

RIVER CREE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

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River Cree Management Plan November 2017

Objective

The aim of the River Cree management plan is to protect and enhance the stocks of salmon and sea trout within the River Cree catchment. The plan details the works the Board wish to have carried out on the catchment in order to achieve this objective.

1. Protection

(a) Bailiffing

The Board currently have a head bailiff, Mr John Galloway, together with Mr Andrew Johnstone and Mr Murdo Crosbie. These bailiffs are authorised to protect the Cree catchment and costs are subsidised by the Board. The Cree catchment encompasses both the Dumfries & Galloway and Ayrshire districts. Scotland has moved to a single Police Force and the Board should be aware of how this may affect Bailiffing.

Action: All beat owners or their representatives should ensure the contact details of the Bailiffs are printed on Permits (RCDSFB Bailiffs)

(b) Conservation measures and code of practice

The Board currently has a defined Conservation Code which has been in place since 2012. This code will be reviewed each year.

Some beats enforce a more strict code than that of the Board – this is at the discretion of the beat owner. The Board Conservation Code should be the *minimum* standard to which every fishery within the catchment must adhere to.

Action: Review the Board Conservation Code annually (RCDSFB)

(c) Predator control

Avian: The Board has carried out counts of fish-eating birds which identified potential serious damage to fish stocks within the catchment. Following applications to SNH for licences to control cormorants and goosanders, licences to scare/shoot these birds were granted for the periods February-April 2016 and 2017. The Board intends to apply for licences in the future if surveys continue to show similar problems.

Action: Continue surveys of fish eating birds (RCHHT and volunteers)

Mammal: Mink – beat owners should remain vigilant for the presence of mink on the river. Mink traps are available from the Board for the specific purpose of trapping mink.

Seals – the Board do not regard the seal population within the immediate vicinity of the Cree estuary to pose a significant threat to the salmon and sea trout population. However the status and size of the seal population should be monitored and frequent users of the estuary have been asked to keep a diary of seal sightings.

Action: Remain vigilant for mink. Monitor status of seal population

Fish: Pike have always been present within the Cree catchment. It is considered that pike are having a significant detrimental impact on the juvenile salmon and sea trout population. There are two main pike zones in the catchment. One zone is on the river and is known locally as “the Loch of Cree”, the second is on Loch Trool. Netting has taken place in Loch Trool and in the Loch of Cree. If the necessary permissions can be obtained, then these areas will be netted or electro-fished in the future. The Board note that perch have been caught in recent seasons within the Cree catchment. Perch are not native to the Cree system and should **not** be returned to the river. The Board do not know of any method effectively to control the spread of the perch, however netting in the Loch of Cree has removed some. Perch have been caught from the meetings of the Cree & Minnoch, down to the A75 road bridge. The size and spread of the perch population should be monitored and perch should be removed from the river whenever possible.

Action: Conduct netting and/or electro-fishing of pike and perch. Remove perch whenever possible. Monitor size and spread of perch population (RCHHT).

(d) Environmental protection

The Board should support the local SEPA officer in dealing with any pollution incidents. The Board has made representation to SEPA to provide local staff with the equipment to effectively police the catchment.

Fishery owners are encouraged to report any pollution incidents direct to the local SEPA officer or the SEPA 24hr pollution hotline if it is outwith normal working hours.

(e) Forest design plans

The Board requests that GFT consult the Board with regard to all forest replanting design plans which affect the Cree catchment. Following consultation and agreement with the Board GFT will submit an appropriate response to any such plans on a case-by-case basis.

2. Enhancement

(a) Habitat works

(i) Barriers to migration: There are no natural barriers within the Cree catchment which impede the migration of salmon or sea trout to potentially significant spawning areas. There are impassable waterfalls on some Minnoch sub-tributaries – but there is minimal potential spawning areas above these. There are poorly designed culverts on Black Clauchrie Burn – there are no salmon at present accessing this area but the Board will support their removal or redesign.

The Board will organise the Minnoch and its tributaries and the spawning burns off the main stem and the Penkiln to be walked in late September each year. The spawning burns will be checked for any natural blockages and these will be removed under the direction of the Board.

There is a dam at the outfall of Loch Trool – the Board do not consider this dam to impede the migration of fish to Loch Trool.

Action: Walk spawning burns late September each year (volunteers). Support the removal of poorly designed road culverts (GFT and RCHHT)

(ii) Non-native species: A previous programme of Japanese Knotweed control significantly reduced the impact of JK on the catchment. This programme is no longer running, but RCHHT has carried out spraying of JK and pulling Himalayan Balsam. The removal and control of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan Balsam is the responsibility of the fishery owner. The Board will request RCHHT to monitor the presence of JK and HB and if it is found in the catchment will request that the fishery owner have it controlled. If assistance is required then the Board will request RCHHT to assist in control.

Action: Monitor presence of HB & JK. Request that fishery owners control HB & JK (RCHHT)

(iii) Sitka regeneration: The Board recognise that the natural regeneration of Sitka within the Minnoch, Penkiln and High Cree catchments is a significant problem. Where regeneration has been identified and is, or will in the future, degrade the riparian habitat, the Board will seek to have this controlled at the earliest stage possible. RCHHT has carried out significant Sitka removal on burns in the upper Penkiln and Minnoch catchments and the Board will therefore task the RCHHT with Sitka regeneration removal.

