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Lincs and Northants Fisheries Team Activity Report March 2020

Introduction

The period from January to March has again been dominated by the weather and the impacts on river flow, levels and flooding. Fishing rivers and still waters in our area has been very difficult if not impossible. The fisheries team have not only been engaged with flood support but have also been progressing routine business and planning for the New Year ahead. Advisory visits, fish movement permitting, winter still water survey work, report writing and training have dominated this recent period. Our report will summarise this work and provide a look forward into the new financial year. Feedback from our area Fisheries Team trial has been excellent. Team Leaders have agreed with our Area Environment Manager Thomas Enright that the trial can continue into the new financial year with a review date in June 2020. This is great news and has been well received by fisheries staff and colleagues in adjacent teams.

We are now dealing with the public health incident. EA staff are working from home and implementing social distancing measures, in line with the current instruction from Government. This incident will impact all Environment Agency services. We will continue to operate our fisheries standby duty rota. Staff are on call to provide assistance and guidance although site visits and on the ground incident assessments and response will be effected. We still encourage our customers to continue to report any incidents to our Incident Line 0800 80 70 60. We encourage everyone to follow the instructions from Government.

Communications and working with partners

In addition to meeting our consultative members at EA office Nene House each quarter, Fisheries Team Leader James Hooker and our Area Environment Manager Thomas Enright meet with the Consultative Chairman David Hawley, Angling Trust officers Kelvin Allen, James Roach and Paul Thomas on a regular basis. David Hawley will discuss the minutes of these meetings with the consultative members. Regular face to face meetings are very beneficial but we can also use web based conferencing tools at this time.



Nene Witham & Welland Angling Consultative Team

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A key part of our work is communicating and engaging with our customers and partners. Team members have been busy this period getting out and about, providing talks and presentations and supporting angling activities. As well as presenting survey reports to our consultative group Fisheries Technical Specialist Jake Reeds has presented fisheries survey data to Holbeach AC at their meeting at the Rose & Crown in Fleet Hargate. Jake has also given a presentation to Tees Fisheries Forum. James has presented to the Tattashall Group who fish the Witham. Jake and James also met with the Pike Anglers of Great Britain. Hugh was guest speaker for the Wildlife Trust Rutland Group volunteers and provided a talk about the Agency's statutory responsibilities for the management of fresh water fisheries. Thomas Enright and Jake attended the AT Fisheries Forum where Jake provided a talk about fisheries monitoring and the new techniques being developed. Darren Randall has been working with the Lincolnshire & District AC in the development of still water fisheries plans while also assisting in the development of a new lease for Toft Newton Trout Fishery. Darren is also working on another critical area which is the development and implementation of a Floating Pennywort eradication plan for the Witham Catchment. Floating Pennywort is a significant threat to biodiversity and the Witham Fishery.



Floating Pennywort Eradication – Witham Catchment

Fisheries Enforcement – Supporting Junior Angling Events

Despite the drop in anglers on the bank our Enforcement staff have also been busy with engagement. Bailiff Bryan has attended a Polish School Building Bridges event and Bailiff Mike has attended the recent angling participation event in the Hamptons Peterborough. As well as conducting rod licence patrols and responding to reports of fisheries crime outreach and community engagement is very important. We are fortunate to have two enforcement officers who are very well suited to this type of work and who don't mind going the extra mile and having their pictures taken!



As you can see Mike enjoys this part of the job and likes having his picture taken.

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Fisheries Enforcement Summary

Overall fisheries enforcement work has been quiet this winter period. With river levels very high and the weather and ground conditions very poor in our area many anglers have chosen not to go out. Despite this our enforcement officers have been out and about patrolling and monitoring still waters and rivers. We continue to focus our efforts on identifying, preventing and disrupting fisheries crime. Bryan has been working closely with Wayne Coulson from Boston and District AC and Angling Trust VBS volunteers. High visual joint patrolling is having a positive impact. We understand there has been a noticeable reduction in suspected illegal fishing in this area.

Rod Licence Patrols

The following tables provides a summary of the licences checked, offence reports issued and prosecutions between the period 1st July 2019 and 15th March 2020. (Total ORF refers to the total number of offence reports issued). During this period our officers have checked 1,207 licenses, 166 of these had been checked before with a total of new checks at 1,041. The total number of offence reports issued was 17. This equates to a 1.6% evasion rate.

