

INCREASE IN FISH KILLS

The Fisheries Conservancy Board has described 2001 as a “Nightmare year for the Province’s Waterways”. In the whole of 2000 there were approximately 30 fish kills in Northern Ireland compared to 32 from January to July 2001. Many of these incidents occurred in tributaries and rivers that are part of Lough Neagh and the Lower Bann system. Large parts of the system are being promoted as excellent game and coarse angling rivers but are under threat from various sources of pollution originating from industry, agriculture and the human population.

During the summer months, water-courses are more vulnerable because the high temperatures, low rain fall and low oxygen levels mean that the slightest form of pollution can have a huge impact on life in the river. Last year farm pollution accounted for 31% of total population incidents. The beleaguered agriculture sector is in the headlines again as many of the incidents in June and July 2001 have been attributed to silage effluent.

Last month, pollution from industrial sources killed an estimated 10,000 fish in a stretch of the Six Mile Water from Ballynure to Ballyclare. A large fish kill on the Killymoon, a tributary of the Ballinderry River that flows into Lough Neagh, was the sixth reported incident in the last week of July 2001.

An unauthorised industrial discharge into the river killed approximately 3000 trout and much of the river’s invertebrate life in a stretch of river near Cookstown. Water Service, Fisheries Conservancy Board and Environment and Heritage Service are currently investigating the incident.

If restocked too soon after the flushing of the pollutant, most of the fish would die due to a lack of food. But thanks to a new innovation from America, it is thought that restocking will begin in January, much earlier than previously practicable. Aquamats, installed well up river of the fish kills will attract nymphs and shrimps, the food supply of trout. After two months, the mats and attached invertebrate life will be relocated to the damaged stretch of water to ensure it is recolonised more quickly with the necessary fish food species. If food is available, trout already in the system will move up river and add to the populations of introduced native fry. Hard work and dedication on behalf of the Ballinderry River Enhancement Association (BREA), had ensured that this river had a healthy population of native dollaghan trout. Now BREA will be involved in the vital restoration and re-stocking work.

Alan Keys of BREA hopes that lessons will be learnt from the latest fish kills. Alan indicates that “In certain circumstances new developments are being allowed to proceed

in anticipation of upgrades to sewage treatment works. This does not encompass the precautionary approach that should be adopted when considering the surrounding environment and watercourses. BREAs are keen to see new housing and industrial developments in the area, but these should not be allowed to proceed if the effluent cannot be properly treated at existing works. All too often we see the effects of pollution in our rivers and tributaries.

There is a current desire to promote the natural resources of rural Northern Ireland to local people and tourists. The potential for a high quality angling product within Northern Ireland and particularly the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann system is excellent. Any rise in pollution incidents and fish kills is not sending the 'quality angling' message to high spending anglers.

FOOT AND MOUTH

Everyone is aware of the effects of Foot and Mouth disease has had on day-to-day activities over the last few months. Lough Neagh and the Lower Bann river did not escape unscathed. The outbreak in Ardboe meant that an exciting season of boating activities on the Lough and River had to be postponed. Bann System Ltd suspended angling activities within their jurisdiction, off road waking and cycling activities were curtailed and monitoring and management activities, and meetings of the Advisory Committees were interrupted. The following is a current summary of advice relating to Foot and Mouth:

- People using the waterways and countryside should continue to keep all away from livestock and keep their dogs and children under control.
- All vehicles accessing the countryside should be parked in designated car parks.
- Farmers should continue to practice fortress farming and take suitable precautions.
- Disinfectant mats are no longer needed at public and private sector buildings.
- Vehicles and people that have been in contact with farm animals whilst in Great Britain should report to DARD Import Inspectors on returning to Northern Ireland.
- Visitors to Northern Ireland should make appropriate use of the disinfectant facilities at ports and airports, should not bring the products of susceptible animals into the country and should avoid contact with farms or livestock during their visit.

As the vital restrictions are eased, hopefully the life and economy of rural areas will gradually return to normal. Updates on FMD can be obtained from the following web sites: www.dani.gov.uk/pr2001, www.nics.gov.uk, www.ehsni.gov.uk and www.iwai.ie.

