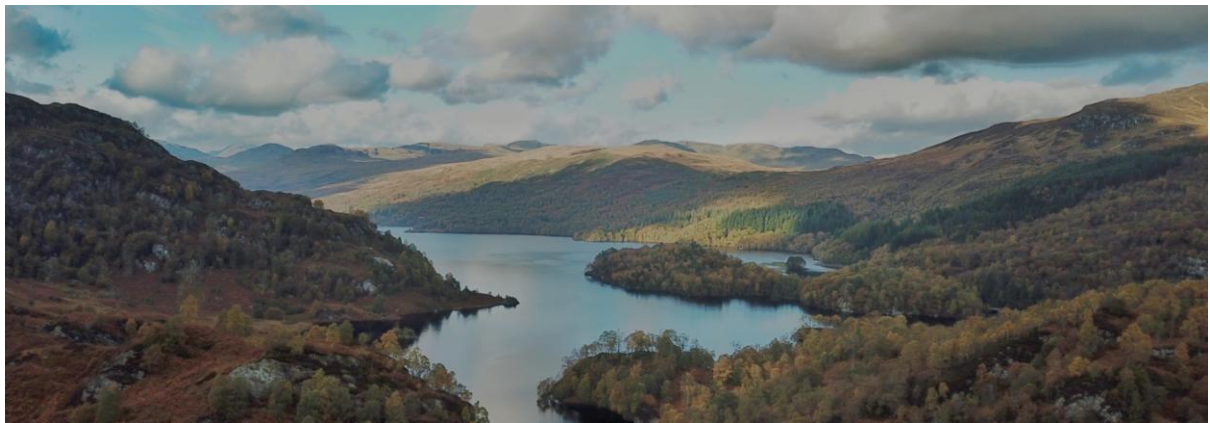




Forth District Salmon Fishery Board

Annual Report 2024



Published July 2025

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Foreword

The Forth District Salmon Fishery Board is experiencing extreme financial pressure. This has been building for some years. The remit of the Board is to deliver protection, conservation and enhancement of the fishery. The ability to raise sufficient funds impacts directly on the DSFBs ability to do this. The Forth District Salmon Fishery Board continues to have one of the highest poundage rates in Scotland.

Severe resource constraints and a legislative structure which is unfit for purpose, means that we are unable to provide Scotland's endangered wild Atlantic salmon, and its habitat, the protection and improvement it urgently requires. We cannot see this changing in the near future and consequently wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout in the Forth District are at risk.

Despite the challenging environment in which we operate, in this Annual Report we highlight the work the DSFB has conducted during 2024. We also set out the significant additional challenge facing the Board in section 2.4 on Financial Status.

1 The Board In 2024

1.1 FORTH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD MEMBERS

The Forth District Salmon Fishery Board held triennial elections on 17 May 2022. The following Board members sat on the Board during this 2024 period.

Upper Proprietors

John McKenzie – Allan Greenloaning (mandated by Allan Water Angling Association), Convenor

Jamie Muir – Blair Drummond

Aly Dickson – Lanrick Estate

Peter Yates – Cambusmore Estate (Mandated)

Alison Baker – Leny (Mandated by Drumardoch Estate)

Fiona Simpson – Leven (mandated by Crown Estate Scotland)

Lower Proprietors

Craig Somerville – Allan Railway Bridge to confluence (Mandated by Allan Water Angling Association) (until August 2024)

Jordan Paterson - Allan Railway Bridge to confluence (Mandated by Allan Water Angling Association) (from November 2024)

Angler Representatives

Graham Owens

Steve Glyn-Jones

Appointed Member:

Dorothy Reid - Stirling Council

1.2 STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND CONTRACTORS

Staff

Clerk to the Board: Wendy Kenyon from May 2024

Superintendent: Lee Fisher

Volunteer Water Bailiffs:

- David Graham
- Douglas Gillan
- Alison Baker
- Jonathan Louis
- Amy Fergusson

Operations: Jonathan Louis and Fergus McFarlane (Forth Rivers Trust)

Science Advice: Amy Fergusson (Forth Rivers Trust)

Finance: Managed Estates, The Old Laundry, Touch Business Centre, Stirling, FK8 3AQ

Accountants: EQ Accountants, Douglas Home & Co Ltd, 47-49 The Square, Kelso, Roxburghshire, TD5 7HW

Legal Advice: Fish Legal, Eastwood House, 6 Rainbow Street, Leominster, HR6 8DQ

2 Governance

This section of the report details how the Board meets the Guidance on Good Governance Obligations in The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013.