Prosecutions Concluded	Successful Prosecutions	Success Rate	Fines	Average Fine	Costs	Average Costs	Cautions Accepted	Warning Letters	Advice & Guidance	Total Input
30	30	100.00%	£4,184.00	£139.47	£3,450.00	£115.00	4	2	1	37

Area Short Code - Bailiff Checks	Area - Bailiff Checks	Total Checks	Total Multichecks	Total New Checks	Total ORF	Evasion
CLA	Cumbria and Lancashire	1121	18	1103	13	1.16%
DCS	Devon and Cornwall	425	13	412	9	2.14%
EAN	East Anglia	3814	61	3753	172	4.38%
EMD	East Midlands	4173	55	4118	83	1.98%
GMC	Gtr Mancs Mersey and Ches	5806	29	5777	27	0.47%
HNL	Herts and North London	4997	956	4041	203	4.78%
KSL	Kent S London and E Sussex	7066	52	7014	69	0.97%
LNA	Lincs and Northants	1207	166	1041	17	1.61%
NEA	North East	780	49	731	34	4.44%
SSD	Solent and South Downs	899	104	795	41	4.90%
THM	Thames	2343	196	2147	62	2.81%
WSX	Wessex	901	22	879	43	4.66%
WMD	West Midlands	2204	100	2104	122	5.48%
YOR	Yorkshire	1669	107	1562	75	4.58%
	Nationally	37405	1928	35477	970	2.66%

Reports of illegal fishing and un-authorized instruments

The National Incident Recording database has been quiet this period. We received one report where a member of the public had found a net and removed it themselves. Another report of an illegal instrument that was investigated and found to be removed and routine calls of suspected illegal fishing in which our officers have investigated. We are now starting to receive a few calls about closed season fishing. We are planning for that scenario and coordinating our response through our Incident Management Team and Partners. We continue to encourage everyone to report fisheries and environmental incidents. Incident reports provide us with very useful and important intelligence resource. If we are unable to attend an incident for whatever reason we use all reports to plan future patrols and targeted operations. This is the only way to direct our resources in a sustainable manner.

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Fisheries Enforcement Resource.

During this period one of our key priorities has been to improve our enforcement resource for all aspects of fisheries regulation. We can report that we are in the process of training three additional Enforcement Officers (FEO); Darren Randall, Hugh Bunker and Jake Reeds. These staff are existing members of the team who have volunteered to support this important work, Hugh and Jake have several years' prior experience. The Training programme is progressing well and we expect that Jake and Hugh will be fully operational by the end of April 2020. This will increase our enforcement resource to 4 full time officers and 1 part time officer. Darren our 5th officer will be operational later in the summer.



A key component of the training programme is an intensive week on conflict resolution. This is an excellent course delivered by expert trainers who are either former police officers and or military staff. The training is intensive and both practical, physical and class room based. The course replicates current Police training in the resolution of conflict and the legislation regarding the use of force. Candidates are assessed throughout the week with a final stress test being carried out on the final day. Staff must pass this training in order to progress and to be issued with full SAFFA Warrants.

Officers are trained to be able to deal with the unexpected so in order to make the training as realistic as possible the trainer uses a red man suite. Mr Red Man can either be compliant and pleased to see you or difficult and grumpy. If the trainee is very un-lucky Mr Red Man can be aggressive. Mr Red Man teaches you to expect the unexpected and to use all your skills to resolve a scenario. This training is important and involves skills that require practice and use. As such the officers are required to undertake a two day refresher course each year. This also provides an opportunity for staff from neighbouring areas to get together.

When all training is complete, warrants have been issued and equipment and PPE provided Hugh, Darren and Jake will support our existing Fisheries Enforcement Officers responding to incidents, assisting in focused and intelligence led rod licence operations, regulation of the eel closed season and compliance with fish movement regulations. Wherever possible we will also be supporting the Angling Trust Volunteer bailiff scheme. The team will be engaging in a range of enforcement activities including overt patrols across the catchments. The additional resource will enable us to; support the existing warranted officers, responding to incident reports and to deliver intelligence led fisheries enforcement across the L&N area. We will also be working with our enforcement colleagues in neighbouring areas.

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Building Bridges – Bailiff Bryan goes back to School (again).

On the 29th February Bryan joined staff from the Angling Trust Building Bridges project and delivered a talk to resident Polish students. The event was a huge success and was very well received by School staff and students. A number of the students were put in handcuffs, which created a great atmosphere and huge laughter and applause from their class mates. Bryan presented two talks in one day, almost 500 students. Bailiff Bryan is becoming a bit of a celebrity in Peterborough's Polish schools and says he really enjoys these events. Well done Bailiff Bryan, keep up the good work.



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Fish Population Monitoring 2020 – Surveys & Reporting

Led by Jake and Darren Finnie the team have undertaken additional surveys of the lakes at Ferry Meadows and are providing continuing support to Peterborough & District AA. A key aspect being fisheries habitat improvements to the Nene Park Fishery. We are also supporting Hampton Angling Club in the development of a long term fishery management plan.

Jake has also led some work this winter surveying and further assessment of the suitability for monitoring tench populations within Sywell Reservoir. The team have been providing tench for Sywell for a number of years. It is now important for us to evaluate if the stocking programme is sustainable. Jake, Darren Finnie and Hugh recently completed a bathometric survey of the reservoir. The bathometric survey is a precursor to undertaking a targeted fish population survey. A report from this work will be developed and discussed with the angling club, Northampton County Council Rangers and the UK Tench Fishers group.