RECONSTITUTED COMMITTEES

The Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committees have been reconstituted by government and will run for a further term of three years, until 2004. The Committees, with representation from local authorities, statutory agencies and stakeholder interests will continue to offer impartial management and development advice on drainage and navigation, open air recreation and the built and natural environmental management. The Advisory Committees hope to have their web site fully functioning in the near future. Keep watching www.lnlb.org.uk

COAL CANALS CONFERENCE

The 4th Annual Conference of the Ulster Waterways Group will focus on the importance of Northern Ireland's Coal Canals – the Newry and Coalisland Canals.

The conference will be held on Thursday, 20th and Friday, 21st of September 2001 in the Canal Court Hotel Newry and Coalisland Heritage Centre respectively. The programme includes presentations by Waterways Ireland, British Waterways Scotland, Waterways Trust, Waterways Recovery Group, Lough Neagh Advisory Committee, Newry Canal Joint Committee and Coalisland & District Development Committee. Attendance at both days will be £105.

For further details and a registration form, contact the Ulster Waterways Group Secretary on 028 90 425230.

FUND FOR LOUGH NEAGH

A working group with representatives from the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee, Loughshores Area Based Strategy, Lough Neagh Co-ordinating Committee and local community networks is drawing up a Lough Neagh Strategic Fund document.

It is hoped that this document will be successful in attracting substantial funds to the Lough Neagh Wetlands area. If successful, funding should be available for environmental, infrastructure, economic and educational projects in the vicinity of the Lough. It is envisaged that a new strategic Lough Neagh body will have to be created to administer this fund. The working group is exploring the possible role and potential implications of such a strategic body. To date, the majority of the local authorities around the Lough are supportive of the progress made by the working group. As yet, there are no firm plans to secure additional funding for the Lower Bann River.

Further details will be available in due course.

LOUGH NEAGH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY YOUR COMMENTS COUNT

The first consultation document relating to the Lough Neagh Management Strategy has been released for public comment. The consultation document sets out a series of outline suggestions for management and enhancement of the Lough Neagh Wetlands. It has been produced to gauge the opinion of local people and stakeholders and to ensure that their views can be incorporated into the final detailed Strategy to be published in Spring 2002. The following is a summary of the background, main issues and draft management objectives.

Background

The Lough Neagh Wetlands, made up of Lough Neagh, Lough Beg, the satellite lakes, associated waterways and low-lying surrounding hinterland, are an extremely complex system where people live, work and interact with the natural environment. The final Management Strategy will highlight the overall goals and actions necessary to achieve an acceptable balance between the needs of people and the needs of the environment. The use of the wetland resource for the benefit of people whilst maintaining the natural environment is enshrined in the Ramsar '**Wise Use of Wetlands**' principle and will form the basis of the Management Strategy.

Local people, stakeholders, local authorities and statutory organisations have been involved in the production of this document and, it is hoped, will continue to be involved in the production of the final Strategy and in the implementation of the future management recommendations.

Mission Statement

The Lough Neagh Wetlands will be sustainably managed to conserve and enhance its natural, built and cultural heritage whilst developing economic and social opportunities for local communities and visitors according to the 'Wise use of Wetlands' principle.

Cross Cutting Issues

The successful implementation of the management Strategy is dependent on due consideration being given to environmental, economic and social sustainability, the ecosystem, agriculture, tourism, partnerships, think globally – act locally and implementation resources. These have been termed 'cross cutting issues'.

In the next section, each subject area or theme is described and expanded, and DRAFT Management Objectives are highlighted. In the published Management Strategy, Indicative actions are also highlighted.

Theme 1 – BIODIVERSITY

Aim: To sustain and enhance the variety of local indigenous life in the Lough Neagh Wetlands.

Habitats

Objectives

- To protect, maintain, and where appropriate restore and create, important wet woodlands, scrub, wet grassland, fens, swamp, reed beds, grazing marsh, islands, cut-over bogs, ditches and drains in the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To raise awareness and promote appreciation and enjoyment of important Lough Neagh wetland habitats.

Species

Objectives

- To protect, maintain, and where appropriate, enhance populations of important species in the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To introduce policy to control invasive species.
- To raise awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of important wetland species.

Theme 2 WATER QUALITY

Aim: To sustain and enhance the variety of local indigenous life in the Lough Neagh catchment, consistent with its role as an internationally important nature conservation site and key recreation sources.

Nutrient levels

Objectives

- To reduce the input of phosphorus from major sources and set appropriate targets.
- To raise awareness of the problems of, and solution to a eutrophic system.

Pollution incidents

Objectives

- To minimise the number and severity of pollution incidents.
- To reduce and redress the effects of pollution.
- To raise awareness of causes and effects of pollution incidents.

