

Proposal
for
THE TWEED TROUT AND GRAYLING INITIATIVE



The Federation of Borders Angling Associations
Tweed Foundation
River Tweed Commissioners
Wild Trout Trust
Grayling Association

Introduction

The Tweed Trout and Grayling angling is administered in the Borders by the Tweed Angling Associations who are grouped together as the Federation of Borders Angling Associations (FBAA) also known as the Angling Clubs. Angling policy, that is the methods of fishing and the numbers of fish that can be taken from the system, is based upon subjective judgements of the clubs and is not related to the natural productivity of the rivers. Indeed for many years the Associations have been boosting the fish available for angling by stocking with farmed trout and using this as the criteria for selling fishing tickets. This is now generally considered to be unsustainable and may even be depressing the natural wild stocks of trout.

This Initiative is based on a consortium of local Angling Clubs, the Tweed Foundation, local communities and natural historians to create self sustaining management of the wild trout and grayling fisheries in the Tweed. It will be a flagship project and an example to other national and international fisheries managers setting a framework and a beacon for community management of local fisheries at a new level. It will target the young, as well as those with an exisiting interest, linking to the Bridging the Borders educational project (part of the Heritage Lottery funded Tweed Rivers Heritage Project) and microbusinesses connected with fisheries.

Aims

The aims of the Initiative will be

I: To strengthen the biodiversity of the stocks of native Brown-trout and Grayling in the Tweed and its tributaries by gathering better information on them and their environment as a base for more directed and intensive conservation and management

II: To improve the Brown-trout and Grayling angling of the Tweed and its tributaries through knowledge-based management

III: To increase the satisfaction of Brown-trout and Grayling anglers on the Tweed and tributaries by gathering information on what they regard as “good fishing” so that management decisions and practices can be directed towards meeting their requirements.

It is likely that there are a variety of different and distinct fish stocks, of varying strength, within the Trout and Grayling populations of the Tweed catchment which need managing in slightly different ways in terms of their habitat and the level of fishing pressure that they can sustain. Basic research by the Tweed Foundation has been and is directed to finding this out. Whilst the project will use this research, it is not itself a research proposal. The strength of the wild resouce will be established by this project and

the type and intensity of the fishing that can be sustained will then be the basis for marketing, especially through the FishTweed project.

The actions of the Consortium would be based on past findings from this fundamental research and would extend it in terms of improving understanding of the pressures angling puts on what stocks. The social dimension of Tweed trout angling would be studied for the first time, with surveys of how anglers use their waters, how they perceive their fishing is at present and how they would like it to be in the future. This last information would then set the aims for fishery managers or, if angler expectations were found to be unreasonable for wild populations, then the aim would be to change those expectations to fit reality.

It is expected that the initiative will lead the way in Brown-trout and Grayling fishery management on many Scottish rivers. It has the wholehearted support of both the River Tweed Commissioners and Tweed Foundation who have pledged to support the move.

Additionally, the Initiative is also supported by The Grayling Society (www.graylingsociety.co.uk) and The Wild Trout Trust (www.wildtrout.org.uk).

Priorities

The main priority of this Project is the transfer of the skills needed for sustainable fisheries management from professionals in the fisheries field to the members of local angling clubs, to give them the "tools" with which to undertake the conservation and management of their own fish stocks. Although many of the fishing clubs of the Tweed catchment have histories going back a century or more (or, in one case, to 1829), and have thus been responsible for the management of the trout and grayling stocks within their respective areas for considerable periods of time, such training has never been available to them before. This has meant that their range of management techniques has been limited to stocking: in the past, many clubs reared their own, but now all buy in stock from outside the catchment. As well as the risk of disease transfer and the accidental introduction of alien species (not just of fish), new information on the genetics of cross-breeding of different stocks of fish has shown the release of fish farm strains into the wild to be highly undesirable.

In addition it will encourage the community to conserve, develop, understand, and access the various water bodies throughout the Scottish Borders which will ensure continued enjoyment, quality, and value for future generations whilst securing the economic well-being of the Border communities.

With the establishment of protocols available through this project, clubs will be able to focus on strengthening wild stocks, largely through habitat protection and restoration.

