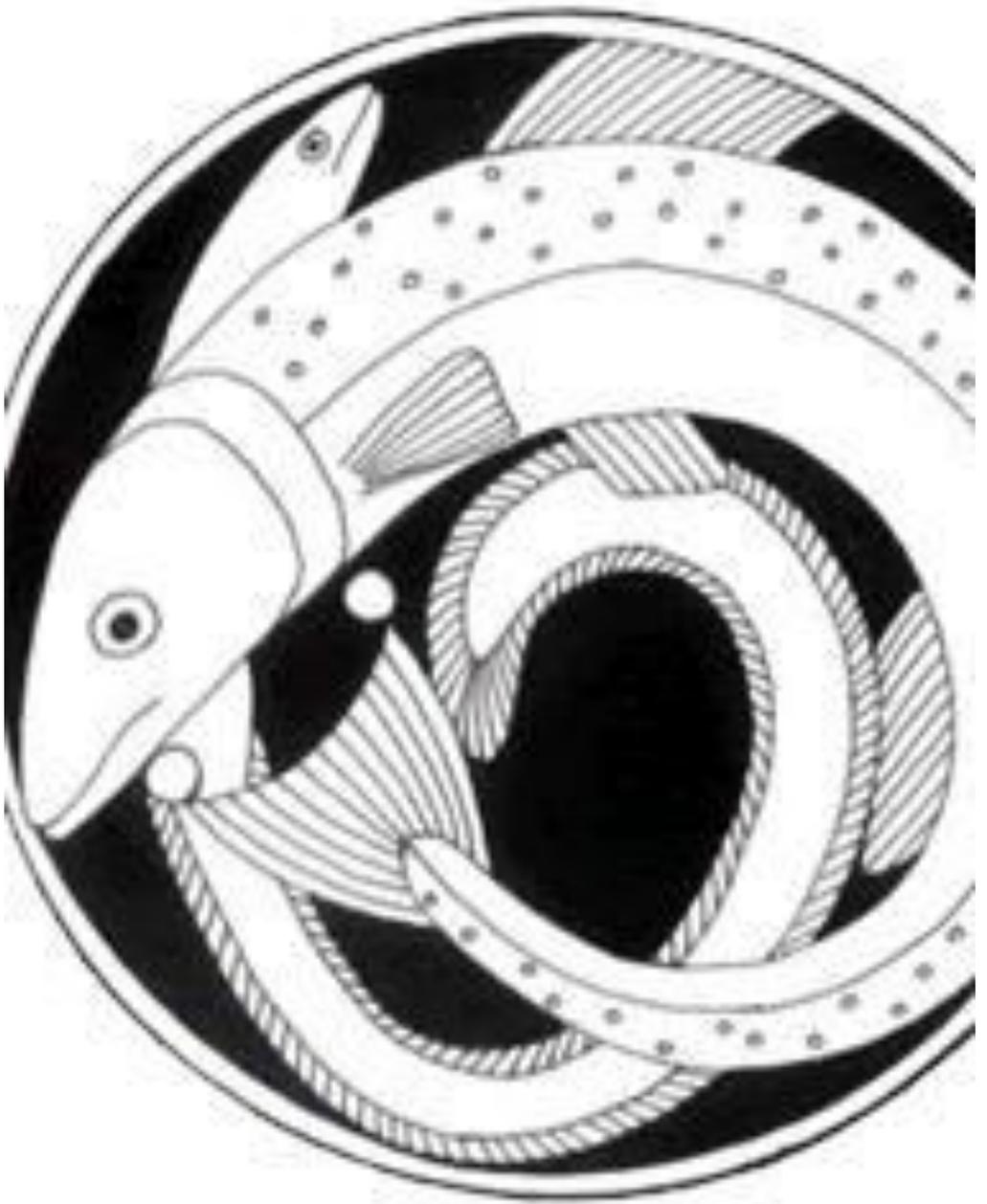


Lochaber Fisheries Trust Monitoring Report, 2025



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Contents

3. Foreword

5. Sea lice monitoring

10. Electrofishing

13. Genetics surveillance

15. 2026 and beyond

Foreword

This year was a challenging one for the Lochaber Fisheries Trust (LFT), with recruitment difficulties and staff illness limiting our survey work early in the season. However, with the assistance of the Argyll Fisheries Trust and the arrival of a new Senior Biologist in August, a great deal of fisheries monitoring work was completed. This included 38 wild fish sea-lice monitoring survey days across seven sites, surveys of 21 juvenile density electrofishing sites, pearl mussel monitoring, and genetics analysis of ~200 salmon fry across four catchments. Overall, the picture for the year was high levels of lice infection on wild salmonids and decreasing juvenile densities.