2.1 COMPLAINTS

The 2013 Act requires all District Salmon Fishery Boards to establish a formal complaints procedure. A copy of the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board procedure is available on the [website](#). There have been no formal complaints during 2024.

2.2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

All members of the Board are asked to complete and keep up to date a declaration of interests relevant to their position on the Board. The most up to date register is available by request to the Clerk of the Board.

2.3 MEETINGS

The annual meeting of qualified proprietors was held on 20 August 2024 at Dunblane Cathedral Halls. This meeting was publicised on the Board website. One qualified proprietor, in addition to the Board members, chose to attend. Informal discussions were held and no minutes were produced.

The annual public meeting was held on 20 August 2024 at Dunblane Cathedral Halls. This meeting was publicised on the Board website. No members of the public chose to attend. There were therefore no minutes from this meeting.

Board meetings were held on 13 and 27 February 2024 and 21 March. During this period the Board did not have a clerk in post. A new Clerk was appointed in May 2024. Further Board meetings were held on 24 May, 20 August and 19 November. These meetings were publicised on the Board website. No members of the public chose to attend these meetings. The minutes from these meeting can be viewed on the Board website.

2.4 FINANCIAL STATUS

The income for the Board comes from the salmon fishery assessment. The value of the fishery has reduced each year since the last valuation in 2023. This has led to great uncertainty and an inability to confidently set a poundage to cover the budget.

The table highlights the financial uncertainty that the Board operates within. Although 2025 is outwith the timeframe of this report, details are included here since a) this issue is retrospective and b) the Board may be forced to discontinue in 2025.

Year	Value of the fishery at the time the assessment issued	Revised value of the fishery published 1 April 2025	Poundage agreed each year based on in-year value	Income based on the assessments issued	Income based on the revised value published 1 April 2025
2023	126,935	90,050	1.23	156,130	110,762
2024	126,105	90,050	1.23	155,109	110,762
2025	90,050	90,050	1.40	126,070	126,070
				437,309	347,593
					89,716

Column 2 shows the value of the district at the time the assessment was issued in 2023, 2024 & 2025
Column 3 shows the revised value of the district published in April 2025
Column 4 shows the poundage agreed each year, based on the value of the district each year
Column 5 shows the income based on the assessment issued
Column 6 shows the based on the revised value of the district published on 1 April 2025.

In light of the devaluation of the fishery between 2023 and 2025, at least one proprietor in the District is demanding a rebate. **If all relevant proprietors demand a rebate the Board will have to discharge a debt of £89,716.**

Legal advice provided to the Board indicates that DSFBs do not have to pay rebates in such circumstances. Work to resolve this issue is ongoing. However, if the Board is required to pay rebates, the consequences for the Forth DSFB will be financially catastrophic. This would result in a question as to whether the DSFB could continue. It may require to be wound up with employees (1.15 FTE) being made redundant and contracts with Managed Estates, Forth Rivers Trust and other supporting organisations and companies being terminated.

The day-to-day management of the finances is expertly handled by Managed Estates on behalf of the Board. The accounts are independently inspected by EQ Chartered Accountants. Copies of the full inspected accounts can be obtained by contacting Managed Estates. The summary is shown below.

Forth District Salmon Fishery Board			
Income Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2025			
	Notes	31/3/25 £	31/3/24 £
INCOME		157,393	220,469
Operating expenses		<u>157,265</u>	<u>222,635</u>
		128	(2,166)
Other operating income		<u>5,965</u>	<u>2,975</u>
OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)		6,093	809
Interest receivable and similar income		<u>330</u>	<u>813</u>
PROFIT/(LOSS) BEFORE TAXATION		6,423	1,622
Tax on profit/(loss)	3	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR		<u><u>6,423</u></u>	<u><u>1,622</u></u>

NB: the Crown Estate Scotland Project ended in the previous financial year. This accounted for around £63,000 in income and expenditure and explains the large difference in operating expenses between 2024 and 2025.

Forth District Salmon Fishery Board
**Statement of Financial Position
31 March 2025**

	Notes	31/3/25 £	£	31/3/24 £	£
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible assets	4		15,254		18,233
CURRENT ASSETS					
Debtors	5	13,807		9,087	
Cash at bank		<u>89,445</u>		<u>84,908</u>	
		103,252		93,995	
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	6	<u>3,519</u>		<u>3,664</u>	
NET CURRENT ASSETS			<u>99,733</u>		<u>90,331</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES			<u>114,987</u>		<u>108,564</u>
RESERVES					
Development reserves			32,000		32,000
Retained earnings			<u>82,987</u>		<u>76,564</u>
			<u>114,987</u>		<u>108,564</u>

