

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 ON THE 27th NOVEMBER 2024

This report covers the period from the 1st October 2023 to the 30th September 2024

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.

During the period covered by this report the Board held four ordinary meetings (4th October 2023, 23rd November 2023, 7th February 2024, 1st May 2024, 31st July 2024). The AMP and APM was held on 23rd November 2023. The minutes from these meetings are available on the Boards website

The **Conservation Code** for the District remained largely unchanged for the 2024 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 2024 season. The Code appears on the Board's website. All river proprietors on the Cree have agreed to abide by the Conservation Code. The only changes made were to include the open season for fishing and the requirement for all anglers to carry forceps or a similar unhooking tool to aid in the quick release of salmon and seatrout

The Proposed Conservation status indicates the River Cree will retain its “Grade 1” status. The Cree will be the only river on the Solway and in SW Scotland to achieve “Grade 1” status.

This achievement is recognition of all the hard work that Murdo Crosbie and his team of volunteers put into the Cree. I would like to publicly thank Murdo for all his efforts.

On the 10th January 2024 SNH granted the Chairman a licence to shoot **fish eating birds** as an aid to scaring them. The licence period was from the 10th January 2024 to the 30th April 2024 (and up to the 31st May for male goosander only) and permitted a maximum of 7 goosander and 3

cormorants to be killed. The agents appointed by the Chairman shot 7 goosander and 3 cormorants under licence, scaring was also used to deter birds from settling in known smolt “pinch spots”.

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 plan was reviewed and agreed by the Board in October 2024. The current plan (dated October 2024) can be seen on the Board’s website. It will be subject to further review from time to time.

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.

The Board believes that the current rod catch figures (especially when compared to other rivers locally) Prove the current River Management Plan is working

Privacy Policy

The Board have completed a Privacy and Data Protection Policy. This document can be viewed on the Boards website

Marine Scotland

Marine Scotland published the “Wild Salmon Strategy: Implementation Plan 2023-2028” on 1st January 2022. They also published a document titled “Marine Scotland Wild Atlantic Salmon Stocking Policy”.

The Board consider that neither of these documents will impact on the current Board Policy

Bailiffing

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. Forest and land Scotland have now erected permanent “No Fishing” signage at Kirriereoch and access points above this

Wind Farms

There are currently two wind farm developments proposed for the Cree catchment. One wind farm of 13 turbines at Glenvernoch (in the river Cree catchment) and a 14 turbine development for Blair Hill, which sits above Knockman wood and Drannadow – this wind farm is within the Penkiln Burn catchment and also the river Cree. Importantly, the Blair Hill wind farm development will require significant engineering works upstream of the hatchery intake on the Penkiln Burn. Any pollution or siltation could have a devastating impact on any fish in the hatchery.

The Glenvernoch Wind Farm proposal has been submitted for planning. The Blair Hill wind farm is proposed to be presented to planning in January 2025. At the board meeting of 4th October 2023, the Board held a discussion on the wind farm proposals and voted unanimously to object to any planning application. This has been minuted. The Board see no positives to either wind farm development. The Board will submit a response to the planning application for Glenvernoch wind farm, and also Blair Hill when it has been submitted

Newton Stewart Flood Prevention Scheme

The proposed NSFPS is still very much live and appears to be proceeding. The local Council have “approved the scheme without modification”.

The Board and a number of individuals, including anglers and fishery owners submitted formal objections to the scheme. A total of 58 objections were received, of which half are angling/fishing related. I attended a meeting of the council and scheme designers at McMillan Hall on 14th November 2023.

The environmental report published by the designers made no mention of migratory fish or angling. The meeting on 14th November sought to address this and is the start of an improved engagement process with the angling community.

The scheme is now subject to a local earring and the government has appointed an independent reporter. The Reporter has been in contact with the Board and is of the opinion that the RCDSFB should have been appointed Statutory Consultees from the beginning of the process. The council must now decide whether to proceed with the scheme knowing that due process has not been followed, or engage with the River Board to find a solution. On 21st November 2024 the council provided a draft document titled “Newton Stewart Flood Prevention Scheme - Protection of Fishing and River Environment². Importantly, the council do not wish to carry out a full EIA report for the scheme – and are asking the River Board to accept the above document and its content in lieu of an EIA. The River Board is currently considering the report and the matter of the NSFPS.