Acknowledgements

We thank Mowi Scotland, Scottish Sea Farms, and the Wild Fisheries Fund, for funding this years monitoring work.

LFT team

Dr Antony Smith

Antony Smith began working as Senior Biologist and Trust Manager at Lochaber Fisheries Trust in August 2025. Antony had previously worked as a fisheries restoration officer in North Wales and as a senior freshwater fisheries consultant with APEM. He has a background in fisheries data science and completed a PhD in Arctic charr population dynamics and life-history evolution at Bangor University.



Rob Pitkin

Rob previously worked for Lochaber Fisheries Trust between 2022 and 2024, returning in March 2026. Prior to moving to Scotland, Rob was employed by the Environment Agency, where he worked in fisheries and biodiversity related roles based in East Anglia and the East Midlands. Before joining the EA, Rob had returned to fulltime education, completing a BSc (Hons) degree in conservation and land management.



LFT would like to thank former Assistant Biologist, Sarah Hadfield, for her excellent work over 2025. We wish her all the best for the future.



Wild fish sea lice monitoring



Background

LFT has been involved with monitoring sea lice burdens on wild fish for several decades because of concerns regarding increased prevalence of lice due to aquaculture activity.

Kingairloch, Lower Loch Linnhe

Seine netting surveys were undertaken at Kingairloch, within the Lower Linnhe Farm Management Area to monitor for sea lice infections on local wild sea trout populations. Five surveys were completed, yielding 16 small trout (< 150 g) and 2 large trout (> 150 g), representing the highest capture rate since 2022.

Sea lice prevalence, abundance, and intensity (PAI) metrics were elevated in 2025 relative to recent years, except for 2022. Among smaller trout (<150 g; $n = 16$), 75% were infected, with a mean of 15.16 lice per infected fish.

Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, the estimated lice-related mortality risk was classified as *high* for both small and large sea trout, at 31% and 75% respectively. These represent the highest recorded risk values since 2022.



Proportion (%) of trout <150g per risk assessment category, including total risk (%), at Kingairloch.

Year	Proportion (%) of trout <150g per category				Total risk (%)
	<0.1	0.1 - 0.2	0.2 - 0.3	>0.3	
2022	29.63	18.52	0.00	51.85	55.56
2023	78.57	7.14	0.00	14.29	15.7
2024	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0
2025	62	0	13	25	31.25

Loch Sunart Farm Management Area

Seine net surveys were undertaken at Strontian on 5 separate days from May to September, yielding 5 small trout (< 150 g) and 3 large trout (> 150 g). These numbers are considerably down from the 47 captured in 2024, which was a significant outlier in the nine-year time series

Sea lice prevalence, abundance and intensity (PAI) were elevated in 2025 compared with recent years, and similar to the higher levels observed in 2016, 2017 and 2023. Among small trout, 80% were infected, with a mean intensity of 20 lice per infected fish. Among large trout, 67% were infected, with a mean intensity of 50 lice per infected fish. Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, the estimated lice-related mortality risk in 2025 was 40% and classified as 'High' for both trout size classes.

Coastal fyke net surveys at Laga Bay yielded 2 large and 4 small trout. This is an improvement on the two previous years surveys in 2022 and 2024, when only 1 fish was captured each year.

For small trout, 75 % were infected, with a mean intensity of 62 lice per infected fish. All large trout were infected, with a mean intensity of 86 lice per infected fish. Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, total estimated mortality risk was 'High' (75%) for small trout and 'High' (83%) for large trout.

Proportion (%) of trout <150g per risk assessment category, including total risk (%), at Strontian .

Year	Proportion (%) of trout <150g per category				Total risk (%)
	<0.1	0.1 - 0.2	0.2 - 0.3	>0.3	
2013	100	0	0	0	0
2014	100	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	100	100
2017	48	3	0	48	49
2022	50	25	0	25	30
2023	100	0	0	0	0
2024	93	4	2	0	2
2025	60	0	0	40	40

Upper Loch Linnhe Farm Management area

Bunree

Seine net surveys were undertaken on 5 separate days from May to July, yielding 36 small trout (< 150 g) and 9 large trout (> 150 g). These numbers are considerably down from the 107 captured in 2024 but comparable to other years.

