

DRAFT ONLY

RIVER CREE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

THE REPORT OF THE BOARD TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF QUALIFIED PROPRIETORS AND ALSO AT THE ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING OF THE BOARD –

This report covers the period from the 1st October 2019 to the 30th September 2020

PART ONE

This part of the report summarises what the Board have done in carrying out their statutory functions during the period and what the Board propose to do in carrying out those functions in the year ahead.

The primary duties of the Board are the protection or improvement of the fisheries within their district, the increase of salmon and the stocking of the waters of the district with salmon – Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003, section 45(1). To assist it in fulfilling those duties the Board has the benefit of the services of two fisheries trusts, Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) and The River Cree Hatchery and Habitat Trust (RCHHT). There are attached as appendices to this report, summaries prepared by those trusts of their activities during the period and their proposals for the coming year.

In addition to the activities of the two trusts mentioned above, the Board has dealt with other matters during the period. To some extent, the activities of the Board appear from an examination of the minutes of all its meetings, which can be viewed on the Board's website – **rivercreedistrictsalmonfisheryboard.com**. The following is a brief summary.

Overall, the activities of the Board have been severely affected by the “lockdown” imposed in late March 2020 and subsequent government measures to control the **Coronavirus pandemic**. During the period covered by this report the Board only held one “ordinary” meeting, in February 2020. Subsequent meetings have had to be postponed indefinitely. Ongoing restrictions continue to affect the work of the Board. In the normal way the Annual Meeting of Proprietors and Annual Public Meeting would have been held in the autumn of 2020 but have had to be delayed. This report nevertheless covers the period October 2019 to September 2020, to make it consistent with previous reports.

Billy McHarg, the longstanding **Treasurer to the Board** intimated that he would not be continuing in that role as from the 6th November 2019. At very short notice, Matthew Pumphrey, the Clerk to the Board, agreed to take on the additional duties of Treasurer and he was duly appointed as Treasurer by the Board on the 6th November 2019.

The **Conservation Code** for the District remained unchanged for the 2020 season, as the Cree retained its “grade 1” status under the **Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations**, meaning that salmon again could be taken during the 2020 season. The Code appears on the Board's website in its present form. It is heartening to note that the Cree is proposed to retain

its “grade 1” status for the 2021 season. This is no mean achievement – the Cree will be the only river on the Solway to achieve “grade 1” status.

On the 18th February 2020 SNH granted the Chairman a licence to shoot **fish eating birds** as an aid to scaring them. The licence period was from the 18th February to the 30th April 2020 (and up to the 31st May for male goosander only) and permitted a maximum of 7 goosander and 3 cormorants to be killed. In the event the agents appointed by the Chairman shot only 2 goosander before the Covid-19 “lockdown” commenced. Thereafter, it was considered that scaring/shooting activities risked breaching the “lockdown” restrictions so no further activities took place. It is nevertheless intended to apply for a further licence for the forthcoming season.

The River Cree Management Plan sets out how the Board aims to achieve its objective of protecting and enhancing stocks of migratory fish within the District. The current plan (dated December 2019) can be seen on the Board’s website. It will be subject to further review from time to time.

Murdo Crosbie continued in office as the Board’s only **water bailiff**. It is of some concern to the Board that we may not be able effectively to control poaching on the waters of the District. An appeal for “River Watchers” continues to be posted on the website has not produced any response.

The Board was belatedly made a non-statutory consultee in relation to the proposed **Claughrie Wind Farm**, mentioned in the Board’s last Annual Report. However, the Board was omitted from the list of consultees who were circulated regarding a consultation on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the development! A sub-committee of the Board was appointed and, after seeking an extension of time, was able to submit representations to the consultation. One of the main thrusts of our representations was that the EIA failed to recognise the recovering wild salmon population in the upper Cree and the work that had gone into stocking salmon fry in the Claughrie and Fardin Burns.

As noted in previous Annual Reports, **Wild Fisheries Reform (WFR)** appears to have been abandoned by the Scottish Government. However, **Fisheries Management Scotland** (which still represents the majority of river boards) shows **WFR** as one of its “Current Priorities” on its website.

Generally, in the year ahead the Board intends to continue to support the two trusts in the work they do for the Board and continue to manage the waters of the district in accordance with the River Management Plan.

