

## P03 Freshwater Lochan Survey



**Project Overview:** (Please refer to LCAP or website)

To audit the fish species present within the area within 20 lochs of Coigach & Assynt (Annex 1). This determined the population status and will enable better management to be made.

**Project lead organisation and other organisations involved:**

West Sutherland Fisheries Trust was contracted to undertake the survey

Others involved: Assynt Foundation, John Muir Trust, Inverpolly Estate, Hopetoun Estate, Assynt Angling Club and Achiltibuie Angling Club.

**Project Location:** Lochs across Assynt and Coigach

**Project dates:** June 2018 – October 2019

## Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Audit covering 20 lochs in the project area	20	20	
Management Plan covering same area	1	1	
Volunteers Trained	20	9	2/12/20 NLHF accepted target won't be met.
Volunteer days Lochan Netting	20	26	

## Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Assynt and Coigach Landscape will better understood and management options discussed. <i>The fish species of selected lochs were surveyed and better understood, with growth rate graph for brown trout updated.</i>
Y	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and biodiversity of selected habitats will be surveyed and mapped. <i>20 lochs were surveyed and species distribution for Arctic Charr increased.</i>
Y	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Assynt and Coigach special and the threats to the unique heritage. <i>Findings and recommendations shared with the parties focused on the management of the fisheries.</i>

Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. <i>Arctic Charr are a unique and important species whose distribution was better understood.</i>
Y	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage. <i>Volunteers learned new skills and surveyed lochs.</i>
Y	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites. <i>Report will be accessible both to fishery managers and the general public.</i>
Y	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset. <i>The local fisheries trust and significant local angler group now have a better understanding of the Coigach and Assynt area.</i>
	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits.

## Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

Development of Assynt specific fish data for the lochs of Assynt

## What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

The outputs from the project will allow for:

- Improved management of the fishery resource and protection of the loch biodiversity
- Improved awareness of the natural heritage of the freshwaters, a major part of the living landscape of Assynt & Coigach
- Natural heritage data added into the National Biodiversity Network and the local Assynt Digital archive for future use in management plans.

## What difference has this project made to People?

The difference that the Freshwater Lochan Survey Project made is:

- Increase in local knowledge on lochans and their species.
- Increased awareness on freshwater lochans and their importance within the Living Landscape
- Increased protection and awareness of management of freshwater lochans from fisheries and anglers.

*“An interesting read. We will consider the recommendations.”*  
Assynt Angling Club

*“Great to have a new Charr population. I’ll add it to the records.”*  
Colin Adams, co-authors of *Arctic Charr in the Lochs of Scotland*

## Useful Links

- West Sutherland Fisheries Trust: [www.wsft.co.uk](http://www.wsft.co.uk)
- Freshwater Lochan Survey: An inventory of the fish populations of 20 of the Coigach & Assynt lochs [CALLP-P03-Freshwater-Lochan-Survey-FINAL-report.pdf \(coigach-assynt.org\)](#)

## Future Plans and Legacy

The ongoing legacy from the project will be:

- Monitoring of actions produced from report.
- Using this report as a baseline survey; monitoring of potential impacts, negative and positive, of the tree planting schemes undertaken within the project area.
- Understand the freshwater systems further using eDNA

## Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. There is new information to learn about the distribution of species
2. Trout growth rate data becomes available for local fish managers, indicating trout fishery is in healthy condition
3. Communities are eager to learn more about their environment

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. Restrictions of bird nesting season and weather delayed fieldwork
2. Limited number of local population restricted achieving volunteer number targets
3. DNA sampling was too expensive to include in the limited budget

## Funding Partners



## Photographic Evidence



Researchers using the gillnet survey technique © A. Rawlings



One of the species found within the diet of surveyed fish: frog hopper  
© S. Marshall



One of the surveyed species: Trout © A. Beynon-Jones

## Annex 1: Map of Surveyed Lochs