Sea lice prevalence, abundance and intensity (PAI) were considerably higher in 2025 compared with 2024 and were similar to the high levels observed in 2023. Among small trout, 89% were infected, with a mean intensity of 20 lice per infected fish. Among large trout, 100% were infected, with a mean intensity of 14 lice per infected fish.

Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, total estimated mortality risk was 'High' (74%) for small trout and 'High' (48%) for large trout. These are the highest levels recorded across the four-year time series.



Leven

A total of 54 sea trout were captured in 2025, considerably higher than previous years.

For small fish, the abundance and intensity of lice were similar to previous years. Among small trout, 81% were infected, with a mean intensity of 12 lice per infected fish. Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, total estimated mortality risk was 'Moderate' (20%) for small trout.





Camusnagual

Seine net surveys were undertaken on 5 separate days from May to September, yielding 80 small trout (< 150 g) and 10 large trout (> 150 g). These numbers are considerably down from 2024 and 2022 but comparable to 2023.

Sea lice prevalence, abundance and intensity (PAI) were comparable to 2024 and generally lower compared to 2022 and 2023 surveys. Among small trout, 85% were infected, with a mean intensity of 12 lice per infected fish.

Using the Taranger risk assessment framework, total estimated mortality risk was 'High' (33%) for small trout and 'Moderate' (28%) for large trout. This is the second lowest level recorded across the four-year time series.

Proportion (%) of trout <150g per risk assessment category, including total risk (%), at Camusnagaul.

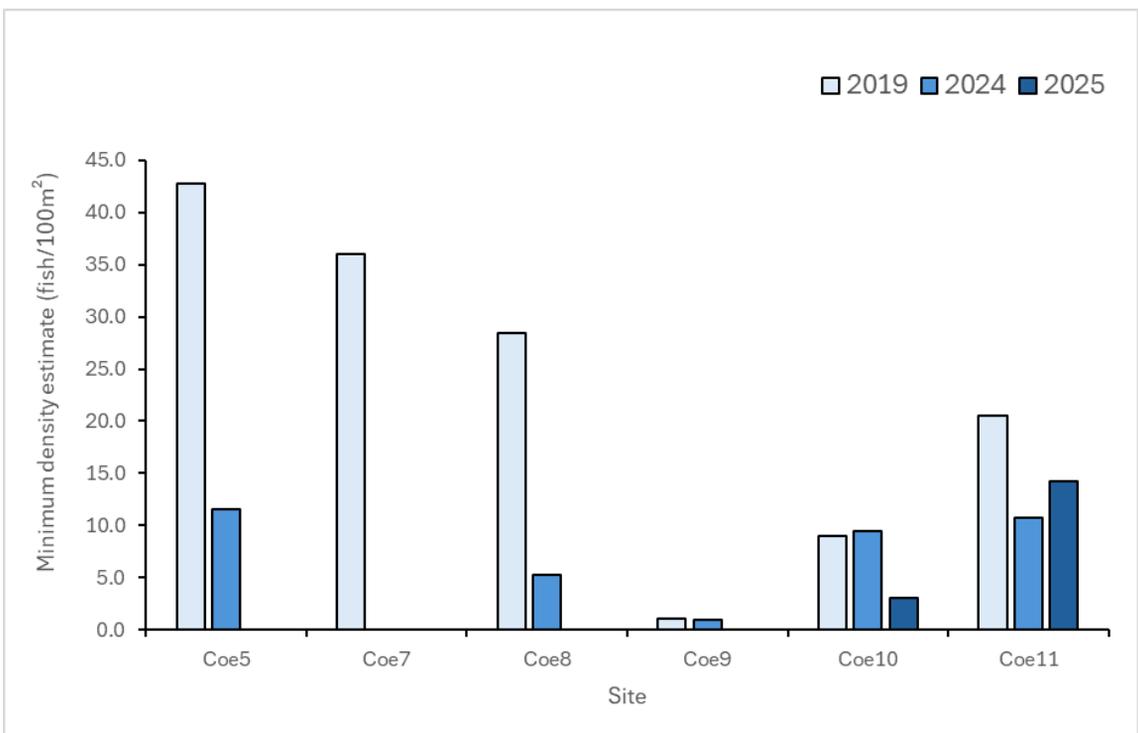
Year	Proportion (%) of trout <150g per category				Total risk (%)
	<0.1	0.1 - 0.2	0.2 - 0.3	>0.3	
2022	33	13	12	42	51
2023	12	8	9	71	77
2024	77	15	2	5	10
2025	50	13	15	23	33



