

MINUTES RETA COMMITTEE MEETING MONDAY 10th January 2022

The Chairman welcomed Bruce Pearson and Toby Diggens to the committee.

Treasurer. There is a deficit of approximately £14,500 due to the £25,000 transferred to the SEW fund. There are 268 members of RETA, the highest number ever. £65k had been raised from members for the SEW fund but this is disappointing as it came from only 10% of the membership and included 3 large donations.

Fish the Exe. Nothing to report.

SWRA report. William Entwisle has taken over the SWRA chair. The EA had withdrawn permission for their fish traps to be used for broodstock collection.

Exe Mitigation Group The EMG were to meet later in the week.

Exmoor Rivers and Streams/Headwaters of the Exe Richard McLaughlin who had provided very valuable input over hydro power plants has retired. ERaSG had responded over the NT proposal on the River Aller. The Tiverton hydro proposal remains unresolved on the Mid Devon Council website.

Robin Bailey Tuition Day. It is hoped to hold three tuition days in 2022.

Website. The SEW project information and donation form are on the website.

AGM 2022. 18th March at the Hartnoll. The Auction will again be held on-line. Dylan Roberts from GWCT is to speak and there will be a SEW update and repeat request for donations.

EA/Defra matters. Defra funding for the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme is minimal so fish farm abstractions on the Exe, possible candidates for review, are unlikely to be changed. The EA may be considering 100% mandatory catch and release of salmon on South West rivers. C&R controls to date have reduced fishing effort and river management has suffered from reduced interest and decrease in funds from licences or voluntary funds. Weirs causing difficulty for smolt migration were discussed.

Exe Strategic Weirs At last it is established that Mill on the Exe Weir is owned by Exeter City Council it should now be possible to move the proposal forward on this very disruptive weir. EA is working with RETA over the modelling of weir disruption. At Bickleigh Bridge Weir difficulties remain because of possible threat to the ancient bridge if river flows are greatly altered. At Bolham it is hoped that the design for a fish pass will be completed in 2022 and the work in 2023. Work at Bridgetown should start in 2022.

Membership RETA needs to do more to encourage the young to fish especially those who might have attended a Robin Bailey tuition day. The charge for a Fish the Exe day including membership of RETA was too heavy for the young and some means of getting the young onto the river (accompanied by an adult for safety) is considered essential. It was thought that perhaps possibly offering Robin Bailey attendees a free ticket or a free ticket alongside an adult taking a Fish the Exe day.

Hatchery. As reported under the SWRA report.

Coppice work Phil Turnbull of WRT is reviewing the programmes and the past work, however GIS when fully available will assist with so much of this work.

Gravel washing Gravel cleaning report on the Haddeo and Iron Mill Stream by DAA volunteers had previously been submitted. The work in breaking the gravel is demanding. It was agreed to use a contractor for this work in future. EA permission is required. WRT will advise on areas needing treatment beyond those on the Haddeo. Discussion then centred on questions as to what opportunities existed for funding river work from the plethora of Defra schemes as the Basic Payment scheme is withdrawn,

Heathcoat Factory Nothing to report.

Juvenile survey The survey gave a very mixed picture, the Barle good, other areas very variable.

Spawning Observations had been encouraging and it is hoped that in 2022 a wider survey will be possible. Observations on the river at that time of year are valuable just in themselves.

GIS The anticipated cost of running the system will be £250 pcm.

Riverfly The full and detailed 2021 report had been circulated and the committee recorded their thanks to the coordinators. The importance of a healthy riverfly population was discussed and further emphasis put on monitoring the levels of pollution particularly from animal medications.

Canoes and access Nothing new

Sawbills and Cormorants It was agreed that the control of cormorants under our NE licence should be promoted. It is difficult to arrange the shooting of the licensed number of cormorants as landowner permissions are needed. While the Exe has a significant resident population of goosanders that predates heavily on salmonids there is little likelihood of obtaining a licence from NE for lethal control.

Committee dates for 2022 11th April, 18th July, 17th October (all at 6pm). The 2022 AGM 18th March AOB. Insurance and liability of fishing clubs and associations was discussed in the light of the recent death of a volunteer from a club in the north of England. Members agreed that RETA must have a written Health and Safety statement and a guide note addressing the assessment of risk where volunteers are used.