



CENTRAL SOUTH ISLAND REGION

Upper Ōhau River Spring Season 2025 —Results of the controlled-period ballot, angler survey, and spawning surveys.

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February 2026



Prepared for the Central South Island Fish and Game Council

Report number: CSI2026-030

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Executive Summary

The Spring Season was created by Central South Island Fish & Game to restore a once highly valued fishery to the Upper Ōhau River. The work and outcomes of managing the Spring Season on the Upper Ōhau River aligns closely with several objectives of the 2022-2032 Sports Fish and Game Management Plan of the Central South Island Fish and Game Region Council.

The 2025 Spring Season's administration included holding a ballot to distribute controlled period licences; angler catch, harvest and satisfaction monitoring, and spawning surveys.

The Spring Season ballot schedule was consistent for the 2023-2025 period providing for short term comparisons of catch and satisfaction. In a short-term context, the 2025 Spring season can be noted as a relatively poor season with low catch rates and suboptimal angler satisfaction. Similarly, spawning was reduced in 2025 compared to 2023 and 2024 indicating a reduced spawning population.

Two matters of urgency were identified from the 2025 angling and spawning monitoring being:

1. Moderate Satisfaction: 2025 angler satisfaction was 77%, below the established 80% satisfaction threshold.
2. Low catch rates: catch was significantly reduced from 2023 and 2024 levels, with catch rates of medium and large fish combined approximately 40% lower than averaged across 2023 and 2024.

Without long term data sets to review, it is uncertain whether the reduced catch and spawning observed in 2025 is a one-off event, indicates the start of a decline in the interconnected fishery or is indicative of natural variation that may become apparent with continued long-term monitoring. The poor season, likely to indicate relatively low fish numbers, is not thought to be caused by the Spring Season fishing, rather, factors with larger influence on the interconnected fishery such as harvest of trout at Ōhau B Canal or changes in recruitment via the downstream migration of fish from the headwater lakes.

Considering the lack of long-term data available, a low-risk management approach for the Spring Season should continue. Therefore, in considering any management change to address matters of urgency, Council must aim to ensure the sustainability of the fishery; maintain the established Spring Season angling values at a minimum of 80% angler satisfaction; and maintain the high-country aesthetics of the fishery. Management options are limited, but reducing the ballot schedule notably is likely the best option for change if aiming to maintain an open season, increase catch rates, increase satisfaction above the 80% satisfaction threshold, maintain fishery aesthetics and reduce risk of the Spring Season compromising sustainability of the interconnected fishery.

Management options for Council include: "A - no change", "B – risk-reducing reduction of ballot schedule", and "C - zero risk temporary closure".

It is recommended:

Option B, "risk-reducing reduction of ballot schedule": The proposed 2026 Spring Season Ballot Schedule aims to reduce sustainability risk, maintain an open Spring Season, increase catch rates, maintain fishery aesthetics, achieve 80+% satisfaction subject to a Spring Season subject to similar catch and fish numbers as available in 2025. The 2026 schedule provides for a significantly reduced angling opportunity from the 2023-2025 schedule with an overall reduction of approximately two-thirds of angler days, whereby the later four October-based allocations will be omitted and the maximum angler numbers per allocation will be reduced by half.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Strategic Purpose	5
3. Controlled-Period Ballot 2025	5
4. Controlled-period Angler Survey	6
4.1 Survey response.....	6
4.2 Fishing activity.....	6
4.3 Catch.....	6
4.4 Trophy trout comparisons.....	7
4.5 Harvest comparisons.....	8
4.6 Methods.....	8
4.7 Satisfaction.....	9
1.8 Feedback.....	9
5. Spawning Surveys	10
5.1 Live trout survey – June.....	10
5.2 Live trout survey – September.....	10
5.3 Sites of significance redd survey - September.....	11
6. Matters of Urgency Arising	12
6.1 Moderate angler Satisfaction.....	12
6.2 Low catch rates.....	13
7. Discussion	15
7.1 2025 Spring Season overview.....	15
8. Council Options	17
9. Recommendation	18
10. Appendices	19
Appendix 1.....	19
Appendix 2.....	20
Appendix 3.....	21

1. Introduction

The Upper Ōhau River's Spring Season was created by Central South Island Fish and Game Council (CSIFGC) to return a once highly valued fishery to the Ōhau River. The Ōhau River fishery was essentially lost in the 1980's when the river was disconnected from Lake Benmore by the construction of Lake Ruataniwha and the Ōhau chain of power stations and canals. Despite the restoration of controlled flows to the upper river, designed to optimally support the fishery, the fish populations and fishing opportunity did not return during the traditional fishing season from November to April. The river is used seasonally by trout from May to October for spawning, notably by trophy-size trout of canal origin. By November most trout have migrated back to their favoured feeding grounds and rarely remained in the river due to a lack of food availability. The introduction of the early opening "Spring Season" in September and October provides anglers a unique opportunity to access the river while rainbow trout are seasonally abundant during the latter part of their spawning run.

