

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2015
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 31 salmon were caught on the Derwent, 25 of these were returned to the water. There were 28 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were returned. On the Cocker no salmon or sea trout were reported and angling effort was very light due to the low water conditions during the season.
- For comparison figures for Cockermouth Angling Association for earlier years are as follows:

Season	Derwent Total Salmon	Derwent Salmon Returned	Derwent Sea Trout	Cocker Total Salmon
2002	58	?	?	3
2003	20	?	?	0
2004	93	30	26	8
2005	55	33	10	6
2006	61	27	17	7
2007	121	53	4	22
2008	64	23	1	25
2009	82	44	14	11
2010	72	38	27	11
2011	55	19	13	13
2012	44	22	10	5
2013	34	17	6	15
2014	24	20	46	15

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 486 sessions (256 last year) and for the Cocker it was about 40 sessions (67 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 16 sessions per salmon!
- Overall it has been one of the poorest salmon seasons on record. This poor season is replicated on most other North West rivers.
- For interest the other figures I have for other Derwent beats so far is as follows (with last year's figures in brackets) are Workington AA 80 (76 in 2014), Castle Rods 58 (77), Isel Fisheries 15 (33), Keswick 1 (20), Woodhall 10 (14), and the Cradles 4 (14).
- It would seem likely, based upon the figures I have so far, that the River Derwent is likely to fail its Conservation Limit for the second year in a row. This is of very serious concern.
- A "Salmon Summit" was organised by the Environment Agency on 19th November 2015 in London to consider what needed to be done about the continuing fall in salmon stocks in UK Rivers. The Angling Trust and other national angling organisations submitted their ideas and the Minister is said to be considering how Defra will respond.

- There is virtually nothing that local angling associations can do about marine survival rates, which the EA say is the most significant reason for the fall in salmon stocks. This will take action at national and international level and it is hoped that more action is taken in these areas as a result of the "Salmon Summit".
- Locally, we can influence the numbers of smolts which migrate from our rivers. The Derwent Owners Association, working with the EA and Natural England, has put together a River Derwent Conservation Action Plan, which is aimed at halting the decline and then improving the salmon numbers on the Derwent. I reported last year that this Plan includes
 - **Increasing catches and release rates.** It seems likely that even more will be asked for in this area. The North West Angling Trust Fisheries Consultative Council has asked members if they would support bringing in a 2 salmon per season bag limit, together with a carcass tagging system. If SAC Rivers like the Derwent continue to fail to meet Conservation Limits, it is possible that EA will seek to introduce mandatory 100% catch and release. However, this would require bye-law changes and it certainly will not apply to 2016.
 - **Decreasing predation by fish eating birds.** We have made some progress in this area and the numbers of control licences for goosanders and cormorants on the Derwent have been replaced by a single area licence. This authorises us to shoot 20 goosanders and 20 cormorants up to the 15th March 2016. We will then be given a separate licence, with further numbers, to give some additional protection during the smolt migration up to 15th May 2016. There is some increased flexibility with the Area Based Licence but it does mean some additional work for me, because as the Principal Licence holder (as Chairman of DOA), I am required to administer it and prepare a report on all bird control activities carried out. The Angling Trust continues to press for increase in the numbers of birds we are allowed to shoot as part of the control programme. Progress depends upon being able to provide hard evidence on the numbers of birds on the river and the damage they are causing. Adrian Mills will also be organising our annual counts of goosanders etc. on the river from March onwards and we would appreciate additional help to make this as comprehensive a survey as possible. Anyone interested in helping should give contact details to Adrian.
 - **Doing more habitat improvement work.** CAA has supported the DOA's involvement with habitat improvement work over many years. This last season we carried out improvement work to the left bank of Iron Bridge and our thanks are due to John Moses for organising and over seeing that work. We paid 25% towards the cost of that work, with 25% coming from DOA and the remainder from the Rivers Corridor Group. We will have to wait to see how these (and other habitat improvement works) have stood up to the onslaught of the December 2015 floods.
 - **Enhancement of Juvenile Fish Stocks.** The debate about the benefits of running hatcheries to enhance juvenile fish stocks has continued and I know there are many local anglers with very strong views in favour of hatcheries. Mark Hastings has chaired a DOA Hatcheries Group which has had strong support from John Moses and others. DOA is waiting for a final report from this group in the New Year. However, up to press, the EA position remains that it will not authorise the operation of Keswick Hatchery to increase

stocking in the Derwent. Another area where we have made some progress is that we have supported the carrying out of "semi-quantitative" electro-fishing surveys by the West Cumbria Rivers Trust throughout the Derwent catchment. The first survey was completed during 2015. This is seen as the first of a 4 or 5 year programme which will provide hard evidence of the state of juvenile salmon and trout stocks throughout the Derwent system. It is in addition to the routine quantitative surveys which the EA carries out at selected sites.