Danger
Electric
Fishing in
Progress

River Coe

This year's survey recorded historically low densities of Atlantic salmon and trout, consistent with the broader decreasing trend observed between 2019, 2024, and 2025. In 2019, salmon fry were classified as 'Good' or 'Excellent' at four of the five sites and salmon parr were classified as 'Fair' or 'Excellent'. In contrast, the best classification in 2025 was 'Fair', with most sites rated as 'Very Poor' or absent. Trout numbers have been persistently low since the first survey in 2019, but this year trout were nearly absent, with only one fish captured.



Salmon fry densities, River Coe.

River Carnoch

This year's survey recorded historically low densities of Atlantic salmon and trout, with an absence of fry for both species indicating very poor recruitment success in 2025. Salmon parr were classified as 'Very Poor' at four sites and 'Fair' at one site, while trout were absent at two sites and classified as 'Very Poor' at the remaining three. These low densities are consistent with a decreasing trend observed for the River Carnoch between 2016, 2024, and 2025.





Ardnamurchan Burns SAC

Electrofishing surveys were undertaken in September 2025 to monitor juvenile Atlantic salmon and brown trout populations within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in the West Highlands. This year's survey was a continuation of annual monitoring carried out since 2018 to assess salmonid populations in relation to the freshwater pearl mussel (FWPM) populations.

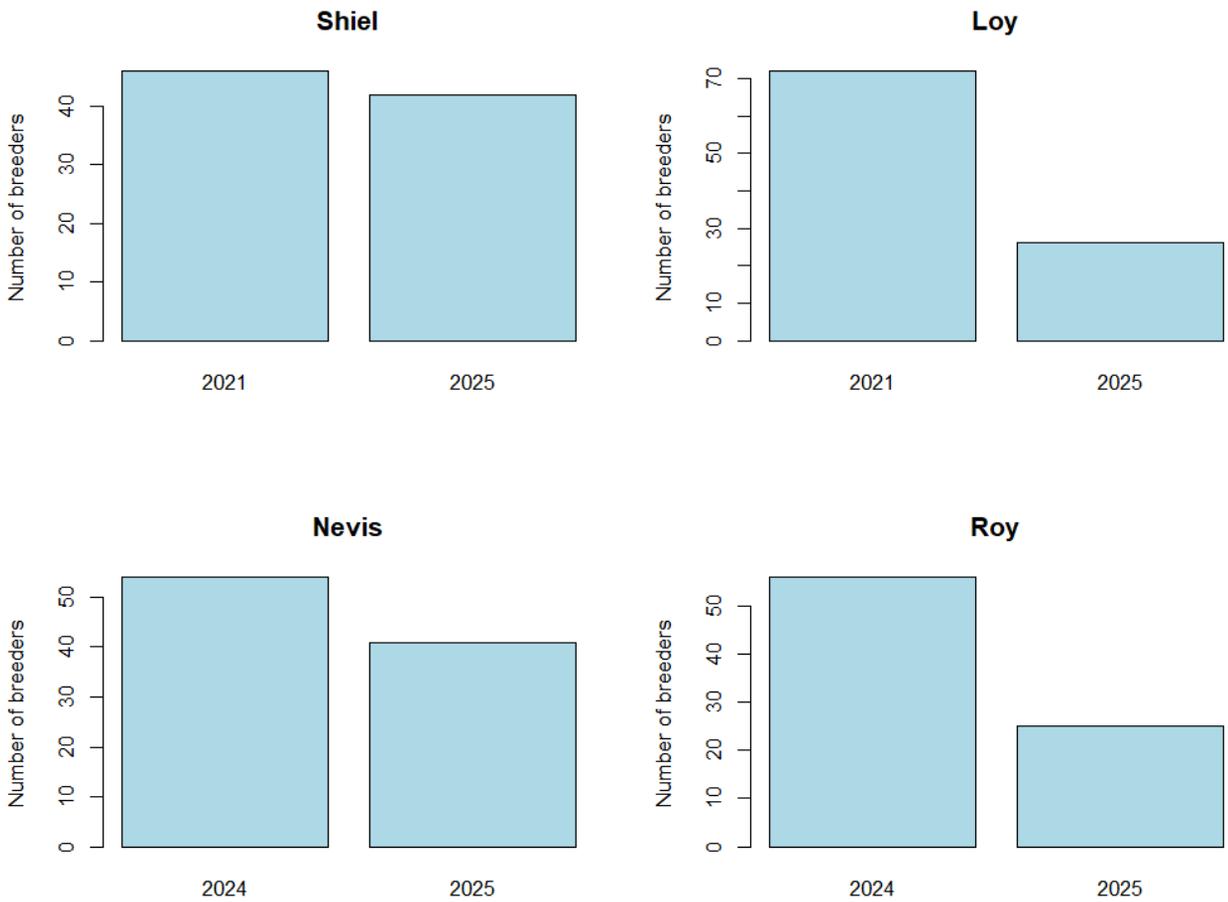
The Ardnamurchan burns are assessed as favourable for host fish densities in 2025, with 100% of the seven sites exceeding the JNCC threshold of 10 fish per 100 m² required for successful FWPM recruitment. Encouragingly, Atlantic salmon were captured at Sanna for the first time since 2022. However, FWPM glochidia counts on the gills of host fish remain very low across Ardnamurchan, as were densities of 0+ salmon and trout (fry), indicating poor recruitment success this year.