The Spring Season opened for the first time in October 2018. Between 2018 and 2021 the Spring Season's popularity grew from relative obscurity to a fishery of national significance with an international profile owing to its coverage in online media. The attraction of the fishery centres around its one-of-a-kind opportunity for anglers to sight-fish with spin or fly for extremely large canal-origin rainbow trout in an attractive and challenging high-country river fishery.

CSIFGC staff have anticipated and observed the Spring Season's growth in popularity and proactively adapted its management annually. As such, the type and intensity of monitoring has varied between seasons, regulations have changed, and angling pressure has changed meaning that robust comparisons between Spring Seasons are limited. A lack of consistent and long-term monitoring has necessitated a low-risk approach to managing the sustainability of the Upper Ōhau River fishery and the interconnected fisheries of Lake Ruataniwha, Ōhau B Canal, Wairepo Arm and Kellands Pond – hereafter named collectively as the "interconnected fishery." CSIFGC's Spring Season angler management has developed from an open fishery with no angler catch monitoring in October 2018 followed by intensive creel surveys undertaken in 2019 and 2020, then to its designation as a backcountry fishery in October 2021 with an associated online survey and finally as a controlled fishery with its associated online angler survey from 2022 onwards.

Management of the Spring Season adopted by the CSIFGC in May 2021, February 2022, and May 2023 developed a low-risk strategy such that:

1. A controlled period is in place for the months of September and October – the Spring Season.
2. A ballot schedule establishes the maximum number of controlled period licences (angler days) available during the controlled period and the dates they are valid. The schedule can be changed annually and is additional to the Anglers Notice review process.
3. A ballot draw is held to randomly distribute controlled period licences to eligible licence holders.
4. An online survey of angler activity, catch, harvest and satisfaction is completed annually and reported.
5. Spawning monitoring consisting of aerial live trout surveys and redds survey are completed annually and reported.
6. Consented spawning enhancement sites are monitored and maintained.
7. CSI staff identify any matters of urgency arising from annual monitoring. Any regulation change or management adaptations recommended as a result must aim to ensure the sustainability of the fishery; maintain the established Spring Season angling values at a

minimum of 80% angler satisfaction; and maintain the high-country aesthetics of the fishery.

A scheduled review of the long-term sustainability of the Spring Season and review of non-urgent regulation was completed prior to the May 2025 triennial regulations review. Three key outcomes resulting from the review were:

1. It was recommended and adopted that the established “2023 and 2024” ballot schedule is to be repeated indefinitely to maintain consistent angler use in the long term, unless a matter of urgency is identified that compels an adjustment to the ballot schedule.
2. It was recommended and adopted that review of long-term sustainability is decoupled from the triennial review process, honouring the Spring Season’s low-risk management approach of assessing sustainability on an annual basis.
3. Through the triennial review process the bag limit changed to be 2 sports fish for all waters of the interconnected fishery, including the Upper Ōhau River. The change is not expected to influence Spring Season catch or harvest.

This report presents the results of the 2025 Spring Season ballot, angling and spawning surveys.

2. Strategic Purpose

The work and outcomes of managing the Spring Season on the Upper Ōhau River aligns closely with several objectives of the 2022-2032 Sports Fish and Game Management Plan for Central South Island Fish and Game Region.

8.3.1 The current quality, population and harvest of the sea-run salmon, trout, land-locked sockeye and canal fisheries are understood and recorded.

8.3.7 Highly valued trout fisheries in the CSI Fish and Game Region are identified, enhanced and maintained.

8.3.9 Areas of the trout fishery experiencing high rates of catch and release practices are targeted by media and communications to promote best-practice catch and release.

8.3.10 Areas of the canal fishery that are declining in quality are identified and interventions are implemented to stem or reverse the decline.

9.4.12 Seek restoration and enhancement of trout habitat, including trout spawning and rearing areas, to support the different stages of their life cycles.

10.3.1 The views of licence holders are sought, understood and valued by the CSI Fish and Game Council.

10.3.13 Angling and hunting conditions are changed appropriately in response to pressure on the resource where that threatens or adversely affects the quality of recreational experience or resource sustainability.

3. Controlled-Period Ballot 2025

The ballot schedule and associated instructions, information and application forms were published on the CSI pages of the www.fishandgame.org.nz website. The Ballot was advertised in CSIFGC’s weekly fishing report and on CSIFGC’s Facebook and Instagram. The ballot schedule remained the same as for 2023 and 2024, with the only adjustment to provide for a first Saturday in September opening date.

