

MINUTES OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST OFFICES		PRESENT:	
DATE: 07 December 2012		John Mackenzie (JM)	Richard Wilson (RW)
OPENED AT: 10.30 CLOSED AT: 13.15		Bob Kindness (BK)	Melanie Smith (MS)
IN ATTENDANCE:		Angus Davidson (AD)	Richard Greene (RG)
Peter Cunningham (PC)	Peter Minting (PM)	Nigel Pearson (NP) [via telephone]	
Callum Sinclair (RAFTS)	Mary Gibson (MG)	APOLOGIES:	
Donna-Claire Hunter (RAFTS)	David Barclay (DB)	Henry Dalgety (HD)	Mark Williams (MW)
Veronica Mullaney (VM)	Peter Jarosz (PJ)	David Barclay (DB)	Ben Hadfield (BH)

1. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the 8th October 2012 minutes which were accepted as a true record – proposed by RG seconded by BK.

2. **FINANCE REPORTS**

2.i and 2.ii There were no issues arising from both the cash projections and the management reports.

2.iii All trustees have replied in full agreement to the proposal that the trust's accounts move from full audit (the requirement stated in the WRFT's Deed of Trust) to independent review (the current OSCAR and legal requirement). There is a considerable cost saving associated with this change.

2.iv In order to keep a balance between financial contributions from proprietors in the WRASFB area and those who are not a full catch analysis of the southern rivers has been completed. There remains, however, a need to do a comparison check with catch analysis of a number of rivers within the board area. That way a comparison can be accurately made and a more informed assessment of the southern rivers' contributions can then be made.

3. **RAFTS Managing Interactions: Aquaculture Project**

- Presentation from Donna-Claire Hunter and Callum Sinclair.
- Highlighted that project purpose was being explained in meetings with all the Trusts involved.
- Project focuses on wild fisheries interests.
- 3 major activities: sea trout post smolt sweep netting, genetic sampling and analysis and locational guidance and zones of sensitivity.

A number of points of detail were raised, the main one being that it was critical for the credibility of the project that all the data fed into the programme must be absolutely sound and robust.

4. **PLANNING AHEAD**

4.i New Biologist

Peter Minting has been appointed as the new biologist (following Jonah Tosney's move to Norfolk) and his role, based in the office at Strathcarron, will cover the same geographical patch and be a similar role as Jonah's. He will be involved in the recent raft of aquaculture applications hence:

4.ii There is a need to write up a procedure for responses by WRFT to applications and appeals and for it to be circulated to all trustees for their agreement – **PJ**.

4.iii Angling Advisory Project

This project is to provide an advisory service for anglers (that includes a biosecurity element) based on an "interactive platform" and "Smartphone apps". It is intended to be interactive and will also allow users to report non-native invasive species around the Gairloch and Portree areas. It is financed with a grant from ENTRUST.

4.iii Bruachaig Restoration Project

A quantity (about 7000) of large salmon fry was put in the Bruachaig above the falls in the past few weeks. There is a possible use for Angus Morrison's rotary screw trap to be used to monitor the numbers going to sea next year and to complement the monitoring of adults returning. Permission to use the trap has been sought from Angus and we await his response. BK commented that, following a visit to look at its headwaters, he thought the Bruachaig was an ideal river for salmon habitat that was being under-utilized currently.

4.iv P C Biologist's Report (PC's full report is attached below)

PC reported:

- 416 salmon have been caught on the River Carron - 3 short of 210 record - with many fish below the Loch system.
- Grilse numbers much higher than last year with grilse probably larger than previously seen.
- Sea trout sampling - need to make sure it is done at the right time to catch fish in the sea pools – this may require the use of a boat.
- **Herring Project** - long and varied interviews of (older generation) fishermen about the former herring industry have been completed.
- All could talk about herring spawning grounds - linked into sea trout and salmon.
- All interviewees agreed that the arrival of large trawlers was when things started to change for the worse.
- Most of the interviewees considered the reason for low fish stocks to be combination of overfishing in the first place and changing sea temperature.
- They noted that increased sea temperature seems to have caused a spread of breeding in clams and prawns - through winter.
- Final report will be written on basis of interviews over the last year and will outline generalised findings. Will also do a map - showing where fishing areas are - where fishing for herring taking place.
- The project has been a great insight into fishing in the west coast and Peter C is keen to put the findings of the project together as a poster.
- It may be possible to do some local inshore monitoring of local populations of herring - interest from SAMS (Sheila Heymans) in looking at inshore fisheries.
- A bid (part of a European Project) from SAMS has gone in for a project for a student to undertake.
- There has also been a WREN application - linked into schools etc. - all as part of the herring project.
- **Mink** - Bid in with RAFTS to co-ordinate control of mink - using volunteers.
- Minnow found at the top of the river Ewe system - will be interesting to see what happens - especially as this is a core area for sea trout smolt production.

5 **WRASFB**

The new board meets on 3rd January to elect a chairman and consider its relationship with WRFT among other things.

6. **AOB:**

The Scottish Salmon Company has appealed against the planning refusal of the proposed Kishorn fish farm and WRFT has been invited to respond to this appeal (see also 4.ii). Our response will be submitted shortly.

7. **Dates of Future Meetings**

There had been a request for the change of the date of our next meeting - the change was agreed with a new date of 4th March replacing the previous proposed date of 21st March – see below for the latest list of forward dates:

8. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

NEXT MEETINGS	DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Trustees' meeting	04/03/2013	WRFT Office	10.30
Trustees' meeting	30/05/2013	WRFT Office	10.30
Trustees' meeting	01/08/2013	WRFT Office	10.30

WRFT Trustee Meeting 7th December 2012

Report for Trustees by Peter Cunningham, WRFT biologist (5th Dec 2012)

1. Juvenile fish-surveys & river reports (core-funded). No further juvenile fish surveys since last meeting. I've made some progress on compilation of results; and also on the Torridon fish and habitat survey report (draft nearly finished!). I attended the SFCC electro-fishing workshop on 1st & 2nd November where protocols were reviewed and new equipment compared. A useful workshop . . .

2. Sea trout sampling and surveys (core funded in August and September)

One further sweep net session of the Flowerdale estuary on 15/10 where 14 sea trout were caught, including two mature female fish of over 400mm. Most fish carried no lice (maximum 4 lice). The catch of mature fish was not as large as anticipated so later in the day we explored a short section of the Flowerdale burn finding several mature sea trout, including a female fish that had previously been captured 6 times in the estuary (including initial capture in March 2011). This supports the hypothesis that a majority of the sea trout taken in the Flowerdale estuary in recent years are fish which originate in the Flowerdale burn. The 2012 sea trout report will consider and compare growth rates and rates of marine survival for Flowerdale sea trout with those of other sampling sites in Wester Ross.

The composition of spawning trout in the Sguod system was investigated by electro-fishing and using a fyke net. The fyke was operated by Roger Mclachlan. Over 80 trout were caught between 17th and 29th October, of which the great majority were and brown (rather than sea) trout and male. Three sea trout were taken, including a female of 420mm (largest fish in sample) and a male of 373mm. Mature female brown trout were also present (less than 10 were caught). The trap was removed following very heavy rainfall when the stream became unfishable. Tentative conclusions: (1) mature male trout greatly outnumber mature female trout. (2) the mature female sea trout was much larger than any of the mature female brown trout, so egg deposition by 'sea trout' may not be that much less than by brown trout. Analyses and report to follow.

3. Fish farm visits (?core funded)

PC visited MH Isle Ewe on 4/12 with Ray Dingwall. This was interesting and useful. Thank you and well done to Stevie, Connor and team for good progress so far this production cycle. A report will be drafted (to be agreed). I plan to visit other farms approaching 2nd year of production cycle early in 2013, subject to agreement of all concerned.