On the river Moidart, only 50% of four sites were above the JNCC threshold, and historical comparisons indicate a decline in host fish densities since 2022. Glochidia counts were also considerably lower than in previous years. There is therefore concern that the health of the Moidart FWPM population may be deteriorating.



Genetics surveillance of wild salmon

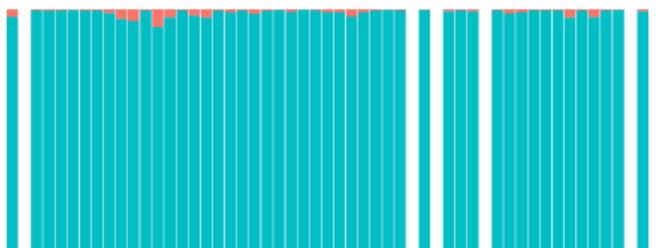
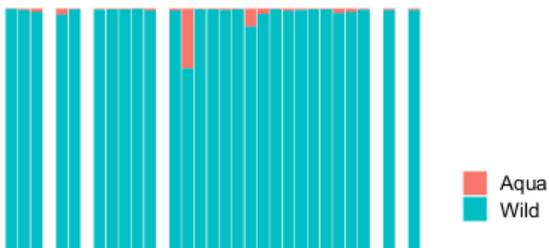
This year we continued our genetic surveillance monitoring in the Lochaber region, supported by the Wild fisheries Fund. Fin clips of almost 200 Atlantic salmon fry were collected by electrofishing from the river Loy, Roy, Nevis, and lower Shiel for genetic analysis at the University of Inverness.



Estimates of minimum number of breeders were lower for all rivers compared with previous years, most noticeably for the Loy and Roy (see figure above). The result showed limited genetic introgression of farmed fish overall, particularly on the Shiel (see figure below).

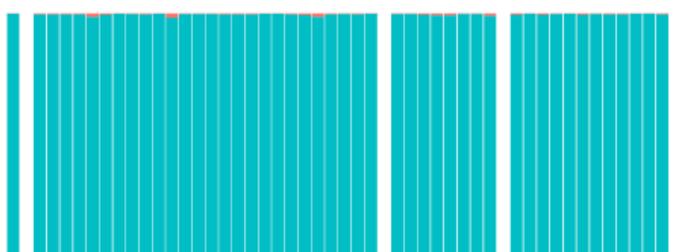
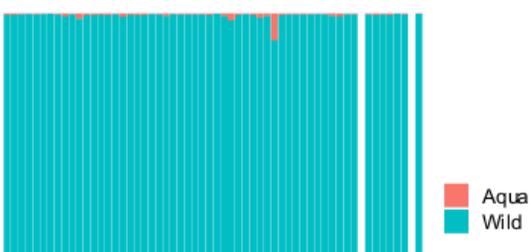
Roy 2025

Nevis 2025



Lochy (Loy) 2025

Upper Shiel 2025



Invertebrate monitoring Aline catchment

We continued our stream invertebrate monitoring on the Ardtornish Estate in collaboration with Buglife Scotland. The project aims to assess improvements to the river's ecology following restoration efforts by the Estate in the Aline catchment. The final report will be issued toward the end of 2026.