The ballot received 547 angler entries and was drawn on July 16, 2025, resulting in 55 successful ballot winning parties made up of 134 individual anglers. The ballot has increased in popularity from 399 angler entries in 2023, 504 angler entries in 2024, and 547 angler entries in 2025.

Anglers/parties winning September allocations were issued controlled period licences (CPL) immediately after the ballot draw, while those who won October allocation were issued CPLs upon providing their new season's sport fishing licence that went on sale in September. Ten October allocation winning anglers did not supply their sports fishing licence, for various reasons, and were therefore not issued CPLs. The total number of CPLs issued was 124.

CPLs included a code of conduct designed to encourage ballot winners to amicably share the river and act responsibly and to promote best practice catch and release (see appendix 1). Prior to their fishing allocation anglers were emailed with information to support a successful fishing trip such as access options, spawning monitoring results and feedback from anglers, and other important matters.

4. Controlled-period Angler Survey

An online survey (Google Form) designed to capture information relating to individual CPL holders fishing activity, catch, satisfaction and general comments during their controlled period allocation was emailed to all CPL holders.

4.1 Survey response

Overall, the survey email and related communications resulted in an approximate 89% survey response rate.

4.2 Fishing activity

It is estimated 106 ballot winners (79%) actively fished during the 2025 Spring Season compared to 114 in 2024 and 119 holders in 2023 (table 1).

“Angler days” are a measurement of angler activity whereby one “angler day” represents one date on which an angler was active on a fishery, regardless of the duration of the fishing activity within that date. It is estimated that ballot winners fished 183 angler days in the 2025 season, which is a slight reduction from 205 angler days in the 2024 and 195 angler days fished in 2023 (Table 2).

4.3 Catch

Anglers were asked to report the number of trout caught in three size categories. The “small” category, 0.86kg/1.9lb or smaller, is considered indicative of a small trout likely to be juvenile or young adult trout resident to the Upper Ōhau River or has run up the Upper Ōhau River from the interconnected fishery or migrated downstream from Lake Ōhau. “Medium” trout between 1kg/2lb and 4.4kg /9.9lbs, are considered indicative of a mix of trout of all possible origins, and the “large” size category, 4.5kg/10 lbs or bigger, is considered indicative of “trophy-size” trout that have spent time in the Ōhau B Canal around the salmon farms.

In total, it was estimated that 106 CPL holders caught 236 trout of which 4 were kept (harvested) during 185 angler days that spanned 11 fishing allocations between 6 September and 12 October 2025 (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated trout caught and kept by 106 anglers during 183 angler days considering “small, “medium” and “large” (trophy) size categories during the 2025 controlled period. *Rounded to whole numbers for presentation – rounding errors are displayed.

Allocation	Active anglers	Angler Days.	Total trout caught – “small” 1.9lb (0.86kg) or smaller	Total trout caught – “medium” between 2 - 9.9lb (1.1- 4.4kg)	Total trout caught – “large 10lb (4.5kg) or bigger.	Total catch	Total kept
1 - Opening Weekend	18	32	4	17	49	70	0
2 - Mid Week	10	20	6	14	9	29	3
3 - Weekend	13	25	4	4	8	15	0
4 - Mid Week	12	20	1	7	8	17	1
5 - Weekend	9	13	0	7	8	14	0
6 - Mid Week	7	13	3	5	4	12	0
7 - Weekend	9	16	3	5	0	9	0
8 - Mid Week	6	8	0	2	1	3	0
9 - Weekend	9	15	7	3	6	15	0
10 - Mid Week	9	16	3	3	23	30	0
11 - Weekend	5	5	15	3	3	22	0
Total	106	183	46	71	119	236	4

Total catch was notably lower in 2025 when compared to 2024 and 2023 Spring Seasons across all size ranges of fish (Table 2). The most pronounced reduction was in the small fish size range with an approximate 60% decrease; however, it must be noted that fish of this size are generally not targeted, rather incidentally caught. Compared to an averaged 2023 and 2024 catch, in 2025 there was a 43% decrease for medium size trout and 42% decrease in large trout catch. Angler days were slightly lower in 2025 in comparison to 2024 and 2023, despite that, the rate of catch, measured as the average number of combined medium and large trout caught per angler day, was also significantly reduced being approximately 40% decreased or 1 fish per day compared to approximately 1.6 – 1.7 fish per day.

Table 2. Catch comparisons between 2025, 2024 and 2023 Spring Seasons.

