

## MINUTES OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

<b>WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST OFFICES</b>		<b>PRESENT:</b>	
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>24 October 2014</b>	<b>David Barclay (DB) Chair</b>	<b>Richard Greene (RG)</b>
<b>OPENED AT:</b>	<b>11.00</b>	<b>Angus Davidson (AD)</b>	<b>Bob Kindness (BK)</b>
<b>CLOSED AT:</b>	<b>14.45</b>	<b>Ewen Ballantyne (EB)</b>	
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>		<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	
<b>Peter Cunningham (PC)</b>	<b>Mary Gibson (MG)</b>	<b>Nigel Pearson (NP)</b>	<b>Melanie Smith (MS)</b>
<b>Veronica Mullaney (VM)</b>	<b>Peter Jarosz (PJ)</b>	<b>Henry Dalgety (HD)</b>	<b>Mark Williams (MW)</b>

### 1. MATTERS ARISING

1.i There were no matters arising from the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2014 minutes – which were adopted as an accurate record and were proposed by PC seconded by DB.

1.ii Andrew Thin's Review of Trusts has yet to be published and its implications are not currently clear. However, the possibility of substantial changes resulting from the Wild Fisheries Review, triggered a discussion on the apparent recommendation in the review for the existing small fisheries trusts in Scotland to be amalgamated into larger trusts. Skye Fisheries Trust (SFT) has no biologist and no facilities and are, therefore, keen to continue to work/cooperate with WRFT – as they have been doing for the past 2/3 years. Most fisheries trusts employ 2 biologists and, indeed, this has been seen as the default by RAFTS in the past for the costing of over-headed rates etc and seems to be the accepted default for trusts in the future. As has been proven quite recently, WRFT can only afford to employ 1 biologist so some form of "amalgamation" with SFT may be helpful or even necessary (see below 2.iv).

### 2. Meetings (DB) and correspondence

2.i On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> October, there will be a pilot meeting in Inverness regarding aquaculture in Torridon, involving WRASFB and the two aquaculture companies operating there, that will look at the interactions between farmed and wild salmon in this area and assess methods for monitoring these interactions. A further meeting in late November will feature the same topic but on a "west coast" area basis with more boards and aquaculture companies involved.

2.ii DB has been working with Gairloch High School on a science project and on the Loch Maree Project, both of which help raise the profile of the trust and the local environment as well as providing knowledge and support to the school.

2.iii DB has written a letter to Philip Smith thanking him for his donation to the trust.

2.iv A meeting in late November has also been arranged with SFT to discuss details of continuing cooperation with WRFT and to examine the basic "infrastructure" required for this cooperation.

2.v A new page has now been inserted on the WRFT web site with the names of trustees and details of the office bearers. A "link" has also been provided to the WRASFB web site.

### 3. FINANCE REPORTS

#### 3.i Cash Projections.

The end of September cash projections had been previously emailed to trustees giving everyone an opportunity to read through them and bring any queries to the meeting. No queries were raised.

#### 3.ii Management Reports

VM presented simplified financial reports for the meeting that had been previously emailed out.

#### 3.iii 2014 Finance

- Following the agreement with UHI for the sharing a biologist now formally ended, the trust should be cost neutral by the end of this financial year. However, a strong link with UHI will remain - with a number of possible projects remaining "on the cards" where mutual resources and mutual access to funding can be shared.
- PJ reported that the further grant from ENTRUST for the Angling Information project had been signed off for fund distribution to WRFT.
- There is funding available for the Pearls in the Classroom project so PJ needs to discuss with Lorna Brown proposals for the inclusion of all the local schools over the next three years into this project.
- Quarterly payments from the WRASFB have been forthcoming and have proven timely.

#### **4. BIOLOGIST' REPORTS**

##### **PC's report (attached below)**

PC's report had been circulated previous to this meeting to trustees. PC offered a précis of the contents of his report to the meeting.

