

Shin Smolt Project

The first steps to re-introduce a self-sustaining population of wild salmon in the upper tributaries of Loch Shin.

The long running project to trap, tag and transport smolts from the river Tirry to below the diversion dam at Lairg has now pretty much run its course, it has been demonstrated that about 10% of smolts released in the Tirry make it past the diversion dam at the downstream end of Little Loch Shin.

Following constructive discussions with SSE and SEPA, the Trustees have decided to set up a programme to carry on with 'trapping and trucking' on all of the main Loch Shin tributaries – the rivers Tirry, Fiag, Merkland and the Corriekinloch Burn. They will set up, manage and operate temporary smolt traps on all these rivers in the spring of 2011. The smolts caught will be trucked and released back into the river Shin at several points below the diversion dam.

Simultaneously, SSE will alter their abstraction rates through the dam turbines to establish a sustained and defined flow within the lower end of the loch to coincide with the smolt migration period. They will also install a smolt curtain in the loch to direct smolts towards the existing narrow outlet; all to encourage any naturally migrating smolts, not otherwise trapped, to find the exit points from the loch more easily.



Example of a temporary smolt trap

A sample group of smolts taken from the river Tirry will be tagged and released to make their own way through the hydro system. These will be identified on their downstream journey by the decoder installed in the diversion dam and will, to some extent, prove the effectiveness or otherwise of these measures being taken by SSE.

In the event that the initiative proves to be as successful as theory suggests, the next stage of this project will be to install and operate permanent smolt traps. By necessity, that next stage would

have to be a jointly funded and managed programme between the Trust & Board, SSE, SEPA and other interests, perhaps not yet identified.

As it stands, the Trust has raised sufficient funding to make this project work for long enough to prove its value to the fishery and the broader community. Major contributions in funding, access, permission, verbal and written support and help in kind have been made by Highland LEADER, the Upper Tributary Proprietors (particularly Shinness, Fiag and Merkland Estates), the Lairg and Kyle Angling Associations, various local businesses, the local Community Councils and both the Kyle Board and the Kyle Trust. It should be noted also that this project runs very much on the back of the original experimental work, which was jointly funded by the Lower Shin proprietors, SSE and the Kyle Board and Trust.

Our gratitude and thanks are extended to all of these parties who continue to take the long term view and be fully co-operative in all aspects as and when required; without any one of them it would have been that much more difficult to make this most important project get off the ground. Their continued support is indicative of the combined view that this is a vitally important initiative.

We will make regular reports on our progress, all of which should become available from time to time on our website and, anyone wishing to know more about what we are doing should get in touch and we will be pleased to provide whatever information we can.