The FPS has the potential to cause significant damage to the river environment - both short and long term. The exiting pool and riffle structures and angling pools could be significantly altered or destroyed by the scheme.

The Board is committed to ensuring that migratory fish are wholly protected and also in supporting Newton Stewart Angling Association in their efforts to ensure their angling waters and pools are not degraded by the scheme.

Salmon Conservation Status

The salmon population in Great Britain has been downgraded by the IUCN to a conservation status of “Endangered”

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 23rd November 2022 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 23rd November 2023 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.

PART FOUR – GENERAL

Catches - The Marine Scotland officially recorded 2023 rod catch for the Cree District was 219 (4 fin clipped) salmon and grilse (347 in 2022). This compares very favourably with neighbouring rivers (Bladnoch 35, Luce 42, Urr 52, Stinchar 99, Nith 244, Annan 97, Girvan 22, Doon 283). The 2023 fishing season was impacted by drought conditions in early spring and early summer. However, good numbers of Salmon ran the river. Grilse numbers were lower, with a large number of Salmon in the catches. Seatrout numbers were again worryingly low

The Board's estimate of the rod catch for 2024 season is 320 salmon and grilse (7 fin clipped salmon reported by anglers). Salmon catches all over Scotland have generally better than in recent seasons. There was a wet summer with good angling conditions throughout. There was no significant run of fresh autumn fish to any of the Scottish rivers again this season. Seven adipose fin clipped fish have been reported by anglers this season – however many anglers are still not checking their fish.

Hatchery Operations – Permission was obtained from all the required fishery owners and landowners. Sufficient broodstock were captured to fulfil the Stocking Policy Document. The Stocking Policy Document was received from GFT within the deadline and was agreed by the Board

Broodstock capture this season has proven to be relatively straightforward. Permissions were again received for all the relevant waters. The numbers of adult salmon found during broodstock capture were very encouraging. Good numbers of Salmon were found in the Minnoch and Penkiln, whilst rod angling was very effective on the main stem of the Cree. Good numbers of salmon have been observed spawning on the main stem of the River Cree

On the Penkiln Burn 15% of the fish handled were adipose fin clipped.

Only a small percentage of the fish captured from any one location are retained for broodstock. This ensures sufficient salmon remain to spawn naturally.

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

Jamie Hyslop

Chairman

Dated: 27th November 2024



RIVER CREE HATCHERY & HABITAT TRUST SCIO

During the period from the 1st October 2023 to the 30th September 2024 RCHHT carried out the following works on the catchment of the District

HATCHERY WORKS

Broodstock collection started on the Water of Minnoch above Kirriereoch Bridge on the 24th October, Water levels were good for the stretch above Kirriereoch and made netting fish a lot easier. Good numbers of fish were seen in most of the pools . 16 hens and 7 cocks were taken from here.

Glentool Estates once again dragged their heels before granting permission, although slightly earlier than last season. Once permission was granted we electro fished around Kings Ford and Palgowan. Conditions did not help us with higher water levels than we would have liked. Reasonable numbers of fish were seen although difficult to catch with fish leaving the pools. 6 hens and 2 cocks were retained. I stripped the first Minnoch fish on 3rd of November and stripped the last Cree fish on the 24th December.

Broodstock & Egg numbers

<u>Minnoch</u>	<u>22 Hens</u>	<u>9 Cocks</u>	<u>Approx</u>	<u>92,000 eggs</u>
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<u>Penkiln</u>	<u>14 Hens</u>	<u>6Cocks</u>	<u>Approx</u>	<u>61,000 eggs</u>
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The River Cree brood stock collection was all done by rod and line and was completed by the 3rd November, A lot easier than previous years.

Cree	10 Hens	5 Cocks	Approx 38,000 eggs
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The Hatchery ran smoothly with very mild conditions throughout the winter months .This meant that the eggs developed quickly again this year with the first of the Minnoch eggs starting to eye up on the 14th of December. Conditions remained mild, and as a result, the first of the eggs started to hatch on the 26th January. Unfortunately the spring was cold which meant that the fry were not going onto the feed very well resulting in bigger losses in the early stage.