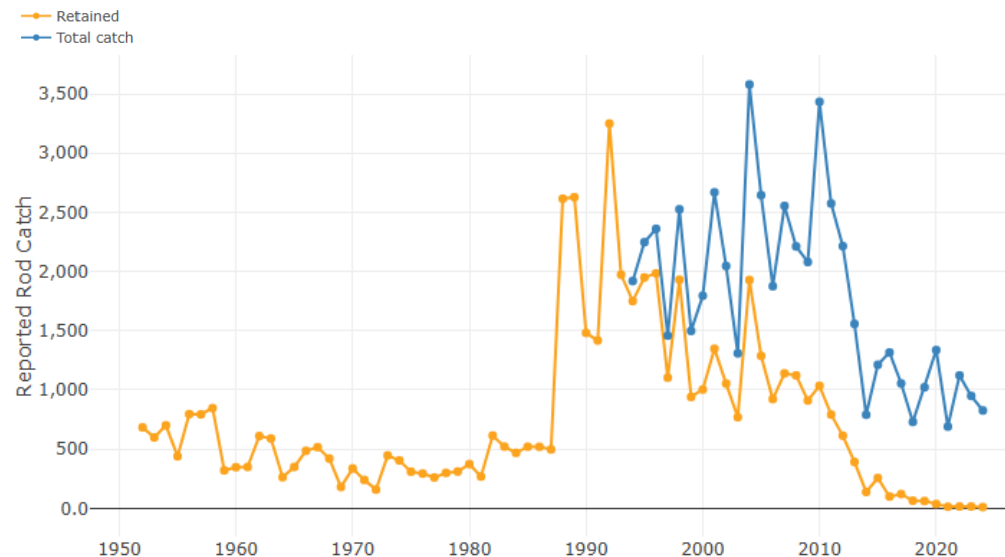
3 Salmon and Sea Trout Catches

Salmon and sea trout catches are reported to the Scottish Government and published annually on its website. The graphs and figures below are sourced from government statistics:

<https://scotland.shinyapps.io/sg-salmon-sea-trout-catch/>

3.1 SALMON CATCH IN THE FORTH

Total salmon caught by rod in the Forth District, 1952 – 2024

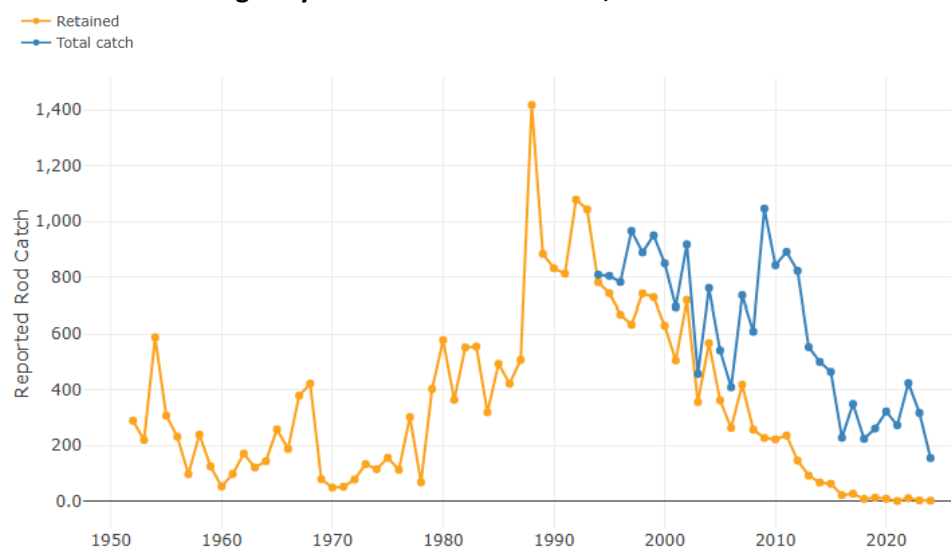


In 2024, the statistics provided by the Scottish Government, based on self-reported catch returns show that in the Forth District:

- 826 salmon in total caught with 10 being retained
- 235 were One Sea Winter Salmon (grilse)
- 591 were Multi Sea Winter Salmon
- No salmon were reported caught by nets.