PART TWO – COMPLAINTS

During the year the Board received no complaints.

PART THREE – GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Board has complied with the good governance requirements in the 2003 Act, as amended by the 2013 Act, as follows. The Annual Report considered at the Annual Public Meeting on the 6th November 2019 complied with Section 46A and the meeting itself complied with Section 46B. That Report and the audited accounts were published on the Board’s website and copies sent to the Scottish Ministers in accordance with Section 44(1A). The notice of the annual meeting of qualified proprietors and the annual public meeting to be held on the 6th November 2019 was publicised on

the Board's website as well as on the premises of the Galloway Angling Centre and another site in Newton Stewart. A copy was sent to the Scottish Ministers to comply with Section 46C. The other requirements of Section 46C in relation to the meetings of the Board have been complied with by publicising the dates of meetings and publishing the minutes thereof on the Board's website.

The Board's complaints procedure is publicised on the website in accordance with Section 46D.

The Board has established a register of relevant financial interests of members of the Board (available for public inspection) in accordance with Section 46E.

In the following year the Board intends to comply with the good governance requirements by keeping its procedures under review and observing the good governance requirements so far as possible. Of course, the ongoing government restrictions imposed as a result of the **Coronavirus pandemic** may make it impossible fully to comply with the good governance requirements, for example in relation to the holding of an Annual Public Meeting.

PART FOUR – GENERAL

The Marine Scotland officially recorded 2019 rod catch for the Cree, Fleet and Dee Districts was 362 salmon and grilse. It is unhelpful that there are now no stand-alone figures for the Cree District. The change in reporting style is apparently driven by data protection concerns. The Board's estimate of the 2019 rod catch for the Cree was 356 salmon and grilse, which would suggest that the Fleet and Dee had only 6 fish between them. The Board's estimate of the rod catch for 2020 season is 460 salmon and grilse, the best for many years.

Given that there was no fishing during the "lockdown" from the 23rd March to the 28th May (and that there was only one salmon reported as having been caught before "lockdown") the total is very pleasing. However, rainfall arrived in June and catches responded accordingly. July was a month of generally high rainfall and the best of the season in terms of catches, despite many days lost to angling due to high water. There was an apparent abundance of grilse, but fewer summer salmon. There appeared to be fewer sea trout, which is a cause for concern.

This is the final report mentioned in section 44(1) of the 2003 Act.

Terence Flanagan
Chairman
Dated



THE RIVER CREE HATCHERY AND HABITAT TRUST CHARITY SC042355

During the period from the 1st October 2019 to the 30th September 2020 RCHHT carried out the following works on the catchment of the District.

HATCHERY WORKS

We started the broodstock collection on the Water of Minnoch on the 26th October and stripped the first fish on the 1st November which is approx one week early. I stripped the last Cree fish on the 17th December. The Minnoch had good numbers of fish throughout the upper reaches.

Broodstock & Egg numbers

Minnoch 23 Hens 9 Cocks Approx 105,000 eggs

Penkiln 12 Hens 6Cocks Approx 65,000 eggs

The River Cree brood stock collection proved difficult once again and all fish were caught by rod and line.

Cree 7 Hens 3 Cocks Approx 30,700 eggs

The Hatchery had run smoothly with very little in the way of cooler conditions. This meant that the eggs developed quicker again this year. The first of the Minnoch eggs started eyeing up on the 19th December and started to hatch on the 23rd January. We are now using the gravity fed water supply which is giving us a bigger volume of water to play with.

Stocking Sites & Numbers for 2020

The first fry were stocked out on the 19th May and this was completed by the 28th September. The stocking sites and approximate numbers of fry stocked were as follows:-

<u>Penkiln</u>	<u>Approx No Eggs</u>
Pulbae Burn	15,000
Green Burn	5,000
Campbells Burn	3,000
Garlies Burn	7,000
Upper Penkiln Burn	20,000
Upper Penkiln Autumn Fry	11,000

Total 61,000

<u>Minnoch</u>	
Eldrick Burn	15,000
Kirriemore Burn	20,000
Pulniskie Burn	Nil
Pilnyark Burn	15,000
Rowantree	5,000

Total 50,000

<u>Cree</u>	
Fardin Burn	40,000
Claghrie Burn	10,000
Challoch Burn	4,000
Castle Burn	5,000
Millburn	8,000
Linloskin Autumn Fry	10,500

Total 77,500

Stocking fry this year was made more challenging with Covid restrictions and were released when space and before welfare issues became a problem.