Flotsam

Objectives

- To reduce the input and increase removal of flotsam.
- To raise awareness of the effects of litter in the watercourse.

Bacteria Levels

Objectives

- To ensure that all Lough Neagh water meets 'bathing water' quality standards.
- To ensure that all water taken from Lough Neagh for human consumption continues to be effectively treated.

Theme 3 WATER QUALITY

Aim: To ensure fair and equitable use of the water resource for local people and stakeholders whilst maintaining and enhancing nature conservation interests.

Water Levels

Objectives

- To manage water levels in Lough Neagh for agriculture, navigation and other users whilst ensuring the integrity of the wetland ecosystem.
- To ensure an adequate supply of potable water whilst allowing for the needs of Lough users and maintaining the environmental integrity of the wetland ecosystem.
- Raise awareness of the importance and complex nature of water levels within the system.

Ecosystem Integrity

Objectives

- To protect and conserve the integrity of the wetlands ecosystem through naturalisation of water levels, whilst considering the recreational and economic needs of the Wetlands.

Theme 4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Aim: To maintain and enhance the characteristic landscape features of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.

Built Heritage

Objectives

- Ensure that all buildings with distinctive local features continue to contribute to the overall landscape quality.
- Raise awareness and appreciation in local people and visitors of the importance of local traditional buildings and individual landscape features.

Blending Existing Buildings

Objectives

- To ensure that existing 'out of character' buildings blend with the landscape.
- To raise awareness and appreciation of the impact of 'out of character' buildings on the landscape.

Integration of New Buildings

Objectives

- To ensure that all new buildings/developments are sympathetically designed and appropriately sited to maintain the traditional landscape character.
- To ensure that local people and developers are aware of, appreciate and use traditional features when designing new buildings in the Wetlands.

Boundary Patterns and Individual Features

Objectives

- To maintain and enhance traditional field and boundary patterns and individual landscape features which contribute to overall land character.

- To raise awareness of the importance of field and boundary patterns and individual landscape features in contributing to the overall landscape.

Theme 5 RESOURCES

Aim: To ensure the sustainable use of the resources of the Wetlands.

Minerals and Petroleum

Objectives

- To maintain a viable local economy whilst protecting and enhancing the archaeological interest, landscape and biodiversity of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of the resources of the Lough.

Fish

Objectives

- To maintain and enhance indigenous fish populations.
- To maintain and enhance a viable commercial fishing industry.
- Raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of fish populations in the system.

People

Objectives

- To retain and celebrate the cultural aspects of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To maintain and enhance a sense of local 'ownership' of the Wetlands.
- To raise awareness and appreciation of the diversity of cultural traditions in the Wetlands.

Theme 6 LAND BASED RECREATION

Aim: To manage and enhance land based recreational opportunities, for local people and visitors, whilst maintaining the area's environmental integrity.

Activity Based Recreation

Objectives

- To manage and enhance the recreational product whilst protecting the vital natural and built heritage resource.
- To strategically promote and market the Wetlands as a well-managed recreational activity site and internationally important ecosystem.

Wildfowling

Objectives

- To ensure sustainable management of wildfowl and wildfowling for local people within the Wetlands.
- To raise awareness of wildfowling and the positive effects wildfowling can have on the environment.

Theme 7 WATER BASED RECREATION

Aim: To provide opportunities for high quality environmentally sustainable water-based recreation for local people and visitors.

Angling

Objectives

- To protect, sustainably manage and enhance indigenous fish stocks in the whole system.
- To protect, sustainably manage and enhance all breeding and feeding habitats.
- To provide adequate freedom on movement for fish and feeding habitats.
- To provide opportunity for inclusive quality game and coarse angling.
- To market the high quality game and coarse angling product.

Watersports

Objectives

- To provide a safe navigable waterway.
- To extend navigable waters and seasonal usage period.
- To provide well-managed and resourced water access points.
- To market the water based recreation resource to local people and visitors.
- To provide opportunities for sustainable business development.

Theme 8 AWARENESS

Aim: To raise awareness of, and increase visits to the Lough Neagh Wetlands.

Education and Awareness

Objectives

- To raise awareness and appreciation in local people and visitors of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To ensure that local people have a sense of belonging and 'ownership' of the Wetlands.

Marketing

Objectives

- To increase numbers of local people and visitors experiencing the Wetlands.
- To increase the amount of money spent whilst in the Wetlands.
- To increase the length of stay of visitors to the Wetlands.

