

MINUTES RETA COMMITTEE MEETING, MONDAY 25th January 2021

Minutes of the Committee meetings held on 20th July 2020 were approved.

Matters arising. Adrian Howell has resigned from the Committee.

Treasurer's Report, RETA has some £50k in its account in addition to the Strategic Exe Weirs and Exe Mitigation Group money held by WRT. It was decided to transfer £25k from RETA held funds into the SEW fund. The SEW fund already holds a £30k donation. It was agreed to make a £500 donation to GWCT. There are 203 paid up members already in 2021, 7 resignations and 5 new members

Fish the Exe, Nothing to report.

SWRA report. A report was circulated earlier. There were no questions.

Exe Mitigation Group. It is hoped to obtain increased funding. Because of Wimbleball Reservoir the Haddeo is never going to be returned to a productive salmon river and South West Water has accepted that funds provided by them to EMG could be used in the wider river system. Wimbleball also supplies water resources to Wessex Water and they do not currently donate to EMG. Mitigation money for other South West reservoirs are more generous. WRT had established obligations under the Wimbleball licence for release of water for environmental reasons.

Exmoor Rivers and Streams/Headwaters of the Exe. Report circulated earlier. There were no questions

Robin Bailey Tuition Day. There were no tuition days in 2020 still hopeful about later in 2021

Website report, Waiting to confirm the cost (£250?) of professional work on an overall revamp

AGM 2021. (incl 2020 AGM), The date chosen for the AGMs is 11/6/21 but inevitably COVID19 might cause further difficulty. The pandemic situation remains a problem for the AGM and sponsorship

EA/Defra matters It was noted that the Angling Trust (and others) commissioned independent Cowx Report on beavers had been sent to the Defra Minister George Eustice. It was noted that the EA's approach to salmonid stock assessments based on licence returns was inadequate. In Wales mandatory catch and release (C&R) is already arbitrarily imposed. The committee agreed that voluntary 90% C&R should be the way forward and that then be tailored to any particular river. The Trews Weir fish counter was discussed, it was noted that fish were using the old baulk pass in higher flows and so the counter on the Larinier was likely to be missing significant numbers. The EA ran out of funding by early November to maintain the counter but it is hoped they will now reinstate the collection of data and make the Exe one of three South West rivers to monitor salmon numbers.

Exe Strategic Weirs The complexity of the ownership of the numerous weirs requiring attention was discussed, with it being discovered that the Mill on the Exe weirs are owned by Exeter City Council these being the most in need of improvement for fish passage. Discussion then moved to the proposed presentation at the AGM launch of SEW and then wider exposure.

Hatchery. The hatchery at Colliford will provide hatchery facilities as needed for all South West rivers. The EA are not that keen but that with the necessary genetic knowledge of the stock entering the hatchery then closer knowledge of returning adult salmon and a better understanding of the value of a hatchery will be possible. RETA will maintain its interest for possible future use.

Coppice work. It has been a difficult but some work has been done

Gravel washing.. A larger area on the Haddeo was cleaned this year these areas entered on the GIS mappings

Heathcoat Factory. Possible reduction of this abstraction under the EA Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) scheme. Also Perry Weir but the pandemic has greatly delayed any action. Mid Devon Council planners had received about 85 objections to The Tiverton hydro scheme the scheme and only one letter in support.

Juvenile survey. Plans being laid for the survey in 2021. WRT had announced an increased charge for the electrofishing work.

Spawning observation. Three teams had deployed to undertake the survey. Several redds were seen on the upper Barle but there were few other sightings. Data will be added to the GIS system.

GIS. There is still work to do to bring the system together and begin to really benefit from this compilation of river data. Habitat and gravel data had been sent to WRT and we are expecting the mapping system with this and all the other data included. The GIS system will be essential for the SEW launch and also for discussions with EMG.

Canoes and access. SWRA was active over this issue with the Lyn Association's great help. George Eustice had recently made it clear that Defra supports permissive access arrangements and has no plans to impose any change over the private property rights of owners. It was noted that public funds through Sport England should not be going to British Canoeing whilst that body promotes canoeing through trespass on private rivers.

Sawbills and Cormorants. Lobbying needs to continue on these predators. Like the beaver situation it is highly political. RETA will need to consider a further survey.