Outlook for 2026 and beyond

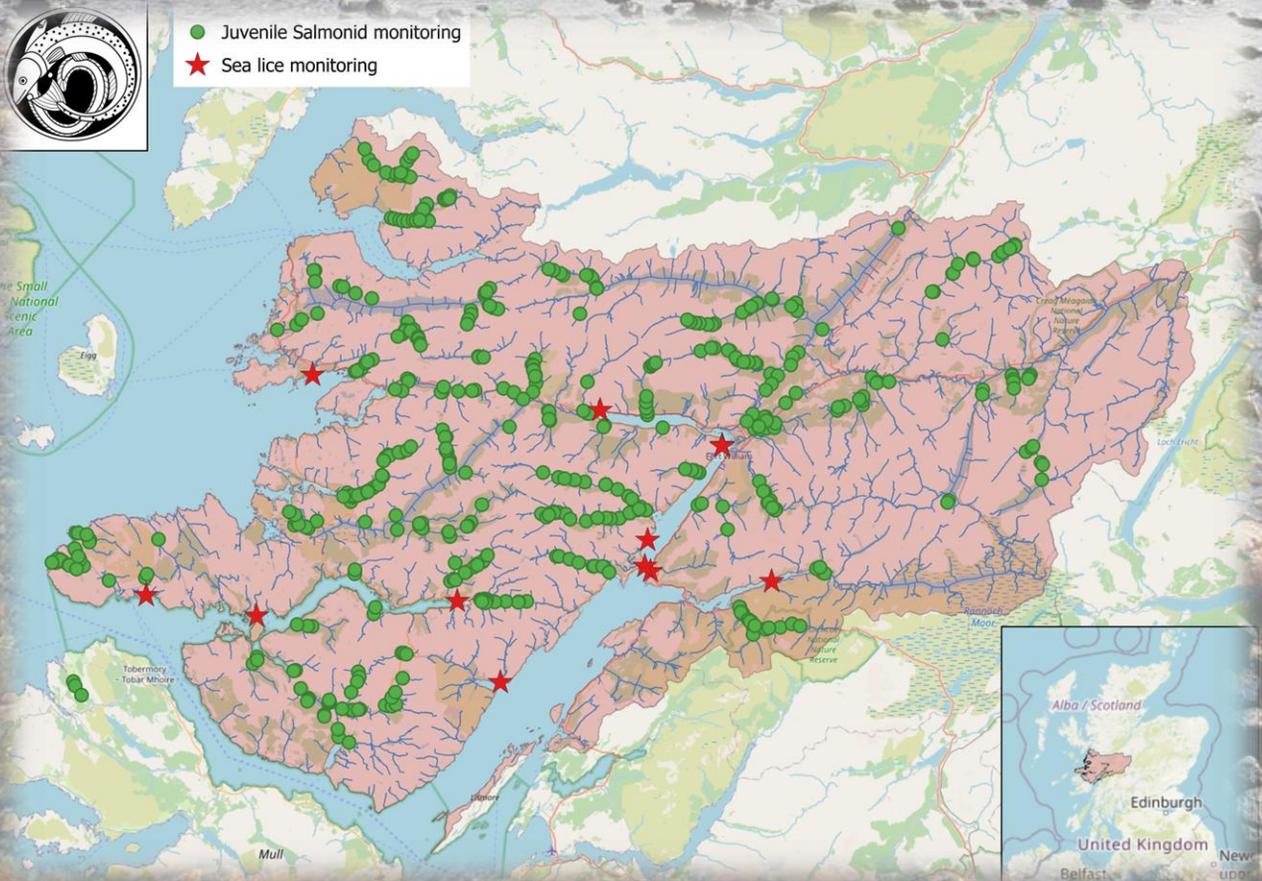
In 2026, LFT will continue most of the monitoring activities carried out in 2025. In addition, genetic surveillance will be expanded to include a further nine catchments, and a new sea-lice monitoring site will be established at Sanna Beach, Ardnamurchan. We will also return to the Corrou Estate to undertake our Biennial surveys of brown trout densities and are starting an exciting new monitoring project on the Duror with MaCCOLL.

Beyond 2026, we are assessing several potential restoration projects, including tree planting, barrier removals, and INNS treatment. On the monitoring side, we aim to initiate new smolt and adult monitoring projects and expand juvenile density surveys as part of a strategic core monitoring programme for the Lochaber region.

If you would like to support the work of the Trust, either through volunteering, or by making donation, then please get in touch: info@lochaberfisheritrust.org.



- Juvenile Salmonid monitoring
- ★ Sea lice monitoring



LFT monitoring sites