

Don District Salmon Fishery Board



**Superintendents Annual Report For The
Year 2007**

DON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

SUPERINTENDENTS ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2007

SUMMARY OF FISH STOCKS, ANGLING, SPANWING, HABITAT AND HATCHERY

SUPERINTENDENT

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HONORARY BAILIFFS

D, Mackie, Littlewood Estate
G, Ogilvie, Kildrummy Estate
N, James, Burnhervie, Inverurie

JIM KERR SNR.

On Saturday the 14th of July 2007 Mr James Kerr senior (my father) very suddenly passed away. He will be very sadly missed on the riverbanks of the Don. Mr Kerr was with the Board for 37 years before he retired and thereafter continued for 3 years 9 months undertaking his habitat survey of the River. Mr Kerr was a very dedicated man when pollution and poaching

was at its highest during the 70's 80's and into the early 90's and was also one of the bailiffs who helped start the hatchery in 1968. Everyone who

knew my father will have their own memory of him, and every where I look on the river he is still there, and will always be remembered by all who knew him.

STATE OF RIVER

This year there were only two months when river flows were not above average: - April and October. There were three exceptionally large river flows, when the river went into full flood. On the 12th of February the river reached a height of 5ft above normal base level, and again on the 7th of August when the river reached a height of 5ft. The largest flood of the year was on the 23rd of November when four days of rain put the river up by six feet. With the wet spring and summer, river flows were above normal for ten months of 2007, which is very unusual.

The river weed *Ranunculus* Crowfoot that I mentioned on last years annual report, is now becoming a threat to the spawning beds from Alford down to the lower river. Permission will be sought from the proprietors by the Board staff during 2008 which will allow us to cut sections of the weed to allow salmon onto the spawning beds. The Don Board staff has also noticed whilst clearing fish passes, that they were choked with this type of weed. It is the very large amount of grit and fine sediment that collects at the base of this weed which is in turn slowly filling up the salmon holding pools and smothering the spawning beds with sediment that would naturally flow right through the system if this weed was not in abundance within the system.



The picture on the left shows the density of the *Ranunculus* Crowfoot weed and the picture on the right is one of the spawning beds at Alford which is slowly becoming smothered by this weed.

FISH IN RIVER AND ANGLING

During January Salmon were still cutting Redds throughout the river system. The late running Salmon that entered the system in December of 2006 had plenty of fat stores, and were still holding in Salmon pools well into late April of 2007 as Kelts before returning to sea.

The Salmon season started on the Don in February. It got off to a bad start with the River being in full spate conditions, and even when the river level dropped slightly, fishing effort was very poor. A total of four spring Salmon were landed during the first week of the season. This was the same amount as the previous year of 2006. One fish was landed at Kemnay, one at Manar, one at Kintore, and one was landed on the Parkhill fishings at Dyce. All fish were in the 6-71b range.

The month of March was on the poor side for catches of spring Salmon. The beats that did manage to land some nice spring Salmon were from Kemnay down to the upper Parkhill beats at Dyce on the lower Don.

April showed no improvement in fresh Salmon entering the river system.

May can be an excellent month for Salmon fishing as it was in 2006. However this was not the case this year. It has been very hard to get an accurate account of the spring Salmon entering the river system during 2007. For the first four months of the season river levels were extremely high. This meant a lot of angling days were lost and also angling effort due to river conditions was very poor.

As the summer months moved in anglers started to look for Sea Trout. The month of June saw Grandhome up to Inverurie waters getting good sport out of small numbers of Sea Trout. It was not until July that there was a slight increase in catch figures of Sea Trout in the system, especially on the lower Don catchment. The sea trout catches for August and September were very low. The decline of Sea Trout stocks within the Don system is certainly noticeable although this seems to be the case in most North East Coast Rivers and not just the Don.

The Brown Trout fishing within the river system has been excellent over the last few years and this year was no exception. All the trout visiting anglers that I have encountered over the year could not praise the river highly enough on the condition of the Trout. Some that were landed were over the 51b mark and there were quite a few. This year the Grilse were late to enter the river system, as seems to be the trend over the last few years, with the main run of Salmon entering the system from Middle of August right through to October along with the autumn salmon. Grilse were coming off each tide from the sea and good numbers were caught from Parkhill at Dyce, down to Granhome on the lower Don. Once the Grilse decided to move through the system no one saw them, perhaps because they lay in the deeper waters above Fintray Bridge to change into their spawning dress. For whatever reason, Grilse never showed in good numbers from Kintore up stream to the middle reaches.