Year	Angler Days	Total trout caught – “small” 1.9lb (0.86kg) or smaller	Total trout caught – “medium” between 2 - 9.9lb (1.1- 4.4kg)	Total trout caught – “trophy” 10lb (4.5kg) or bigger.	Total catch	Medium + trophy trout caught per angling day
2023	195	267	140	188	595	1.7
2024	204	243	108	219	569	1.6
2025	185	46	70	121	238	1.0

4.4 Trophy trout comparisons

To monitor the state of the trophy trout fishery component of the interconnected fishery over time, anglers are asked to report the weight of the largest fish they caught and the number of fish in the

“large” trophy size category. There was a relatively high number of trophy trout caught on opening weekend of 2025 (Table 3). Trophy trout number for the whole 2025 season were relatively low, approximately 42% less in comparison to 2024 and 2023. The average size of the largest fish landed was impressive at over 13-pounds, however, was notably lower than in 2023 and 2024.

Table 3. Weight range and average weight of anglers’ largest fish landed and number of Trophy size trout landed for the Opening Weekend allocations and all allocations during the 2025 , 2024 and 2023 Spring Seasons.

Spring Season	Allocation	Size range of largest trout caught by anglers (lb)	Average size of largest trout caught by anglers size (lb)	Total no. of trophy trout caught
2023	Opening Weekend	3.5-32	14.95	30
	All allocations	0.5-32	14.64	188
2024	Opening Weekend	3.0-27	17.55	46
	All allocations	0.8-30	16.9	219
2025	Opening Weekend	3.0-27	14.73	49
	All allocations	1.9-28	13.05	119

4.5 Harvest comparisons

Percentage of total catch harvested and total number of trout harvested has varied between Spring Seasons subject to variable management parameters and angler days. An estimated 4 trout were kept in total at a harvest rate of approximately 2% of overall catch in 2025 (Table 4). The 2025 Spring Season harvest was relatively low as both a proportion of catch and in total number compared to Spring Seasons 2019 - 2024.

Table 4. Spring Season open months and management status presented in relation to harvest measurables: overall % catch harvested, and total trout harvest estimate for the period 2018 to 2025.

Spring Season	Month	Survey	Status	Angler Days	Overall % of catch harvested	Total trout harvest estimate
2018	October only	None	Open fishery	n/a	n/s	n/s
2019	September - October	Non-quantitative	Open fishery	n/a	7	n/a
2020	September - October	Quantitative	Open fishery	n/a	3	27
2021	October only	Limited-quantitative	Backcountry	n/a	n/a	At least 24
2022	September - October	Quantitative	Controlled	433	4	18
2023	September - October	Quantitative	Controlled	195	3	15
2024	September - October	Quantitative	Controlled	204	6	21
2025	September - October	Quantitative	Controlled	183	2	4

4.6 Methods

Methods available to anglers were fly and spin, as previously available. From October 2025 new 2025/26 season regulations were available, particularly the use of scented soft bait when actively used to imitate bait fish was permitted. The survey was not modified to consider soft bait use, therefore any soft bait use is considered spin fishing for 2025 monitoring. 2025 angling activity was made up by

anglers who only fly fished (54%), anglers who used both fly and spin (23%) and anglers who only spin fished (23%).

4.7 Satisfaction

Anglers were asked, “How do you rate your overall fishing experience during your allocation”? The answers available were either “satisfied” or “unsatisfied.”

Most anglers, 77%, were “satisfied” while 23% of anglers were unsatisfied. In explaining their unsatisfied rating, one angler remarked “I wouldn’t say unsatisfied”, suggesting the true satisfaction level is likely to be 78%. 2025 Satisfaction is notably reduced from 2024 (90%) and 2023 (92%).

On an allocation basis, 2025 satisfaction shows a mixed pattern with a generally trending decrease in satisfaction as the season progresses (Table 1). Low satisfaction ratings were only observed in the later half of the season from allocation 7, 27 & 28 September onwards.

Table 5. 2025 Spring Season anglers satisfaction rating per allocation.

Allocation	% satisfied	Satisfaction Key
1	71	High 80+%
2	100	Moderate 51-79%
3	91	Low 50% or less
4	100	High 80+%
5	86	High 80+%
6	71	Moderate 51-79%
7	50	Low 50% or less
8	50	Low 50% or less
9	88	High 80+%
10	63	Moderate 51-79%
11	33	Low 50% or less

The reported satisfaction level of 77% narrowly falls short of the 80% satisfaction threshold established whereby Council has resolved that a matter of urgency must be identified and assessed. This angler satisfaction matter of urgency is addressed later in the report.

“Unsatisfied” anglers were given the opportunity to explain their reasoning for being unsatisfied. A full record of the explanations, excluding angler names for privacy, are provided in Appendix 2.