Action: Sitka regeneration removal (RCHHT)

(iv) Riparian zone and instream management: A number of tributaries/burns require bankside zone and instream management/improvement. The Board will ask RCHHT to produce a riparian zone and instream management plan for any tributary requiring maintenance or improvement. The work will be completed by RCHHT unless the works are of a more specialist nature when the Board will seek the appropriate advice.

Action: RCHHT implement or specialist

(v) Compacted spawning gravels: There may be localised areas of compacted spawning gravels within the catchment – although in general the Board believes it is not significantly impacting on salmon and sea trout reproduction. The Board will ask RCHHT to provide detail on any areas with potentially compacted gravels and will task the RCHHT and volunteers with gravel decompaction.

Action: RCHHT implement

(vi) Erosion: There are areas of erosion within the upper catchment, and in particular on the Minnoch. Some areas of erosion may be beneficial to the river (ie addition of spawning gravel) while others areas may have a negative impact (ie sediment, safety). The Board would ask RCHHT with identifying these areas. The repair of ‘bad’ erosion will be examined on a case-by-case basis and may require specialist assistance

Action: RCHHT identify

(b) High Cree Liming and other Works

The Board fully supported the liming trials which were carried out on the High Cree by the GFT, but the Board have no plans for any further liming trials. The Board also supports stocking non-acidified burns on the High Cree with salmon fry. Any future habitat enhancement works (e.g. cutting back Sitka regen. and re-planting with broadleaf trees) will be carried out by RCHHT .

Action: Stocking and habitat works to be carried out by RCHHT.

(c) Stocking

(i) Stocking Plan: The Board will request a Stocking Plan from GFT each season. This document will detail the location and number of fish to be stocked each year. The draft Stocking Plan will be presented to the Board NO LATER than 14th August each year if possible. The plan will be discussed at a Board meeting and the final stocking policy for that year agreed by the Board or a sub-committee of the Board.

Action: GFT prepare draft Stocking Plan, RCDSFB agree Stocking Plan.

(ii) Broodstock Capture: Following agreement by the Board on the Stocking Plan, the Board will apply for a licence to collect broodstock to meet the Stocking Plan.

The act of broodstock capture will be undertaken by RCHHT. Broodstock will be retained, stripped and the eggs laid down in the RCHHT hatchery facility on the Penkiln.

Action: Capture broodstock (RCHHT)

(iii) Planting-out hatchery fish: The hatchery reared juvenile fish will be planted out by RCHHT and volunteers. The young fish will be planted out in accordance with the agreed Stocking Plan.

Action: Planting-out of hatchery fish (RCHHT)

Note: A record of the Stocking Plan, captured broodstock and the number & location of hatchery-origin fish planted out each year will be passed to the Clerk of the board for lodgement in a central register.

Note: The Board will keep under review the possibility of rearing sea trout fry.

(d) Electro-fishing

(i) Stocking sites: The Board consider it essential that every stocking site is electro-fished every year. There are some 22 stocking sites in the catchment, though the number will vary according to the Stocking Plan. GFT have agreed that they will electro-fish one third of the stocking sites so that over a three year period they will have monitored all sites. The remaining sites will be electro-fished by RCHHT.

All electro-fishing data/analysis of the stocking sites should be completed and submitted to the Board NO LATER than 14th August each season – so that this data can be used to direct the Stocking Plan.

(ii) Survey/monitoring sites: Additional electro-fishing requires to be carried out for monitoring the health of fish stocks in the entire catchment. The Board request that this electro-fishing be carried out by GFT and RCHHT on a four-year rolling programme, so that the whole of the Cree catchment is electro-fished every four years.

Note: A record of all electro-fishing carried out each season on the Cree catchment will be passed to the Clerk of the board for lodgement in a central register.

(e) Water Quality

The Board have a continuing concern regarding water quality within the Cree catchment. There are two main issues: (1) acidification (2) pollution from forest operations

The Board intend to build a database of water quality measurements within the catchment. The board will encourage ad-hoc sampling of water quality (pH) and turbidity (secchi disk). These measurements will be collated each year and held by the Clerk to the board for lodgement in a central register.

The Board will encourage all incidents of water pollution to be reported direct to SEPA.

Note: A record of all water quality measurements carried out each season on the Cree catchment will be passed to the Clerk of the board for lodgement in a central register.

(f) Palnure Burn

The Board recognizes the sensitive nature of this burn but would wish to explore with SNH the possibility of carrying out habitat improvements and/or stocking salmon fry in this burn.

CONSERVATION LIMITS

The Board considers that it is desirable for the Cree to have a “grade1” status under the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations from time to time. To this end the Board requests GFT to report on any proposed changes to the model used by Marine Scotland for calculating conservation limits and its possible impact on the conservation status of the Cree under the Regulations. GFT agrees to attend meetings of the Salmon Liaison Group and to aim at those meetings to protect the Cree’s “grade 1” status so far as possible.

REGULAR MEETINGS

There should be regular meetings between the Chairman of the Board and representatives of GFT and RCHHT to discuss current and proposed works.

Division of Works

GFT

- Stocking Plan
- Electro-fishing of one third of stocking sites together with other electro-fishing as part of the rolling four-year programme
- Expert comment on forest plans & restructuring
- Work on Conservation Limits

RCHHT

- Broodstock capture
- Hatchery operations
- Planting-out of hatchery fish
- Sitka regeneration removal
- Riparian zone and instream works
- Netting and electro-fishing of pike and perch
- INNS
- Fish-eating birds – counts etc
- Electro-fishing of two thirds of the stocking sites together with other electro-fishing as part of the rolling four-year programme