It wasn't until late November and into the second week of December that late running Grilse showed themselves in the top reaches of the river. Perhaps they had just waited in the lower Don till they were ready to move up to the spawning beds. October was a very dry month and very little movement of fish was seen. On the lower Don again from Dyce down to the tidal reaches anglers were picking up fresh run Salmon, while from Kintore up to the top reaches anglers were still managing to get some sport from Salmon in their spawning dress as they awaited rain to take them up to the spawning areas. The rains finally came in November after seven weeks of dry weather, and Salmon and trout started to move through the system in good numbers to fill up the

spawning areas for another year. They were still running hard

at the very top of the system in the month of December due to the very mild winter conditions and unusual warmer river temperature, when it should be just above freezing.

There were still undersized Grilse coming back from the sea in 2007 but not the numbers

that there were in 2006. In 2007 we now had Grilse coming back from the sea with distended and bleeding vents as you can see in the picture below. This Grilse was fresh of the tide and still had sea lice on its flanks. When you have a closer look at the fish the

vent that would normally protrude at spawning time is totally gone.

Information from F.R.S Freshwater research services have informed us that returning fish with similar symptoms have been reported as having been observed in 23 rivers. There has been

speculation as to what might be causing this. The most likely reason is that it could be due to the infestation of a small round worm which is *Anisakis simplex* and common in wild fish but is also harmful to humans if the fish is eaten raw. When one of these Grilse was examined and dissected at the hatchery in November by the F.R.S. biologists, you could

clearly see the worms curled up around the gut and on the outside of the liver of the fish. The Board staff noticed that the early Grilse which came into the river in late June and early July never had this parasite; it seemed to be the Salmon

that came in from late July onwards that were affected.



SUMMARY OF COASTAL FISHINGS

Every year I find it so hard to write good news on coastal fishings, and each year it seems to be the same story. Rough seas, large inshore swells battering the shore line, and terrible weather during the summer months with rain. All these factors put the river above normal summer flows and allowed the Salmon to smell the fresh water quite a distance out to sea, encouraging the salmon to bypass the coastal nets and enter straight into the river. Ever increasing seal predation also hampered the netsmen. All in all the 2007 season for the netting stations on the Don coast was another poor one.

SMOLT MIGRATION

The Smolt migration was another successful one. On numerous occasions anglers fishing for Trout and Salmon in the middle stretches had to stop, as with every cast, Smolts were taking the fly. On the lower stretches in June, Smolts were seen by the

bailiff staff at night making their way down over the face of the weirs. The high river flows that the river has seen this year would have certainly helped the Smolts on a safer journey to the sea, as predation from bird life is quite high during their migration.

POLLUTION

During 2007 there were no incidents of pollution reported to the Board. This is the first year ever that there has been no reports from the public, or the bailiffs coming across pollution during the course of their daily duties.

THE DON CONSERVATION CODE

There have been no changes made to the policy. Once all the catch returns have been handed into the Don board they will be analyzed by the board and the policy will then be discussed to see if further measures are needed. The Board wishes to commend Aberdeenshire council for adopting the conservation code for the coming year, on all its fishings, Alford, Inverurie and Kintore. Additional rules will also help in releasing the fish back in to the river in the best possible condition:- All multi hooked lures to be reduced to one hook, and markers to be placed at all their fishings and, once the river levels drop to these markers, fly fishing only to apply. The Board would also like to thank all proprietors for returning their fish to the system, as this is one of the best ways to increase stocks in the river to allow fish to spawn. The more Smolts the river can produce to migrate to sea, the greater the number of salmon that will return to the River. This has worked extremely well in the Dee and I see no reason why it should not work on the Don.