Theme 9 OVERALL MANAGEMENT

Aim: To ensure co-ordinated management and sustainable enhancement of the environmental, economic and social resource of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.

Advice

Objectives

- To ensure strategic management and sustainable development of the environment, economic and social resources of the Lough Neagh Wetlands.
- To ensure that all interested parties and stakeholders can input into an impartial decision making process.

Action

Objectives

- To ensure co-ordinated appropriate structures for strategic management and sustainable development of the wetlands.
- To provide opportunities for strategic sustainable development through provision of dedicated funding.
- To ensure that local people and stakeholders have a sense of 'ownership' of, and belonging to the Wetlands.

Comments on the above should be submitted to Sperrin House, Magherafelt by Friday 28th September 2001. A printed or electronic version of the full Management Strategy consultation document may be obtained from Sperrin House or from the following web sites: www.loughneagh.org.uk, www.magherfelt.gov.uk/loughneagh, or www.ehsni.gov.uk. Please note that copies of the printed document are limited.

WORLD WETLAND WEBSITE

UNESCO and Ramsar have combined forces in the setting up of a new website to provide information on the world's wetland sites. It offers brief texts and links to longer texts on each of about 60 sites. This may be a useful research tool for students and can be found at <http://www.unesco.org/mab/ramsarmab.htm>.

NEW QUAY FOR GAWLEY'S GATE

A new quay development at Gawley's Gate with facilities for up to 20 boats was officially opened in May of 2000 by the Mayor of Craigavon, Dolores Kelly. The project provides a new quay and slipway and is aimed at encouraging water based tourism on Lough Neagh as well as providing facilities for the indigenous fishing industry.

Gawley's Gate Quay was developed by the Aghagallon Aghalee Partnership, a cross community organisation bringing together the two villages on the shore of the lough. The project is one of a series of six quays being developed along the southern and western shores of the Lough as part of the Loughshores Area Based Strategy's Quay Development Programme.

Since the opening, the Gawley's Gate Quay Company, has diligently worked towards improving the amenity and much development has already been completed including the levelling and seeding of the site. The land close to the jetty now hosts a barbeque and picnic area and the roadway to the slipway has also had investment. Lighting and landscaping are the next facets requiring attention.

The Company hopes to continue the improvement bringing other services and attributes to the site for the benefit of all. The desire is to have Gawley's Gate as another feature that will enhance the Lough Neagh Experience.

An excellent restaurant and refreshments are available in the Gate Inn and a warm welcome is afforded to all visitors. Please check restaurant opening hours as they are limited to the weekends at present. Watching the sun go down on the Lough from Gawley's Gate is a true spectacle.

Don McBurney
Gawley's Gate Quay Company

SHAME SHAME SHAME

Despite lobbying by Inland Waterways and other interested groups, Banbridge District Council, the lead partner in the Newry Canal re-generation project, has proceeded to erect a low level bridge over the canal to the rear of the Scarva visitors centre.

Waterway enthusiasts will recognise this sends out the completely wrong message to the wider public. Local farmers will see this crude makeshift structure as a stimulus to erect like constructions to facilitate movement of livestock, farm machinery etc. After all why should they not erect a bridge to block the waterway when the local authority can.

The bridge is erected on three telegraph poles and effectively would block all but the smallest of boat movement. The Council insists that this is a temporary construction but we all recognise how suddenly temporary structures become permanent, and rights of way become established. Such development flies in the face of Minister McGimpsey's statement when he stated no development should be permitted that would impede the re-opening of our waterways.

Banbridge District Council's record to date of sensitive canal management is hardly impressive. The Newry Canal was the oldest summit canal in the United Kingdom and linked the Irish Sea to Lough Neagh. Sadly the now tarmaced towpath boasts vulgar crash barriers along the section at Jerretspass and the façade of some of the original bridges has been insensitively modified.

All this begs the question should such a body have responsibility for this important historical artefact? Perhaps it is time to transfer such assets to the charge of Waterways Ireland. Thankfully other District Councils have chosen to liaise with user groups on such issues.

Brian Cassells
Chairman, Northern Ireland Branch, IWAI

WATERSIDE BRIDGE COMPLETE

The new Waterside Millennium Foot and Cycle Bridge in Coleraine is now operational and open to the public.

It is anticipated that the 4 metre wide bridge will carry around 260,000 pedestrians and cyclists each year.