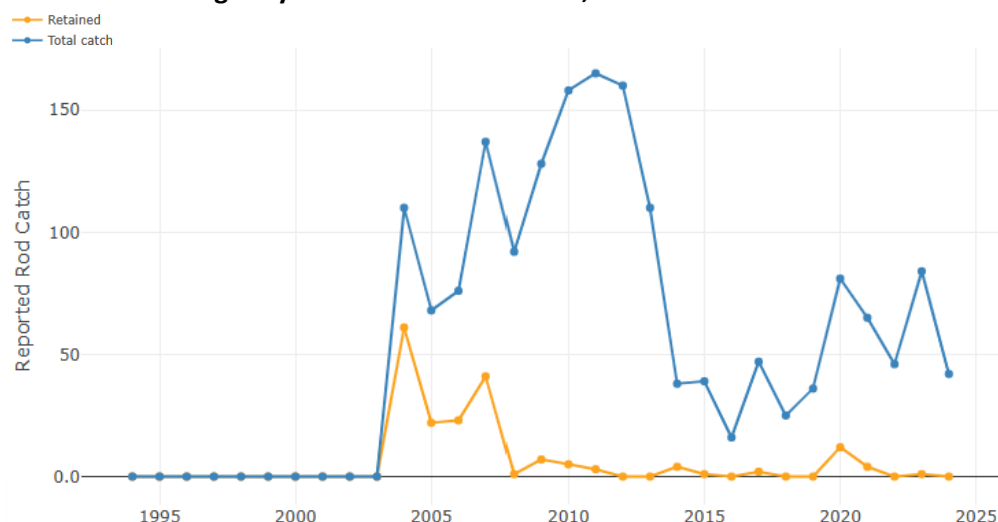
3.2 SEA TROUT CATCH IN THE FORTH

Total sea trout caught by rod in the Forth District, 1952 – 2024



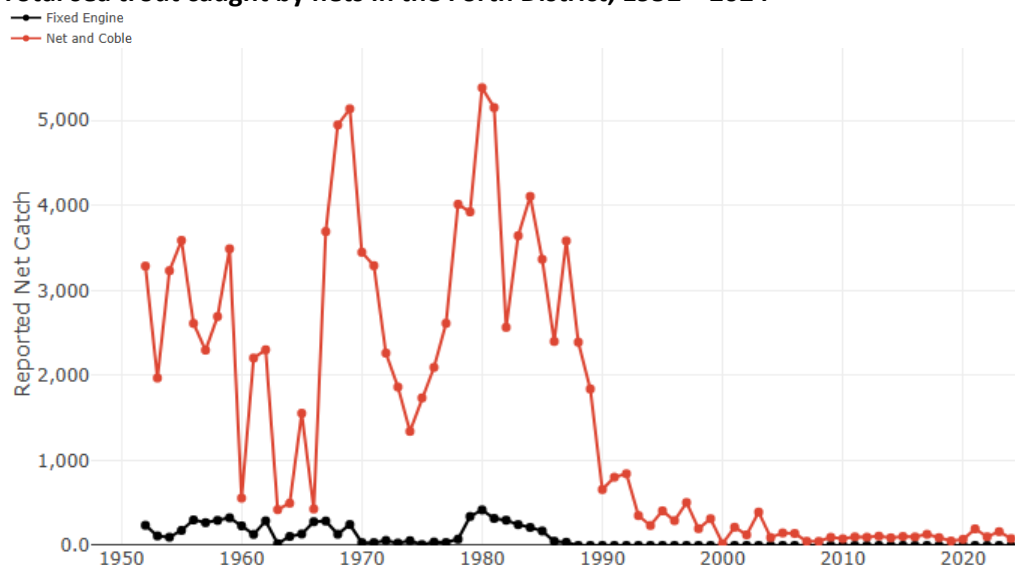
In 2024, the statistics provided by the Scottish Government, based on self-reported catch returns show that in the Forth District 155 sea trout were caught with 2 being retained. This is down from 317 being caught in 2023.

Total finnock caught by rod in the Forth District, 1952 – 2024



In 2024, the statistics provided by the Scottish Government, based on self-reported catch returns show that in the Forth District 42 finnock were caught with 0 being retained. This is down from 84 reported caught in 2023.

Total sea trout caught by nets in the Forth District, 1952 – 2024



Source: <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/sg-salmon-sea-trout-catch/>

