Save the Spring

April 2024 Update

River Muick smolts enter the programme

In our March update we highlighted the initial prioritisation areas identified for the Save the Spring programme's combined, strategic approach of habitat restoration and wild fish repopulation. This included how we propose to pilot the smolt-to-adult supplementation (S2A) wild fish repopulation method on the River Muick, an important Dee tributary where targeted habitat restoration efforts have already taken place. The aim for this year is to capture a sample of 100 smolts from the River Muick priority area and transport them to the University of Stirling's land-based, closed containment marine facility on the West Coast in order to rear them to adulthood for eventual release back into the wild to support wild spawning

Rotary screw trap in place in the River Muick, April 2024

Two rotary screw traps were placed into the River Muick by the River Dee team in early April 2024, one above and one below the Falls of Muick and fish pass, in order to intercept downstream migrating salmon smolts later in the month. It is thought that low water temperatures have delayed the smolt migration slightly this year, with the first smolt being captured on April 18th. At the time of sharing this report on 9th May 2024, over 80 smolts have been safely captured and transported to the University of Stirling's facilities with more set to follow. A 'soft transfer' process was undertaken when the fish arrived, gradually increasing water

salinity over the course of a few days. In our May update we will provide further insight into this part of the programme.

The River Dee team checks one of the River Muick rotary screw traps

The first smolt caught in 2024 in the River Muick

This short **video** filmed on 18th April 2024 shows the upper smolt trap's location in the River Muick, along with an area further upstream where targeted riverside woodland restoration has already taken place – an example of the programme's strategic two-pronged approach of habitat restoration and wild fish repopulation.

Riverside woodland restoration on the upper River Muick

River Muick smolts safely captured for transfer to the University of Stirling rearing facility

Save the Spring programme work package development

While the teams on the ground continue at pace with wild fish repopulation efforts and ongoing habitat restoration work, the programme's management team has been developing and focusing its various work packages. This process has also been greatly assisted thanks to John Miller coming on board.

John has spent a career delivering complex project management schemes for companies around the globe and, after retiring, he looked to see what he could offer back to the River Dee – a river he's fished for the last 35 years and cares for deeply. We're delighted that John has agreed to volunteer for the Save the Spring programme by donating his time to support the staff in our organisations and associated delivery of the programme objectives. We are sure he will play a hugely valuable role in our work to restore the River Dee for future generations.

The work packages being delivered by the management team are:

1. **Habitat Restoration**
2. **Wild Fish Repopulation – Conservation Translocation**
3. **Monitoring**
4. **Marine Transition Zone**
5. **Communication**
6. **Community & Stakeholder Engagement**
7. **Fundraising**

We look forward to providing further detail on each of these programme elements in future updates.

Both Dr Lorraine Hawkins (Director, River Dee) and Professor Melanie Smith (Research Director, Atlantic Salmon Trust) are also part of the Science & Evidence Board for the Scottish Government's Wild Salmon Strategy. They will be sharing the learnings from this pilot year of wild fish repopulation with this Board for the benefit of others working to restore wild Atlantic salmon populations in Scotland.