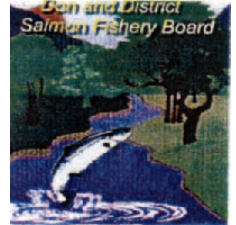
GYRODACTYLUS SALARIS

Gyrodactylus Salaris (GS) is the greatest threat to wild salmon in the River Don, and the UK as a whole. It is a parasitic freshwater fluke which is indigenous to rivers in parts of Russia, Norway and Sweden, where salmon have evolved resistance to it. However, GS has spread to rivers in Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, Spain and Portugal where native salmon have no resistance, resulting in mass mortality of juvenile fish. In Norway infected rivers lost 98% of their salmon within 5 years. Infected rivers must be poisoned to remove all fish hosts, and barriers erected to stop salmon entering the river to spawn and generate more hosts. GS can survive for 5 to 7 days without a host in damp conditions (e.g. angling clothing, waders, wet reels, lines or landing nets). All visiting anglers to the river must be encouraged to fill in a Declaration form indicating that they have not fished outside the United Kingdom in the last three months or that they have taken the necessary anti-GS measures. This is imperative to keep Gyrodactylus Salaris out of the Don and U.K. I have put a copy of a declaration form in my report. If any proprietor, Angling club, or syndicate, does not have one of these they can get in touch with myself or the Board and request a copy.

Fishery/Beat



Gyrodactylus Salaris Angler «c Declaration Form



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Currently the UK is GS-free. The economic and ecological consequences of GS entering the Country and the Don would be catastrophic.

Please do your part to prevent GS from decimating the Don wild salmon by signing this Angler Declaration BEFORE FISHING.

ANGLER DECLARATION

A:

I have/have not (please circle) fished OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM within the last 3 months.

If you circled 'have', please complete Section B.

If you circled 'have not', please sign and print your name below:

Signed

Printed

Date.....

B:

Before fishing the Don I have taken anti-GS measures by (please tick box):

1. **Drying equipment/clothing at 20°C or more for at least 2 days**
2. **Heating equipment/clothing at 60°C or more for at least 1 hour**
3. **Deep freezing equipment/clothing for at least 1 day**

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT for 2008

During 2008 there will be a number of projects running. In 2007 I applied for a grant along with F.W.A.G, (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group). The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Road (AWPR) Committee were looking for projects in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire suggested by stakeholders. The Board along with FWAG put a project together; "River Don Control Scoping Study" in which the Board staff will survey the main river from the top reaches down to the lower Don and FWAG will survey the Urie system. This survey will be to see the extent of Giant Hogweed. Giant Hogweed is a pernicious alien invader which causes severe skin inflammation when touched, a form of dermatitis that can persist for several months. It forms dense, impenetrable stands that restrict access on the river banks for walkers, farmers and anglers and poses a significant risk, particularly for children. Giant Hogweed has a significant impact on river ecosystems as it excludes native bank side vegetation, replacing it with dense stands which die back in winter, creating bare ground vulnerable to soil erosion which in turn leads to siltation of fish spawning areas. Key national and local biodiversity action plan species such as otter, water vole, Daubentons bat, brown trout and salmon are all being adversely affected and the economic impact on the Don, an important trout and salmon river, is significant. Japanese Knotweed is also a growing problem for biodiversity - although not poisonous to humans, the dense stands it forms have similar effect on riparian ecology to giant hogweed. Its population is thought to be expanding in the Don catchment

The picture on the right shows the Giant Hogweed emerging during late spring of 2007. This island is on the Kildrummy Fishing and is only one of the sites that is infested by the Hogweed. We have been informed that the first part of the application for the survey has been passed and AWPR have now asked for figures for spraying out the hogweed over a three year period. These have now been submitted.



If all goes well, Phase 1 will commence spring /summer 2008. This will be a survey of the mainstem of the Don and the Urie tributary.

Results will be mapped and for three consecutive years the hogweed will need to be sprayed.

A meeting was held on the Nochtly burn attended by myself, Mr. David Smart, Factor of Tillpronie Estate and a Board member and a senior hydrologist from SEPA. The Nochtly burn is one of the Don's main salmon tributary. Erosion has caused some damage to this stream over the years and a bank has now collapsed as this picture shows.

Willow saplings will be planted along this bank during the spring of 2008 to help bind it and hopefully this will help stabilize the erosion.



During the summer months coppicing work on trees that are blocking out sunlight to feeder streams will be carried out, to improve stream habitat. Tributaries that will be looked at are the Ernan, Nocht, Buchat, and Deskry burn.