- In general, salmon catches are down on last year. However, the rivers Carron and Kanaird are the exception with both reporting improved salmon catches this year. There have also been reports of big fish being caught on the Gruinard and the Kanaird rivers. It would be very useful to collect more data on the individual weight of fish caught so as to be able to distinguish between grilse and salmon and, thereby, understand more fully if there are particular trends per rivers.
- The juvenile fish surveys, mostly financed by the board, revealed fish absence in some headwaters although the main core areas were healthy.
- This year's sweep netting surveys indicated that sea lice levels were generally low. Fish farms in the Carron area had been harvested by the time the smolts ran so there were few lice on smolts in that area.
- However, sea lice levels in farms in Loch Alsh and Loch Duich were high and well over the code of good practice. Should this trigger a discussion with Marine Harvest regarding, in the very least, a clarification of why numbers were so high or even a reduction in biomass on these farms as per their letter to WRFT of some two years ago?
- There have been a number of contract work projects done this year – is there a percentage of income that as a charity we cannot exceed from an OSCR viewpoint? – PJ to check.
- WRFT has provided advice to WRASFB on the Bruachaig hydro scheme and the board will request a fish pass to be installed as a condition of approval of the scheme.
- The WRFT Annual Review will now include information from 2013 and 2104.

#### **5. PLANNING AHEAD**

##### **5.i Wester Ross MPA**

A consultation meeting in Ullapool for the Wester Ross MPA and a similar meeting in Kyle for the Loch Duich/Loch Alsh MPA will consider management options for these MPAs.

##### **5.ii Project Based Work Programme**

Trustees are asked to identify any projects that they consider the WRFT should be doing over the next year (or two) and these ideas can be presented and discussed at our next meeting. These can then be built into the WRFT 5-year plan.

PC suggested possible items for projects as being:

- Loch Maree ghillies' interviews – a project similar to the Herring project that Sue Pomeroy did two years ago.
- Redd wash out study
- Fish wash out study
- High water temperatures study
- Marine conservation study

##### **5.iii Angling Information**

With the additional funding now available (see 3.ii bullet point two) for this project the existing web site (<http://www.wrsaas.org.uk/>) can now be populated with information relating to Gairloch and a ten mile surrounding area as well as develop the "smart 'phone app" required to both find and record information especially on invasive species.

As far as information required to populate the web site is concerned, WRFT will need to seek permission from landowners as well as input from local anglers.

SEPA are currently developing a "smart 'phone app" for information regarding culverts and water courses that will perform almost identically to the one we intend to develop so the possibility of cooperation in a joint development should be explored.

Cellnet signal limitations in our area are a factor that needs to be considered in the "smart 'phone app" development ensuring that information recorded in an area of no signal can later be transmitted once the 'phone is back into a "signal area".

##### **5.iv Loch Maree Project**

This project is a proposal drawn up by UHI, Gairloch Estate (GE) and WRFT with participation by Gairloch High School (GHS) and the Forestry Commission (FC) that involves a blend of commercial (GE), teaching (GHS) and research (UHI and WRFT) aspects. It will involve a new building that among its many other uses would offer facilities for WRFT. It would focus on teaching, research and the history of Loch Maree and not just on visitor attraction.

Whilst this project is in its early stages, it is important to consider key issues and factor in, early on, regarding designations and planning issues.

There is a need to clarify the role of WRFT, deciding at this early stage, just how heavily the trust should be involved and what exactly the trust should seek to be included.

#### **5.v Additional Trustee**

WRFT still needs an additional trustee – trustees were agreed that a suitable candidate should be approached. DB.

#### **5.vi 5-year: Aims and plan**

Because of the current financial constraints and the possibility of substantial changes resulting from the Wild Fisheries Review, the trust needs to define a five-year “aim” and, at the same time, develop a one-year plan – on going.

### **6. AOB**

- BK reported that the Bruachaig brood-stock is in ponds and tanks and that some are now “ripe” and that some could be kept for a further year. There are 50 “hens” in total capable of producing 100,000 eggs – so some instruction is required.
- It should be possible to cross these with additional River Ewe or River Carron male fish to improve the genetic mix though this may be complicated from a practical point of view. We should seek advice from UHI and examine the cost options.
- The hatchery at Arnisdale is running successfully and genetic work is slowly continuing. Good genetic contacts, including Steve Kett and Mark Coulson, will be advantageous.
- A film unit is up filming charr at Coulin over the next few weeks.
- The invoices to the Southern River proprietors will be accompanied this year with a letter of thanks for their support over the past years.

### **7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

<b>NEXT MEETINGS</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>TIME</b>
Trustees' meeting	16/12/2014	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	19/03/2015	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	05/06/2015	WRFT Office	11.00

## 1. Returning adult fish

Overall, rod catches of **salmon** received so far indicate that numbers of salmon taken by anglers during the 2014 season are down on those of the past three or more years. Grilse have been particularly scarce on some rivers including the Little Gruinard (Atlantic salmon SAC) and Ewe. At Tournai, to date, only 4 salmon (all grilse) have been taken this year in the upstream trap, so we are heading towards the lowest salmon total since 2003 (the trap is still in operation; salmon have been taken as late as early November in the trap).