4. Rod catches of salmon and sea trout

Indications are that it has been a good year for salmon following rainfall in the second half of the summer and autumn. The 2012 Gruinard catch of 267 salmon and grilse was slightly above the 5 year average; the Ewe catch is estimated at around 300 fish (also above 5 year average); and Carron just short of a record year. Other figures to follow at meeting. The largest salmon reported to date was a fish of 30lb . . .

Figures for sea trout remain generally poor. The Gruinard catch of 17 sea trout is below a very low 5 year average. Figures for the Ewe system are not yet available (and note that Loch Maree Hotel was closed all season so minimal fishing effort); the largest Loch Maree sea trout reported was a 3.5lb sea trout taken at the head of the loch in September (in 1980 12% of rod caught sea trout were of 4lb or more).

5. Tournai trap project (supported by Marine Harvest)

Following the collapse of a small section of retaining wall in the pool with the upstream trap on 14/10, the trap was decommissioned for the year (it's not a big section of wall and can be repaired next spring). As reported for last meeting, a record number of 43 salmon (nearly all grilse) were taken in the upstream trap in 2012 prior to 14/10. It is unlikely many other fish entered the system and were missed after that date. Of sea

trout, only 3 finnock for the whole year, one of which had sea lice damage to dorsal fin. Smallest number of sea trout since 2003.

Water levels were high through much of November and early December, and there have been many opportunities for grilse to access spawning areas high up the burn above the loch. It will be very interesting to find out in 2013 whether salmon have spawned in areas where fry were absent this year.

6. Bruachaig Salmon Restoration project (funded by the Scottish Government via RAFTs and Ewe proprietors, with support from Coulin Estate, and from 2011, from Scottish and Southern Energy and Marine Harvest). Following discussions with Eric Verspoor, ~7000 salmon fry (progeny of Kinlochewe River fish) from Bob Kindness were stocked into the Bruachaig above the falls on 16/11. DNA samples have been taken from which they can be recognised in future years. Thank you to Neil Morrison and Bob for rearing the wee fish and to Roddy McLennan and Frank Kalinowski for helping with stocking them out.

I helped Neil and Simon Stewart at Coulin hatchery on 20/11, including collecting samples of DNA of broodfish for the Bruachaig Project. Eggs were stripped from all fish for hatchery. Scales were read; one of the fish was a second time spawner. Later in the day I observed salmon spawning in 4 separate places in a nearby burn. A female salmon had been taken by an otter nearby.

7. Herring Project (and other marine initiatives)

Sue Pomeroy has carried out a further interview of a fisherman and is now nearing completion of contract (PJ can update). Sue has done a superb job and I look forward to listening to all recordings and collating information.

The WREN bid to SNH for funding of a follow up herring project was unsuccessful. However, a bid to HLF is also being submitted (developed by Helen Smith of Rowantree Consultants) and other possible funding options are being explored. In parallel, following a meeting with Dr Sheila Heymans in Inverness, UHI-SAMS / Scottish Marine Institute have included a project proposal to investigate inshore herring spawning areas as part of an international collaborative bid for funding for a series of marine projects across Western Europe. WRFT has offered support for this project subject to the availability of resources. I discussed other opportunities for collaborative work with UHI SAMS including student projects possibilities and using our sweep nets to collect samples of juvenile flatfish and gadids (which we catch as bi-catch when sweep netting for sea trout).

8. Marine Protected Areas (local community bid update . . .)

Further developments are likely within the next week or two . . .

9. Mink & other invasive species (WRFT activity currently core funded)

Another two mink were caught by the Little Gruinard river, which seems to be the hot spot for mink in the area – with 9 for the year to date (or else they are much under recorded in other areas).

A minnow was found by Simon Stewart in Loch Clair (top of Ewe system) signalling their arrival in the Ewe headwaters. Earlier in the summer a minnow was taken in the A' Ghairbhie river near Cromasaig during e-fishing survey; however they had not been recorded in the Coulin lochs. Implications for sea trout smolt production will be better understood following monitoring at MSS Shieldaig Sea trout project.