Stocking Sites & Numbers for 2024

The first fry were stocked out on the 23rd May and this was completed by the 21st October. 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	Left fallow this year	Upper Penkiln
Burn	20,000	
Upper Penkiln Autumn Fry	10,900	
	<u>Total 53,900</u>	
<u>Minnoch</u>		
Eldrick Burn	15,000	
Kirriemore Burn	20,000	
Pilnyark Burn	15,000	

Rowantree
10,000

60,000

Cree

Fardin Burn

35,000

Clauchrie Burn

Challoch Burn

Castle Burn

Millburn

Linloskin Autumn Fry



Total

1,000

4,000

7,000

10,000

10,500

Total 67,500



The Penkiln autumn fry were stocked out from the 26th of July through to the 21st of October with 10,900 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 from July through to the early part of October. We stocked approx 10,500 into this location. We also stocked approx 5,000 into the runs at Millburn after the site had been electro fished. All autumn fry were in good condition although growth rate was slower with the cold start, all were fin clipped.

All autumn fry were graded throughout the summer and the larger fish clipped and released as we were grading them.

Electro- Fishing



We surveyed 11 stocked sites. We made a start on the electro-fishing surveys in the week commencing the 15th of July. The fin clipped sites on the upper Penkiln, which totalled 3 sites, once again proved to be very successful with good results. Before electro-fishing the top site, we released some of this years fin clipped fry approximately 300 to 400 metres downstream. When doing the survey it was noted the amount of fry from the stocking that had migrated upstream.

Photo of some of the Autumn Fry from the Upper Penkiln burn

RCHHT Electro fishing results stocked sites 2024

Site	Date	Trout Fry	Trout Parr	Salmon Fry	Salmon Parr	PH
Upper Penkiln Burn Autumn Fry	15/07/24	0	1	0	22	6.4
Upper Penkiln Burn (Middle)Autumn Fry	15/07/24	1	5	0	29	6.5
Upper Penkiln Burn Lower Autumn Fry	15/07/24	5	3	4	15	6.5
Pulbae Burn						
Green Burn						
Campbells Burn						
Garlies Burn						
Challoch Burn	30/07/24	21	0	140	26	6.6
Castle Burn	30/07/24	6	0	84	13	6
Claughrie Burn	30/07/24	23	10	53	0	5.7
Millburn (Cree)	15/07/24	0	2	35	17	6.5
Fardin	24/07/24	0	2	77	14	6.6
Eldrick	24/07/24	7	7	46	34	6.9
Pilnyark	24/07/24	11	4	82	17	7.2
Kirriemore	24/07/24	3	1	56	11	6.9

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All figures converted to give Minimum densities per 100m²

0

0 Red

0 Orange

0 Yellow

0 Light Green

0 Dark Green

SFCC classification

Salmon fry

0	absent	White
<4.7	E very poor	red
4.7-<10.3	D poor	orange
10.3-<20.3	C moderate	yellow
20.3-<42.1	B Good	Light green
>42.1	A excellent	Dark green

Salmon Parr

0	absent	White
<2.6	E very poor	red
2.6-<5.1	D poor	orange
5.1-<9.1	C moderate	yellow
9.1-<15.8	B Good	Light green
>15.8	A excellent	Dark green

Trout fry

0		absent	White
<2.5	E	very poor	red
2.5-<5.3	D	poor	orange
5.3-<12.4	C	moderate	yellow
12.4-<30.3	B	Good	Light green
>30.3	A	excellent	Dark green

Trout Parr

0		absent	White
<1.6	E	very poor	red
1.6-<3.1	D	poor	orange
3.1-<5.6	C	moderate	yellow
5.6-<10.4	B	Good	Light green
>10.4	A	excellent	Dark green

HABITAT WORKS

Rhododendron Clearing

A walk over survey in the summer has shown some new growth and some re-growth. These are now at a size where spraying will be effective.

Japanese Knotweed & Himalayan Balsam

Spraying took place from the end of August and once again only plants that had flowers and of large size were sprayed. Area covered was from the weir at the Ghyll pool down to the A75 Bridge. Again, any plants that had not matured and flowered were left to hopefully mature and flower next year. Plants are left until the autumn and to flower as this is the best time to hit them with Glyphosphate. Michael Todd has continued picking Himalayan Balsam from the Brewery pool down to the Saughs pool.

