

WADAA announces major investment in game angling

As we move forward to address the challenges we are facing, the WADAA Board of Directors want to share with you some of the improvements we are planning, particularly to our trout waters, in 2021.

In a previous update, we referred to the imminent acquisition of some new trout fisheries. I can now announce that the club has agreed a merger with Carnforth and District Angling Association (CDAA), the legal process has been largely completed. The club will take ownership of a new stillwater at Capernwray and gain access to a number of stretches of the adjacent River Keer. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank all at CDAA for 'gifting' the venues to WADAA as part of a merger deal that will benefit both clubs and increase angling opportunities in the area. Of particular importance here is the 'stretching' of the current offering further south, especially important during these times of restricted travel.

As part of the ongoing development plan and building on the surge of interest in angling post Covid-19, we have also been working hard to improve our rental arrangements and are going through a series of negotiations to increase lease lengths on a number of venues. Of course, leases gives security both ways and it is important that the club have a strong and stable base to give it the confidence to enter into these long-term agreements.

These investments run into commitments of tens of thousands of pounds and whilst we may be able to raise some funding externally (though opportunities here have been severely restricted by the pandemic), our main source of income is membership renewals. Conscious of the need to minimize the financial impact to members and give something positive to those anglers currently not able to fish, we hope that this announcement will give everybody something to look forward to. We do however have to balance the books and run the club (from a financial point of view at least), as a business. It is highly likely that both coarse and full memberships this year will be over-subscribed and though our priority is obviously to renewing members, we will be taking on new members until the cap is reached. I would implore any members planning on renewing to have done-so before the 14th February – we have made a temporary extension to the cut-off date this year given the disruption caused by the pandemic. If paying for membership is a barrier, please contact us directly as we may be able to help.

We had hoped to make some of the physical improvements during the winter months, but a combination of Covid restrictions, bad weather and a delay in finalising legal issues, has meant that this work will be carried out at the same time that fishing activity picks up - restrictions permitting! We'll do everything we can to minimize disturbance and inform members in advance where possible – but expect some muddy boots!

When angling returns to something resembling normality, the investments we are making will benefit all our members, including those who struggle with mobility issues. We hope to expand opportunities for angling and environmental awareness in the younger population soon, and we will keep members informed if we will manage to make progress in this area.

David Blacow
WADAA Chairman

The following update from Nick Butterfield (WADAA Manager) will provide more information about the new initiatives and our plans for the future.

The majority of physical improvement activities over the last 2 years has been focused on the coarse venues. This investment was necessary; a number of important venues had been lost to members over the last decade and those that remained were in poor condition and most close to the ends of their lease agreements.

The work carried-out has focused on 3 things, quality, quality and quality!! We have added Castlehead Fishery back into the portfolio, giving us 6 fantastic coarse venues.

The 3 managed venues have been completely rebuilt in terms of facilities, predation protection and stock and with such a robust base, we look forward to seeing a great return on the efforts for our members.

In doing this work, we have learned a lot and although the game venues were less critical in terms of their condition, the time is now right for us to switch our attentions. Ultimately, anglers want to catch fish, but our offering – fantastic fishing in a fantastic environment, means we have to focus on many more things than simply stocking.

The improvements we have planned focus in 3 areas:

1. Water quality and management of the environment
2. Venue infrastructure and facilities
3. Stocking and predation protection

Though it is often tempting just to tip fish into a venue to improve catches, to give a long-term sustainable solution, it is not the starting point.

1. Water quality and management of the environment

As we have communicated previously, current climatic and environmental conditions are creating new challenges for angling. This is exaggerated in the case of game fishing as trout are far less resilient to adverse water conditions. When things get tough (water temperature and dissolved oxygen), they shut down. This not only hits the quality of the sport, but also leaves the fish very susceptible to disease and ultimately death.

The science says water temperatures above 20 degrees centigrade is a significant risk, and bearing in mind the levels of oxygen in water reduces with temperature, we were close to critical last year as our venues peaked at 24 degrees. We escaped the worst outcomes on the deeper venues, such as Ghyll Head, but major difficulties were encountered on the shallower waters.

As well as the issues surrounding DO and temperature, the venues are also increasingly at risk from algal blooms. Though in themselves not dangerous, they impact the quality of fishing by colouring the water and triggering oxygen-crashes when they inevitably die off (usually triggered by something like a summer thunderstorm).

Bright sunshine and high water temperatures also promotes weed growth. A number of our venues are increasingly suffering from excessive summer growth – primarily from the invasive Canadian Pond Weed.

Unfortunately, management is not straight-forwards, as resolving 1 issue, adversely impacts another. For example, removing all the weed from a venue helps fishing access but seriously impacts the levels of DO.

Our approach therefore not only needs to be careful and considered, but also agile and pro-active, We need plans for each water and the actions modified throughout the course of the year.

The club have invested our water quality management capabilities. I will release more details of this later in the year.

We have now equipped ourselves with the tools and skills to carry out our own sampling and analysis. This is now being done weekly on rotation across all of our venues.