Jake has completed and published the 2019 Fishery Survey Report of the Fen Drain system. The 70 page report has been presented to our Angling community and contains analysis of data collected in the 2019 and early 2020 monitoring programme. A number of the monitoring techniques the team uses are very novel and pioneering. We are very proud of Jake who is leading the Country in this developing methodology.

Fisheries Survey Season 2020-2021

Jake Reeds and Dave Green have been busy finalising the fisheries survey season for this year. This work is planned to start on the 1st April however this is now under review. As soon as we receive guidance from Government the work will be re-scheduled. Where possible all team members will be involved in the survey work which will include netting, scanning, hydro acoustics and electro fishing. The rivers being surveyed this season include; River Chater, River Bain, River Glen, Brant, River Witham, River Welland, Barlings Eau, Maxey Cut and River Gwash.



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Fisheries Incident Summary

We continue to plan and prepare for fisheries incidents. One particular task has been to improve our kit and training for staff based at Nene House. We will soon be kitting out our new Welland & Nene Incident Response Trailer which will be a huge step forward. We have also purchased a new boat which will be used for general fisheries survey work, incident response and enforcement patrols. We still have some work to do but we are better resourced in Welland & Nene and overall our Incident Response capability has improved significantly in this part of the patch. We are now moving into coarse fish spawning periods, this time can be stressful for fish and it is inevitable that we will see cases of spawning mortality in both rivers and still waters. As water temperatures start to rise algal bloom growth will increase and fish pathogens can become active. The good news is that we have plenty of water in the catchments. In all cases fishery managers should report incidents using our Incident Line 0800 807060.

This period has been very quiet from a fisheries incident aspect. We have been involved with one significant fish mortality in North Lincolnshire and the site in question has lost a significant number of fish. Following investigations it has not been possible to determine the cause. Jake Reeds continues to support the fishery during the recovery phase.

In response to an incident where a fault with telemetry equipment resulted in the lowering of water levels within the Bargate Drain system Jake and Darren Finnie undertook a short notice fish survey to assess the impact of the de-watering on the Bargate fishery. Jake was able to demonstrate that the fish population had largely been unaffected although some fish may have been lost. We will continue to monitor the fishery and when the current restrictions area lifted we will use anglers catch data in combination with our own survey work. We have also received a report recently where a fishery is losing carp. The angling club are proactive with water quality monitoring which has been very helpful in the mortality assessment. In this case it is suspected that the mortality has been caused by stress, induced by repeated cormorant pressure.

Free Aquatic Plant Workshop – Funded by Rod License Income.

On the 15th February this year the Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) delivered a free workshop for local angling clubs on the management of aquatic plants. The event was held at Wicksteed Park and Over 130 delegates attended. A good many clubs from Lincs and Northants were present, including several members of our Consultative group. The event was organised by the IFM in partnership with the Environment Agency and was funded through the National Rod License income. Overall the feedback from this event has been excellent.



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Managing Assets & Public Safety.



Throughout Lincolnshire the Environment Agency has created assets intended for use by the public. Area teams have responsibility for managing these assets and ensuring that they are safe for the public to use. The majority of our sites are fisheries focused and consist of various types of angling platforms and pegs. This work is very important and requires significant time and resource to manage. Technical officer Amy Turner is responsible for this work. Amy ensures that the team's assets remain in good condition and are inspected on a regular basis. If repair or improvement works are required Amy will plan and undertake these works. Amy is also responsible for liaison with those groups who use or lease these assets from the EA. This is usually landowners, farmers and angling clubs. This work can be as simple as ordering a new safety sign but in some cases more complicated construction work is required. Ensuring that the public are safe while using our assets is a very important work and we are lucky to have Amy managing this for the team.

Summary.

The outlook for the coming months and year is uncertain but our team remains committed to providing a top class fisheries service and within the current restrictions. All staff are settled into home working routine and we are holding on-line meetings three days a week to stay in touch. Although survey work, site visits and other field activities will be on hold we are still available on the phone and email. We have received a number of enquiries from Fishery Managers about fishery closures. Our response is: please follow Governmental instruction and stay at home. Guidance can also be found on the Angling Trust Website.

Our report contains some very positive developments and outcomes, not least for our area fisheries enforcement resource but also our incident response and fish population monitoring capabilities. Our fish population reports are top quality and we receive excellent feedback from customers and partners. The team are now better trained and equipped which ensures we can be flexible in our service delivery and our ability to respond. We have some very talented and experienced staff who are all multi skilled and flexible. Our staff also have an excellent reputation across the area, this has been a result of hard work and dedication to the job.

When the waters calm later this year we will be ready to get back out, meeting our customers and engaging with our partners and most importantly, delivering the Fisheries Service.

We hope everyone follows the guidance from Government and remains safe and well.

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