- **Control of Poaching and Illegal Fishing.** There have been several reports of illegal netting etc. taking place on the Derwent again this season. Understandably, local anglers get very frustrated about the absence of teams of EA warranted bailiffs. However, it is quite clear that this cannot happen because of continued cuts in Government "Grant in Aid" to the Environment Agency. We have to find alternative ways of combatting this problem. Again the Angling Trust is taking a lead in this area and has appointed a national team of 6 ex-police officers to provide help and advice to local areas. Can I again emphasise the importance of reporting any intelligence or even suspicion of illegal activity on the river to the Emergency Helpline Number on your licence **0800 80 70 60**. I also have a meeting set up with Darren Bedworth of the EA Fisheries Operations Team in the New Year to see what else can be done to focus their activities on to our particular problem areas.
- **Removal of Barriers to Fish Migration.** This is an area where the West Cumbria Rivers Trust is taking the lead and working with EA, UU and others. Plans are being worked up to remove some major barriers (like Yearl Weir and the Coops weir) but these are at an early stage of development. However, more immediately work is in hand to improve fish passage by removing blockages caused by fallen trees and piped "culverts".
- This type of "multi-faceted" approach to trying to improve salmon stocks seems to be considered to be "best practice". No single measure on its own can halt the decline, never mind improve things.

COGRA MOSS

- Eric Brown retired as Still Waters Secretary last year. Most of you will know that Eric has been seriously ill this year, not only was he diagnosed with prostate cancer but he suffered a serious stroke. I have kept in touch with Margaret and have been round to see Eric fairly regularly. I am pleased to be able to tell you that when I saw him last week he had made significant progress. He was walking much more freely and his speech had improved markedly. He is being typically stubborn and fighting back and we all wish him well.
- Terry Barnes and John Smith have managed the work that Eric used to do and our thanks are due to them, and the many others who have helped with the numerous routine tasks at Cogra Moss. Terry will be presenting his Cogra Moss report later in the meeting.
- Members will be fully aware of the threat of closure of Cogra Moss caused by United Utilities plans to consider permanently draining the reservoir rather than carrying out essential repairs to some redundant pipework associated with the dam. Members would therefore be delighted with the news that after carefully

considering their options, United Utilities decided not to "decommission" Cogra Moss and to carry out the essential engineering work instead. This will involve a temporary reduction in water levels and United Utilities will be sharing detailed plans in the New Year. We do not expect the 2016 season to be affected and will work with United Utilities to ensure that any disruption to fishing is kept to a minimum.

- I am sure that the very vigorous campaign that we organised, which involved writing letters, working with Sue Hayman MP, radio and TV interviews, using "Social Media" like Facebook and "Friends of Cogra Moss", on-line petitions, working with Friends of the Lake District & Lamplugh Parish Council as well as numerous meetings with United Utilities, all played a part in persuading them to take the "right decision". This was a big success and I'd like to thank everyone who helped to achieve it.

WEB-SITE

- John Smith has continued to maintain the Cockermouth Angling Society web-site and I would encourage members to visit it at cockermouthanglingassociation.co.uk

ANNUAL DINNER

- Held again at Hundith Hill last March with a good attendance. This year's Dinner Dance will be at the same venue on Saturday 27th February 2015 and Sue will be sending out details in the New Year. It's a good night out so please try and support it again this year.

DECEMBER FLOODS

- I have briefly referred to the events of the first week of December 2015 but these floods were more destructive than those of November 2009. They were County wide, rainfall and river levels broke all previous records. Most of Cockermouth was not as badly affected as in 2009, due to the improved flood defences and the town is recovering much more quickly. However, some areas like the Gote have really been hammered again. Our heartfelt sympathies go out to all those affected.
- The Derwent system will have been significantly altered again and unfortunately much of the improvement work we have done may have been destroyed. We will be carrying out inspections to see the extent of the damage in due course, when it is safe to do so. We will then have to prioritise action to start work on the system again. Just as we did after the 2009 floods. However, we have to be fully aware of the wider picture in the County and recognise that there are far greater priorities than ours. We will get there, but it will take some time to do so.

FINALLY, THANKS

- Are due to
 - Our Secretary Sue Moses who has carried out these duties with great efficiency during the year, ably assisted by husband John. Sue has given the Committee 12 months' notice that, after about 10 years as secretary, she will be resigning from the post at the AGM next year. Thanks for everything you have done on our behalf Sue.
 - Our Treasurer John Smith and to Vice Chairman Peter Laws.
 - Terry Barnes, together with Steven Black and others for their excellent work at Cogra Moss.
 - John Moses, Sean Wilson and Frank Hope for organising and carrying out river bank maintenance work throughout the season.
 - The wardens at Ingle Nook Caravan Park for selling day permits for Cogra Moss on our behalf.
 - David Coulthard and Michael Cleeland for running the guest schemes.
 - The whole of the Committee which has worked very well as a team, not only in meetings but also when it comes to getting things done on the river bank.
 - I'd also like to thank Dave Smith for his on-going help and support and I recognise the difficulties and uncertainties which he is facing in his role as Castle Fisheries Manager.
 - All of our members, for generally fishing in a sporting manner, looking after new comers and giving the committee very few problems!

Jack Abernethy
Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association