AFT Biologist's Report – AGM 4th November 2025

Trust Development & Public relations 2025

In 2025-26, the Trust is engaged in a diversity of work which included both Marine and freshwater surveys, habitat improvement works, and other projects aimed at improving the status of fish populations in the region. The development of the AFT organisation is also ongoing, and recent developments are summarised below:

- The Trust's team has shown a higher degree of flexibility with four full-time staff providing opportunities to take on more and a greater diversity of work including contract work for AST on Project Laxford.
- A 4-week placement of French student Mael Merle with AFT in June-July has been successfully completed. Mael mainly helped us with our sea trout netting programme.
- A Toyota Hiace van has been purchased to replace our ailing Fiat Dioblo van.
- The management 'dashboard' and timeline have helped to assist the management of staff time utilisation in the first half of the year.

The work of the Trust is divided into separate categories related to funding sources, including National projects which us public funds which are administered by Fishery Management Scotland (FMS), Catchment projects which utilise funds from a variety of sources and Commercial contracts that relates to survey work undertaken under contracts from private companies. The work currently planned (and partly completed in Q1 & Q2) in 2025-26 is summarised below:

National Projects

AFT will participated in four projects that are organised on a Scotland-wide basis by Fishery Management Scotland (FMS) with public funding. The value of these projects in 2024-25 is around £20.88K. Some projects (SRTMN) are unfunded consume Trust resources but are important contributions to forming fishery management policy in Scotland.

Funded National Projects

Sea trout sweep netting (SEPA/FMS) – AFT has completed sweep netting and analysis of sea lice burdens of sea trout at Loch Riddon, West Loch Tarbert and Loch Eil (Lochaber) in 2025 (£13.38K). The work will inform further development of monitoring of the Sea Lice Regulatory Framework. https://fms.scot/fish-farming/publications-and-data/ .

Adult salmon sampling programme (ASSES) (MD/FMS) - following work carried out between 2021-24, AFT has collected 11 scale samples, length and weight data from adult salmon caught in the River Awe. This information will be used to inform Salmon conservation limits (£7.5K). More information can be found here: https://www.gov.scot/policies/salmon-and-recreational-fisheries/conservation/ .

Unfunded National Projects

Pink Salmon eDNA sampling (FMS) – AFT has collected eDNA samples from River Awe and River Orchy as part of a national monitoring programme for the monitoring of pink salmon in Scotland in August 2025. No funding was available for this project (£1.5K budgeted). https://fms.scot/pink-salmon-in-scotland/ .

Scottish River Temperature Monitoring Network (SRTMN – MD) - AFT continues to contribute water temperature data to the national picture through our data collection from our network of temperature recording tags deployed in the Add, Carradale and Awe catchments.

The project is not funded. More information can be found here https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-river-temperature-monitoring-network-srtmn/

Catchment Projects

AFT are working with a range of project partners on 10 different catchment-based projects which are aimed at gathering data to inform management of fisheries, improving habitats and minimising impacts from use of water resources on fish populations.

Awe & Etive Catchment Studies – AFT produced a new Fishery Management Plan for the Awe catchment in 2024. This plan prioritises actions (and projects) required to conserve and improve fish populations going forward. The short-term priority is identified as improving the survival of smolts migrating to sea, reducing water temperature peaks in the headwaters and creating a baseline of genetic and density data on juvenile salmon populations due to an increased risks to wild salmon posed by a change in fish farming in Loch Etive and Loch Awe from rainbow trout to salmon. Implementation of the plan utilises funding from SSE & Mowi Scotland which is facilitated by ADSFB. The work programme for 2025 is underway:

Awe Barrage Smolt Tracking Project - Following previous studies (2021-2024) to assess downstream fish passage at the Awe barrage, AFT tagged and released a further 100 salmon smolts with acoustic tags in April 2025 and tracked them through Loch Awe and the River Awe to the sea. The in-river receivers were collected in August which indicate an improvement in the proportion of smolts detected at the estuary:

Some 80 % of smolts released in the Pass of Brander were detected when the freshet gate was lowered and 50 % of smolts released in the River Orchy were also detected at the estuary. This compares favourably to the 20 % of smolts detected in 2024 when the freshet gate was operated to existing smolt passage management procedures. The in-loch receivers will be retrieved and data downloaded in early 2026 following the ferox trout spawning season.