The new bridge is a vital safe link in Route 93 of the National Cycling Network.

Navigational traffic has not been affected as the air draft under the new bridge exceeds that of the existing bridge.

Work will now start on the existing bridge to remove the northern footpath and widen the southern footpath.

For further details on cycling routes in Northern Ireland, visit:

www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk

Boaters please note: Contrary to signage, the middle arch of the Waterside Bridge is the navigation arch.

DRUMAHEGLIS MARINA AND CARAVAN PARK

The award winning Drumaheglis Marina and Caravan Park managed by Ballymoney Borough Council is one of the few and most attractive access points to the Lower River Bann, its superb setting and picturesque surroundings making it the perfect riverside location.

The caravan park has recently achieved 5 stars in the British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme run by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Complementing this top quality caravan park at Drumaheglis is the new 32-berth marina which will attract many new visitors to the Lower Bann. The marina, which has 32 fully serviced berths, should be of particular interest to the cruising market. Berthing is available at the marina on a yearly, monthly, weekly or daily basis.

Further details on the facilities and marina charges can be obtained from the Leisure and Amenities Department, Ballymoney Borough Council, Riada House, 14 Charles Street, Ballymoney, BT53 6DZ. Tel: 028 2766 2280.

LOWER BANN BOAT RALLY

The RBLNA and Erne Branch IWAI hope to hold a one-way boat rally on the Lower Bann River on the 1st and 2nd September 2001.

Boats can gather at Ballyronan on Friday 31st August or on the Saturday Morning. Arrangements are being put in place to leave boat trailers at the end destination, Coleraine Marina, and ferry crew back to Ballyronan by road.

Boats will leave Ballyronan at 11.00am on Saturday, travel to the Wild Duck Inn, Portglenone for lunch, spend the night at Portneal Lodge, Kilrea, cruise to the Salmon Leap for lunch on Sunday, and eventually finish at Coleraine Marina on Sunday afternoon.

This will be an excellent opportunity for newcomers to become more familiar with the navigation, including five locks, and the beautiful landscape of the Lower Bann River.

For confirmation and further details contact:
Michael Savage 07715368050 or Ken Bell 028 9036 5131.

NEW ALL IRELAND PILOT BOOK

When preparing the seventh edition of 'The Inland Waterways of Great Britain' in the late 1990s, the publishers Imray, Laurie, Norie and Wilson Ltd and I, decided that with all the extensive developments and continuing work on the Irish waterways, it was time to produce a separate book on the Inland Waterways of Ireland.

My intention with the new 'Inland Waterways of Ireland' has been to bring together enough basic information about the canals, rivers and loughs of Ireland to enable readers to start exploring for themselves and thus contribute to their enjoyment of this incomparable country and its miles of magnificent navigable water. The sections about the history of each waterway are only very brief summaries that I hope will add general interest for all visitors. The full history and background to the Irish waterways has been covered in depth and with scholarly precision by other authors.

The Irish waterways also enhance and cater for an enormous range and variety of land based activities. In an effort to encourage more people to visit these beautiful areas, this book is not directed solely at those with an exclusive interest in exploring by boat. With more general tourists in mind, I have included some suggestions on interesting sights and activities close to each canal, river or lough, and I have also given a few local suggestions for good places to eat.

I hope this new book will be of interest to readers who already know the Irish waterways and that it will introduce others who have yet to discover the delights in store. The book is scheduled to be launched at the London Boat Show in early January and will be available from bookshops or directly from the publishers, Imray, Laurie, Norie and Wilson Ltd, Wych House, The Broadway, St Ives, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE17 4BT, Tel: 01480 462114, Fax: 01480 496109 Email: ilnw@imray.com.

Jane Cumberlidge

ULSTER CANAL WHEN?

I know we are all asking the same question. After all we have been asking it for the last three years. "Is the Ulster Canal really going to re-open?" Well perhaps we are one small step closer. One thing we can be grateful for is the high profile now being given to Inland waterways, not only are we hearing announcements regarding developments but progress is slowly being achieved.

Michael McGimpsey, the Minister for Culture Arts and Leisure, reported to the Assembly on 3rd July of the £89 million plan to re-open the canal over a seven year period, and reiterated all the benefits to tourism and the local economy. Before we greet the proposals with rapturous applause, Government haven't yet worked out where all the necessary finance is coming from. We are told the project will have to attract private finance as well as the necessary funds provided by other agencies. I understand that an announcement will be made at the inter governmental meeting in October, lets keep our fingers crossed that financial backing will be found. An ambitious three year plan to promote Inland waterways is being developed with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bord Failte. It will be of paramount importance that user interests are represented on any such body.

