

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 – 18TH NOVEMBER 2015

This report covers the period from the 1st October 2014 to the 30th September 2015.

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 employs 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 many other matters during the period. To a large 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.

At the meeting of the Board in November 2014 the **Conservation Code** for the district was further amended. It appears on the Board's website in its present form and is to be considered at this year's Annual Public Meeting. The content of the Code is likely to be overshadowed by the effects of the **Wild Fisheries Review/Reform**, which is mentioned below.

At the meeting of the Board in February 2015 the **River Management Plan** for the district was considered and slightly amended. The Plan succinctly sets out how the Board aims to achieve its objective of protecting and enhancing stocks of migratory fish within the district and is available for inspection on the Board's website.

During the period of this report there were two counts of **fish-eating birds** in the district, which revealed a substantial problem with these predators. An application has been made to Scottish Natural Heritage for a licence to cull. The application process is difficult and seems designed to deter successful applications. Until the result of the application is known, it seems premature to arrange further bird counts.

The next **triennial elections** to the Board will be due before the 20th October 2018, if indeed the Board still exists by then.

It will be recalled that in January 2014 the Scottish Government set up a **Wild Fisheries Review**, to examine and make recommendations as to the management of

wild fisheries in Scotland. The Review panel, chaired by Andrew Thin, published its report in October 2014 and made 53 recommendations for change. The recommendations amounted to the abolition of the existing management system (including the abolition of district salmon fishery boards) and its replacement by a new system of “Fishery Management Organisations” (FMOs).

Throughout the period covered by this report the Scottish government launched a series of consultations and the Board responded to each one. The first and third were in relation to proposed conservation measures to introduce a licensing system for killing wild salmon. The original consultation was largely directed at a proposed “tagging” scheme. This scheme was abandoned at a fairly late stage and a replacement proposal amounted to placing all salmon rivers in Scotland into one of three categories. All the Solway rivers are proposed as category three rivers which would have compulsory 100% catch and release imposed on them for the 2016 season. Needless to say, this Board has strenuously argued against the requirement for both the “tagging” scheme and for the compulsory catch and release scheme. It remains to be seen whether 100% catch and release will be imposed.

The remaining “consultation” was in relation to the bulk of the Review recommendations. It is worth noting that there was a change in the description of the Review to “**Wild Fisheries Reform**”, perhaps indicating that change was to come about, whatever the results of the various consultations. To bear this out, there was no consultation on the central question of whether district salmon fishery boards were to be replaced by FMOs – that was taken as a *fait accompli*. The response of the Board to this main consultation was to the effect that it disagreed with all the proposals for change.

Be that as it may, the Scottish Government has indicated that it will publish a draft wild fisheries bill early in 2016 and will consult on its terms. The bill will not be enacted before the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2016, but is expected to become law at some time in 2017. Unless there is a major change in the political landscape following next May’s elections, it is idle to pretend that change is not coming. It behoves the Board to prepare for that change.

The most vexed issue considered by the Board in that connection has been **the geographical extent of the FMO** which will replace it. Guidance from the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards is that there will be about 15 FMOs for the whole of Scotland, but that the areas for them will not be included within the legislation. The government is looking to fishery boards and trusts to suggest the preferred extent of their local FMOs. The Board has resolved that it would prefer the local FMO to cover all the Solway rivers from the Luce to the Annan. The Annan and Nith boards and trusts are of the same opinion. However, a substantial minority of this Board and the Galloway Fisheries Trust would prefer the FMO to cover only the six Galloway rivers (the Luce to the Urr) or failing that, those six rivers and the Ayrshire rivers. A meeting with representatives of the ASFB, Galloway Fisheries Trust and members of this Board failed to reach any consensus on the matter.

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. No doubt, **Wild Fisheries Reform** will continue to absorb an inordinate amount of the Board's time and effort.

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 22nd October 2014 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 18th November 2015 were advertised in a local newspaper and a copy sent to the Scottish Ministers to comply with Section 46C. The other requirements of Section 46C in relation to all other 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 as hitherto.

PART FOUR – GENERAL

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The officially recorded 2014 rod catch for the Cree district was disappointing – 163, the worst ever. The final figures for 2015 are not to hand at the time of writing but it is pleasing to report a much better season generally and in particular a better run of spring fish. Provisional reports suggest the rod catch was in the region of 350 salmon and grilse. One beat has reported a catch almost quadruple its 2014 total.