However, in contrast Bob K reports good numbers of grilse in the River Carron, however not so many MSW salmon! In September, 20 – 30 salmon were videoed in some pools in Shiel and Elchaig (I thought mainly MSW fish – see for yourself from video on 24/10).

Reported catches of sea trout in 2014 indicate higher numbers of fish and some good ones. Sea trout of 5.5lb and 4.5lb were taken from the River Ewe and several fish of over 3lb from Loch Maree. At Tournai, 6 maturing female sea trout (350mm - 462mm) were taken in the upstream trap. If these fish survive to spawn, deposition of sea trout eggs within the system will be higher than for any other year since the trap project started in 1999. A sea trout smolt of 139mm which was taken in downstream trap (on its way to sea) on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2014 was recaptured in upstream trap on 4<sup>th</sup> August as a finnock of 243mm, demonstrating good growth in Loch Ewe.

Further rod catch reports and interpretation (various theories . . . ) to be discussed at the meeting.

## 2. Juvenile fish surveys

Progress has been good with generally low flows, except for the week of 10<sup>th</sup> August. Sites have been surveyed using e-fishing kit on the Kanaird, Lael (as part of contract), Dundonnell, Gruinard (further sites next week weather permitting), Inverianvie, Laide burn, Allt beith, Tournai, Ewe (Kernsary, Letterewe burns, Bruachaig, Docherty burn, A' Ghairbie, Coulin), Inverasdale burn, Sguod, Torridon, Balgy, Cuaig, Elchaig and Shiel rivers.

The picture is mixed, though generally good, despite the big spate on 10-11 August. Salmon fry were absent from sites (mostly in headwaters) where present in some previous years in the Kanaird (above Langwell falls), Allt beith, Tournai, one tributary at Kernsary, Cuaig and Balgy (above Loch an Loin). In contrast juvenile salmon were recorded in the Inverianvie (2 year classes), Sguod and Elchaig at some sites where they had been absent on at least one previous occasion in recent years. CPUE data indicates juvenile salmon populations were at or near carrying capacity in much of the Kanaird, lower Lael, Dundonnell, Gruinard (some important sites still to survey), Kernsary, Docherty burn, Coulin River, A'Ghairbie, Torridon, Abhainn Dearg (Balgy), Elchaig and Shiel.

Surveys were assisted by Gary Bulmer, Ben Rushbrooke, Colin Simpson, Arran Matheson, Jim Buchanan, Katherine Vine and volunteers Nick Sanders (from Glenelg), David Holland (Conchra House) and Mark Williams and family. Thank you to all, especially to Nick (& Liz Sanders for putting me up for the night!) and David Holland for enthusiastic support as very capable volunteer assistants.

## 3. Sea lice

Lice levels (and signs of sea lice) on sea trout seen at sampling sites in the northern part of the WRFT area indicate that sea lice have not been a lesser problem in 2014 during the spring and early part of the summer at least, than in 2013. The last sweep of the season at Flowerdale on 24<sup>th</sup> September produced just one large mature sea trout of 480mm (a recaptured fish) with no evidence of recent sea lice infection (however it had a stunted dorsal fin recorded as louse damaged in 2013).

Data on lice levels on salmon farms in the area can be found in SSPO fish health reports at <http://scottishsalmon.co.uk/tag/fish-health-management/> . Average lice levels on farms within the Kennart to Gruinard area once again were above CoGP treatment threshold levels for the period April to June however much lower than in 2013. The Ardessie farm remained fallow, and most other farms were in 1<sup>st</sup> year of production cycle.

Farms in Loch Ewe and Loch Torridon were in their first year of production with low levels of sea lice.

Farms in Loch Carron were fallow in April – June 2014. However average lice levels on farms (all operated by Marine Harvest) in the Loch Alsh – Duich, all in latter stages of the second year of the production cycle, rose to levels well above the CoGP treatment threshold levels. No sweep net samples of sea trout were taken in the area. However a local angler reported good numbers of sea trout with little sign of sea louse damage in the Loch Long area; I saw and videoed many (20++) finnock with healthy looking fins in the bridge pool of the River Shiel in September.

