

MINUTES OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST OFFICES		PRESENT: David Barclay – Vice-Chairman (DB) Bob Kindness (BK) Mark Williams (MW) Nigel Pearson (NP) Henry Dalgetty (HD) Melanie Smith (MS) [- via Skype]
DATE:	31 May 2012	
OPENED AT:	16.00	
CLOSED AT:	18.15	
IN ATTENDANCE: Peter Cunningham (PC) Jonah Tosney (JT) Veronica Mullaney (VM) Peter Jarosz (PJ)		APOLOGIES: Ben Hadfield (BH) Richard Greene (RG) Richard Wilson (RW) John Mackenzie (JM)

1. MATTERS ARISING

1.i There were no matters arising from the 29th March 2012 minutes.

2. TRUSTEES

2.i Henry Dalgetty was unanimously appointed as a WRFT trustee.

3. FINANCE REPORTS

3.i Cash Projections:

- The (end of April) cash projections show that payment of a survey contract (that came via Bob Morgan) is also outstanding – the invoice (for £4276.00) has only recently been sent out.
- Payments from a couple of RAFTS of 2011-12 projects have just been received – they totalled £3K.
- Neither the survey contract nor the RAFTS projects monies are shown in our budget figures for 2012-13 and MW asked why these figures should not be included - **PJ**.

3.ii Management Reports:

There were no immediate issues from the Management Reports and trustees decided to look through these reports at their leisure.

3.iii 2012 – 2013 Budget:

- i Discussion on the ever widening gap between core income (which at best is simply “holding its own”) and core expenses followed – the need to use over-headed rates for both contract and restricted project works and so channel some percentage of our operational costs into specific projects is becoming increasingly important. The Trustees felt however that the tying of grant funds to specific projects with measureable deliverables is a good thing, despite its contribution to this apparent budget gap.
- ii It is worth recording that the budget figures on the end of April cash projections are provisional and will change as more definitive information on funding via RAFTS becomes confirmed.

3.iv Southern River Proprietors' Contributions

There was no discussion on this item as it requires some interim research and any possible proposal will be put to the trustees at a later meeting.

4. PLANNING AHEAD

4.i 2012/3 Work Programmes and Costings

- Work on Skye (for the Skye Fisheries Trust) has been outlined to JT and should amount to some 37 days of fieldwork.
- With the intended work on the southern rivers JT's fieldwork programme is full and its completion could be dependant on the weather.
- PC's fieldwork programme is also extremely full, with little room for any unexpected work requirements that might arise and it is equally dependant on kind weather throughout the fieldwork period.
- Budget costs have been assigned to both biologists' work programmes and, although there is a need for each biologist to keep within their individual costs budget, manoeuvre **within** their individual budget to meet ad hoc opportunities can be proposed and agreed.
- **PC** said that Alastair Macdonald would be putting in the fyke net at Dundonnell soon in order to monitor sea lice in that area – last year this monitoring proved to be an important source of information.

- **PC** has started the sweep netting programme for this year with two sweeps in Flowerdale Bay and one at Mungasdale. He plans to sweep up at the Kannaird and at Boor Bay next week.
- **JT** suggested hand plankton trawling as both a time and cost effective method of recognizing sea lice problems/hotspots quickly and early. There was some discussion on this subject and it was agreed that it should not replace sweep netting as the alternative method of sea lice monitoring but that it may well prove to be an important addition to the sea lice monitoring programme. Early recognition of sea lice problems using the plankton trawling method could be verified with targeted sweep netting of the hotspot area.
- **MW** introduced a report on a speech given by the Norwegian State Secretary at the 9th International Sea Lice Conference in Bergen on 21st May 2012 and copies of the report were distributed (copy attached below the biologists' reports).
- **SEPA** are planning a seminar in July (date to be announced) in Inverness on "Small Burn Restoration" work - WRFT are looking at a proposal for such a project.
- The extent of otter predation on wild fish was mentioned and its possible impact on fish numbers discussed. MS pointed out that for every area where otter numbers are reported as increasing, there appears to be a corresponding area where their numbers are reported as declining. DB/MS agreed that a scientific study, rather than anecdotal data is needed and MS suggested this might provide a study for a PhD student.
- The Tournai trap requires some repair work on the fish ladder and the downstream trap – last year the upstream trap was repaired – before it is fully operational for this year. It was agreed that this work should be done.
- WRFT have been made aware of a recent UDN problem on the river Spey and a discussion ensued about the consequences of a previous outbreak on the Tweed. BK pointed out that the real problem was subsequent fungal infection, which can be lethal especially at times of low water. Both PC and JT will ensure that this information is disseminated out to those who need to know.

4.ii Peter Cunningham's biologist's report (copy attached below):

4.iii Jonah Tosney's biologist's report (copy attached below):

4.iv Bruachaig project:

MS was able to update the meeting on the input Eric Verspoor will be able to have in this project. **EV** officially starts on 1st July but a meeting at the WRFT offices is likely on either 14th or 15th June to discuss the project in more detail with **EV** and **MS**.