At the World Canals Conference, Minister McGimpsey announced plans to construct a new bridge on the short canal between Maghery and Derrywarragh Island. This effectively extends cruising up the River Blackwater as far as the motorway bridge for larger boats and as far as Blackwatertown for smaller craft. The River Blackwater is one of the hidden treasures of our waterway network and a gem waiting to be discovered. It is important to ensure the local community realise the benefits of such developments and whole heartedly support the project.

Brian Cassells
Chairman, IWAI/Northern Ireland Branch

EARLY BOAT RALLIES IN ULSTER BY RUTH DELANEY

Craigavon Historical Society is hosting a presentation by Ruth Delaney on archive footage of early boat rallies in Ulster, in Craigavon Civic Centre on Tuesday 25 September 2001 at 8.00pm. Everyone welcome.

RBLNA RALLY 2001

Forty-three boats entered the 2001 Lough Neagh Boat Rally during the first weekend in August. After an excellent barbeque and entertainment of Friday night, the rally boats, minus the racing yachts, set off for Oxford Island at 11.00am on Saturday. Councillor Pearse McAleer, Chairman of Cookstown District Council, started the yacht race to Kinnego at 1.00pm. The weather was fine for the cruisers but the wind was too light for the racing yachts and some had to resort to engine power after struggling to keep their sails filled.

Participants spent Saturday night on Coney Island. As usual Peter McClelland, Coney's warden made everyone extremely welcome and the party continued on into the wee small hours. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Jim McGarry Perpetual Cup presented in Jim's memory by the McGarry family. In its inaugural year, the Cup was presented to John Freeburn, the Vice Chairman of River Bann and Lough Neagh Association and Chairman of the Rally Committee, who had worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the Rally.

On Sunday morning the crews headed for home after seeing the excellent new facilities at the Battery Harbour, Ardboe. Despite an earlier postponement due to Foot and Mouth Disease, the 2001 Rally was an outstanding success. Already the RBLNA is thinking ahead to next year's Rally.

BATTERY FINISHED

The recent upgrade and development work at the Battery Harbour on the western shore of Lough Neagh has now been completed. It will be officially launched at the beginning of September.

The harbour now has mooring and launching facilities for recreation and fishing boats and acts as a second base for Lough Neagh Rescue.

The project was funded by the Loughshores Area Based Strategy, Cookstown District Council, Rivers Agency and Lough Neagh Rescue and will be managed by a dedicated Company with representation from the local Moortown Community Group.

The new and existing recreational facilities at the Battery provide another excellent location to enjoy the benefits of the Lough from land and water.

DERRYWARRAGH BRIDGE

Minister Michael McGimpsey, announced that the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, was committed to improving the existing bridge from Maghery on to Derrywarragh Island to facilitate boat access into the existing 12 miles of navigation in the Blackwater River.

DCAL and Craigavon Borough Council will be working in partnership to implement this project.

CLOSURE OF RIVER DUE TO WORK AT M1 BANN RIVER BRIDGE

Bridge strengthening work will commence in September on the Upper Bann river in the vicinity of the M1 Bridge. Hence, the watercourse will not be navigable through this location. Work should be completed by April/May 2002. For further information please contact Ciaran McKenna, Roads Service, Tel: 028 3832 0308.

DUCK – IT'S THE SHOOTING SEASON!

Darren Evans and Keith Day of the Schools of Environmental Studies, UUC have recently published a research paper entitled 'Does shooting disturbance affect diving ducks wintering on large shallow lakes? A case study on Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland.' The following is a brief summary of their work.

Waterfowl hunting can affect waterfowl populations directly through the kill and indirectly through disturbance. The disturbance of wintering Pochard, Tufted duck and Scaup were affected by shooting disturbance on Lough Neagh. But the disturbance effect was small as these birds could still obtain sufficient food reasonably far from the shore, out of the range of wildfowlers. As Goldeneye predominantly fed during the day, it would be expected that they would show the biggest response to day-time shooting disturbance. But observations in the Toome Bay area during and after the shooting season showed that there was no significant change in bird numbers. The numbers of Pochard and Tufted Duck feeding did increase after the shooting season had closed. However this increase was attributed to increased feeding prior to migration rather than to the end of the shooting season.

