

Meeting: Ruswarp Liaison Meeting – final notes V2

Venue: NYMNPA Office, Helmsley

Date: Tuesday 20 June 2017 1-30pm

Attendance

Pat O'Brien (EA); Dr Mike Ford, Dr Rory Newman (Esk Energy); Stephen Till (YERT); Rex Parry (EFA), Michael Graham, Chair (NYMNPA).

Papers circulated; update from EA on Saprolegnia; Wild Trout Trust report on Ruswarp & Danby Weirs.

Apologies; Paul Slater (EA); Angus Oughtred (YERT); Stephen Larkin (Esk Energy)

It was agreed at the start of the meeting that the agenda items relating to Ruswarp would be discussed, and when that part of the meeting had concluded, informal discussion on other items could continue if desired.

1. Any issues to raise from the final monitoring report

EA had responded to comments on the draft and issued the final report in November 2016. No further issues raised were raised at this meeting about the report itself but the following points were noted;

- That not much is known about fish migration and knowledge of how the different factors affect particularly salmon is lacking.
- Marine survival rates of salmon are uncertain and there is evidence that predation and illegal netting are significant issues.
- Despite an annual stocking programme over many years (until recently), the presence of juvenile salmon appear to be declining which is very concerning
- Data collection and presentation of juvenile monitoring at Lealholm was discussed without conclusion though noted the long term trend showed no obvious pattern. EA are to survey this site in September.
- Hull University are surveying 17 sites on the river over 3 years funded by the Catchment Partnership
- YERT hoping to continue monitoring on the whole river
- Rod catch and juvenile monitoring are the two monitoring methods used to determine fish populations
- Noted that salmon are in national decline, not just in the Esk though numbers in the Ure have made a dramatic natural recovery over the last 10 years.
- River Esk is the only 'principle designated salmon river' in Yorkshire

It was agreed to wait for the results of 2017 surveys and invite Richard Noble to the 2018 meeting to discuss. **Action; EA / MG**

2. Ruswarp fish pass efficiency

One of the recommendations in the HiFi Monitoring Report was to investigate if fish passage efficiency could be improved in the main fish pass. It is thought that the figure being achieved is c.50% against a target of 90% passage.

PO'B had checked the original design plans, checked these on site and a hydrologist had checked all the calculations and figs of flow rates, length, gradient etc and all were found to be appropriate and in accordance with the design documents. The fish

pass takes around 20% of the flow which is double the national guidance. There appeared nothing else that could be done to improve the fish pass using current guidance and information apart from possibly increasing the depth of the pool at the foot of the pass though this was questioned as the pool is already 1.2 - 1.8m deep.

MF suggested that Esk Energy would be open to discussion on shutting the turbine when fish were running in order to improve fish passage and compensating generation by increasing the flow down the turbine at times when they were not and there was sufficient water in the river. He also thought a control mechanism would be needed on the entrance to the fish pass to regulate the flow as appropriate.

Addendum; n.b The EA's role in this would be entirely regulatory with formal changes to the abstraction licence and a new fish pass approval document.

The role of the baulk pass also needs to be considered and a control could be put on that too if needed. Any discussions on 'trading water' in the fish pass needs to take this in to consideration and also the eel passage noted at pt 3. Action; YERT/EFA to consider whether this might be beneficial and if so what might work.

The role of a fish counter was discussed. It was recognised that they are expensive to run but options are available from conventional resistive counters to state-of-the-art acoustic counters. This would need further research, and there are currently no proposals for funding one. EE's previous offer to provide safe housing, power and internet connectivity still stands. PO'B suggested involving a fish pass consultant such as Fishways, Fishtek or Hi-Fi in discussing proposals.

It was noted that the nationally set salmon action targets set for the River Esk are failing to be met. These are . An estimated 1000 salmon need to ascend the river based on the calculated amount of spawning habitat in the river. PO'B commented that there was disagreement when the targets were set and it was considered by the EA at the time that the target was too high based upon actual usable spawning habitat.

3. Wild Trout Trust site assessment – Ruswarp & Danby Weirs

As well as the fish pass, the report mentions eel passage as a concern. EA are concerned the concrete crest on the weir could be an impediment and needs some water to go over the lip even in just a few places. Noted that brook lamprey are present but seldom seen. Solutions for lamprey passage features are still being developed nationally.

ST stated that the report mentions the 'absence of wing walls' (P9). PO'B thought that to introduce them would reduce the benefit of co-location with the turbine and it was questioned whether they were included in design guidelines.

ST asked about the bank erosion below the turbine and also the build-up of gravel (latter discussed in depth at the 2016 meeting). PO'B thought it unlikely that either would worsen, but if they did, there were cheap options to remedy. RP offered to discuss stoning the area near the bank to prevent further erosion with Esk Energy and noted that the trees present were shallow rooting species which wouldn't help protect the bank.

The depths of the outflow channels were discussed and MF thought the report followed the precautionary principle of "do nothing" and ignored the opportunity of improved predator protection. PO'B said it was recommended to build in fish protection areas in the bed but that these should be discussed with a geomorphologist. Issue was discussed with no clear conclusion.

Action; agreed that YERT and EFA will discuss the issues and get back to Esk Energy if a site visit is required

4. Updates from EA/Esk Energy/YERT

a. Update from Esk Energy

MF reported that electricity generation was on budget in 16/17 with a very dry spring being offset by a wet autumn. A graph of electricity generated is available on the [website](#). Some upstream siltation deposited in a spring flood has been removed by hand.

RN noted that the fish pass had been blocked with debris for some time whilst the river level was too high to safely remove it but this has now been done. Noted that the fish pass gets cleared much quicker than before the turbine was installed.

Action; PO'B to check the best route to report debris that needs clearing to EA.

Addendum following meeting;

The EA advise to continue to use the Freephone incident reporting line 0800 807060, but to state clearly that any fish pass blockage is not an incident as such and for the information to be passed on to fisheries staff namely Shaun McGinty during normal working hours. This means that EA duty staff working weekends etc are not required to attend or become involved with something they are unsure of.

EA duty staff often have to juggle a number of incidents and so prioritising urgent ones can be difficult if based only on information received.

The benefit of this approach is that the report is logged and follow up action is taken in due course. Also it's a free phone call.

b. Update from YERT

The Trust is;

- in a Catchment Based Approach Partnership (CABA).
- looking at a programme of activities and funding including an application to the facilitation fund (Countryside Stewardship) which is targeted to a cluster of farmers.
- producing a whole river fisheries plan to identify issues, define solutions and find funding to improve the river. CABA will look for funding for this and it may be possible to include a fish counter.

c. Update from EA

EA continues to be driven by the Water Framework Directive and it is not thought likely that Brexit will affect this. Natural Flood Management (NFM) has been awarded £15m by government in the autumn which could deliver ecological benefits as long as projects were contributing to flood management. No new issues reported on the Esk. Saprolegnia update circulated.

NFM was discussed for the Esk but it was thought there were very few places where this could be applied in the Catchment

5. Any other business

None

6. Date of next meeting

Whilst the Fish Monitoring Study in its current form has been completed, the group thinks it is desirable to continue to meet annually. **The third Tuesday 19 June 2018 was agreed with the time to be confirmed.**