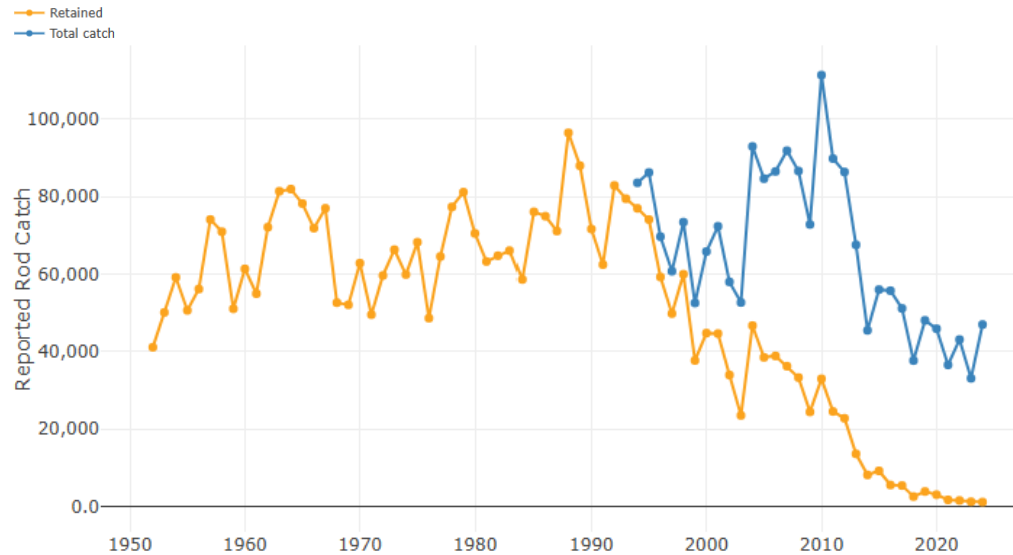
In 2024, the statistics provided by the Scottish Government, based on self-reported catch returns show that in the Forth District 80 sea trout were caught by net and coble in 2024. This is down from 162 in 2023. We are surprised that no salmon have been declared given that net and coble netting is indiscriminatory of species caught.

3.3 SALMON AND SEA TROUT CATCH IN SCOTLAND AS A WHOLE

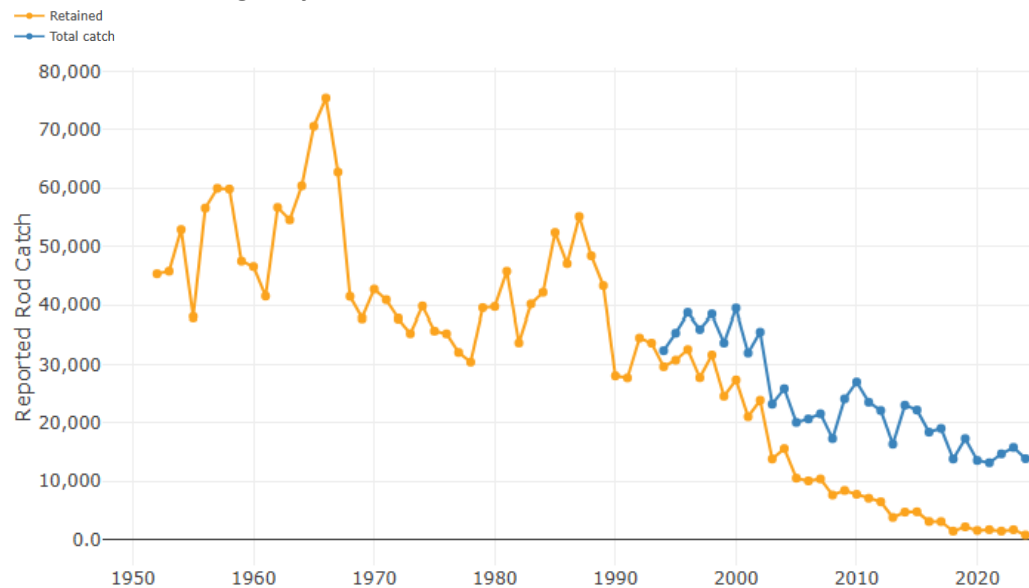
For context, the graphs below show the catch for salmon and sea trout in Scotland as a whole.

- total salmon rod caught in Scotland were 46,978 in 2024, up from 33,084 in 2023
- total sea trout rod caught in Scotland were 13,876 in 2024, down from 15,802 in 2023.

Total salmon caught by rod in Scotland, 1952 – 2024



Total sea trout caught by rod in Scotland, 1952 – 2024



4 A Summary of what the Board has done in 2024

4.1 FISHERIES PROTECTION

The past year has been one of recovery, resilience, and steady progress across the district. Early in 2024, the Superintendent returned to light duties following an injury, with support from the Board, Forth Rivers Trust and a committed team of honorary bailiffs, local clubs, and volunteers. This teamwork ensured the continuity of operations, with foot patrols, and enforcement activity maintained throughout the spring period.

Favourable river conditions at the start of the year allowed early fish movement across many systems. Smolt migration progressed without major buildup, with most sightings reported from the mainstem. Coordination with the Deanston hydro operator continued, focusing on flows through the turbine lade, which had possibly disrupted smolt passage due to the amount of water going down the lade in comparison with the river flow at the time. Throughout the summer, low water levels posed significant challenges. Fish were observed holding at river mouths and in deeper pools, increasing their vulnerability to illegal fishing.