In stream weed cutting on spawning beds will also be looked at if river conditions allow in 2008.

RIVER RESTOCKING PROGRAMME FOR 2007

Stocking of fry and eyed Salmon ova, and unfed Sea-Trout fry into the tributaries and mainstream of the River was undertaken.

Main River stocking with eyed Salmon Ova

7 sites chosen above Luib Bridge, 4 Redds in each site, 28 Redds in total. 2,000 eggs in each Redd. Total stocked out 56,000

3 sites chosen at Culfork, a Total of 4 Redds were made at each site, 28 Redds in total **Total** stocked out 56,000.

2 sites were chosen at Bellabeg, 6 Redds made at each site. Total eggs stocked 24,000. Main

Tributary's stocked with Eyed Salmon Ova. Ernan Burn

A Total of 30 Artificial Redds was made within the Ernan Burn, 2,000 eggs in each Redd. Total eggs stocked 60,000.

Nocht Burn

A Total of 24 Artificial Redds was made within the Nocht Burn, 2,000 eggs in each Redd. Total eggs stocked 48,000.

Kindie Burn

A Total of 43,000 eyed ova were spread out over 30 Artificial Redds within the Kindie Burn

Leochel Burn

A Total of 32,000 eyed ova were spread out over 16 Artificial Redds within the Leochel Burn.

Total Eyed Salmon Ova Stocked Out for (2007) 319,000

Sea Trout Stocking Of Unfed Fry 2007

A total of 98,000 unfed sea trout fry was stocked out into the River system in April of 2007. They were spread throughout the River from Candacraig waters down to Monymusk waters and one tributary the, Conrie Burn. Sites and quantities are as follows.

Conrie Burn

A total of 15,000 fry was stocked out in the Conrie Burn between marks indicated on maps.

Main River Stocking

25,000 fry were spread out from Candacraig waters down to Tornashean waters.

30,000 fry was stocked out from the Mouth of the Buchat Burn down to Glenkindie Bridge.

18,000 fry were spread out from Iron main Road Bridge at Ardhuncart down to the mouth of the Mossat Burn.

10,500 approximately were spread out from Monymusk Bridge don to the Home Farm Monymusk.

Maps are included in this restocking programme for 2007. Red flag markers have been placed on the maps indicating the areas stocked with Eyed Ova, Sea Trout unfed Fry. The Tributary or River is marked out in red between each flag; also a grid reference number showing the location of the part of River or Tributary. The map extracts are from 1:50,000 scale ordnance survey Landranger region 6 Northern Scotland.

THE DON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
JUVENILE STOCK SURVEY OF TRIBUTARIES 2007

On each tributary that was surveyed, 30 metres was measured out and electro fished. Results on fish densities were counted and logged. Fish counted were juvenile Salmon, Trout, Eel, and Brook lamprey. On each site chosen a Grid reference was taken for future reference. The maps included in this survey, all have flag markings to show the sites that have been electro fished and surveyed.

In September 2007 a total of 7 of our main tributaries at the top reaches of the river system were surveyed. All of the sites chosen had good numbers of this year's fry, both salmon and trout in the age bracket of 0+ years. These surveys are normally done during the month of August, but due to the very unsettled weather they had to be done in September. I would like to have been able to get a lot more survey work done but unfortunately September is also very busy time of year for the Board staff, policing the river and trying to get the hatchery ready for the spawning season.

Ernan Burn

Ernan Burn		Salmon Parr	Trout Parr	Other Species
Site 1 Ernan	NJ 29601 12655	37	14	0
Site 2 Ernan	NJ 31008 13010	12	12	0
Site 3 Ernan	NJ 32621 12280	35	31	0
Site 4 Ernan	NJ 33076 11 683	34	20	0

Comments

The Ernan burn rises in the Ladder hills and flows south eastwards for 10.8 Km entering the Don at Inverernan, a total decent of 1,435ft. During a habitat survey of the Ernan Burn, a PH reading was taken; the readings were showing between 7. 4 and 7.6 which is excellent water quality. The Ernan is a very fast flowing stream and when in spate can be very turbulent, carrying a lot of large rock and gravel down with it. The salmon Parr densities are well up on years 2005 and 2006 and looking back at Data from the year 2000. This is when the densities were over 25 salmon Parr per 30m. The Brown Trout have stayed at the same level since year 2000. This Burn will be surveyed again in 2009 at the same sites to assess any dramatic change to densities

