

## MINUTES OF WRASFB ANNUAL PROPRIETORS' & PUBLIC MEETINGS

HARBOUR CENTRE, GAIRLOCH	<b>PRESENT:</b> Bill Whyte (BW) Chair Rosie Nicoll (RN) Donald Rice (DR) - by Skype Gordon Crawford (GC) – by Skype Mark Lorimer (ML) Mary Gibson (MG) Peter Jarosz (PJ) Clerk	Neil Morrison (NM) Ray Dingwall (RD) Ian Lindsay (IL) Craig Peter Cunningham (PC) One Member of the public
DATE: 11 November 2019		
OPENED AT:14.00 CLOSED AT:15.15		

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Bate, Hugh Whittle and Stuart Allison.

### 2. Comments

- There were four proprietors attending the annual meetings, three mandatories, three invitees and two members of the public.
- BW gave a report on the Board's work that had taken place to date in this financial year.

### 3. Annual Report 2017-8

Copies of the Annual Report 2018-19 were available at the meeting and the chairman talked the meeting through its contents:

- The report contains rod catch figures for 2018 for salmon and sea trout as figures for 2019 are currently not available on the Marine Scotland web site.
- Sighting forms for the recording of piscivorous ducks presence were sent out by email but none have been returned to date. Verbal reports seem to suggest that numbers of these predators are increasing so sightings of cormorants, mergansers, goosanders as well as herons need to be recorded (and any mink sightings should be noted/reported). The form that was circulated to proprietors should be used if the Board is to build up a case for any control license, against these birds, to be permitted.
- The new MSS guidance on stocking of rivers from brood stock progeny means that consents will not be granted for salmon stocking.

All those present expressed their approval of the report and of the work that the board had achieved within the year but with the reservation that the graphs on catches will need to be updated once the catch returns form MS have been received.

### 4. Accounts 2018-9

PJ reported that copies of the WRASFB accounts (2018-9) had been forwarded to all proprietors by email for their perusal.

In the time between the accounts being sent out and the date of the annual meeting, there were no queries or questions from proprietors regarding the accounts.

PJ then talked through the contents of the accounts, highlighting the fact that the Board, following two years of exceptional expenditure due to legal costs, was now in the 2018-

19 accounts experiencing our more usual annual budget costs and this for a second year in succession.

PJ was also able to present half-year budget figures that are predicting that the current financial year (2019-20) should also end with expenditure costs similar to our usual annual budget.

There is £697.50 still outstanding from the 2019-20 levies including one levy invoice from 2018-19.

PJ stated that the accounts were fairly self explanatory and reflected the yearly projection that PJ presented to the Board meeting back in the April meeting.

Those present at the meeting pronounced their approval of the accounts.

### **5. WRFT Biologist's Report**

Peter C showed a Powerpoint presentation that covered the points of his biologist's report of which there were hard copies available at the meeting.

PC's report is attached at the end of these minutes.

The meeting closed at 1515 hours.



Signed by the Clerk to the Board:

Dated: 11 November 2019

## **1. Sea trout monitoring and sea lice** (Supported by the Scottish Government and WRASFB)

As in previous years, sea trout were sampled from the sea using the sweep net in the Kanaird river estuary, Boor Bay (Loch Ewe), Flowerdale (Loch Gairloch), and at the head of Little Loch Broom (Dundonnell).

At the mouth of the **River Kanaird**, only 11 sea trout were caught in total despite much effort on two sweep netting occasions (18<sup>th</sup> June and 16<sup>th</sup> July) in 2019. All except two of these fish carried no sea lice; each of the infested fish carried just one louse. On both occasions, the River Kanaird was running at a higher level than in previous years; however other estuarine fish were caught; indicating marine conditions at high tide. In 2018, sea trout carrying 200+ sea lice were recorded at this site.

At the head of **Little Loch Broom** (Dundonnell), 19 mostly small (146mm – 280mm) sea trout were caught on the 12<sup>th</sup> August. These fish carried an average of 9.16 sea lice, mostly chalimus stage lice. In previous years we have caught just a few sea trout at this site during the summer.

At **Boor Bay** (Loch Ewe) a total of 25 sea trout were caught over two sweep netting sessions. On 15<sup>th</sup> June, 15 sea trout were caught with no or low levels of sea lice. However on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 10 mostly small sea trout were caught carrying up to 43 sea lice. Some of these fish had lice numbers in excess of thresholds at which mortality or early return to freshwater is predicted based on analyses in Taranger et al 2014.

At **Flowerdale estuary** (Loch Gairloch), there was a total of 80 sea trout captures (including at least one sea trout caught on more than one occasion) over 4 sampling sessions (April 19<sup>th</sup> [30 sea trout]; June 7<sup>th</sup> [8 sea trout]; June 19<sup>th</sup> [26 sea trout]; September 16<sup>th</sup> [16 sea trout]). Sea trout caught in samples in April and June carried high number of sea lice (to over 250 lice per fish) an additional sample was taken just upstream of the usual site on 1<sup>st</sup> May; one of the two sea trout caught on this occasion (as part of the Wild Trout Workshop, also filmed for STV's Sean's Scotland programme) carried over 500 sea lice). In September 16 sea trout, mostly maturing females of up to 560mm in length were caught; these fish carried few sea lice in contrast to samples taken earlier in the year. Most of these fish had damaged but healed dorsal fins, indicative of sea lice infestation earlier in the year.

In October, a fyke net was set in the Sand River (Loch Gairloch) to learn more about the spawning trout population. In total there was 103 trout captures, of which 20 were mature sea trout: 8 females [largest 435mm] and 12 male trout captures [largest 410mm] (one or more of the males may have been caught twice). The remaining trout were nearly all small mature male resident brown trout. No mature female resident brown trout were caught, suggesting that the trout populations is sustained by sea going female trout rather than by resident female brown trout.