Bankside and instream works



One
was



tree

removed from the NSAA part of the Ghyll pool, this was pulled in by a hand winch and cut into small sections and left to disperse in the next rise in water.

Before

After

Forestry

Project

With the help of our volunteers, we managed to get our maintenance program finished for the 23/24 season. This entailed removing tubes from trees that we felt were big enough to withstand the elements and browsing deer, these tubes had to be cut from most trees as the branches have grown out through the mesh and making the job very difficult. Any trees that had died were replaced and re tubed. in total approximately 1,750 were planted as replacement or utilising any good tubes and stakes that were taken off other sizable trees. As we were doing each burn we were hand pulling a few self seeded Sitka Spruce trees, Unfortunately we were halted by FLS on the use of a chainsaw due to an earlier accident by another party somewhere on FLS ground. They did give us the green light to restart but too late in the season. The benefits of this work is to help create a buffer zone from the commercial crop of Sitka Spruce and hopefully reduce the acidity that leaches into the water courses. It also lets more light reach the water which helps to increase invertebrate numbers. The broadleaved trees that have been planted will, in time, create bank stability, dappled shade, add nutrients and attract a greater number of insects.



School Visits

The school visits started in November with 6 schools and 73 pupils being involved. The first visit is all about the life cycle of the salmon, the problems that they face and the reasoning behind the hatchery. We then strip a hen salmon of her eggs and they also get to see and find out the fertilization process with the milt from the cock salmon before laying down the eggs.

The second visit consists of the children releasing a small amount of fry, they have a bucket each with approx 5 fry in each bucket, once released we then discuss what the fry are likely to be feeding on and also do a kick test to enable the children to see what invertebrates are within the system.

The third visit is to Glenamour loch to fish for rainbow trout, where 73 pupils all caught at least 1 fish each and with 72 of the fish despatched and taken home. The loch is stocked by Newton Stewart Angling Association to hopefully give them a better chance at catching a fish. It is also discussed that these fish can be killed for eating and the biggest majority of the children take their fish home. The Schools involved include Penninghame, Creetown, Minnigaff, St Ninians, Wigtown and Kirkcowan

Pupils showing off their catch

Checking the invertebrates

Fish Eating Birds

In November we did a walk over survey of the Penkiln, Minnoch and the main stem of the Cree, recording any sightings of Goosanders and Cormorants, This survey is carried out normally one hour after sunrise and is only possible due to the amount of volunteers. The information is then submitted to Natural Scotland by Jamie Hyslop on behalf of the river Board



A



licence was then granted early January which permitted 7 Goosanders and 3 Cormorants to be culled. This was achieved by the end of May. During this period we were continually patrolling parts of the lower river using scaring tactics.

Fin Clipped Salmon

During the 2024 angling season I had reports of 7 fin clipped hatchery fish being caught. One was caught on the Minnoch in the spring Unfortunately, I feel that fish are been missed by anglers not checking.

A fin clipped salmon of approx 6lbs caught by Dougie Grove on the Galloway Estate water just above the Challoch



A Fin Clipped fish caught by Murdo approx 6lbs Machermore pool



Constant Monitoring on the Claughrie Burn

For the last year we have had a constant monitoring recorder deployed in the Claughrie burn looking at PH levels and Temperature.



Guardians of our Rivers

Myself and 8 volunteers took part in a practical training session with Kerry Dodd from Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust. This was the follow up to a theory session on identifying in river Invertebrates.

All volunteers are now trained and competent in identification of these bugs. We are intending to monitor 5 different sites on the River Cree system on a monthly basis from April through to October each year. We did manage to make a start after getting a break in the weather with water levels being low enough to get our first invertebrate survey done.

Over 2 days we conducted invertebrate surveys on 5 different sites, 1 on the Minnoch, High Cree, Penkiln and 2 sites on the main stem of the Cree. All sites

produced decent amounts of invertebrates. A second survey was done on all sites in early October , This will be the last invertebrate survey of 2024. We will resume monthly surveys from April next year.