The Rivers Forth/Teith, particularly at Craigforth in Stirling, saw high numbers of fish, and the Board worked with local anglers to increase patrols and reduce poaching. Reports from these efforts were encouraging, with some beats reporting safer fishing conditions and a more visible enforcement presence.

Elsewhere, illegal netting persisted. Five nets were recovered from the Tyne, while reports of traps and nets emerged from the Esk. These incidents prompted training sessions for local police, delivered by the Superintendent and Wildlife Crime Officers, to support more effective responses and identify illegal techniques in relation to their section of river.

By autumn, heavy rain briefly improved river conditions and encouraged strong fish runs across the district. Sea trout were reported in good numbers, averaging 4lb, and salmon sightings were widespread throughout the district's rivers. However, as rainfall remained sporadic, many fish held in pools, making them targets for poachers. Multiple rod and line offences were reported from the Forth, Esk, Tyne, Devon, and Teith. A major enforcement success came when a group operating illegally at Blair Drummond was apprehended, with equipment seized and investigations ongoing. Clubs were encouraged to report incidents via Crimestoppers to support intelligence gathering and better target enforcement resources.

The back-end months brought further evidence of strong fish presence across the district. Notably, the lower Teith saw a high volume of large fish holding in pools awaiting fresher flows before moving on to their respective spawning sites. Fresh sea trout were seen in several rivers well into the closed season, particularly south of Edinburgh, in the River Tyne and Beil. Unfortunately, this also led to a rise in off-season illegal fishing, including the setting of nets at the mouth of the River Esk, where trapped wildlife prompted intervention by the coastguard and Board bailiffs. In response, new training and patrol strategies were put in place, and the Board began introducing new enforcement tools, including body-worn cameras and covert surveillance equipment, to enhance safety and improve evidence collection. The Superintendent also made use of the closed season to prepare for 2025, with new surveillance locations scoped out and training for police officers in Haddington and Dunbar agreed in principle.

Loch Venachar remained a concern throughout the year due to lack of natural spill, limiting flows downstream. APEM carried out fish rescues on behalf of Scottish Water, but the long-term solution will rely on improved flow management and coordination with dam operators.

The partnership with Wildlife Crime Officers, club bailiffs, and river watchers continues to grow and remains central to the success of the Board's protection and conservation work.

The Superintendent wishes to thank all club members, volunteers, landowners, and enforcement partners for their continued support. Special thanks are due to Graham Imrie, Will Muir (Blair Drummond estate), honorary bailiffs David Graham, Douglas Gillan and PC's Laura Robertson and Alistair Whitby for their vital contributions. Their dedication has made a significant impact in protecting our fish and sustaining a collaborative approach to river management across the Forth District

4.2 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Between April 2024 and end of April 2025, 107 consultations were handled by Forth Rivers Trust on behalf of The Board. By responding to these consultations and working with those planning to work instream, the Board successfully discharges its statutory duty of protecting salmonid populations within the Forth, while ensuring that those working instream do not breach the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003.

Past experience shows that work is often scheduled to be undertaken during the winter months, particularly within the energy and water sector. This can result in pollution incidents and highlights the need to push for works to be deferred to protect juvenile salmonid populations, particularly where the risk is greatest. Advice was provided by the Trust on behalf of the Board, on 13 scheduled works outwith the safe working window for salmon, which were subsequently deferred until a safer time period.



Fish rescued on the Danny Burn in July 2024

During this period 18 fish rescues were made - which might otherwise not have been completed due to clients not considering fish welfare in risk assessments or method statements. All fish rescue sites had salmonid populations apart from one which was highlighted a pollution incident. At least four fish rescues were in watercourses with Atlantic salmon.

The benefit of this consultation work can be illustrated by a case that occurred on the Danny Burn in July 2024. By chance, Lee Fisher and Amy Fergusson discovered some instream works taking place in the Danny Burn, which the Board had not been notified about. Their actions led to an emergency fish

rescue which led to the relocation of 48 brown trout and 28 salmon parr away from harm during the removal of the weir and the building of a rock ramp.

Similarly, an emergency rescue occurred on the River Esk in August during works to a lade which had created a poaching hotspot. The rescue prevented adult fish from building up below Inveresk Weir, thereby protecting them from harm that would otherwise have occurred.