The Penkiln Autumn fry were stocked out at the beginning and the end of September with 11,0500 fin clipped fry being stocked from a couple of hundred metres above the concrete bridge all the way up to the upper concrete bridge.

Linloskin Autumn fry were released 13th August and 15th September. We stocked approx 10,500 into this location. All autumn fry were in good condition and all were fin clipped.

Electro- Fishing

We surveyed twelve stocked sites and 10 non-stocked sites. All stocked sites scored good apart from the Claghrie burn which proved to be absent of salmon fry and parr. The Autumn fry sites were surveyed on the Upper Penkiln burn and again produced good results. We also found Autumn fin clipped fry while surveying Millburn. All Results Attached

Photo Fin Clipped Autumn Fry



HABITAT WORKS

Rhododendron Clearing

No Work done due to Covid and Access

Japanese Knotweed & Himalayan Balsam

No Spraying done this year,

Bankside and instream works

We removed one large oak tree from Rock pool which is on Whitehills stretch. The tree had to be hand winched out and cut up into rounds. The wood was left for Whitehills to use as firewood. At least four more trees to be removed from Whitehills, Linloskin and NSAA water.



Forestry Project

We started work on the upper Minnoch at the start of December. We started at Kirriereoch bridge and worked upstream cutting back Sitka Spruce regeneration trees on both banks. These trees were cut then brashed, dragged and stacked above the high water mark or at least 10 metres from the burn. Unfortunately we had to stop as lockdown was introduced. This meant that we had 3500 trees to look after all summer as these could not be planted.

Before



After



School Visits

On the 14th and, 15th November, We had Minnigaff, Creetown, St Ninians and Penninghame primary 5 pupils visiting the hatchery. During the visits we discussed the life cycle of the salmon and also the threats against their survival. We then stripped eggs from some ripe hen fish and added the milt from the cock fish whilst discussing the fertilization process. The second and third visits were cancelled due to Covid restrictions.

Fish Eating Birds

We organised a bird count in November and assisted with the Board's application to SNH for a licence to shoot/scare. The Board received the SNH licence in early February. After shooting one of each species we had to halt our activities due to Covid restrictions.

Fin Clipped Salmon

During the 2020 angling season I had reports of ten fin clipped hatchery fish being caught mostly from NSAA water and one grilse from Palgowan pool on the Minnoch.

Mark Fuller, a day rod, reported one weighing approx 15lbs. Unfortunately, no scale samples were taken.



PROPOSALS FOR NEXT YEAR

It is intended to operate the hatchery and stock salmon fry into the catchment as set out in the Board's stocking policy document agreed on the 8th September.

Work will continue to monitor INNS along the banks of the Cree and Penkiln Burn and eradication measures will be taken as necessary.

It is intended to net the Cree once again with a view to removing pike and perch.

It is intended to remove any trees or obstructions that are causing any problems i.e. bank erosion or the potential to cause flooding.

We have now got the go ahead to work on the Upper Minnoch and Shalloch burn removing and clearing Sitka Spruce regeneration trees. This project will also involve the planting, staking and putting deer guards on 1000 + trees of indigenous species (alder, downy birch, rowan and aspen) along the banks of the burn. We also intend to replace dead trees on the Upper Penkiln burn, Kirriemore burn, Eldrick burn, Fardin burn and the Pilnyark burn. This work will commence in December 2020 through to June 2021

It is intended to continue and expand with our school programme and to promote angling for all.

It is intended to continue with the shepherding of the smolts by scaring and, at times, shooting fish eating birds under license.

It is intended to continue with surveying by means of electro-fishing stocked and non-stocked sites.

