Small Streams Characterisation System (SSCS)

__Dr. Ken Whelan__ examines why he believes that training volunteers to assess the small streams in their area is vitally important to improving the overall health of our fisheries



Are *you* interested in assessing and protecting your local streams?

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the conservation and management of small streams. These constitute a major proportion of overall river length and the European Environmental Bureau has estimated that some 80% of all river systems in Europe comprise small streams. They are poorly protected by existing legislation and the care and attention urgently required by such small water bodies is most likely to come from volunteers.

The Atlantic Salmon Trust, with their partners in the Annan Trust and the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, commissioned Martin McGarrigle (of Limnos Consultancy, Castlebar) to compile a survey manual based on a small streams survey system used by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) for many years in Ireland. Teaching materials to accompany the manual were commissioned by the Atlantic Salmon Trust from the Galloway Fisheries Trust and Donald Paterson, a consultant with extensive experience in designing and delivering technical courses to fisheries staff. Having assessed a course pilot, run with the enthusiastic assistance of the Stranraer & District Angling Association, the Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) agreed to issue a Certificate of Achievement to those who successfully complete the SSCS course.

The initiative is based on a simple premise: that obtaining high-quality information on the condition of our small streams is key for catchment and fishery managers to put in place plans to protect pristine water-courses and improve the problematic areas. This two day, citizen science-based training programme, covers the collection of data on fauna, flora and the physical structure of rivers (hydromorphology) and provides volunteers with the required skills and training to walk and monitor the small streams in their particular location, both small mountain streams and discrete coastal streams. The objective of the assessment is not to intentionally seek out pollution points but to objectively assess the current status of small streams.

So far, two successful courses have been run in Ireland, with very positive feedback. If, over the winter months, your club is looking for a practical event which would enthusiastically engage members, old and new, you might consider running one of these practical volunteer programmes.

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For more info on SSCS courses click here

The Atlantic Salmon Trust SSCS programme is designed to engage not only anglers but also a wide range of other interest groups such as wildlife enthusiasts, bird watchers and hill walkers. It also neatly compliments the work of the newly established Local Authorities Water and Community Office (LAWCO), who are actively engaged in ensuring that the wider community becomes involved and takes ownership of the rivers, streams and loughs in their local area.

Ken Whelan