

Minutes from the forty-sixth meeting of the Cross Party Group on Waterways

Committee Room 5, Welsh Assembly, Cardiff, CF99 1NA

Tuesday 26th September 2017

6:00pm

AMs in attendance:

Nick Ramsay AM (Welsh Conservative, Monmouth) Chair

Attendees:

Andrew Stumpf	Glandŵr Cymru, the Canal & River Trust in Wales - Secretariat
Emily Lewis	Glandŵr Cymru, the Canal & River Trust in Wales - Secretariat
Anthony Rees MBE	Angling Cymru & Merthyr Anglers
Gareth Williams	CITB
David Mee	NRW/CNC
Jeremy Frost	Welsh Government
Steve Rayner	Canoe Wales
Paul Thomas	Cardiff University & Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru
Nigel Annett	Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru
Rachel Evans	Countryside Alliance & Countryside Alliance Foundation
Dr Ruth Hall	Bwrdd Glandŵr Cymru
Jonathan Taylor	n/a

The meeting commenced at 6.40pm

Item 1: Fly fishing and breast cancer recovery – Rachel Evans, Director Countryside Alliance Wales & Countryside Alliance Foundation

Nick Ramsay welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced Rachel Evans, Director of Countryside Alliance Wales & the Countryside Alliance Foundation. Rachel thanked Nick and outlined the beginnings of the Casting for Recovery charity, which was started in America over ten years ago by two friends: a breast care surgeon and fly fisher.

Casting for Recovery was first brought to the UK in 2007. It was run by Sue Hunter and Sue Shaw, who then approached Countryside Alliance to sponsor – it is now under the banner of Countryside Alliance Foundation. They have now just run their 41st retreat, and six retreats are planned for next year including one in Wales.

More than 50,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK each year – that is one diagnosis every ten minutes. Casting for Recovery helps ladies move forward from the shock of diagnosis and the grind of treatment. Rachel explained that the gentle movement of casting is similar to post-op exercises and helps rebuild tissue damaged in surgery, noting that there has been enthusiasm from the medical profession about its benefits.

The weekends provide peace, tranquillity, and ‘time to think’ for the healing of body and mind. Participants can form friendships with other women who have gone through similar, often quite isolating, experiences. One participant described it as “getting the sparkle back”,

another called it a “magical therapy.” Usually, the whole hotel is taken over, helping everyone relax and sometimes become used to being in the outside world again. The ladies have to have clearance from their GP before attending, and medical support is provided over the weekend.

The last day sees a morning’s guided fly fishing, with the option for catch and dispatch or catch and release. Fish can be filleted and taken home, or just taken home.

Casting for Recovery is an independent charity, with the Countryside Alliance Foundation taking responsibility for fundraising. Each retreat lasts two and a half days and will have up to 14 participants. Everything is paid for including food, accommodation, kit and medical support. A retreat costs around £500 per person.

Each weekend is run by volunteers, including medical staff from The Royal Marsden in London, professional councillors, and their trusted van driver Keith. Orvis sponsor some of the kit.

Achieving a goal after long period of illness can really make a difference, and Rachel ended the presentation with a response she had received from the husband of a participant, who had seen the resort have a hugely positive impact on his wife, who had gone through a long period of illness.

Discussion

Q: An attendee asked if the programme was oversubscribed.

A: They are oversubscribed and always looking to expand and develop new projects. Rachel mentioned a new programme, Castaway, for young adults with cancer, and the foundation has also recently been approached by a prostate charity.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation want to link people to the countryside. Need projects like this to develop properly and meaningfully.

Rachel also noted how the programme can improve home life, with attendees then going fishing with their partner or family.

Q: An attendee asked about green prescribing, and whether this project had the capacity to meet subscribing demand.

A: The foundation is inundated with requests for all its programmes, and meeting demand is difficult.

An attendee noted that the positive benefits are brilliant and that there is so much scope for this kind of thing, with fantastic benefits for schools as well.

Item 2: Coarse fishing and the community – John Ellis, National Fisheries & Angling Manager, Canal & River Trust

2016 was a great year for Welsh sport. And who won the 2016 European Coarse Angling Championships? Wales! John began by explain how the team, the ‘Sam Warburtons of the

angling community', had all learnt to fish on natural rivers or canals. They were self-funded so unfortunately could not go on to compete in the World Championships.

John then went on to look at how individuals can benefit. He outlined why fishing is a positive activity for health and wellbeing, including:

- Knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment
- Learning to share the space and co-operate with others
- Improving self-esteem
- Developing skills, co-ordination and timing
- Social activity, particularly for youngsters.

