Lottery Grant to ‘Catch’ Lough Neagh Fishing Heritage

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For centuries, hundreds of families have made their livelihood from fishing on Lough Neagh. These families and those from the surrounding shoreline have a unique heritage and distinctive lifestyle, but changes in technology and the fish markets have meant that the old ways and traditions are declining and are in danger of being lost.

The 18-month ‘Lough Neagh Fishing Families Heritage’ project will record the memories, experiences and stories of the community to capture and preserve this heritage for future generations. Themes to be explored include the methods of fishing, the boats, and the changing social and economic conditions that saw the fishermen finally gain ownership of the Lough Neagh Fisheries in 1970 after an almost century-long legal battle.

Volunteers will be recruited and trained in interview techniques to enable them to record the personal histories of up to 60 senior members of the fishing community. A photographic database consisting of both historic and new images will be compiled and these, alongside the video and audio interviews, will be used to create a publicly accessible digital archive of the heritage.

An information pack will be developed to enable local primary and secondary school children to learn more about the story of Lough Neagh’s fishing families. A book encapsulating the story will be produced and distributed to the local community and education and library boards across Northern Ireland to share this heritage with the wider community.

The project will also bring together former and current generations of local fishermen and their families to share and record the fishing activities of the past. Up to 30 volunteer fishermen will be involved in re-enacting traditional methods of fishing the Lough, including fishing under sail and with trammel nets, which will be filmed to provide a permanent visual record of the past.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: “We are delighted to be involved in this ambitious project which will create a permanent record of a way of life that is rapidly changing. The local community is justly proud of its heritage and this project will enable the fishing families of Lough Neagh to explore, record, and celebrate the history of their community, from their own perspective, for the first time.”

Commenting on behalf of ALPHA, Secretary Martin Devlin expressed his delight that the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund would enable a long-cherished project to be undertaken: “We are very happy that the record of the unique way of life of the Lough Neagh fishing families can now be preserved, and that future generations will be able to access and appreciate this incomparable heritage. Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund we are now able to undertake a project which, over and above the collection, preservation, and compilation of valuable material pertaining to the fishing families, will serve to improve and enhance social cohesion in the Loughshore community.”

HLF has grant-giving programmes to support both large and small heritage projects, and since 1994 has awarded £135 million to projects across Northern Ireland.

Further information about HLF's funding programmes

Further information

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