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

Terence Flanagan

Chairman

Dated 18th November 2015

Summary of 2015 Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) work on the Cree catchment



Forest Design Plans

Extensive Sitka spruce plantations have impacted heavily on the fish populations of much of the Cree catchment. GFT provide on-going input to the forest restructuring plans to minimise further damage during the felling phase and to ensure that any replanting is undertaken in a manner to promote recovery of water quality and fish populations. This year we have provided input to the Forestry Commission Upper Cree Land Management Plan with specific comments to restore the Cairnfore Burn, Fardin Burn, Loch Moan, Creebank Burn and High Cree through drain blocking, peatland restoration and deforesting riparian areas. Also been involved in forestry management issues around the Palnure Burn.

Limestone Gravel Salmon Spawning Beds

Salmon continue to successfully spawn in the gravel beds which had limestone gravel added to them in the High Cree around Dalnaw. This recovery of salmon is encouraging here where acidification had wiped out fish stocks. As the limestone is spreading naturally we are now finding more fry in some of the surrounding riffle areas. Adult salmon have been seen in the High Cree near Dalnaw this autumn. Electrofishing results below.

Water course	Location	Grid reference	Salmon fry *	Salmon parr*	Trout fry*	Trout parr*	Comments
High Cree	Dalnaw Farm bridge	321771	30.6	8.2	17.3	1	Riffle between limestone beds
High Cree	Bend below Dalnaw Bridge	319770	44.1	6.8	9.1	0.8	Original limestone gravel bed
High Cree	Upstream of Carrick Lane Burn	318762	26.6	10.1	6.3	0	Riffle between limestone beds
Carrick Lane Burn	Lower burn	318761	0	9.1	7.3	5.5	Un-limed tributary
High Cree	Track past Dalnaw Farm	320765	30.9	1.6	8.7	0	Original limestone gravel bed

*fish numbers are all standardised to density per 100 m² of water (minimum densities)

Water sampling

Following the Galloway wide water sampling exercise undertaken in 2014, we were concerned about the pH and Labile Aluminium (most toxic form of Aluminium) recorded in the Rowantree Burn (a tributary of the Minnoch). Electrofishing has found a lack of fish here. Presently we are sampling the burn monthly as we need an annual mean value of the Aluminium if it is going

to be officially 'downgraded'. Our aim is to have the conifers removed from this sub-catchment as we believe they are contributing to these problems.

Site visits

The Castle Burn has been surveyed by GFT and recommendations for possible RCHHT works provided. GFT have undertaken various works on the burn previously and are now taking forward 2 actions: trying to reduce the bridge sill under the A714 bridge and digging a fish channel through the dense weed in the lower Penninghame Pond (in 2016).

Hatchery programme

GFT monitored the stocking programme by electrofishing 13 stocked sites. All contained good densities of fish. 2015/16 Cree Stocking Guidance document produced for the CDSFB which considers the latest best practice guidance and recent research.

Electrofishing surveys to monitor wild salmon stocks:

The focus this year was surveying suitable juvenile wild salmon sites on the Water of Minnoch catchment – overall numbers were healthy. Surveys were completed in July 2015.

Site	Grid reference	Trout fry*	Trout parr*	Salmon fry*	Salmon parr*
Pilnyark Burn – near Waterhead of Minnoch	362911	22.8	6.5	0	4.9
Minnoch – u/s of Rowantree Burn outflow	358903	2.7	0	13.4	13.4
Shalloch Burn – at side of track to cottage	365895	0	3.9	20.7	15.5
Minnoch – at Tarfessock	359880	1.7	0	59.7	3.4
Minnoch – at Kirriereoch Bridge	358866	0	0	67.7	18.3
Minnoch – Palgowan Bridge	371828	0	2	15	19
Knockcrayie Burn – u/s track bridge	370827	0	5.3	36.8	11.8
Glenhead Burn – u/s bridge near Glenhead	432798	7.7	7.7	0	24.9
Minnoch – u/s Holm Bridge	374773	0	0	56	15.3
Pulniskie Burn – d/s lower road bridge	365744	4	0	129.4	12.1

*fish numbers are all standardised to density per 100 m² of water (minimum densities)

Glenhead Burn Project:

The head water of the Glenhead Burn (which runs into Loch Trool) was diverted many years ago into the Dee catchment. This loss of water is now a concern as wild salmon have returned in good numbers to the lower and mid burn as water quality has improved. GFT have submitted details to SEPA requesting some water must be returned. We believe juvenile salmon over 2 km of the burn would benefit from this increased water flow if agreed.

Conservation Limits and mandatory catch and release

The data being used by Marine Scotland to calculate the Conservation Limits for the Solway rivers (and used to categorise rivers) is flawed. An over reliance on rod catch data, some dubious correction factors being used and a lack of local expertise / data means that the figures being generated are not accurate and thus may not be categorising rivers correctly. GFT are continuing to make representation to MS and looking at how and what local

data is required to correct the Conservation Limits in the future to show the true health of salmon stocks.