AFT and ADSFB met with Drax (Cruachan PSH scheme) in June and August to seek further funding for this and other projects in the catchment. The project is also collecting data from tagged ferox trout which may utilise the River Awe for spawning in Autumn (tags funded by LAIA). Deep water receivers are being loaned by Atlantic Salmon Trust and Glasgow University have provided licensing & technical support.

Awe & Etive Fish population survey - Following the change of use at fish farms in Loch Awe and Loch Etive, it was necessary to collect genetic information on salmon populations and get updated information on the status of salmon and trout populations in the area. The genetic data will provide a baseline upon which to monitor any effect of potential escapes of farm fish. Further samples will be collected during electrofishing surveys in the Awe catchment and Loch Etive rivers in September and October 2025.

Upper River Orchy Habitat improvement - This area of the catchment has been identified by monitoring as effected by high water temperatures and significant reductions in juvenile salmon populations. Initial meetings of AFT/ADSFB and landowners to discuss options for implementing sub-catchment scale habitat management/restoration plans were undertaken in 2024 and earlier in 2025. AK has developed proposals for fencing and tree planting which has been amended following a site visit (July, 2025) and a planting plan has been approved by FLS (with help from Blackmount Estate). Trees for planting will be ordered before end of September. Discussions with Blackmount Estate are ongoing.

River Ruel habitat improvement (RRIA) –

Fish habitat improvement works in the upper river Ruel over the past 6 years will be continued in 2025. The work has introduced Coarse woody debris into the river and green bank revetment (GBR) to increase the cover for fish, increase scour of riverbed substrates and protecting banks from erosion. AFT provided support to RRIA to successfully apply for additional funds in 2025 from the Salmon Scotland Wild Fisheries Fund (WFF) to bring the total project fund to circa £16.8K including funding from RRIA and Cruach Mor Wind Farm Trust.

Ruel salmon 'Living Gene Bank seeks to evaluate new techniques of utilising hatcheries to maintain genetic diversity in declining salmon populations. A proposal to continue the partnership with Otter Ferry Sea Fish Ltd to on grow wild parr to mature adult in 2025 (to act as a source of fertilised eggs / release of mature adults) was accepted by the WFF. AFT will be undertaking juvenile fish and spawning surveys to inform the project in 2025. All aspects of the project will be informed by genetic information and guidance from Marine Directorate.

Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park –

The AFT application to the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park authority (LLNPA) for funding projects in the park area in 2025 was successful (£42.3K). This contribution agreement will support fish habitat improvement work in two catchments in the park area:

River Eachaig habitat improvement -. AFT will support fish habitat improvement such as coarse woody and green bank revetment Autumn 2025.

River Goil habitat improvement - AFT will undertake green bank revetment and fencing work in 2025.https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/park-authority/what-we-do/conservation/land-management/our-work-in-action/river-goil-green-revetment-project-supporting-salmon-nature-based-solutions/

Invasive plant control – A contribution agreement with the NPA was secured for further work to control of invasive plants in the Lettermay Burn, River Goil and River Eachaig utilising professional contractors.

In addition to the above projects, AFT is working with the Lochgoilhead community Trust and angling club to secure further funding for a re-meandering & flood prevention project on the River Goil.

River Creran RIA – Salmon Recovery Programme – In 2025, AFT will continue the evaluation of a nutrient supplement trial for the third year. This work evaluates the outcomes of the experimental addition of nutrients (fish pellets) on juvenile fish survival and growth. AKW also provided advice on gravel removal in the main river this summer. This work is supported by a donation from David Stewart via CAF America.

Loch Fyne RIA – AFT have completed the fieldwork for the bi-annual juvenile fish monitoring in Loch Fyne rivers in 2024. A report was issued in March 2025. AFT is seeking further engagement with river owners to identify fishery management priorities going forward.

Knapdale beaver / fish interactions (Nature Scot)

A 3-year contribution agreement was secured in 2024 from Nature Scot to evaluate mitigation measures taken to ease the migration of sea trout at a coastal stream in Knapdale that has been colonised by European Beaver. Further electrofishing has been completed, and spawning surveys will be carried out later in 2025 to evaluate the results of the work.