This project represents a new departure in freshwater fisheries management in Scotland. As said above, up till now, management has been largely limited to stocking, which is now known to be potentially deleterious to natural fish stocks. Part of the reason for this dependence on stocking has been the lack of knowledge to do anything else. This project aims to provide that knowledge and thus set trout and grayling management on a new course, based on the sustainable exploitation of natural stocks, for the benefit of present and future generations. A website / newspaper will be part of the project, providing a source of information on Trout and Grayling management and on the work being undertaken to improve management and fish stocks that has hitherto been entirely lacking in this area (and no equivalent is known of elsewhere).

It will benefit the priority target vgroups identified who are primarily the members of the Tweed Angling associations but particularly visiting angling tourists who play an important part of the Borders leisure sector. Community involvement in enhancing local conservation and protection of the local environment and its resources (the fish) is intergral in local commitment to sustainability. This initiative has a high degree to community participation at all levels and particularly makes opportunities of young fishers to enjoy and care for the rivers on which they live.

All the angling clubs in the Borders are concerned at the lack of younger people taking an interest in fishing (in one club, an actual majority will soon be pensioners) and a recruitment drive is being planned. By broadening the function of the angling clubs from purely fishing, to management of a natural resource, it is hoped that the clubs will increase their appeal to younger age-groups, and thus secure their future existence. Better fishing should also improve the prospects of those businesses that benefit from both local and visiting anglers – tackle shops in particular and the local tourist infrastructure in general.

Relationship to Other Strategies

River Tweed Fisheries District Management Plan - 3rd edition 2002-2006 (Tweed Foundation) - the project is strongly linked to this plan and is completely in synchronisation with it.

River Tweed Catchment Management Plan 2003 (Tweed Forum) - Strategic Aim 3, and specifically 3.2.4 - Conservation and enhancement of the fisheries of the Tweed Catchment.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) – protection and enhancement of streams.

Scottish Borders Rivers and Burns Action Plan (HAP) – sustainable management of fisheries for future generations.

New Ways Environmental Strategy (NWES). Improving the environmental performance by making better use of resources; managing the activities and operations of each organisation (the angling clubs) in order to reduce resource use (in this case imported stock fish) and to increase biodiversity and amenity value, while at the same time saving money.

One of the Key Issues identified in the Rivers and Burns section of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for the Borders is Overfishing which it matched by a major theme of this project to set up systems to check the level of fishing pressure on the stocks of Brown-trout and Grayling which are native species. At present, there is no hard information on whether fishing pressure on these fish populations is sustainable or not.

The Scottish Borders Rivers and Burns Habitat Action Plan (HAP), which is based on the local LBAP calls for the protection and restoration of banksides and streams. This is one of the aims of this project.

The Rivers and Burns HAP also calls for the sustainable management of fisheries and is another of the aims of this project. This is designated in the HAP as the responsibility of the Tweed Foundation, but this project will spread this to the clubs, the main stakeholders in the fishery, and so create a wider community involvement in the HAP process.

Fishing is an important part of Scottish Borders tourism. For the Borders, as a leading short break destination, angling prospects must match availability and must link closely with the Borders Trout Fishing Booking System which is soon to be introduced on the Fish Tweed website.

Demand

Tweed fishing is acknowledged internationally as being amongst the finest in the world. Many people travel to Tweed to enjoy salmon, trout, and increasingly, grayling fishing. There has been much publicity recently about how good the Tweed salmon fishing is but there is a perception by some that in common with many other rivers, trout fishing is not as good as it used to be. No one is quite sure exactly what the cause of this might be but the traditional response to that has been to stock the river with farmed fish to try and improve catches.

In December 2003 the Tweed Foundation held a seminar on the efficacy of stocking which cast doubt, in the minds of many, of the current practice of stocking. To address the issue of both trout and grayling management on Tweed, the Border Angling Associations, under the auspices of the Federation of Border Angling Associations, and in conjunction with the Tweed Foundation, proposed the formation a management consortium.

This has been ratified by subsequent meetings of the trustees of the Tweed Foundation, the Council of the River Tweed Commissioners and the Federation of Borders Angling Association. In addition the following Angling Associations have agreed to be part of the consortium: Melrose, Coldstream and District, Gordon, Selkirk and District, Earlston, Peebleshire, Gala, Ellem, Kelso, Berwick and District and Hawick.

The initiative absolutely complements and underpins the existing sale of trout tickets and particularly adds additional value to the Borders Trout Fishing Booking System. Arguably, to promote fishing without a sustainable fisheries management plan is unsustainable and this is therefore a prerequisite for tourist management and angling tourism.

Project Management

The project will be administered by the Tweed Foundation.