Sea lice levels reported by salmon farms in the WRASFB area for the months April to June 2019 were low for salmon farms from Loch Ewe – Two Brooms area. However, sea lice levels on salmon farms in Loch Torridon were far above the SSPO Code of Good Practice sea lice treatment threshold levels. The high lice levels reported for salmon farms in Loch Torridon correlate with the high numbers of lice seen on sea trout in the Flowerdale estuary Loch Gairloch. Some of the lice on sea trout samples in Loch Ewe may also have originated from Loch Torridon farms.

<http://scottishsalmon.co.uk/monthly-sea-lice-reports/>.

For help with sampling sea trout in WRASFB area, thank you to Mark MacKenzie and Ben Bulmer (Kaenchullish estate), Ian McFadyen (Langwell estate), Nigel Carr, Iain Muir, Keith Dunbar, Chris Beresford, Cory Jones, Annie Dickinson, Alastair Pearson, Alasdair MacDonald and Donald Rice and family and friends (Dundonnell estate); volunteers from Achiltibuie Angling Club, Mark Williams, Dr James Close, Dr Steve Kett, Bill and Fraser Anderson, Peter and Janet Davison, Duncan Donald, Bill Whyte, Ian Whyte, Len Campbell, Gary Bulmer, Chris Gudgeon, family and friends and everyone else . . .

## **2 Rod catches**

Figures for the 2019 season to follow. Notable catches included sea trout of up to 4.5lb + in the north of the WRASFB area. Official catch figures for the 2018 season are also still awaited; unofficial figures for the Gruinard River and River Ewe system have been reported previously.

### 3. Juvenile fish surveys (supported by the Scottish Government and WRASFB)

The main task for SWRFT electro-fishing teams during the past summer has been to survey a series of sites in rivers across our region as part of the collaborative National Electro-fishing Programme for Scotland [NEPS]<sup>1</sup>. The ultimate aim of the programme is to be able to obtain a data set from which the conservation status of wild salmon across Scotland can be better assessed, to complement the SG's published rod catch statistics for adult fish and information from fish counters.

Sites are randomly chosen, with several sites in some rivers and none in other rivers. This is the second year of the NEPS survey, and a total of 21 sites were fished in the SWRFT area including some sites out with the WRASFB area.

In addition to the sites for the NEP, we surveyed other sites including other nearby sites to gather additional data to inform the WRASFB and local fisheries management, making the most of our time in the field.

NEP sites were surveyed in the Kanaird, Ullapool, Dundonnell, upper Gruinard, Ewe, Kerry, and Torridon Rivers; and to the south of the WRASFB area in the Elchaig, Shiel, Glenmore and Glenbeag rivers. It was not possible to survey some of the sites on larger channels because water levels in August and September were too high. When water levels were too high for surveying NEPS sites it was sometimes possible to carry out surveys of sites in smaller rivers. Additional sites were surveyed on the Kanaird, Ullapool, Broom and in the River Ewe headwaters. Sites were also surveyed in the Tournai and Sguod river systems and several smaller streams around the Loch Maree catchment area; and also the Bruachaig (River Ewe system) to provide complimentary data.

For juvenile salmon, preliminary results [more detailed analyses to follow] indicate that salmon fry numbers (CPUE and densities) are lower at many sites than in 2018. Estimated densities of over 30 fry per 100m<sup>2</sup> were also recorded at just a few sites. In contrast, numbers of salmon parr were higher than in 2018.

Initial interpretation that the low levels of salmon fry were associated with the less stable rivers where redd washout may have been a major factor (upper Ullapool River and Dundonnell River). Low water during the salmon spawning season in November 2018 may have contributed to low numbers of salmon fry in some smaller headwater streams.

In addition to our own surveys, the SEPA e-fishing team fished sites in the River Croe during the summer of 2018; thank you to SEPA for sharing their data.

The SWRFT e-fish team has been Peter C and Colin Simpson, with Ben Rushbrooke, Finn Simpson, Gary Bulmer, David Holland, Peter Davison and family, Mark Williams, Alasdair MacDonald, Dr Steve Kett and Dr Andy Vicks, helping at sites where three or more people were required (especially some of the deeper water N sites). Thank you to Marine Science Scotland and Fraser Wilson for loan of bank-side generator powered electro-fishing equipment. Thank you also to many other helpers including friends and family of some of the above, Pete Crichton and SNH Beinn Eighe NNR volunteers, Dave Richards and family, Dr Malcolm Stewart; and Alan and Billy MacKenzie (Eileanreach Estate) and Gary Ross (Gruinard Estate) for 4x4 transport to otherwise inaccessible sites.

### 4. Some other activities

- Support for BW regarding various salmon farm related issues
- Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (HLF & SNH funded) Peter J and Bill W can describe . . .
- Wester Ross Biosphere . . . Natural Heritage subgroup proposed woodland fragments project

### 5. New projects for 2020

- Maerl beds and ecology of spawning herring areas (funded by The William Grant Foundation). This follows filming of herring spawning grounds by the late Andy Jackson in March 2019.
- Stream nutrient restoration project. This aims to raise levels of productivity of salmon streams in many rivers; please see <http://www.riverdee.org.uk/news/2019/river-dee-conservation-series-river-muick> for similar initiative in the River Dee.
- Extended education programme . . . IL or PJ can describe . . .

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<sup>1</sup> <http://marine.gov.scot/information/national-electrofishing-programme-scotland-2018-site-locations>