Proposed GFT works for the next 12 months on the Cree catchment:

- Priority to improve accuracy of Cree Conservation Limits calculations – this will require various data collection / analysis once we understand MS thinking.
- Continue to monitor and advise on best practice regarding the Cree stocking programme including the experimental stocking of autumn fry.
- Undertake survey of wild fish stocks on the High Cree and Palnure Burn catchments
- Progress increasing water flows in the Glenhead Burn
- Survey key tributaries of the Minnoch and High Cree so habitat enhancement works can be undertaken by various parties including anglers, GFT, RCHHT, FCS, etc.

APPENDIX 2

THE RIVER CREE HATCHERY AND HABITAT TRUST CHARITY SC042355

During the period from the 1st October 2014 to the 30th September 2015 RCHHT carried out the following works on the catchment of the District.

HATCHERY WORKS

Broodstock collection commenced in the last week of October and continued during November. The number of fish collected and the resulting approximate numbers of eggs were as follows:-

Cree – 4 hens, 3 cocks giving approx. 20,000 eggs

Minnoch – 14 hens, 11 cocks giving approx 45,000 eggs

Penkilm – 12 hens, 10 cocks giving approx. 65,000 eggs

Development of the fry was a little slower than last year due to the colder spell in the first couple of months of 2015. We constructed incubators this year, following an informative visit to the Keilder Hatchery. These produced a stronger young fish (we have photos of the construction stages on our facebook page if anyone would like to see).

The first fry were stocked out in April and this was completed by the middle of September. The stocking sites and approximate numbers of fry stocked were as follows:-

Stocking Sites & Numbers for 2015

Penkilm Burn

Approx No Eggs

Glenshalloch Burn

6000

Pulbae Burn	15000
Green Burn	5000
Campbells Burn	3000
Garlies Burn	7000
Upper Penkiln Burn	19000
Autumn Fry Upper Penkiln	5500
	<u>Total 60500</u>

Minnoch

Eldrick Burn	7000
Kirriemore Burn	15000
Pulniskie Burn	7000
	<u>Total 29000</u>

Cree

Fardin Burn	15000
Challoch Burn	5000
Castle Burn	5000
Millburn	5000
Linloskin	5000
	<u>Total 35000</u>

The autumn fry have done very well and seem strong, they have been fin clipped to enable us to identify them when electro-fishing or when they return as grilse or salmon. It takes a lot longer to stock out when at this size due to the amount you can safely carry in a bucket with the amount of oxygen available to them.

The Galloway Fisheries Trust also received 100 eyed eggs for their Salmon in the Classroom project and this was followed up by a visit to the hatchery by Minnigaff Primary School pupils.

We accompanied the GFT biologists again this year when they carried out electro-fishing surveys of most of the stocking sites during August. Again It was pleasing to note that there were good (and sometimes excellent) densities of fry and parr at all sites some being a bit smaller due to the cold conditions in the early part of the year.

HABITAT WORKS

Invasive non-native species

Work continued in clearing rhododendrons from the banks of the Penkiln Burn and spraying re-growth. It is very encouraging to see the amount of regrowth of vegetation in the areas that have been cleared. This summer we again hand picked extensive areas of Himalayan Balsam along the banks of the Cree. Japanese Knotweed has been sprayed again this September from the Ghyll Pool down to the Saughes Pool . Some areas have had a good kill rate, the smaller plants seem to be more resilient.

Bankside and instream works

The winter floods and gales brought down more trees into the Penkiln Burn and lower Cree, which were successfully removed.

Pike removal

During April, part of the Cree downstream of Cunninghams Ford to the loch of Cree was netted for pike. This produced 22 pike up to 6lbs and over 1000 perch up to 1.5lbs. All were dispatched. On opening many of the pike it revealed that many had been eating salmonids with one having 2 identifiable smolts. The bigger perch also had salmonids in their stomachs.

Challoch Burn Project

The Challoch burn project is all but finished with just a few minor works to complete. The project involved removing a culvert bridge and replacing with a spanned bridge to allow better fish access. The project has seen 2.2 kilometers of fencing erected along the banks of the burn to stop cattle poaching the ground which should reduce the amount of silt being washed down and encourage better riparian habitat. Water gates have also been installed. We have added 2 areas of gravel to try and enhance spawning of Salmon and Seatrout. Larger stones have also been added to make more fry and par habitat. Within the project we have cut back bank side trees to reduce over shading and bank side erosion.

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 3rd September. One change from previous years is that it is intended to stock a maximum of 10,000 fry into the upper Penkiln Burn as autumn fry.

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 Penkiln Burn, Pulbae and Green Burns 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. This work will commence in October 2015

Murdo Crosbie
Hatchery co-ordinator