It is anticipated that the consortium will consist of approximately 10 representatives of the Tweed Angling Clubs who are participating in the project with representatives of the Tweed Foundation.

The Tweed Foundation will recruit an extra member to its biology team who will be dedicated to the project. This person will be the biologist who will undertake the actions of the project but will be under the supervision of the Foundation's senior Biologist Dr. R. Campbell.

It is also planned to retain an external chairman of the project who has extensive knowledge not only of angling but also of fresh water fisheries management. This chairman will be expected to work some 10 days per year and will not only add depth and experience to this project but will also act as an ambassador to other Associations and organisations who may also join the project in the future.

This project is innovative and it is hoped that its format will serve as a blueprint for freshwater fisheries management in other Scottish rivers.

The Tweed Foundation successfully ran a project of habitat enhancement works over six years under the European Union Objective 5b program amounting to a spend of almost £1m. Currently it is managing the second phase of the riparian Habitats Project which is part of the larger catchment-wide project, the Tweed Rivers Heritage Project which is a Heritage Lottery funded initiative. The Tweed Foundation has also managed, completed and reported on project works for SNH, WWF (Scotland) and the local Enterprise Board.

The Angling Associations are already partners in the Leader + Borders Trout Fishing Booking System project and this project will work well within this new and related scheme, being additional and complementary to it.

Partners

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The project is planned for an initial three years, but its aim is actually that, skills, knowledge and established systems having been passed on to club members, fisheries management in the Tweed catchment will be permanently upgraded, whether supported by a formal structure or not. Should the clubs wish to continue with a formal joint structure for fisheries management, and / or the continuation of professional back-up from a Trout Biologist at the Tweed Foundation, this could be arranged. As some elements of the project, such as the Catch Logbooks and the Traps are aimed at being part of the regular monitoring programme of the Tweed & Eye Fisheries District Management Plan, they would have the continued professional back-up of the Tweed Foundation in any event.

It is intended that the plans for each club should run for an initial five years. This will establish a continuous work programme past the date of the end of the formal project, and so keep it in operation after the initial three year launch.

There is, at present, widespread dissatisfaction with trout angling in the Tweed catchment. By training anglers to undertake surveys and management themselves, they will be able to identify whether their own complaints are justified, and take appropriate action where possible or require it of government agencies on the basis of hard data. The feeling of empowerment that this will give will have a beneficial effect above and beyond the physical gains to be had from actual work undertaken on the water. Better dissemination of information on the state of the stocks through the project website and “newspaper” could itself improve satisfaction by showing that the state of stocks/fishing was not as bad as thought – or not as different from past states as imagined – and simply by showing that “something was being done” to address the concerns expressed by anglers. It is hoped that an increase in income from angling permit sales would be established to maintain the management strategy that emanates from this project.

Sustainable development

While the major economic importance of Salmon fishing to the economy of the Scottish Borders is well established and is quantifiable in money terms, the value of trout and grayling fishing is more of a social nature and is therefore not so apparent, though the 'spend' of visiting anglers on permits and local services does contribute to the economy of the area and was estimated at £623,000 by the Scottish Executive Economic Impact Survey in 2004 . The local angling clubs are a well established feature of local society in this area and service on their committees is a long-standing tradition. By extending the management practices that trout clubs can undertake, these traditional organisations will be able to enter a new and more effective phase that will ensure their continuing existence and role in local civic society. As stated above there is concern amongst the trout clubs of this area at the lack of young people coming into the sport (an initiative to recruit younger members will start at this year's Border Union show) and a widening of the work of clubs to include more environmental- based management could increase the attraction of club membership to younger age groups. Restoring and protecting the habitats on which fish stocks depend, and better understanding of angling pressure on those stocks will both enhance and safeguard the environment of the catchment and ensure the sustainable nature of Tweed's Trout and Grayling fisheries.

Monitoring and evaluation

Participating clubs will each have a representative on the management group, but at the end of each year, there will be a general meeting of members of participating clubs at which concerns can be raised and plans made. As the main aim of the project is to address the, at present, widespread dissatisfaction with the trout fishing of the Tweed catchment, this forum will show if the project is addressing this issue or is not and what changes to its direction might be needed.

An annual report listing numbers of personnel trained, monitoring programmes set up, samples taken, bankside works undertaken and results from traps and catch monitoring will be produced.

Duration

It is planned to commence the project early in 2005 and that it should run for three years to the end of 2008