Commercial Contracts 2024-25

Aquaculture EMP contracts:

AFT has completed several commercial contracts related to aquaculture Environment Monitoring Plans (EMPs) in 2025. A total of 20 sites were sampled on 96 visits, catching 941 sea trout including 783 small sea trout (< 150 g) and 158 large trout (> 150 g). A summary of the Results of the sampling is given below with the level of additional sea lice-related risk to the population given as high (red), moderate (yellow) and low (green):

Bakkefrost Scotland EMPs

AFT have completed 5 contracts in 2025 for marine sampling that informs EMPs at Loch Fyne, Loch na Keal, Lamlash and Ardyne and East Tarbet Bay. The surveys collected a total of 322 sea trout from 20 sampling events. A low additional lice-related risk to small sea trout was found at four locations and a high risk found at one other (Lamlash). A low lice-related risk to larger trout was found at Loch Fyne, a moderate risk was found at Loch na Keal and a high risk at Ardyne (one trout).

BFS	Site	Visits	small	large	Total
Fyne	Fyne	6	203	31	234
Kyles	Ardyne	3	10	1	11
W. Kintyre	East Tarbert Bay	5	38	0	38
Arran	Lamlash	3	8	0	8
West Mull	Loch na Keal	3	11	20	31
BFS	5	20	270	52	322

Mowi / Kames EMPs

AFT have undertaken 3 contracts for marine monitoring of EMPs for Mowi Scotland in 2025 including Carradale, Loch Etive and Sound of Shuna. Sub-contract work for Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust for sea lice monitoring work at the River Leven has also been undertaken.

The surveys collected a total of 393 sea trout from 49 sampling events. A low additional lice-related risk to small sea trout was found at three sites (Etive, Carradale & R. Leven), a moderate risk at two sites (L. Melfort & Kinlochleven) and a high risk found at two sites in upper Loch Linnhe and two sites in Loch Sunart. A low lice-related risk to larger trout was found at r. Leven, a moderate risk was found at Loch Etive and a high risk at L. Melfort and all sites in Upper Loch Linnhe and Loch Sunart.

Mowi	Site	Visits	small	large	Total
Lower Linnhe	Etive	4	45	24	69
L. Melfort	Sound of Shuna	10	20	6	26
East Kintyre	Carradale	4	67	0	67
Lomond	Leven	4	22	13	35
Upper Linnhe	Kinlochleven	5	47	7	54
	Bunree	5	41	9	50
	Camusnagaul	4	71	8	79
Loch Sunart	Strontian	3	4	3	7
	Laga Bay (Fyke)	10	4	2	6
Mowi	9	49	321	72	393

Scottish Sea Farms EMPs

Sea trout sampling for the lower Loch Linnhe EMP contracts for Scottish Sea Farms at Dunstaffnage, Loch Creran, and Kingairloch sampled 58 sea trout including 48 small trout and 10 larger trout in 14 sampling events. A high additional sea lice-related risk was found at all three sites for both small and larger trout.

SSF	Site	Visits	small	large	Total
Lower Linnhe	Kingairloch	4	15	2	17
	Creran	5	24	7	31
	Dunstaffnage	5	9	1	10
SSF	3	14	48	10	58

Additional data (August & September) has been collected for the Loch Etive Sea Lice Project https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=BB/Z515292/1 at Dunstaffnage and Loch Etive.

SEPA – Sea Lice Regulatory Framework

Sea trout sampling for the SLRF monitoring for FMS at Kinlocheil (Lochaber), West Loch Tarbert, and Loch Riddon sampled 168 sea trout including 144 small trout and 24 larger trout in 13 sampling events. A low additional lice-related risk to small sea trout was found at Loch Riddon, and a moderate risk at Kinlocheil and West Loch Tarbert. A moderate risk to larger trout was found at Kinlocheil and a high risk at West Loch Tarbert and Loch Riddon.

SEPA	Site	Visits	small	large	Total
Upper Linnhe	Kinlocheil	5	66	5	71
W. Kintyre	West Loch Tarbert	3	29	8	37
Kyles	Loch Riddon	5	49	11	60
SEPA	3	13	144	24	168

Additional Contracts:

Further contract work required to inform renewable energy developments is underway at one site.

River Talladale (Wester Ross) – Fish and fish habitat surveys (£6.65K) have been completed, reported and invoiced.

AST Project Laxford – Fish sampling and PIT tagging of salmon parr has been completed (AKW & DK) on the River Laxford Core Rivers Project for Atlantic Salmon Trust (£12K).

Einig Wind Farm – AKW & TB worked with River Revivors to undertake fieldwork on fish and fish habitat at a proposed wind farm development on the River Einig (R. Oykel catchment). The income for the work is forecast at £14.9K with significant contractor costs (£9K).

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