. To translate into precise adult return further info would be required as to detection rates. Agreed that it is the difference between return rates of the 2 treatments that matters in determining the number of smolts required. We can set up a working agreement to request work from them as and when the project requires once we have completed smolt run 2026.

- Updated [Smolt protocol](#) comments were submitted 12th February to SSE. We have added that responsible water management should be in place ahead of the smolt run to ensure sufficient water is available in the hydro lochs at the top of the catchment (especially in the context of drought conditions), also that if numbers in the gate slots reach >500 then increased generation is required to draw them out (based on issues experienced in 2024 and 2025). SSE have not yet provided generation data under a non-disclosure agreement, so a specific minimum generation at night during the smolt run has not been requested.

-Met with Sunny from the Conon DSFB to discuss the '[Whoosh](#)' solution to improve smolt passage out of Loch Beannacharan on the Farrar. It is anticipated that SSE will require evidence of smolt migration delay through the loch before supporting any mitigation.

***Predation:**

-The seal licence is now being transferred over to LBFS.

-lengthy discussion with Ness Fishery Board staff to check whether we could borrow their marksperson (27 Jan) unsuccessful.

-SMRU interested in collecting any seal carcasses/ providing collection kit (17th Dec).

-Frequent seal sightings in December at the dam, a couple of sightings in January, none in February (low river levels).

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

- The SISI project is continuing in interim form for another 2 years (despite one of the funders pulling out). We confirmed we still wanted to host a Seasonal Project Officer in 2026 for the shorter term of 4 months despite a lower associated income (29 Jan).
- SISI claim (Sep-Dec) submitted 18 Dec.

Riparian trees: Agreement with Braulen estate staff to locate their set quota of boxed trees close to the banks of the U. Misge, in liaison with Denis (Bidwells). RW visited site on 10 Dec to advise. Spare vole guards not available from Struy estate.

Development/ consultations/ advice:

- Ardersier Port extension, [response](#) by Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Trust, which mentions Beaulys smolts (8 Jan).
- attended Black bridge consultation event and provided [feedback](#) (4th Dec).
- [Fanellan](#) transmission station- rejected by Highland Council's South Planning Committee, to be appealed by SSEN to Scottish Government.
- Beaulys-Peterhead overhead line: [Response from SSEN received](#). Have quoted for associated contract work.
- Lewis-Fanellan underground cabling: SSEN meeting 21st Jan. Addressed our [previous queries](#). Actions [here](#).
- LBFS request to change lift timings to a dual set of timings unsupported by SSE due to operational cost. Review of temperature and seal pressure completed, but evidence requested from SSE not there to justify change (confirmed 16th Jan).
- Ballach windfarm response due.
- Moray Flow park on the horizon....

Beavers: The monitoring group met on 22nd Jan. Please email tobias@treesforlife.org.uk with any new sightings/ beaver signs, or if you require advice (07926718338).

3. Monitoring

Smolt monitoring: We plan to run the trap for 2 months in spring 2026, to improve trap efficiency, to support trial Trap and Truck mitigation. Marine Directorate consent has been attained. Smolt trap inspection to highlight repairs necessary with SSE 16th Jan. See 'Smolt passage' in previous section for more info.

Fish counts: slightly updated (received 12th Feb). [Kilmorack](#) 1,439 (significant undercount due to AI technical issues) [Aigas](#) 2,826 (No counts from the week commencing 6th October due to AI technical issues), [Beannacharan](#) 245 (full validated count via MK14).

Drone: Upper and Lower Beaulys surveyed in December and January to aid redd counting and observe spawning. New drone (DJI Matrice 4T) received 11th Feb from FMS. New drone should significantly improve our surveying capacity and can be used for bailiffing too.

Electro-fishing:

- Efish report drafted 3rd Feb, awaiting feedback from Keith at Kyle of Sutherland. Currently with the board and LBFS for comments before finalising. Includes sediment management advice received from SEPA. **Action RW:** Chase feedback, send to KAYA ahead of their visit, data entry to SFCC database due.
- draft 2026 plans involve contract work for Beaulys-Peterhead OHL, re-survey of R. Beaulys. Surveys will need to be done of wider catchment too dependent on staffing resource.
- RW still to enter the 2019 NEPs data, and correct 2023 data in SFCC database.

Predation monitoring: Reporting of specialist seal presence in the river continues in the [FMS reporting app](#).

- Next piscivorous bird count due during smolt run.

People: Community engagement, participation and heritage

Cnoc path/ Bridgend burn: community council/ Highland council visit to discuss path stabilisation through green engineering (willow protection) and de-culverting. **Action: Highland Council** to suggest costings.

Website: Updated with Senior Biologist November update.

Annual Public Meeting: 9th December. 14 attendees (inc RW, Hamish and AC). Presented our work for 2024-25.

Trout and Salmon magazine (Andrew Graham-Stewart) in touch about dam counts and smolt study.

Social media: Spawning fish (4th Dec), Braulen estate tree visit (10 Dec), Bailiffing (6, 16th, 22nd, 26th Jan), Sluice gates open (12 Jan), Drone survey, River Opening (28 Jan), Kelt checking (13 Feb), River Opening (14 Feb).

Proprietors:

-River Opening email (2 Feb). AS attended River opening hosted by BAC (14th Feb).

No Incidents

Written outputs: Trap and Truck Literature review (8 Jan), Marine Directorate Smolt and efish consent application, DRAFT R. Beauly 2025 Fish survey and habitat report.

Meetings/ chats: SEPA engagement forum (2nd Dec), SFCC ARCGIS/ Storyboard support (7 Jan), Conon Whoosh meeting (15 Jan), Smolt trap inspection (16 Jan), SSEN cable meeting (21 Jan), FMS hydro meet (23 Jan), Interim board meeting (27th Jan), Ness Fishery Board marksperson chat (27th Jan), BLOSS stats meeting (29th Jan), Louis/ HIEF funding meetings x2, Scottish Gas networks meet (17 Feb), SFCC Biologist's meeting 18-19th Feb.