In summary, the explanations of those anglers that were “unsatisfied,” were most related to the fish numbers not meeting expectations (12 of 22 anglers). This was also the most common reason for “unsatisfied” ratings in 2024 (6 of 10 anglers) and 2023 (6 of 9 anglers). Other notable explanations in 2025 included: Didymo was a nuisance (5 of 22 anglers), fish were hard to catch (4 of 22 anglers), and Poor weather (4 of 22 anglers).

1.8 Feedback

The closing question of the angler survey asked, “is there anything you would like to tell us about the Ōhau River Controlled Fishery?” Fifty-two anglers took the opportunity to provide feedback. Apart from angler names, which were removed for privacy, verbatim records of feedback are presented in Appendix 3 of this report. Over twenty themes of feedback were provided.

In summary, these are the themes identified as common feedback items:

1. Anglers enjoyed their fishing experience (38% of responses).
2. Anglers expressed their support for the ballot and CSIFGC work managing and providing the Upper Ōhau Spring Season Fishery (33% of responses).
3. Fish numbers encountered were lower than expected (29% of responses).

Other notable feedback themes are summarised as:

4. Didymo was a nuisance (21% of responses).
5. Giving thanks to Fish & Game (21% of responses).
6. Suggested changes for managing the fishery (10% of responses).

5. Spawning Surveys

Spawning monitoring involves two surveys that are paired to enable assessment of both live fish present and the observable output of spawning activity, redds (egg nests).

5.1 Live trout survey – June

An aerial (helicopter) live fish survey in June was introduced in 2024. The June timing targets the brown trout spawning run and a point in the spawning run not likely to be impacted by Spring Season harvest in the previous September-October periods. Observations from the surveyor in 2024 were, that of the readily identifiable fish, it was an approximately 50:50 ratio of brown and rainbow trout, indicating that the survey captured both the brown and rainbow trout spawning runs.

An aerial (helicopter) live trout survey was completed on 24/06/2025 (Table 6). Water clarity could be described as “excellent” with 4.9m visibility recorded using the black disc methodology. The bottom of deep pools could be partially observed, unlike during the previous year. The live trout count was 298 fish in 2025, a notable reduction of approximately 32% from 444 fish counted in June 2024. Relatively high-water clarity observed in 2025 compared to 2024 suggests that the 2025 survey can be considered a relatively accurate count with a lower risk of significant undercounting that is likely with the reduced clarity in 2024.

Table 6. Aerial live trout surveys of the Upper Ōhau River undertaken in the month of June.

Date	Live trout counted	Water clarity (m)
26/06/2024	444	2.9
24/06/2025	298	4.9

5.2 Live trout survey – September

An aerial (helicopter) live trout survey was completed on 15/09/2025 targeting rainbow trout (Table 5). Water clarity could be described as “Excellent” with 4.7m visibility recorded using the black disc methodology. At this clarity some of the deep pools could be partially observed, unlike previous years. The survey was undertaken on a non-fishing day. The 2025 count of 199 appears to be at moderate to low levels with respect to data comparable from 2017, 2021, 2023 and 2024 surveys. Comparing the relatively high-water clarity observed in 2025 to previous years suggests that the 2025 can be considered a relatively accurate count with a lower risk of significant undercounting that is likely with reduced clarity.

Table 5. Aerial live trout surveys of the Upper Ōhau River undertaken in the month of September and their relevance to the status of the Spring Season, water clarity, and trout harvest.

Date	Live trout counted	Water clarity (m)	Spring Season in place on survey year	fished days up to survey date	Trout kept prior to survey date
19/09/2017	130		No		
2018	n/s		October Only		
2019	n/s		September & October		
2020	n/s		September & October		
16/09/2021	282		October Only	0	n/a
2022	Water clarity insufficient		September & October	n/a	n/a
11/09/2023	211	3.4	September & October	6	9
16/09/2024	249	3.8	September & October	6	11
15/09/2025	199	4.7	September & October	6	3

5.3 Sites of significance redd survey - September

There are 30 spawning sites (gravel where trout deposited eggs) identified on the Upper Ōhau River where at least one redd has been observed between 2016 and 2025. Most spawning sites are used annually. Since 2016, spawning sites have been formed or depleted during floods, spawning enhancement and river engineering. The discovery of new sites in recent years suggest that the distribution of spawning effort across the river’s length is variable from year to year due to availability of spawning habitat.