Evidence of an abundance of food fish in local sea lochs during the summer has continued with large numbers of trapped sprats at the head of Loch Ewe (from late August to mid September at least), where mackerel targeted them; some were stranded on the beach. I've made a movie of the spectacle using GoPro video footage taken on 28<sup>th</sup> August. On 14<sup>th</sup> October we caught many small sandeels in a fine mesh sweep net off the golf course beach in Gairloch.

A useful recent review of sea lice and salmonids can be found via links at:

<http://www.fisheriesireland.ie/Press-releases/salmon-farms-can-have-significant-impact-on-wild-salmon-and-sea-trout-stocks.html>

#### 4. Mink monitoring project [SMI programme; funding agreement with SNH via RAFTS]

Since last meeting (August) mink have been caught near Opinan (Mellon Udrigle), Isle of Ewe and Little Gruinard. Volunteers are being encouraged to keep up the effort. Problem mink (difficult to trap) were seen at Slaggan. At time of writing work is required to produce a report as part of the funding agreement. Thank you to PJ for offering to help keep the SMI database up to date.

#### 5. Contract work

Fish survey contracts have been carried out on the Lael and Kanaird since August; the Lael contract completed (Kanaird data to complete). A further possible contract to supply data for fish survey near Loch broom was postponed following damage to access tracks due to flooding in August.

#### 6. Consultations

Comments have been provided to WRASFB regarding several proposed hydropower projects within the River Ewe catchment area. Issues relating to a proposed project on the Bruachaig river above the Heights of Kinlochewe has required additional time to resolve; a site visit may take place next week.

#### 7. Some other things

- **Japanese knotweed meeting (8/9)** Thank you to Eddie Hughes (Braemore Square) for hosting a meeting and site visit to see large stands of riparian JK by River Broom at to Rob Dewar and John Parrot for demonstrating methods of dealing with it. WRFT is to develop a project application to address JK in the Broom catchment in 2015.
- **Highland Invasive Species Forum meeting, Ullapool (26/9)** The amount of money spent on controlling INNS in the Highland area is now several million pounds each year. FC has been spending £1.5k on *ponticum* control in the Lochaber area alone. In Wester Ross, on-going removal of *ponticum* on south side of Loch Torridon is costing ~£250k. A major problem remains a lack of awareness and acceptance by members of the public that *ponticum* is a major and increasingly expensive problem. Where the plant remains in a few gardens, it is able to quickly reseed into cleared areas.
- **Dr James Fenton upland ecology course. (25/9)** I joined the students for a half day session at Tournaig: e-fish demonstration and learning about invasive species. In addition to *ponticum*, and various knotweeds, skunk cabbage, Gunnera (giant rhubarb), *Aceana*, prickly heath, cotoneaster and several other invasive species are becoming invasive in the Wester Ross area. Without improved, government-led co-ordinated response, the cost of addressing INNS problems will continue to increase in future years.
- **WRFT Loch Maree fishing day (1/10)**. Four boats fly fishing out of Loch Maree hotel for first time in many years! Trout were hard to catch, 11 trout were measured, six of which were assumed to be sea trout; the largest male sea trout (90% sure from scale reading) of 460mm to Keith Dunbar.
- **Reforestation Scotland annual meeting, Kyleakin (3-4/10)**. Interesting presentations on community woodlands; a recent survey of native woodlands in Scotland [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/NWSS-Report2014.pdf/\\$FILE/NWSS-Report2014.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/NWSS-Report2014.pdf/$FILE/NWSS-Report2014.pdf) the majority remain a degraded state; grazing, principally by deer remains the most widespread problem. I joined Ally MacAskill & Mike Daniels of JMT and other participants on site visit to Strathaird where many issues including spread of invasive species were discussed.
- **MPA management forum, Inverness 7/10**. Meeting of stakeholders to discuss management options including for Wester Ross MPA to be included in consultation which will commence in November.
- **Highland seashore project festival:** I attended sessions at Dundonnell on 11/10, Gairloch on 14/10 (seine netting on beach), 16/10 Poolewe seashore ceilidh with own videos of marine wildlife around An Dun, and Poolewe sprats . . . .
- **New computer:** Thank you to everyone especially to PJ for organising the installation of a new computer with a BIG screen, which is great improvement on what we had before.
- **WRFT Review.** Target date for on-line publication: November 2014, to include rod catch, juvenile fish survey and sea trout monitoring reports from both 2013 & 2014 seasons.

Peter Cunningham, 17 Oct 2014.