

# A study of the fish population in Loch Ken is published

📅 11 September 2018

During 2016 and 2017, Galloway Fisheries Trust undertook a study of the fish, fisheries and anglers of Loch Ken. This was to assess the fish populations in the Loch and the extent to which angling around the loch assists the local economy.

This work sought to better understand the impact of the North American Signal Crayfish on the fish populations and identify recommendations for the future management of the coarse fishery.

The Study was commissioned by the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme ('Galloway Glens Partnership') as part of the Partnership's development phase and was managed and funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Galloway Glens Partnership.

The report is published on the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme [website](#), with the following headline points:

- Loch Ken continues to be a popular fishery particularly for visiting anglers from outwith Dumfries & Galloway, with most anglers stating they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their angling experience on the loch. The loch provides good overall catches during much of the year. Many match anglers feel that if more suitable fishing sites were available, then more matches would be held.
- The presence of North American Signal Crayfish is felt to negatively impact on the angling, particularly through interference with baits. At present however, it appears that the coarse fish population in Loch Ken can support the fishery in spite of this presence.
- The main fish species being targeted by anglers on the loch are bream, roach, pike, perch and to a lesser extent dace and ruffe. Consideration of the overall health of these fish populations including growth rates suggested all were healthy.
- The population of large perch in Loch Ken is felt by anglers to have increased in recent years due to these fish feeding on juvenile signal crayfish. Examination of perch growth rates did find a large increase in growth rates in perch over four years old.
- Some degree of biosecurity is undertaken by over half of anglers on the loch to help reduce the risk of transfer of invasive non-native species.
- Information and data was collected via stake holder events, the distribution of an angler questionnaire, interviews with anglers fishing (creel surveys), seine netting and through angling matches.

A number of recommendations are provided regarding understanding the fish populations in the loch and the future development of Loch Ken as an important coarse fishery. These include:

- a) better promotion / increased accessibility (improving access at angling areas, creation of new fishing pegs for angling matches,
- b) future monitoring of fish populations (collection of data from matches, seine netting, creel surveys);
- c) management of the fishery (improved governance through formation of Loch Ken Fisheries Management Group, production of a 5 year fishery management plan, improved enforcement),

Nick Chisholm, Galloway Glens Project Officer and leading on the activities around the loch in coming years, said:

Loch Ken is one of coarse angling's best kept secrets. A popular match fishing venue in the 80s and 90s which went into decline after it became synonymous with the colonisation of American signal crayfish in the early part of this century. The presence of crayfish is not ideal, but this report illustrates a healthy and self-sustaining fishery. On the mainland of the British Isles there are very few wild stillwater fisheries of this magnitude; an angler could spend weeks exploring by bank and boat and find something new on every visit. There are some key recommendations on this report that need to be taken forward so that Loch Ken can re-establish its rightful place as the UK's best large wild stillwater. The wider Galloway Glens scheme, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and working with partners around the Loch including the Loch Ken Management Advisory Committee, gives us the opportunity to realise these ambitions."

Callum Sinclair from SNH, who managed the undertaking of the report on behalf of the funding partners, said:

The presence of American signal crayfish in Loch Ken and the surrounding catchment is clearly undesirable and unwelcome. However, there is no technically feasible means of eradicating or meaningfully controlling this infestation. Therefore, this study sought both to look at the actual health of the fish and fishery and capture the views and perspectives of anglers who use Loch Ken alongside the crayfish. The findings indicate a healthy fishery and a flexible and resilient set of anglers who have, in the main, adapted their techniques to minimise the crayfish impact on the enjoyment of their pastime. Whilst Loch Ken is already delivering significant local economic benefits to the area from angling there is potential to further develop and more effectively manage the fishery to increase these benefits and ensure that a valuable recreational resource is protected for the future and continues to support local communities, businesses and users of the loch."

John McCubbing from the New Galloway Angling Association, said:

The report is an interesting read and illustrates that there are a lot of fish in Loch Ken. The New Galloway Angling Association can use this report to publicize the quality of the fishing that is present. It is now time for the whole angling community to move forward and use the findings of this report to make everyone aware of how good Loch Ken is. There is now an opportunity with the Galloway Glens scheme to help us in these endeavours."

Jamie Ribbens, Senior Fisheries Biologist from Galloway Fisheries Trust who undertook the report, said:

This was an interesting piece of work to be involved in delivering and it was encouraging to see how healthy the coarse fish population of Loch Ken is. GFT would like to thank the many anglers and angling clubs who assisted us during this study. There are many opportunities to develop this fishery further for the benefit of the local community and anglers from around the UK and we look forward to working further with the Galloway Glens Scheme in the future."

Anne Connick, Planning Officer (Catchment Management) from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's (SEPA) Dumfries and Galloway team, said:

Every day SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment, and we are committed to using partnerships as our principal way of delivering environmental outcomes. Loch Ken and the surrounding area is a valuable resource and a popular location for anglers and other visitors. It is very encouraging to see the results of this important study which indicates there is a healthy coarse fish population in Loch Ken. This is good news for the environment, and also for local and visiting anglers, and we will continue to work with our partners to help ensure the sustainable future of Loch Ken."

Karen Morley, Countryside Development Officer from Dumfries & Galloway Council added:

The Council's Environment service, part of the Economic Development Department, operates on and around Loch Ken and we also work to support the Loch Ken Management Advisory Committee which is made up of all the different user groups. Coarse angling is one of the many activities supported by the Loch, it is interesting to see the impressive size of some of the fish being caught around the Loch in recent years and we will be doing everything we can to make sure this amazing natural resource is used to drive economic activity and encourage more people to visit."

**Ends**