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.

It is intended to continue with our habitat work on FLS land to include the removal of sitka spruce trees, plant Broadleaved trees and to perform maintenance works to include replacing dead trees and removing tubes from trees that are large enough.

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.

It is intended to continue with the water quality monitoring

It is intended to continue with invertebrate surveying by means of kick testing on all 5 sites monthly from April to October.

Murdo Crosbie
Hatchery co-ordinator

Summary of relevant GFT work on the Cree catchment in 2024

(for CDSFB AGM Meeting 27/11/24)

- **Stop the replanting of conifers on deep peats (to address acidification)** – GFT continues to lobby hard for this using the Galloway rivers as a case study at the following meetings: Scottish Government 'Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan Group'; FMS Regional meeting; to Scottish Forestry Land Use and Environment Policy Advisor Linsey Mason-McLean; Galloway & South Ayrshire Biosphere; SEPA National Team; in forestry plan consultations; FLS; NatureScot; and on GFT social media and on the GFT website. GFT is giving a talk in December to the Scottish Forestry Regional Stakeholder Group which include concerns regarding replanting on deep peat.
- Updated the '**GFT Cree Stocking Guidance**' report to cover 2024 / 2025 - the report was agreed with the Board stocking sub-committee.
- With regard to the **two windfarm proposals** near Newton Stewart – GFT will be submitting consultation responses.
- GFT continue to **monitor water temperatures** at 2 sites on the High Cree on behalf of the High Cree Game Fishers.
- GFT completed various **electrofishing** on the Cree catchment. There were no NEPS surveys in 2024. Electrofishing was undertaken at 6 stocked sites on the Penkiln Burn for inclusion in the stocking guidance report. The GFT continue to deliver the rolling three year programme which monitors wild salmon spawning across the Cree catchment. This is important data which we need to be able to respond to various consultations such as forestry restructuring plans. This year GFT completed sites on the Minnoch (at Tarfessock, at Kirriereoch Bridge, Shalloch Burn) and 5 lower Cree sites (by Penninghame House, near Challock Church, White Hills, above Suspension Bridge and below Creebridge). The data was provided to the CDSFB through inclusion in the Stocking Guidance Report. The data is available to anyone on request.
- GFT sit on the Scottish Government '**Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan Delivery Group**'. We are using this to highlight the unacceptable on-going situation where Sitka spruce continues to be replanted on some deep peats even though it is known this causes acidification.
- GFT have been developing our capacity to organise and oversee **peatland restoration** work for small forest to bog sites – peatland restoration is an important way to address acidification. We consider this type of peatland restoration work needs prioritised locally. We have been looking into two sites in the High Cree catchment which we would like to restore soon.
- Sadly **North American signal crayfish** were confirmed in GFT surveys in the upper Balloch Burn behind Creetown (which flows into the lower Cree estuary). They are well

established so trapping is not feasible to control the overall population. GFT plan to identify their exact distribution next year and then consider if anything can be done about them.

- **Invasive Non-Native plant control:** Tracy Starks (GFT INNS Control Officer) has completed control of two populations of American skunk cabbage on the Cree catchment (approx. 200 plants near Glentool and a further 300 plants near Challoch). This work will be on-going over the next few years.
- **Monitoring water quality & water temperatures:** GFT are undertaking a study of water temperatures (this will be on-going at 12 sites) and water quality parameters (including pH) using our sonde network (5 constant monitoring sondes) and regular spot sampling at 55 sites this winter/next spring across the Palnure Burn, Penkiln Burn, Minnoch, Water of Trool and High Cree. The water quality work is part of a rolling programme GFT have been undertaking around the Galloway rivers. The Cree work will follow a similar study completed last year on the Bladnoch catchment which has led to useful discussions between GFT, SEPA, NatureScot, Scottish Forestry and the BDSFB regarding forestry on deep peats, forestry restructuring and peatland restoration across the Bladnoch catchment. The data collected on the Cree will be written up into a report and shared with the Cree DSFB.

If you want to see the Bladnoch report completed earlier this year to see the sort of work being undertaken on the Cree this winter check this link - https://www.nathonjones.com/files/GFT_2024_Bladnoch_WQM_Report_Final.pdf