5. AOB

5.i Aquaculture Planning Applications and Responses:

JT will respond to a Highland Council query over the objection lodged by WRFT on the SSC application for a new 2000 tonne aquaculture farm in Loch Carron. His response will be influenced by the availability to him of the data that should have been submitted in support of the application, and Trustees would be emailed for their views on any response before it was submitted.

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NEXT MEETINGS	DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Trustees' meeting	15/08/2012	WRFT Office	10.30
Trustees' meeting	08/10/2012	WRFT Office	10.30
Trustees' meeting	05/12/2012	WRFT Office	10.30

WRFT Annual Meeting 31st May 2012

Biologist's report by Peter Cunningham, 30th May 2012

1. Juvenile fish-surveys (core funded and also some contract fishing)

A summary of the results of electro-fishing surveys in 2011 has been prepared for the forthcoming WRFT review. A main finding was of reduced fry numbers in headwater streams. The northern rivers report (Kanaird, Ullapool, Broom, Dundonnell) has still not been finished, but will be completed in time to circulate to all interested parties prior to a possible meeting of 'northern' proprietors and others with interest in fisheries in the area.

In response to report via SEPA of dead trout in the River Broom, I carried out electro-fishing survey of sites by Achindrean Bridge and Inverbroom bridge on 10th May [after collecting two serviced e-fish kits in Inverness], with help from local estate keepers Alan McGillivray and Jake Buckthorpe and family. We found good numbers of salmon parr and a few salmon smolts which had not yet gone to sea, and some very small salmon fry (steered clear of the main spawning areas). Fish populations were healthy.

On 26th May (as part of 'Moles of Melvaig' expedition) I electro-fishing two sites in the Melvaig Burn and recorded eels and small trout of sizes and numbers indicative of a small healthy sea trout population.

The main electro-fishing field season will get underway in July, and priority work includes initially the Bruachaig above falls, then the Dundonnell, Torridon, Badachro and Balgy rivers are of highest priority this year. We also have project sites to do on the Little Gruinard, and as part of Carrying Capacity project (with Cromarty Firth FT & MSS) streams at Achnasheen. There is at least one contract in prospect.

2. Sea trout sampling 2012

We've had two successful sweeps in Loch Gairloch so far this year. We sampled 45 trout on 11 April and 40 trout (of 90 caught) on 22 May. The April sample included many over-wintered finnock, demonstrating good survival of 2011 sea trout smolt year class. However, the May sample was almost entirely (except for at most three fish) of post-smolt sea trout. Lice levels were low with most fish free of sea lice. Only one large fish, a sea trout of 485 mm (last time) that has now been caught, anaesthetised, measured, scale sampled and inspected for sea lice 5 times! The Flowerdale Bay sea trout study is now one of the most useful in the area, and is particularly good value in terms of catch per unit effort (and cost). The next scheduled Flowerdale sweep is on afternoon of 22 May during the Gairloch Wildlife Festival.

We sweep netted Mungasdale beach (Gruinard Bay) on 23 May as part of the Little Gruinard SAC management research project. Conditions were difficult with bright sunshine and calm seas. Only one sea trout, a fish of 520mm, was caught. The trout was a recapture from June 2011, when it was 465mm in length. 27 lice were counted on the fish. Lots of sandeels were seen, and we gathered an impressive collection of juvenile plaice and lesser weever fish. Thanks to Bill Whyte of Gruinard Estate for helping to get the boat to and from the beach and David Barclay for volunteer help.

Next week we plan to carry out sweeps at the River Kanaird estuary and Boor Bay, Loch Ewe (RAFTS Aquaculture Project).

3. Catches of salmon and sea trout

A catch report for 2011 has been prepared for the WRFT Review June 2012. The first salmon of the season (that I heard about) was a fish taken on the Gruinard River (?by Mrs MacLay) on 19 May. This week (as of

today) 4 salmon have been caught and released in the River Ewe of up to 10lbs and also a small fish of 6lb [rpt from Ray D]. A 4lb sea trout was also C&R(?last week) from the Ewe, one of the largest in the system in recent years. Another small 6lb salmon was taken in the Gruinard (rpt from Bill W)

4. 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).

In July 2012, the area above the falls will be carefully electro-fished to record fry from wild fish which spawned in 2011.

5. Herring Project (SG funded via RAFTS in 2009 and 2011)

Sue Pomeroy has continued to make great progress interviewing fishermen. At the WREN (Wester Ross Environment Network) meeting on 8 May it was agreed that work carried out by Rowantree Consultants and others to develop a second stage Herring Project building from the findings and of WRFT Interview project, possibly to include the preparation of a herring poster and booklet with transcripts of some of the stories, a bit about herring life cycle, and herring places, could be developed by WRFT. From a biology / ecology perspective, I've suggested that spawning grounds identified by herring fishermen be surveyed as soon as possible to see whether the habitat is still suitable for herring to spawn in respective areas. Two weekends ago, as part of search for MPA features, divers from Black Isle dive club led by Neil McInnes carried out a dive at Naast, reported to be an area where herring formerly spawned. They described the seabed as if it had been dredged; only fragments of maerl were found. I'm concerned that other local herring spawning areas may have also been degraded.