As a further preventative measure, we will manage the growth of algae and weed in venues by:

- Addition of barley straw – these will be placed around susceptible venues in nylon net 'sausages'. As the barley straw breaks down it produces a chemical which destroys the algae. Unfortunately, the action is unpredictable, working in some places and not others. There is an element of 'trial and error' to get the most effective distribution.

- Addition of Blue dye – this reduces the amount of light penetration through the water, reducing the growth of both weed and algae



By far, the greatest investment effort aimed at improving water quality and habitats will be the addition of mechanical aeration at a number of venues.

The key components of 'healthy' venues are oxygenation and flow. Venues suffering most in this respect are those that are shallow and sheltered.

A key challenge here is that aeration usually involves shifting water – and this consumes lots of power. Cost aside, this isn't a major issue where lakeside power is available. However, with rural venues, this is a problem. Though some of our smaller coarse waters can run solar powered solutions, these don't provide enough capacity on the bigger game venues.

On our 2 worst affected venues, we will be constructing a lakeside, mains power supply. We will then install 1 or more types of aeration system, working in conjunction with the interests of our landlords and the nature of the venues:

Paddle Aerators

These create both oxygenation and flow through a revolving paddle wheel. They can be used as either a stand-alone device or in conjunction with other oxygenation devices:



Diffused Oxygen

Using air generated from a compressor, air is pumped through a series of pipes into the water



Surface Fountain

Using a device which floats on the surface, water is sucked up and cascaded in the form of a fountain.



Due to size, we will not be aiming at oxygenated full water bodies – more-over creating safe-havens for fish if conditions get extreme.

Lowest oxygen levels are between the hours of 3am and 9am and we will hopefully restrict the operation of these devices between these times. This will be governed by information we gather in our water quality testing.

2. Venue infrastructure and facilities

We plan to execute a series of venue improvements focused on increasing accessibility and comfort at our venues. The club not only has a policy of inclusivity which requires us to improve things in this respect, we also have to recognize the aging demographic of members.

Given the terrain of some of our venues, access is severely restricted for disabled and mobility impaired anglers. Work will be carried out to improved safe access.

Whilst carrying out these tasks, we have to also carefully consider the environment and nature of our venues and not undermine their basic characteristics and appeal.

As such, any activities will be focused and targeted and as is the case for our coarse fisheries, some venues will be more heavily 'managed' than others.

Examples of work to be carried out are as follows:

Toilet facilities

The club has developed it's own eco-loo solution for the coarse waters. This has had to combine a safe and healthy environment, a feasible design for successful composting and accessibility for the disabled, whilst being cost-effective and easy to manage.

Toilet facilities are transformational for certain groups of anglers, particularly the elderly, disabled or female. The feedback from the survey last year listed toilet facilities high on the priority list.



Walkways and Bridges

Significant effort will be made improving walkways and access. This is to increase both comfort, but more importantly, the health and safety of our members.

Again, based on the learning we have gathered from the work completed on our coarse venues, these will be constructed in either stone or timber as appropriate on a case-by-case basis.



Parking

Parking and access to venues is key and again this was highlighted on the survey returns. Though in general, adding to parking in the Lake District National Park is very difficult, we do have some opportunities to improve things.

The club will carry out a series of improvements both on the size and quality of parking provisions at a number of venues.

These will focus on creating larger, compacted stone, firm or hard-standing areas, not only to add capacity and ease of use, but also to prevent a degradation of the landscape. In addition, as we have done elsewhere we will increase the provision of disabled-priority parking.



Fishing stands

Where feasible, the club will construct a number of disabled access fishing stands. These will be integrated with the access paths and present a level and safe position for mobility impaired and wheel-chair bound anglers to fish from.

Additionally, bankside level access will be provided in the form of stone or timber casting platforms.



3. Stocking and predation protection

We have evolved our stocking and stock protection plans in response to the circumstances which now prevail; escalating climatic temperatures, weather extremes and significant increases in both avian and otter predation. The actions which WADAA are taking in this respect have been documented and shared in-depth in previous member communications.

Summary

WADAA will be making a significant investment to safeguard the quality of it's fishing for members and such an ambitious set of plans will take time to deliver.

The club is in a position to undertake this work as a result of the careful financial management which has taken place over a number of years.

The work will however result in a number of impacts. Though the club will seek to minimize as much disruption as possible, there will be periods of time where construction work is underway and this may result in venue closure from time to time.

This represents a significant financial commitment and the club will be delving into reserves to deliver this plan. Conscious of an unstable future and the need to continue to manage frugally, we have to make our money go a long, long way.

We therefore ask a number of things from our members:

Can you help?

- Do you have skills which the club can call upon
- Do you have access to equipment that the club can use
- Could you provide any materials that would help with the projects

And above all, please show encouragement, patience and support.

The club will continue with detailed, periodic member updates. Progress will be shared on both the website and Facebook page. Your feedback is always welcome and ideas taken on-board and built into our plans for the future.

Nick Butterfield

WADAA Manager