Prohibiting shooting along sections of the shoreline of Lough Neagh, where diving duck densities are greatest, would be desirable to create undisturbed roosting sites. But the need to limit shooting disturbance at feeding sites on the Lough is not necessary as diving ducks can feed at night, and in areas well away from shoreline based shooting disturbance. The effects of shooting disturbance, however, may well be adversely affecting other daytime feeding waterfowl species on Lough Neagh.

A copy of the paper can be obtained from Sperrin House.

NORTH ATLANTIC SALMON FUND

In April it was announced in the Assembly by Finance Minister, Mark Durkan that £1.5 million has been allocated out of Executive Programme Funds to a scheme for the closure of commercial salmon fisheries. This scheme is aimed at the conservation of salmon stocks and the development of freshwater angling. It is a voluntary scheme enabling salmon fishermen to cease operations in return for fair compensation arrangements to ensure that standards of living are maintained.

NASF has campaigned long and hard for such a scheme, especially in the last two years during which government scientists have drawn attention to an alarming reduction in the natural survival of salmon at sea.

Inland Fisheries staff in the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure have recognised the long term danger to stocks and also the greater economic potential from carefully regulated salmon angling in freshwater. NASF congratulates DCAL and the Assembly on this bold and forward-thinking initiative and are confident that the Scheme will be welcomed by salmon netsmen around the coast who have also demonstrated their concern over declining stocks in recent years.

Salmon are a valuable but diminishing resource and the time has come for all interests, including angling, to reduce their levels of exploitation to ensure the sustainability of stocks in our local rivers in the years to come. A significant reduction in exploitation should lead to a recovery in stocks which will greatly enhance tourist potential in the province. All those with an interest in the preservation of salmon stocks should welcome this development.

The North Atlantic Salmon Fund is an international organisation dedicated to the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon.

Paul Johnston
NASF

LOWER BANN ANGLING DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The summary paper on the Lower Bann Angling Development Initiative Conference held on 21 June 2001 in the ECOS Centre is now complete. The paper highlights recommendations and next steps for angling development on the river. Further details can be obtained from Sperrin House.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLAY AREA FOR OXFORD ISLAND

After many years of planning and fund raising, an environmental play area is set to open on the site of the old paddling pool at Oxford Island National Nature Reserve, Craigavon. Every visitor survey over the years highlighted the need for play facilities on this site which last year attracted 200,000 visitors, many of which were families with young children.

Close to the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, the play area combines a new semi-circular children's paddling pool with a more conventional dry play area. Pride of place goes to a water spiral and wheel, which the Conservation staff based at Oxford Island will use to portray how the water cycle of evaporation, rainfall, river flow, lough and sea, is powered by the sun's energy. This will be a central theme to their excellent Lough Neagh environmental education programme. Children can turn the spiral to raise water out of the pool. The water then falls into a trough, down sluices, powers a water wheel and returns to the paddling pool. As well as being an excellent learning tool it will be super fun for children of all ages and possibly the staff too!

Funding from Craigavon Borough Council and the Loughshores Area Based Strategy has meant that this first class facility will bring fun and knowledge to the Lough's younger visitors for many years to come. For further details telephone 028 38322205.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

In general, responsibility for inland search and rescue (SAR) the operational arm of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, are responsible for co-ordinating SAR at sea and on the coast.

The RUC and HM Coastguard have agreements that define the delineation between areas of responsibility and have operational arrangements to make most effective use of available resources. In practice, this means that the RUC have primacy in co-ordinating SAR on the Lower Bann from Lough Neagh to Coleraine, HM RUC maintain primacy for SAR on Lough Neagh, they have delegated responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating SAR on the surface of the Lough to HM Coastguard.

In the event of a SAR operation, the Coastguard call on the services of, amongst others, the Lough Neagh Rescue boats at Kinnego and Ardboe, the RNLi lifeboats and the RAF SAR helicopter at Aldergrove. The Coastguard also keep a listening watch on the marine band VHF distress frequency (channel 16). This is used by commercial vessels and many pleasure craft in this area. Although Coastguard VHF is designed to provide coverage over the sea, it also extends over Lough Neagh and recent tests show that, with one or two small exceptions, also covers the Lower Bann.

KINNEGO MARINA NEW HARBOUR GUIDELINES

Kinnego Marina has been operating since 1983 and has had a policy over many years to promote safe and sensible boating. Being based beside Oxford Island National Nature Reserve we have always tried to educate out patrons to keep wildlife disturbance to a minimum.