10. Charr and trout week

Dr Jennifer Dodd, Alex Lyle, and students Oliver Hooker and Martin Hughes from Glasgow University came up for week 5th to 9th November (all at own expense). Oliver was delighted as he returned with fertilised charr eggs for his PhD project after the team (with Jonah's help) were successful in catching charr broodstock at Coulin. We were less successful in catching broodstock trout for Martin's project: several large male trout were taken in the Loch na Fideil burn (of 40cm+) but no females (just a wee bit too late in the year for most trout spawning). Nets were set by Alex Lyle in Loch Bad na H-Achlaise in search of charr; none were caught, brown trout and an unexpected catch of two adult salmon were taken. The salmon were still alive and were smuggled back into the loch (I'm assuming these were Badachro fish that had taken a wrong turning as there

is very little suitable juvenile salmon habitat in the system). The biggest excitement was the rediscovery of charr in the 'Goose Loch' (Loch a Bhaid Luachraich). See: <http://www.wrft.org.uk/news/newsitem.cfm?id=156>. Thanks to all, including Pete Minting for his help for a day as a volunteer.

11. WRFT Fisheries Management Plan review

A summary report has been drafted, primarily for RAFTS, to provide update on progress. I've used the opportunity to reflect on what we've been doing and proposed priorities for future work. The document may be of some value to Trustees as a basis for discussion of future priorities.

12. Other notes

- PJ and I met Jonah and Prof Eric Verspoor to discuss options for Loch Maree research programme and facilities required (16/10). PJ and I also met JT on 15/10 to wish him well on his move to Norfolk. Jonah looks forward to returning to Wester Ross to help with loch sampling expeditions at a future date!
- I attended Area Advisory Group meetings at SNH Kinlochewe (12/10) and Dingwall (16/11). One interesting development is a programme to classify small water bodies (lochs of area of less than 5ha) or streams with catchment area of less than 10km². At the small water bodies [SWB] meeting, following an example from Orkney where targets have been set to improve status of small sea trout systems, we agreed to prioritise classification of SWBs within the 'Torridon Coastal' catchment (which extends from around Loch Torridon, around Loch Gairloch and streams draining into wester Loch Ewe). That includes several small sea trout stream systems within our area that to date have not been classified, with potential for targets to be set to address any issues of concern sooner rather than later. WRFT has been asked to help provide information, and additional surveys are required.
- Aquaculture Debate, Ullapool. 8/11. A series of presentations by those opposed to salmon farming including Don Staniford from GAIAA; and Kurt Odekalv of Norway's Green warriors. Rather one sided! Kurt's presentation was the most interesting, and included a description of prototype closed containment system now in development in Norway. Part of Kurt's presentation can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9uRwrnw2XA> (unfortunately the bit about the development of closed containment systems in Norway which I'd like to know more about does not seem to be included). Concerns of plans for as many as 14 new large farms in waters around Skye were expressed by Arthur Sevestre a representative of the new Skye Waters Against Salmon Farming group.
- At their request, I presented a talk on 'Sustainable Fisheries' to UHI Sustainable Development students at their study weekend at Findhorn on 27th October (on my way north after a week's holiday).
- I helped with a trout dissection class for Gairloch High school pupils (Andrew Johnson's Biology class) on 31/10. Subsequently we set up an aquarium with charr and trout at the school but unfortunately they all died overnight before the pupils were able to see them. An opportunity to present a lesson with 'live' rather than 'dead' fish is now required . . . (c. help with sweep netting in 2013)
- Alfie Gudgeon, from Gairloch High School has been helping WRFT for 1.5 hours once / week over past couple of months as part of Duke of Edinburgh Award requirements. Alfie has learned to read trout scales. I led him on two wild goose chases in search of spawning salmon in the River Kerry (no salmon seen!). So back in the office this week: pMPA poster being developed.
- GoPro video: recorded various Arctic charr week activities, Flowerdale and Sguod trout sampling (thank you to Maddy Scobie), Coulin hatchery activity, salmon spawning stream (though not of spawning salmon so far) and a basking shark since last meeting. I'll put together a film of edited highlights for 2013 (perhaps a job for Alfie . . .)

[end]