Pictures from the fish rescue on the Danny Burn in July 2024



4.3 DONATION TO THE FORTH RIVERS TRUST

In 2024 the Board made a donation to the Forth Rivers Trust. This was put towards a project which reviewed the Loch Venachar (Eas Gobhain) subcatchment of the River Teith SAC. The project sought to:

- identify the full impact of the Loch Venachar dam and operations
- determine the impact on the SAC and salmonid populations within the catchment, and
- help support a case for action, whether voluntary or enforced.

The following conclusions came from this work:

Atlantic salmon were not found upstream of Loch Venachar on any tributary except the River Turk. The River Turk has maintained a population of Atlantic salmon since electrofishing surveys began in 2011 and it may be the only source of salmon smolts in the subcatchment. Comparatively, all sites downstream of Loch Venachar that were surveyed had Atlantic salmon populations represented within the sample at various densities, many of which that were well above benchmark predictions showing the difference between upstream of the dam and elsewhere in the catchment.

Habitat upstream of Loch Venachar is limited for fry suitability and spawning potential. Many tributaries that were assessed through the habitat survey were limited in length available to migratory species due to natural and man made barriers lower down within the tributary reach. Resident brown trout are known to exist upstream of natural falls and so sea trout production from some of these tributaries is likely more successful compared to Atlantic salmon production. Smolt trapping on the Eas Gobhain would be a useful next step in analysis of smolt output and composition of the Eas Gobhain subcatchment.

Habitat below Loch Venachar dam is limited for fry suitability and spawning potential. The SFCC Habitat methodology allows a detailed assessment of spawning habitat to be undertaken. The substrate was deemed unfavourable for spawning due to the percentage of pebble and cobble, lack of gravel, and compaction throughout the channel. Fish rescues are required each year in the North channel due to the presence of juveniles so although the habitat is not optimal, salmonids will spawn in the channel in suboptimal conditions as they will not reverse course to find a suitable alternative. The compaction is likely due to water quality issues in the North channel resulting from dewatering events and a lack of natural flow patterns within this channel.

The area of habitat below Loch Katrine has some areas of suitable spawning and fry habitat, however no Atlantic salmon were detected during electrofishing surveys and very few redds were spotted during checks. Some scour was evident during redd checks and analysis of water levels indicate sharp increases in water level that may be significantly impacting redds during the flow management of Katrine Dam. eDNA results indicate that Atlantic salmon are not spawning in any of the tributaries above Loch Katrine and so are unlikely to be getting through Katrine Dam to the headwaters available there.

Based on this work, the Trust made recommendations for action. The Board is considering these possible actions as it continues to seek solutions to the issues that salmonids face around Loch Venachar.

4.4 FISHING AROUND THE FORTH

The Fishing Around the Forth platform continues to be a vital and evolving resource that benefits both local fisheries and the Board. Developed and managed by the Forth Rivers Trust in partnership with the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board, the platform provides a centralised online space for anglers to purchase permits, access fishery information, and log catch returns while also supporting fisheries in managing income and operations.

The 2024 was a strong year for angling and the season brought some excellent sport across several rivers in the Forth District. Notably, the River Carron, Allan Water and River Teith all recorded positive salmon catches, with an increase in runs and good angling conditions contributing to a memorable season for many anglers.

The 2024 salmon season officially opened on 1st February with a celebratory ceremony hosted at Blair Drummond Estate. The Board would like to extend its thanks to Jamie Muir for hosting the event, which brought together anglers, river managers, and local stakeholders to mark the beginning of the new season. The event helped raise awareness of the importance of sustainable angling and the work underway to protect and restore wild fish populations.

The Fishing Around the Forth Platform Improvements and Impact

Throughout 2024, significant enhancements were made to the Fishing Around the Forth platform to improve user experience and streamline operations:

- A refreshed homepage at www.fishforth.org, improving access to information and navigation
- Introduction of an AI chatbot to answer frequently asked questions in real time
- Overhaul of the fishery search page, with new interactive buttons for each fishery
- Updated permit designs and distribution processes to simplify use and understanding
- Automated financial reconciliation processes for faster, accurate payments to fisheries
- Improved catch return portal, with automated reminders to encourage compliance
- Behind-the-scenes upgrades to ensure smoother platform performance.

These updates enhance the platform's core value: making it easy for anglers to fish legally and responsibly, while helping fisheries and the Board gather essential data to guide decision-making.