Nochty Burn

Nochty Burn		Salmon Parr	Trout Parr	Other Species
Site 1 Nochty	NJ 30253 16950	6	43	0
Site 2, Nochty	NJ31547 15550	10	17	0
Site 3 Nochty	NJ 33977 15385	27	20	0
Site 4 Nochty	NJ 35027 13440	43	25	0

Comments

The Nocht water rises in the ladder hills has an, approximate length of 11.4 km (7 miles) and a drop of 1,395ft before it reaches the Main River below Bellabeg at 920 ft above sea level. The Ph levels in the Nocht were 7.2 -7.4. The Nocht water can be fierce when in full flood; there has been a lot of erosion caused in recent years through severe flooding, yet juvenile Salmon and Trout densities are at a steady level.

Buchat Burn

Buchat Bum		Salmon Parr	Trout Parr	Other Species
Site 1 Buchat	NJ 33976 19377	86	36	0
Site 2 Buchat	NJ 35614 18208	26	22	0
Site 3 Buchat	NJ 38259 16261	32	29	0
Site 4 Buchat	NJ40112 15381	63	39	0

Comments

The Buchat Burn rises on the Eastern slopes of the Ladder hills, in the Eastern Grampian mountains. The burn flows south eastwards for nearly 16 km (10 miles). It falls from 1,426 at the top of the burn system to 786ft above sea level as it enters the main River (a gradient fall of 640ft.) The Ph levels are also excellent reading 7.2 at the top reaches and 7.6 at the downstream end. The Buchat burn is one of our best spawning Tributaries on the Don system. The annual Redd count over the past 5 years is 135 Salmon Redds. Data from previous years show that the counts this year on the Buchat Burn are the highest it has been since we started recording juvenile surveys.

Kindie Burn

Kindie Burn		Salmon Parr	Trout Parr	Other Species
Site 1	NJ 40839 18193		78	0
Site 2	NJ 42454 16794	3	76	0
SiteS	NJ 42883 16109	5	81	0
Site 4	NJ 42737 14960	7	70	0

Comments

The Kindie Burn rises on the eastern slopes of the Grampian Mountains and flows south eastwards, as does its neighbouring tributary the Buchat Burn. The Kindie rises 1,024ft above sea level and enters the main river at 734ft above sea level a gradient fall of 290 ft. Length of the Kindie Bum is 3.55Miles-5.75km. Again the ph levels are good at a reading of 7.6. The Kindie Burn is predominately a Brown trout feeder stream of the main river, as you can quite clearly see by the survey results. Some of these trout were in the 6-7 inches in length. Only towards the middle to lower Kindie are salmon Parr to be found as they move in off the main river to feed during the summer months. Over the

years we have tried introducing unfed Salmon fry to the Kindie but unfortunately it just does not work in this stream. This year we will try planting eyed ova to see if this method is more successful.

Deskry Burn

Deskry Burn Site 1	NJ 37835 07559	Salmon Parr 33	Trout Parr 11	Other Species 0
Site 2	NJ 40358 09960	30	12	Eel 3, Brook Lamprey 4
Site3	NJ 39013 12563	41	14	Eel 2
Site 4	NJ 39053 12160	104	7	Eell

Comments

The Deskry is another of the Don's main Salmon spawning tributaries. She rises at a height of 1,278ft above sea level and has a decent of 847ft before entering the main river close to the slopes of Morven, flowing northeastwards for 14km. The water quality is good with a ph reading of between 7.2 and 7.4. The Deskry will be surveyed again in 2009.