Traditional redd surveys, in which an observer walks and wades several kilometres of river length, are difficult to undertake on the Upper Ōhau River due to its slippery boulder bed and dense riparian vegetation and limited crossings. A full river redd survey at the Upper Ōhau is labour intensive, requiring four staff over one day. To reduce the physical difficulty and staffing requirements of the full river redd survey, the spawning sites-of-significance (SOS) survey was developed in 2021. The SOS survey aimed to capture a subsample of the spawning sites as an index of full river spawning effort. SOS have been identified based on observations that they have been used annually or on most years and usually contain four or more fresh redds during September surveys.

The number of SOS reviewed annually is anticipated to change over time and with changes in the availability and quality of spawning gravels at sites caused mainly by flooding and enhancement projects.

Originally, 11 spawning sites were identified as SOS from 2020 data. In 2023 one new spawning site and three previously known spawning sites that were not included in the original SOS survey were observed to have notable spawning activity and were subsequently added to the SOS redds survey for ongoing assessment (Table 7). The 2025 count of 45 redds across 11 original SOS sites indicates a low spawning production relative to the limited survey data available from 2020 to 2024. When considering the sites added to the SOS survey in 2023, spawning redd counts in 2025 (25) were similar

to those recorded in 2024 (30) and 2023 (25). However, when all SOS survey sites are considered collectively, total redd counts in 2025 were approximately 30% lower than 2024 and 2023.

Table 7. Sites of significant spawning (SOS) redd counts of “fresh” redds undertaken in September between 2020 and 2025 at the Upper Ōhau River.

	2020 (22/09/2020)	2021 (16/09/2021)	2022 (22/09/2022)	2023 (29/09/2023)	2024 (20/09/2024)	2025 (19/09/2022)
	Fresh redds	Fresh redds	Fresh redds	Fresh redds	Fresh redds	Fresh redds
Total fresh redds at SOS sites (n=11)	92	97	59	79	72	45
Total fresh redds at 2023 new SOS sites (n=4)				25	30	25
Total				104	102	70

6. Matters of Urgency Arising

Two matters of urgency are identified from the 2025 angling and spawning monitoring being:

1. Moderate Satisfaction: 2025 angler satisfaction was 77%, below the establish 80% satisfaction threshold.
2. Low catch rates: catch was significantly reduced from 2023 and 2024 levels, with catch rates of medium and large fish combined approximately 40% lower than averaged across 2023 and 2024.

6.1 Moderate angler Satisfaction.

Angler satisfaction was at moderate levels at 77% and fell short of the 80% target. 77% satisfaction is still a relatively good satisfaction level but fell short of the expectations of satisfaction previously experienced (~90%) and from what the Spring Season management framework aims to achieve. The reputation of the Spring Season trophy trout fishery and media exposure of extraordinary fishing trips has created high expectations of the fishing experience. The exclusive nature of winning an allocation through the ballot process has likely exacerbated these high expectations. If extraordinary experiences are not had by ballot winners, many anglers could be sensitive to being unsatisfied, despite still having a unique opportunity to catch a canal-origin trophy trout in a relatively uncrowded river.

The reasons why 23% of anglers were unsatisfied were varied and personal, however, the key theme was that anglers encountered less fish than expected which matches the observed low catch levels and reduced spawning levels when compared to 2023 and 2024. Water clarity was relatively high through the Spring Season so can be discounted from consideration around hindering fish sighting, although anecdotally, with unusually high numbers of storms on the Main Divide it was a windy period which could have affected the number of fish sighted.

There was a general trend of decreasing satisfaction though the timescale from allocation 1 to 11. From about mid-season (allocation 6) satisfaction levels dropped off notably, which probably relates to fish numbers dropping back to the canal as the spawning season tapers off. In previous seasons, as in 2025, anglers have mentioned a lack of fish and opportunity in the latter allocation. Although it is

previously observed and expected that satisfaction will decline throughout the Spring Season along with fish numbers, in 2025 the fish numbers in the later part of the season were possibly the lowest experienced in the Spring Season's short history and is likely to explain why satisfaction generally declined below 80% in the later allocations. Looking forward to future seasons, the latter allocations (allocation 6 – 11) are likely to provide below 80% threshold satisfaction in low fish years, as experienced in 2025 and subject to its '2023-2025' ballot schedule. This is despite there still being a small number of trophy fish available to target and a near certainty that some individual anglers will catch their fish of a lifetime or have their trip of a lifetime in the latter allocations.

