

Slaney River Trust

2005 Conservation Report

Martin Kelly, Inspector, Eastern Regional Fisheries Board

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As part of the Slaney Rivers Trust (SRT) project, the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board (ERFB) and the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) undertook a programme of works in 2005 to improve spawning and nursery areas in the Slaney catchment, in conjunction with assistance from various stakeholders in the catchment, whom the ERFB would like to thank.

The first step was to identify areas needing restoration by taking an aerial reconnaissance of the catchment. All images were captured, catalogued and inputted on the Geographical Information System by Dr. Martin O'Grady, CFB.

As a result bank, revetment works on the Derreen River at Hacketstown was prioritised and following an underwater survey to determine pearl mussel populations in the proposed stretches by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, works began. This entailed importing 700 tonnes of rock armour, which were used to rebuild the banks, which were badly eroded resulting in large accumulations of sedimentation to the spawning beds. In addition, 300 meters of bank protection was also undertaken using pine logs and Christmas tree tops. Over half a dozen ERFB staff were deployed at various times on bank protection alone in the Hacketstown area.

On a nearby spawning tributary, the Douglas River, 12 Vortex weirs and deflectors, and holding pools were created at various intervals, and over 100 tonnes of suitable gravel was placed in the river to improve existing spawning sites and to create new ones. The next phase involved works upstream on the Carrigower River near Donard, where over 1 mile of river was rejuvenated with 200 tonnes of granite boulders and suitable sized gravel to create pool and riffle characteristics. Tree pruning was also carried out on the River Derry near Tinahely to reduce excessive shading, which has a negative impact on plant and animal life in the river (food for fish).

Similar works was undertaken by the Defense Forces in the Artillery range in the Glen of Imaal under Commandant Derek Hanley and his team.

The Dept of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources also provided engineering assistance with regard to weirs and fish passes downriver. Alex Kelly, Project Officer, SRT, communicated with the local farming communities spanning counties Wexford, Wicklow and Carlow.

A tree planting programme will begin in October as well as fencing (the latter is to prevent livestock damaging new and existing river banks).

Salmon need protection from human predators and the ERFB are stepping up patrols in these spawning areas in 2005 to ensure no illegal fishing takes place. Extra staff are being drafted from adjoining fishery districts equipped with the latest technological devices. Spring Slaney fish arrive at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains usually on a cold November night and after

completing their long journey ~80 miles from the sea, they are near exhaustion and extremely vulnerable to poaching in very remote areas and in shallow water.

Various conservation measures are ongoing for rod anglers and commercial fishermen alike to allow greater numbers to reproduce and thus try and reverse the overall declining numbers of spring salmon in the River Slaney. Educational initiatives such as the 'Something Fishy' programme by the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards' will be introduced in schools in the catchment from 2006.

The Slaney is renowned for being one of the best spring salmon rivers in the country and requires sustainable development, conservation and management.