Murdo Crosbie
Hatchery co-ordinator

Summary of GFT work on the Cree catchment over the last 12 months (up to September 2020)



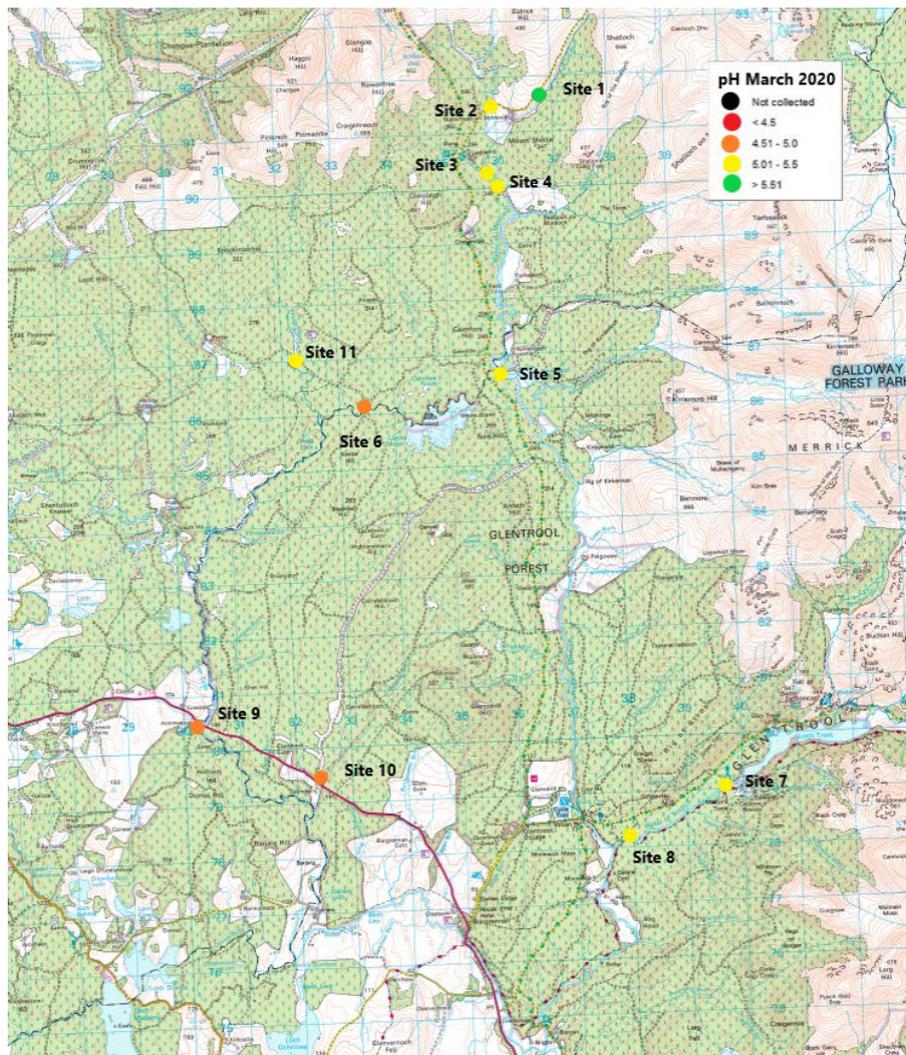
Recent months have been difficult for many reasons but GFT prioritised completing work for the local DSFBs which included a range of works for the CDSFB, as detailed below. In the summer Jackie Graham left GFT after nearly 20 years to join SEPA as their local Fishery Biologist. We continue to work closely with her on various matters. GFT have employed a new biologist, Dr Samantha Beck.

- Conservation Limits (CL) / River Categories

The River Cree remains a category 1 river for the 2021 season. We continue to work to ensure it remains in category 1. In 2020 no changes were made to the Category model or NEPS surveys completed but the model continues to be developed and may allow electrofishing data to be used to categorise rivers.

- Water quality monitoring

With on-going concerns discussed with the CDSFB regarding acidification in the upper Minnoch and the High Cree some limited data was collected in early 2020 with the plan to expand the programme in 2021. PH readings were collected at 11 sampling locations in March 2020 (see table and map below), during medium water flow. Data was collected using an EXO 1 Sonde.



