

SHORT MINUTES - RETA COMMITTEE MEETING, MONDAY 18th July 2022

Treasurer Membership was at 240 with 25 yet to pay their 2022 subscriptions.

Fish the Exe and scheme for junior rods Very low flows and warm temperatures have greatly reduced any demand for fishing.

SWRA Beavers, access, national salmon stocks, predators, hatchery and SWRA contacts were all discussed at the recent SWRA Council meeting.

Exe Mitigation Group A meeting was planned for the following week. Water releases had been made for smolt descent.

ERaSG/HofE report Nothing new

Robin Bailey Tuition Day The tuition day held in May was a success and a second day is planned for 4th September if the weather (temperatures) allowed it.

Website The website now has advice about not fishing during the very warm water temperatures as salmonids caught and returned in these conditions do not easily survive.

2023 AGM A speaker for the AGM on 10th March 2023 at the Hartnoll, possible sponsorship and to a worthy recipient of the Robin Bailey Award were all discussed and potential speakers and sponsors are to be approached. The on-line auction dates will span the AGM date to encourage bidding.

EA/Defra A summary of the EA's stock assessment for England and Wales had been circulated (the full document subsequently became available on the EA website) and the potential for compulsory 100% catch and release discussed. A Westcountry Water Resources Plan is in the early stages of preparation.

Exe Strategic Weirs Fund raising remains very slow but that hopefully the imminent start of construction at Bridgetown should be a good catalyst. Design work is in hand for Bolham. For Bickleigh Bridge the designing process is beginning following acceptance of the visualisation plans. The weirs at Exwick, Cowley and Mill on the Exe are serious barriers and work with Mike Holland of the EA continues. The river split complicates the design process but ownership is being resolved. Network Rail are still involved but with the need for the EA to lead. At Trews Weir work continues to assess the state and stability of the weir structure. The SEW team is considering weir removal at Helebridge. The Dulverton Leat Conservation Trust's plans for fish migration at Dulverton Weir, where recently the leat has dried, is monitored. At Perry and Oakford Bridge flow is significantly compromised by leat take off for fish farms. The raising of trout at these farms is now mainly for stocking and not table fish which means less fish and potentially less water needed in summer months.

Riparian ownership and access In recent events and publications the EA (Blue Spaces Forum) and the Rivers Trust have shown a lack of clarity on ownership of rivers and the fact that navigation rights do not exist on inland rivers other than the Four Great Rivers of England. The permissive access provision on the Barle in partnership with the ENPA is rejected by British Canoeing as they contend that all rivers have free navigational rights. Discussion ensued with concerns about repeated use establishing a navigational right, notices protecting against such rights, the nuisance canoeists cause, the expanding water sports of river walking and wild swimming and the responsibilities riparian owners have. The relevant texts on the RETA website will be re-written.

Hatchery Nothing to report.

Coppice work Riverside coppicing work discussion focussed on the need for the right balance of shade and sunlight and the need to communicate this to land managers. Discussion on the proximity of pheasant release pens to water courses followed. GWCT advice to does not recognise potential pollution from release pens near water courses. GESA (Greater Exmoor Shoots Association) and the GWCT will be contacted.

Gravel washing The planned gravel washing would be completed this autumn.

Juvenile survey Plans are in hand including the surveys due to be completed by the EA

Spawning observation This is scheduled for late autumn and a training session will be held.

GIS Uploading of information onto the system continues.

Riverfly May sampling was completed with fairly encouraging results. For the July programme the very low flows compromised the results and/or made the kick sampling almost impossible.

Canoes and access This was covered above

Beavers/Other Invasive Species Beaver activity has been reported on the Exe system where there are no official release sites. Crayfish control at Withypool and other sites on Exmoor continues.

Predators Natural Resources Wales new recognition of the negative impact of fish eating birds might mean more recognition from the EA, so RETA will consider intensive monitoring at selected weirs in the spring.

Committee dates for 2022/3, 10th October, 9th January, AGM 10th March.