



**Inland Fisheries Ireland**

**Stock Management Plan**

**2021**



## Introduction

In accordance with IFI's policies for the management of designated wild brown trout fisheries and the requirements of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, stock management operations are required for six lake catchments in the WRBD; Loughs Corrib, Mask, Carra, Conn, Cullin and Arrow, all of which are designated, managed wild brown trout fisheries and for Lough Sheelin in the Shannon RBD. The following is the Inland Fisheries Ireland national stock management plan for 2021.

Gill netting and electrofishing (EF) operations are planned for the WRBD lake catchments which will take place using various methodologies during 2021. Electrofishing only is planned for Lough Sheelin. Other methods may also be trialled during 2021 if Covid-19 restrictions prohibit traditional methods. This report outlines the plan for stock management operations both gill netting and electrofishing and is subject to screening for appropriate assessment. Fyke nets and perch traps are methods used on the Owenriff and are also included in this plan. Should other methods be used, additional screening will be undertaken as appropriate. Full details of the proposed start and finish dates are tabulated below. Staff will endeavour to work as efficiently as possible and remove the maximum number of pike, however due to Covid 19 restriction, estimates of the projected numbers of pike (*Esox lucius*) to be removed are unknown.

The operations will be carried out in accordance with the relevant Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for both electrofishing and gill netting operations which have been prepared by IFI for that purpose. The principal purpose of the SOP's is to provide for the safe and humane management of pike stocks in the lakes outlined in the introductory paragraph. All staff handling pike will do so in accordance with IFI's SOPs and all have received fish health, handling and welfare training. All pike carcasses removed from the lakes will be appropriately disposed of, according to standard animal waste disposal procedures. Alternatively pike may be transferred to appropriately screened recipient waters with IFI biosecurity measures implemented throughout the movement process. It should be noted that stock management activities may be altered due to Covid – 19 restrictions. IFI staff will be strictly adhering to Covid-19 guidelines in line with IFI's Covid-19 Safety Handbook.

### Gill Netting Operations

Netting will be concentrated into specific areas on each lake during different periods of the pike management season. As pike behaviour is increasingly well understood, known spawning areas are targeted during periods of maximum spawning activity while other operations will take advantage of congregations of pike which occur in accordance with specific feeding behaviour associated with concentrations of spring and autumn salmonid migrations. Gill netting operations for 2021 will commence in February (depending on Covid-19 restrictions) whenever weather conditions allow. Covid-19 restrictions will impact on this for 2021 and have already pushed out the dates for commencement. Netting will continue until early April at which point operations will incrementally decrease. Further gill netting operations are planned for the fourth quarter of 2021 in Lough's Conn and Cullin concentrating on the month of December. This will be done on a trial basis.

In general, gill nets will be set parallel with lake-shores to intercept pike moving in and out of known pike spawning areas and those feeding on juvenile salmonids as they migrate from their natal streams through the large lakes. All pike will be handled carefully and quickly euthanised or stored in well oxygenated tanks and transported to recipient waters. The transfer of pike to other appropriate waterbodies will be considered if resources and appropriate recipient waterbodies are identified. All pike  $\geq 85\text{cm}$  will be returned immediately subject to viability and survival prospects. Nets will be serviced daily except for instances where there are health and safety concerns in relation to weather conditions.

**Table 1: Details of gill netting operations for planned for 2021 in the WRBD**

Lake	Period	Person days
Arrow	Feb-April	96
Conn	Feb-April & Dec*	165
Cullen	Feb-April & Dec*	45
Carra	Mar-April	50
Mask	Feb-March & Nov*	100
Corrib	Feb-April & Nov*	180
Owenriff	Feb- Sept	60
TOTAL		696

An asterisk\* denotes that dates may change due to Covid-19 restrictions and other influences.

### **Electrofishing Operations**

Electrofishing (EF) operations can be carried out year round on lakes subject to suitable weather and water conditions. As such, the period identified for EF operations on each lake is much longer and can effectively run from 1st January to 31st December in any year. An estimated 356 person days will be allocated to EF operations in 2021 in the WRBD. The table below quantifies the planned electrofishing effort on the lakes for 2021.

In addition to targeting the nursery margins, EF will also be used to control pike numbers in the lower reaches of a number of rivers. There is ample observational evidence of severe predation of salmon smolts and trout near and in the mouths of salmonid nursery rivers and streams especially when salmonids are migrating in March, April and October. EF operations on some river mouths will therefore be scheduled for early spring and autumn to mitigate against excessive predation of migrating salmonids. Staff may need to be deployed from other districts to assist with stock management operations.

**Table 2: Details of electrofishing operations planned for 2021 in the WRBD**

Lake	Period	Person days
Arrow	Jan-Dec	36
Conn	Jan-Dec	90
Cullen	Jan-Dec	60
Corrib Catchment	Jan-Dec	120
Owenriff	Apr - Dec	50
		356



### Lough Sheelin Stock Management Plan

Similar to the WRBD, Stock Management in Lough Sheelin may be impacted by Covid-19 restrictions.

**Table 3: Details of electrofishing operations planned for 2021 on Lough Sheelin**

Lake	Period	Days
Sheelin	Mar-Apr & Aug - Sept	40