River	Grid Reference	pH
1. Piinyark Burn	236911 591737	6
2. Eldrick Hill Burn	235838 591457	5.45
3. Rowantree Burn	235760 590283	5.21
4. Water of Minnoch	235927 590069	5.41
5. Water of Minnoch	235891 586636	5.27
6. Loch Moan outflow	233439 586138	4.55
7. Water of Trool	239706 579044	5.26
8. Water of Trool	237951 578227	5.35
9. River Cree	230238 580469	4.58
10. Cairnderry Burn	232410 579374	4.89
11. Fardin Burn	232318 587041	5.36

- [Cree Annual Stocking Guidance Document](#)

GFT electrofished 5 stocking sites to monitor the hatchery programme. No concerns were found. GFT compiled the Stocking document in the autumn, which was agreed with Cree DSFB, and is used to support the broodstock license and getting some access permissions.

- [Salmon Pressure Mapping](#)

GFT, assisted by the CDSFB chair, completed the on-line mapping of salmon 'pressures' on the Cree catchment. This is a Scotland wide initiative led by Scottish Government. This will produce a useful tool for the CDSFB / GFT and both highlight and quantify the pressures at a local and national scale.

- Consultations

Clachrie Wind Farm - various issues GFT raised during the scoping consultation had been addressed or explanations provided. GFT submitted a detailed technical response to the consultation which included highlighting riparian habitat enhancement opportunities.

GFT submitted a response to consultation 'Corporate Plan for Scottish Forestry 2020-2023'.

Met SEPA to review water classifications for the next Solway Tweed River Basin Management Plan.

- 2020 Electrofishing Survey (non-stocked sites)

As requested by the CDSFB, the catchment wide wild fish electrofishing programme completed by the GFT is now a 3 year rolling programme. This produces an important time series of data which has many uses including responding to consultations and managing the overall fishery.

This summer electrofishing was undertaken on the Palnure Burn and Water of Trool catchments. None of these sites are stocked so all fish present were from wild fish spawning. The data is presented below and includes the 2017 data from the same sites.

Overall, salmon densities remain good within the Palnure Burn. The upper sites have particularly healthy numbers of fry. The lower sites have seen a recent drop though in juvenile salmon numbers – this information has been shared with SEPA in case a water quality issue is occurring and will need to be kept an eye on.

On the Water of Trool salmon stocks have improved in 2020 in the main stem (fry and parr) and Caldons Burn (parr). A number of smaller burns; Pulnabrick Burn, Jenny Burn and Pulharrow Burn do not support wild salmon as they are too small or have impassable falls on them but are important to check their trout populations to help monitor any surrounding forestry operations.

Table 1: Palnure Burn Electrofishing data; 2017 and 2020

Water course	Site description	Grid reference	Year	Fish density per 100 m ² water	
				Salmon fry	Salmon parr
Palnure Burn	Downstream of Corwar Bridge	NX475696	2017	33	2
			2020	39	3
Palnure Burn	~2 km downstream of site 1	NX464682	2017	71	17
			2020	89	13
Palnure Burn	Upstream of Jacks Home Pool	NX461677	2017	91	6
			2020	99	7
Palnure Burn	Upstream of Bargaly Farm	NX462672	2017	59	14
			2020	37	6
Palnure Burn	Upstream of Craignine Bridge	NX460663	2017	16	3

			2020	7	3
P a l n u r e Burn	Downstream of Bargaly House	NX460660	2017	78	2
			2020	48	3

Table 2: Water of Trool Catchment Electrofishing data; 2017 and 2020

W a t e r course	Site description	G r i d reference	Year	Fish density per 100 m ² water	
				Salmon fry	Salmon parr
Pulnabrick Burn	Downstream of road to Glentool Lodge	NX402799	2017	0	0
			2020	0	0
Pulharrow Burn	Near Caldons	NX401790	2017	0	0
			2020	0	0
Water of Trool	Upstream of bridge to old campsite	NX398791	2017	57	2
			2020	119	29
C a l d o n s Burn	By old campsite	NX400789	2017	24	7
			2020	20	9
Jenny's Burn	Downstream of forestry bridge	NX396784	2017	0	0
			2020	0	0
Water of Trool	Upstream of old foot bridge	NX379782	2017	31	6
			2020	35	19

A further two sites were electrofished in 2020, at the suggestion of the CDSFB chairman, in the Wood of Cree Nature Reserve. The Coldstream Burn (46 salmon fry and 6 salmon parr per 100 m²) and Cordorcan Burn (22 salmon fry and 12 salmon parr per 100m²). These densities of salmon are healthy and improved compared to previous surveys.