6. Tournaig trap (supported by Marine Harvest)

Water levels were too low, then as last year, they rose to until last year unprecedented levels for May, and there was too much water for the trap to operate. In 'good' years for salmon there are typically two or three salmon smolts for every trout. Ben reports that this year that numbers of salmon were similar to those for sea trout prior to the big spate; suggesting a salmon smolt run of around 100 – 200 fish. The upstream trap will be operated from early June following recommissioning work and some fish ladder repairs.

7. Consultations and responses (core funded)

PC met with Kirsty Windle of Scottish Water regarding development of a new water supply for Kinlochewe on 9th May and inspected the area where the new water intake is to be located. We discussed designs with the contractors: I'm happy with the design of the intake and proposed instream croy. However, there may be a risk from sediment entering the river if we get very heavy rain during the construction period. I've expressed concerns to contractors and will keep in touch with them as the development progresses to try to help them minimise any impact to fish populations.

I haven't responded to a planning application for the redesigned Garbhaig hydro-scheme which possibly we should have done. However, we were involved with fish surveys prior to development; and I'm assuming that SEPA will have covered freshwater fisheries issues with their usual rigour.

8. Proposed Fish farm visits.

I visited WRF farms at Corry and Ardmail on 20th April. A report was drafted following the visit and agreed with WRF. This report is now available upon request (to be posted on website?). I've also contacted Scottish Sea Farms to request a visit to farms in the Summer Isles.

9. Marine Protected Areas around Wester Ross

Following meeting on 7th May, a Third Party MPA bid has been prepared on behalf of the local communities of Gairloch and Wester Loch Ewe to establish a Two Loch MPA with ncMPA areas in Wester Loch Ewe and Loch Gairloch. The ncMPA bid will be submitted later today; a subsequent research and demonstration MPA bid will require further work following guidance from Marine Scotland. To discuss further. I've split the time that has gone into this bid approximately 50% WRFT time and 50% own time. [Happy to make up any WRFT work hours later in the summer . . . (preferably as part of Loch Maree wild trout sampling project)].

10. Biosecurity issues (core funded)

- **Mink** No further reports of mink within the area since last meeting.
- **North American Signal Crayfish:** These have been found in Lochaber and Diane Baum has organised an eradication programme . . .
- **Minnow** Gairloch Angling Club has made own efforts to control minnows in Loch Tollie. I suggested that the only prospect of reducing numbers would be to target them in a spawning stream with e-fish kit.

11. Some other activities

- Preparation of WRFT Review; most sections are now drafted . . .
- RAFTS Challenge: Trout scale reading workshop at Tweed Foundation 18 May we projected scales and discussed readings. I pulled out of the fishing competition as Nick B also pulled out too much work (and the river was far too high)!
- Discussions with Will Parry r. undergraduate thesis to investigate productivity of local trout lochs.
- Assisted with George Watson's School Projects by Carn Dearg 21 May
- Moles of Melvaig (and e-fishing the burn) – soil biodiversity week event 26 May

12. Dates for diaries

- Nineveh Trust Visit 18th & 19th June
- Flowerdale Sweep Netting 22nd June (Gairloch Wildlife Festival Event)
- Wild trout Fishing expedition 26th June (Gairloch Wildlife Festival event)
- Gairloch Gathering (including e-fishing demo) 30th June
- RAFTS Aquaculture Planning meeting, Inverness 5th July
- Laide Community Woodland Aquatic Bug Hunt ?26th July

[end]

Jonah Tosney's Biologist's Report for WRFT Trustees' meeting, 31/05/2012

- Small burn smolt production survey – a single day survey of the burns feeding the south side of Loch Carron showed that every burn surveyed, ranging in width from 50 cm to 6 m, produced significant numbers of sea trout smolts, suggesting that the cumulative contribution of the smaller burns may be as important as production in some of the larger rivers to sea trout populations.
- Proposed sea lice monitoring project – I would like to trial the use of plankton trawls, as used successfully by Marine Scotland Science, to monitor sea lice populations in our southern sea lochs with a view to introducing an on-going monitoring program. Plankton sampling is cheap, and allows sampling at a number and variety of sites independent of weather and geography. MSS data show that lice numbers in plankton correlate with numbers on fish caught in sweep nets and electro-fishing, and also correlate with farm production period.
- Carron sweep netting 05/05/2012. Five sea trout caught, all heavily infested with lice at all stages.
- Middlesex University visit – one day with Steve Kett's students looking at Tournai fish trap, electro-fishing, invertebrate sampling and an excellent talk from Ray Dingwall
- Lochcarron Brownies Nature and Friends of Animals badge session

Aquaculture:

- Agreement from Scottish Sea Farms to visit Kishorn and Summer Isles sites up to three times per year. Visits will be financially supported to SSF. Provisional agreement from SSF to provide WRFT with lice data from their sites.

Meetings:

- SEPA River Basin Management Plan Area Management Group Meeting – discussion of possible small burns restoration project, merging of North and West Highland groups, on-going quest for a whole catchment restoration project.
- Torridon AMG