Moray Firth Trout Initiative (MFTI) wins Heritage Lottery support

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The MFTI is an exciting new project that aims to protect the future of Moray Firth trout populations and the communities that depend on them through education and conservation.

The trout is a key part of Scotland's natural heritage and is a very valuable species to the communities around the Moray Firth. However, numbers are declining fast and the Moray Firth Trout Initiative (MFTI) is a partnership project that will work with local fisheries trusts, district salmon fishery boards and community angling associations to protect this species through environmental education and the conservation of trout populations and habitat.

Brown trout and sea trout are both the same species, *Salmo trutta* . The MFTI will work with the local Fisheries Trust network to provide both school aged children (primary and secondary) and adults with a better understanding of freshwater ecology and a sense of ownership of their local environment through education and practical involvement in conservation. The MFTI will deliver 15 school visits per year and a series of educational talks and walks on the biology of trout and the threats they face in local rivers and burns.

Furthermore the MFTI will offer local volunteers the opportunity to get involved in the practical conservation and management of their local rivers and trout populations. There will be opportunities to conduct habitat surveys, collect trout scales, survey coastal and upland hill Lochs while also helping to restore degraded local rivers and burns. This work will help inform local fisheries management and will protect our local freshwater ecosystems helping to ensure healthy and productive trout populations for future generations.

Commenting on the award, Marcus Walters, MFTI Project Manager, said: "We are thrilled to have received this support from the Heritage Lottery Fund as this work is hugely valuable in safeguarding this valuable species for future generations. We know so little about our trout populations and why they are declining that any work we can do to better understand them and raise awareness is essential to try and reverse this worrying decline in numbers."

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "This project gives us all the opportunity to learn more about trout and the role it plays in Scotland's biodiversity. Through the Moray Forth Trout Initiative, the community will learn new skills, discover new passions and play their part as custodians of our wonderful natural heritage."

Notes for editors

Sea trout and brown trout are one and the same species. Britain's rivers were colonised after the last ice age by sea-going trout with a propensity to migrate between fresh and salt water. Over time some of these fish adapted to complete their life cycles entirely in freshwater but it is believed that all retain a genetic ability to produce offspring that will attempt to go to sea (smolts). Sea trout cannot be conserved without protecting brown trout and visa versa.

Trout freshwater habitat can be affected by farming, forestry, road building and drainage practices leading to access problems and habitat loss. Supplementary stocking has been carried out in some areas to ameliorate some of these effects. However, there is little evidence that that this has been beneficial. Recent advances in genetics indicate that fish populations can be highly structured even at local level.

Participants in the MFTI are:

- Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust
- Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust
- Ness & Beauly Fisheries Trust
- Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Trust
- Deveron Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust
- Conon DSFB
- Beauly DSFB
- Ness DSFB
- Nairn DSFB
- Findhorn DSFB
- Lossie DSFB
- Deveron DSFB
- Angling associations all around the Moray Firth (up to 33)

Funded By

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Nineveh Charitable Trust
- Scottish and Southern Energy
- Ernest Cook Charitable Trust
- Wild Trout Trust (WTT)
- Highland Council
- Local DSFBs (listed above)
- Local fisheries trusts (listed above)
- Angling associations

Further information

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