Strategic Value to the Board

The platform continues to deliver a range of benefits for the Board, beyond permit sales alone:

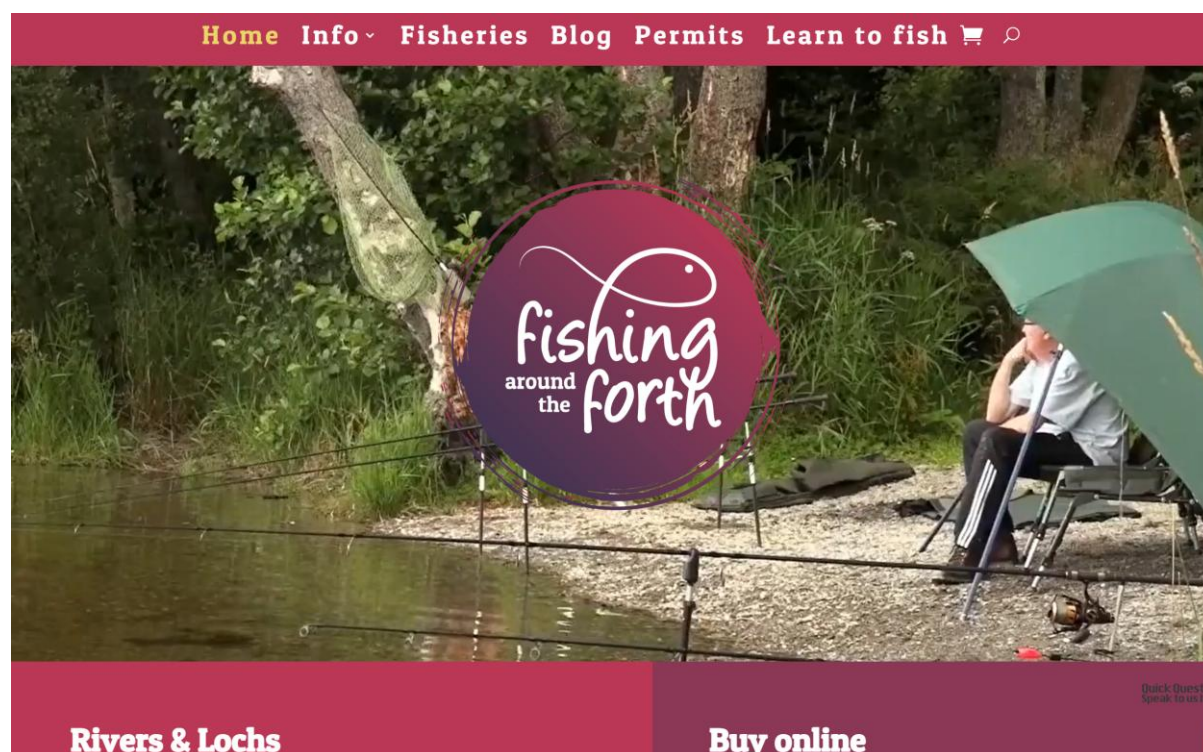
- Real-time visibility of fishing activity allows the Board to monitor angling pressure and better understand usage patterns
- Income transparency and digital reporting simplify financial planning and auditing
- Enhanced enforcement through digital permits, allowing quick checks in the field and better compliance with fishery rules
- Catch return reminders and centralised reporting support effective stock management
- The platform provides an auditable digital trail that supports the Board's statutory responsibilities.

In 2024, a total of £76,648 was generated in permit sales through the platform, resulting in 2,384 permits sold - a 5% increase on the previous year. This continued growth demonstrates the increasing demand for accessible fishing and highlights the effectiveness of collaboration among the Board, Trust, and local fisheries.

Access and Affordability

The platform remains free to all levy-paying proprietors, with all profit from booking fees reinvested into maintaining and enhancing the system. Nearly all major fisheries in the district now participate, helping to present the Forth as a well-managed, accessible, and transparent fishing destination.

As the Board continues to develop its strategy for fishery protection and conservation, the *Fishing Around the Forth* platform stands out as an example of modern, data-driven, partnership-based river management in action.



5 Looking forward

In 2025 the Board will:

1. Hold triennial elections to elect a new Board
2. Be subject to a revised valuation of fisheries in the District
3. Appoint a new clerk
4. Seek a solution to the demands for rebates and seek to maintain financial viability
5. Continue to support the enforcement team to protect the fisheries in the District
6. Work with others, including Police Scotland, to reduce offences which impact the salmon and trout populations
7. Respond to consultations to ensure that instream working are robustly mitigated
8. Produce advisory conservation recommendations in line with Scottish Government conservation measures
9. Engage with Marine Directorate and others to encourage greater protection of wild salmon within the estuary which are currently sustaining damage from sea trout netting
10. Continue to support and promote the Forth fishery using Fishing Around the Forth.
11. Set a budget and appropriate poundage to deliver this work.

This is a reduction of activity that the DSFB has delivered in previous years and limits the ability of the DSFB to deliver effectivity protection, conservation and enhancement of the Forth Salmon Fishery.