Milltown Burn

Milltown Burn Section 1	NJ 26382 093 15	Salmon Parr 6	Trout Parr 29	Other Species 0
Section 2	NJ 26472 095 10	4	22	0
Section 3	NJ 26607 09770	7	22	0

Comments

The Milltown Burn rises in the Eastern slopes of the ladder hills, in the Eastern Grampian Mountains. This stream flows south eastwards for approximately 3.9km or 2.42 miles and rises at 1997ft above sea level and enters the main river system at 1304ft above sea level, a total decent of 693ft. The Milltown Burn enters the main river Don 405m below Cock Bridge and 826m above the Luib Bridge. The make up of the Milltown burn is of large pebbles to medium size rock with small pockets of spawning gravel. The stream has a very healthy stock of mature Brown trout and Juvenile trout in all sizes. It also has good stocks of young Salmon from this years fry to 2 year old Parr and some 3 year old Pan-that will be turning to Smolt this next spring and heading for the sea for the first time. On each section chosen 30 meters of the burn was measured and electro fished and fish species identified were counted. National Grid Reference was taken for future reference.

Leochel Burn

Leochel Burn Site1	NJ 57733 10835	Salmon Parr 22	Trout Parr 16	Other Species 0
Site 2	NJ 56818 12160	37	12	Brook Lamprey 1
SiteS	NJ 55253 14105	31	60	0
Site 4	NJ 55303 16125	63	30	0

Comments

The Leochel Burn has seen dramatic changes over recent years. In 2000 the mouth of the Leochel Burn changed course as the burn went into flood. It breached through a field and created a new course, I believe this could be one of the main reasons why survey counts have plummeted on the Leochel Burn in recent years. Lack of fencing and live stock trampling the banks down have not helped. From where the burn rises till it reaches the main river, the burn runs through prime agricultural land which has a lot of sediment run off, after being cultivated in the autumn months and early spring which can be very wet time of year. The burn at 1,021 ft above sea level and enters the main river at 476ft. This is not a significant drop which gives sediment and chance to settle in the middle to lower Leochel. A more detailed survey of this Burn will take place during 2008 to asses the reasons why the juvenile fish stocks have dropped. Looking back at previous data from 2000-2003- 2005, this year the counts are higher than previous years.

Salmon in the class room Project

The Salmon in the class room project involving children from Craigievar primary school was another success this year.. Salmon eggs were given to children and they were hatched out in the class room. The children then released them in to the Leochel burn. Later on in September I took the children on a site visit to the stream where they had released the young Salmon to see if we could find them. To every one's delight, the results were terrific, with over 60 fish in less than 70 feet of stream.

Children from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have been visiting the hatchery for approximately eleven years now, and every year it is just as popular as it was when the first school came through the doors at the hatchery. In 2008 there are a total of five schools taking part in Salmon in the class room. They are Strathdon primary, Keig Primary, Tough primary, Tullynessle primary and Kemnay academy.



The primary Schools have all been funded by the Scottish Government-to promote enterprise in Schools and Kemnay Academy was funded by Inverurie Angling association. I was informed that the aquarium tanks and all the accessories needed for the project came to £1000 so well done to the Inverurie Angling Association for getting involved with this project. It is very rewarding working with the schools and all will receive eggs for their aquarium tanks in February.

HATCHERY BROOD STOCK FOR 2007

The collecting of brood stock commenced on the 1st of October with very poor results; the lack of flow at the top reaches of the system was stopping the movement of Salmon and Trout. In the month of November the long awaited rain finally came and the river levels improved. It did not take us long and we had our full quota of adult Salmon and Trout to fill the hatchery for another year. We used 41 hen Salmon to get 307,000 Salmon ova. These eggs will be transplanted out to artificial redds as eyed ova in January 2008. The hatchery at this time is also holding 55,500 Brown trout eggs and 58,000 Sea trout eggs, a total of 420,000.

We had a lot of visitors at the hatchery this year, and they are as follows.

25 pupils from the French School run by Total Oil.

30 Members of the Aberdeen Angling Association.

27 pupils from Craigievar primary school.

19 Graduate students from the zoology department at Aberdeen collage

ANNUAL REDD COUNT

Due to the very high flows since November, right through to January of this year we have not been successful in achieving the redd count, but spot checks up and down the system by the bailiffs has shown that a lot of the spawning beds have been cut by Salmon. This year the spawning has been later due to the late arrival of the grilse to the very upper reaches of the system and the seven weeks of no rain at the top of the Don system did not help matters. Nevertheless good strong runs were going over the Newe weir in the 2nd week of December suggesting good spawning in the head waters.

I would now like to thank the Bailiffs, Chairman, and Clerk of the Board and board members and all who have assisted the board in 2007.

James Kerr

River Superintendent