Within the current Spring Season management framework, management options that aim to improve satisfaction are limited to adjusting the ballot schedule to reduce season length to those allocations with more fish likely present and reducing angler numbers to provide more fish/opportunity/free water per angler. Both options reduce fishing opportunity and should therefore be considered carefully. Managing satisfaction, being an angler's personal experience, can be difficult when linked to fish numbers. Many anglers fishing the later allocations were satisfied, despite low fish numbers, for example 88% of anglers were satisfied in allocation 9. Management action has already previously resulted from low late season satisfaction levels with the shortening of the ballot schedule to omit mid and late October subject to 75% seasonal satisfaction experienced in the 2022 Spring Season. In 2025, many anglers provided feedback that the fish that they found were in a pool occupied by other anglers, suggesting that with less anglers on the river it is more likely that anglers could find fish on an unoccupied pool, therefore lower angler numbers may increase opportunity and catch rate despite fish numbers remaining relatively low.

6.2 Low catch rates.

Low catch rates, being best represented as an approximate 40% reduction in catch rate of medium and large trout is considered a matter of urgency, particularly given the absence of a long-term data set to compare to, and anglers' dissatisfaction in 2025 being most often related to encountering less fish than expected.

Low catch rates in 2025 probably indicates that relative to 2023 and 2024 there were significantly fewer medium and large size trout in the river during the Spring Season. Spawning surveys undertaken appears to support this idea but there is some uncertainty around interpreting the data due to water clarity variability and the successive use of preferred spawning sites (superimposition).

The September live fish survey was undertaken in relatively high-water clarity compared to 2024 and 2023 and is likely to be the most accurate September count on record. The number of fish counted in September 2025 was approximately 20% lower than 2024 but only 5% lower than 2023. The reduction in catch rate in 2025 appears to be far more pronounced than the reduction in the live fish count compared to 2023 and 2024. It is likely that in 2023 and 2024, with notably reduced water clarity, that live fish counts were notable underestimates compared to 2025, meaning that only a few fish were missed from the count in 2025, but many fish were likely missed from the count in 2024 and 2023. This observation reflects the importance of measuring water clarity on spawning survey days and the need to develop a better understanding of how best to interpret live fish counts in relation to water clarity.

The June live fish counts are undertaken to monitor a point in the spawning run, and a species (brown trout) not expected to be impacted by the Spring Season, as such, can be considered a monitoring point of the interconnected fishery not impacted by Spring Season catch and harvest. Like September

fish counts, June live fish counts in 2025 were reduced 32% from 2024 levels and were undertaken in highest water clarity on record. The June survey result when compared to the September survey results may indicate that the interconnected fishery supported a low spawning fish population in general in 2025 when compared to 2024. Therefore, June spawning data may suggest that the Spring Season is not having an impact on the Upper Ōhau River spawning run, but other factors, such as harvest at Ōhau B Canal and downstream recruitment from lakes Ōhau and Pūkaki, may be. However, there is no long-term data to review and a 32% change year on year in June spawning numbers may be within the natural variation of the fishery and indicate normal fishery function. We are severely limited as fisheries managers in interpreting the state of the population by only having a limited data set to review. Further challenges to data interpretation must also be considered when relating catch to live fish counts. Live fish counts include all fish (trout), regardless of size, although sight-fishing anglers mainly target medium and large size trout and generally only catch small trout (less than 2 pounds) as bycatch when blind-fishing.

Redd counts, being reduced in 2025 from 2023 and 2024 levels, may also support the possibility that reduced catch reflects reduced fish numbers. There is some difficulty in interpreting redd data as a proxy metric for fish numbers due to superimposition. Superimposition is where fish successively used the same redds, digging up other eggs and replacing it with their own. It is possible that spawning enhancement is causing increasing superimposition due to the artificial creation of preferred spawning habitat and a relative decrease in formally used poorer-quality natural spawning habitat. Although the reduced redd count in 2025 may indicate a reduced spawning population, it is possibly not as pronounced as the data suggests, due to superimposition.

Without long term data to review, the reduction of catch rate experienced in 2025 relative to 2024 and 2023 is difficult to interpret in terms of the long-term sustainability of the interconnected fishery, but, paired with spawning survey data generally indicates that fish numbers were relatively low in 2025 and were too low to support angler satisfaction levels of 80% or above.

Within the current management framework there are limited management actions to utilise to increase and maintain catch rates and fish numbers that support 80+% angler satisfaction. Reducing angler numbers through the ballot schedule may lead to increased catch rates by providing less competition and therefore more opportunity for anglers to target congregations of fish.