From 1983 Craigavon Borough Council (CBC) has issued and amended various handouts to try and ensure safe boating. This process has led to the latest Harbour Guidelines leaflet that sets out a new zoning and navigation channel policy for Kinnego Bay. As well as detailing 11 'Conditions of Use' that must be adhered to, there are four basic rules as follows:

1. Power always gives way to sail.
2. Keep to your starboard side of channel.
3. Any vessel not towing must stay out of the towing area.
4. Keep wildlife disturbance to a minimum.

CBC brought the bed and soil from Shaftesbury Estate and can now put more marker buoys in place to mark operating zones. They have proved successful in the first operating season. There will always be the odd trouble-maker, but we have found that most patrons adhere to the rules. If they don't, they get one warning and then get barred from the site. It is however essential to have a presence on site in the form of a Harbour Master and staff to ensure all rules are enforced. Action must be taken against offenders however difficult although it is fun to see what a few choice words, a clenched fist, and a stern look can do to some people.

I have no doubt that this is the way ahead for many areas around the Lough and we still have some small areas to improve upon. It is essential that we keep areas for Water-skiing and Jet-skiing in zoned areas away from nesting birds, wildlife refuges and club shooting areas. By working together with the wildlife wardens, other groups and environmentalists we are assured that all leisure activities can operate in a controlled and sensible way. If you would like a copy of the Harbour Guidelines phone 028 3832 7573 or email Kinnego@craigavon.gov.uk.

Paddy Prunty, Harbour Master

JAMES MCGARRY, 1926-2001

Jim McGarry died suddenly and unexpectedly on 22 May 2001. He lived in Crumlin, County Antrim and with his brother, ran the long-established boatbuilding and marine contracts family firm of H McGarry & Sons at Ardmore Boatyard, on the shores of Lough Neagh. It was this connection that led to his immense knowledge of and lifelong interest in Lough Neagh, boating and waterways.

Jim McGarry and his family are synonymous with Lough Neagh and their lifetime relationship with the passenger vessel the "Maid of Antrim" cannot be overlooked. For 32 consecutive years Jim has been at the helm of the "Maid" was skippered and crewed by Jim and his family. Then in 1978 Antrim Borough Council bought the boat and Jim remained skipper until 1998. The "Maid" made many cruises on the Lough and River, giving many people an opportunity to relax and enjoy the tranquillity and natural environment from a classic vessel.

Jim was a founder and very active member of the River Bann and Lough Neagh Association (RBLNA). He organised many boat rallies and was constantly giving of his time and experience to ensure that the Lough, which claimed his own son's life, became a safer waterway. His vast knowledge, quiet efficiency and determination made him a very valued member of many other organisations including the Safety & Navigation Working Group of Advisory Committees. He commanded great respect because of his good nature, humour and unassuming manner.

I am proud to have known Jim McGarry, one of nature's true gentlemen. He will be missed by many, but especially by his brother George, his children and by all the other members of his family, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

Victor Hamill, RBLNA

LAGAN CANAL TOWPATH – AGHAGALLON SECTION

Craigavon Borough Council is reinstating a section of the Lagan Canal Towpath near Aghagallon. Work is centered around Cranagh Bridge on the Whitehall/Derryhirk Road and stretches west to Annaghdroghal Bridge, with a shorter section east towards Goudy Bridge. The long-term aim is to secure a route from Lough Neagh, at Ellis's Gut to Aghalee, which would link with the Broadwater section of the Lagan Canal. This route is being funded by the Loughshores Area Based Strategy, Sustrans, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and Craigavon Borough Council.

The path will be 2 metres wide and will accommodate walkers, disabled users, horse riders, and cyclists for a distance of approximately 2.5km. It will be part of the National Cycle Network, Route 9 from Belfast to Newry, and the proposed Lough Neagh Cycle Way.

The towpath had been sold to private landowners after the canal was closed and had become overgrown. The Council has been in negotiation with the landowners to secure access and, because of the built and wildlife interest, has worked closely with Environment and Heritage Service.

Work started in April 2001 but had to be postponed due to foot and mouth precautions. Construction is scheduled to resume in the autumn for completion before Christmas 2001. The route is shown on a new publication 'Walking and Cycling in Craigavon'. For a copy contact 028 3832 2205 or oxford.island@craigavon.gov.uk

Matthew Bushby, Countryside and Access Officer