The formation of clubs who look after their patch has great value for the local community. John mentioned an area where angling helped solve years of petty crime up to serious fish theft. Anglers report a lot of crime to NRW.

John then looked at the demographics of coarse fishing and barriers to entry. 50 percent of anglers started before they were ten years old. The older demographic is still growing.

There has been increased popularity for commercial, more heavily stocked fisheries, which may not be a good thing particularly for younger anglers, as they don't need to learn the skills necessary to catch wild fish in natural fisheries.

John then explained the ways Canal & River Trust is involved in fishing, including the Let's Fish events that began in 2016. These involve inviting the public to try fishing with Level 2 coaches for free on their local canal, including one on the Montgomery Canal at Welshpool. Over 80 have taken place over two years and more than 1,000 people have participated each year across England and Wales.

Alongside this has been the production of 'How to Fish' videos and training more coaches, two of whom are based on the north Wales border. This is being developed with funding from the Angling Trust. John noted that in future the Trust is looking to work in partnership with more fishing clubs, with Goytre (Mon & Brec) and Trevor (Llangollen) two potential coaching venues.

Discussion

It was noted that there is a large eastern European community in Welshpool and that work is being done in terms of engaging with this community through fishing.

An attendee mentioned that currently, fishing is terribly looked after and promoted. A participant from Merthyr Angling Trust highlighted that they are actually doing a lot in terms of engagement and events.

Q: An attendee noted that fishing has traditionally been associated with men, and asked John about how this can be approached in terms of engaging with women, particularly with youth engagement, suggesting it is a thing to focus on.

A: John noted that there are successful ladies fishing teams, and more mums than dads booked in to Let's Fish events and there were as many boys as girls, suggesting that regarding this aspect of engagement things might be improving.

Referring to Professor Donaldson's report on physical literacy, an attendee said that fishing for schools ticks so many boxes. He mentioned his work in a Cardiff school which is having a positive impact. Teachers like their students to get out and enjoy the outdoors, it seems to have a positive impact on students' attitudes and outcomes.

Q: Is it cheap to start fishing?

A: Maybe a £30 cost at the beginning; can be as cheap or expensive as you like. Membership for Angling Association or local clubs is £20 or less per year for youngsters.

Q: Does angling provide benefits to the fish?

A: Creating water environments that are cared for is a huge benefit to the environment as well as local community. Nesting boxes installed, increases in grebes and coots, trees planted in Bridgend. Andrew Stumpf mentioned the experiences the Canal & River Trust has of leasing sections of canal to communities, taking ownership of the care of their local environment.

It was noted that there needs to be people in a community who can fish before people can really invest in this kind of thing; it's about building up an understanding of the activity over time.

Item 3: Feedback and discussion

Q: How else can the benefits of fishing be brought to a wider audience of influencers and decision makers?

Teams are poorly funded so can't promote what they do. There is so much potential but no big pot of money. By working together, it can be done. So much more we could do getting benefits out there.

Angling is not an Olympic sport so is not well funded; Sport Wales money goes down each year.

An attendee noted that there is no Welsh fishing print publication. It is only really covered online, and there could be more development on promotion on this platform, for example, setting up a central page on social media for all Welsh clubs.

It is important to make sure ecosystems are ready to support increased popularity. Pollution events in watercourses can take up to ten years to recover. Canals are better in this regard, with their biggest threat being non-native invasive species such as the predatory Zander in the Midlands and East Anglia, luckily this fish is unlikely to have spread to Wales.

There is a higher dropout rate for girls after around age eight. By secondary school almost all drop out. This high dropout for teenagers, in particular girls, is common in canoeing as well, people then come back as parents or families.

Three main barriers are: somewhere to go, someone to go with, some kit.

Item 4: Update from Andrew Stumpf

Andrew Stumpf updated the group on upcoming events of interest:

8th November **Glandŵr Cymru Annual Public Meeting** sponsored by Kirsty Williams AM, 5.30-8.00 pm, Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay. Register via Eventbrite page (<http://bit.ly/2xb4Gf9>) or email emily.lewis@canalrivertrust.org.uk

9th November Seminar on the Trust's Outcomes Measurement Framework to

- share our OMF linked to well-being in its widest sense
- provide an overview of our current activities which provide the foundation for measurement of change
- share progress made and challenges overcome

2018

23rd January **Cross Party Group on Waterways** theme TBC, 6.00 pm Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay

Item 5: AOB

No other business was recorded.