Further spawning enhancement may have some capacity to increase fish numbers. Spawning enhancement is in place and semi-regularly maintained at one site and further enhancement is planned at a second site to be established in 2026. The second site to be establish in 2026 may double the amount of quality enhanced spawning gravels in the river. There is no way of measuring if spawning enhancement is providing trophy size trout to the river to contribute to spawning and Spring Season catch. It is hoped that the enhancement produces more fish for the interconnected fishery by providing a greater availability and quality of spawning gravels. It is intended that the existing enhancement site at least replaces those fish harvested during the Spring Season. Spawning enhancement has been in place since 2019 and has had potential to support spawning runs since 2022. With relatively low live fish counts observed in spawning run monitoring in both June and September 2025, it is likely that other factors have a far greater impact on the spawning run than the support in production provided by the single established spawning site, such as the number of fish migrating into the interconnected fishery from lakes Ōhau and Pūkaki or the harvest of trout at the Ōhau B Canal. It is hoped that the new enhancement planned for 2026, approximately doubling the enhanced gravels, will have a positive influence on the recruitment of trout in the interconnected fishery and further support the maintenance of the Spring Season and sustainability of the interconnected fishery.

7. Discussion

7.1 2025 Spring Season overview

In a short-term context, the 2025 Spring Season can be noted as a poor season with reduced spawning, low catch and suboptimal angler satisfaction. Despite this, the administration and monitoring of the Spring Season has continued to provide a popular and highly valued trophy trout fishery on the Upper Ōhau River subject to a low-risk management approach. Most anglers were satisfied with the overall fishing experience and nearly 120 trophy trout were landed.

The ballot schedule and catch monitoring have remained the same for the period 2023 to 2025, providing useful comparison in the short term to quantify changes in angler satisfaction and catch. The Spring Season is still a new fishery and long-term monitoring has not yet been achieved simply due to its short-term existence. Without long term data sets to review, it is uncertain whether the reduced catch and spawning observed in 2025 is a one-off event, indicates the start of a decline in the interconnected fishery or is just indicative of natural variations that may become apparent in the long term with further monitoring. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the numbers of fish in the river during the 2025 Spring Season subject to the 2023-2025 ballot schedule did not support high levels of satisfaction that are expected, and were previously experienced, for this one-of-a-kind fishery.

CSIFGC now have the task of making decisions around whether to implement any management actions to address matters of urgency raised without the clarity and confidence that long term monitoring would provide. To date, the fishery has been established subject to a low-risk management structure reflecting that the Spring Season is just one component of the interconnected fishery and that long term data sets are not yet available. Both these factors remain relevant; therefore, a low-risk approach should continue. Council, in considering management change to address matters of urgency, must aim to ensure the sustainability of the fishery; maintain the established Spring Season angling values at a minimum of 80% angler satisfaction; and maintain the high-country aesthetics of the fishery.

The long-term sustainability of the interconnected fishery that supports the Spring Season is unlikely to be appreciably impacted by Spring Season fishing. For example, the Spring season has accounted for only between 4 and 21 trout harvested annually under the 2023-2025 ballot schedule. This is a relatively low number of fish given the enormity of the interconnected fishery. Further, as an offset it is hoped that spawning enhancement, which provides an increase in the quantity and quality of spawning gravels in the river, replaces harvested fish. The impact of the Spring Season angling on the annual spawning production of rainbow trout is considered nil, if not, negligible. This is because most of the annual spawning effort has occurred prior to the Spring Season, superimposition is appreciable, and spawning continues after the fishing allocations. Further, June live fish counts appear to mimic the September counts, suggesting that factors other than the Spring Season fishing activity are governing spawning runs. It is reasoned that other key factors in the interconnected fishery such as the harvest of trout in the Ōhau B Canal, and recruitment of trout from headwater lakes govern the long-term sustainability of the Upper Ōhau spawning runs. Nevertheless, the Spring Season is an “add-on” fishing season, additional to the traditional seasons provided within the interconnected fishery or elsewhere. If management change is to be made to address sustainability, a reasonable position to hold is that this must first happen at the add-on fishery rather than the traditional fisheries, even if such an add-on fishery may attract a higher inherent value to anglers than the traditional.

When considering the potential for management change, it is important to frame the review around the likely state of the fishery at the time those changes would be applied. In this case, that requires forecasting the quality of the 2026 Spring Season. The 2026 Spring Season could result in higher, similar, or lower catch rates than 2025. In respect of uncertainty, a precautionary approach is

warranted. Therefore, this review assumes an unfavourable scenario in which the 2026 season is comparable to 2025 in terms of catch and fish numbers, an outcome that would likely trigger a matter of urgency under the 2023-2025 ballot schedule. Framing the review in this way allows consideration of management changes that may reduce the likelihood of similar matters of urgency arising again in 2026.

In terms of sustainability, Spring Season harvest is the most direct measure of expected losses from the fishery. In 2025 just 4 trout were harvested, so it is highly unlikely that further reductions in harvest through decreased angler use would make an appreciable difference to fishery sustainability in 2026, assuming catch rates and fish numbers remain similar to 2025 levels. If catch rates and fish abundance in 2026 are lower than those observed in 2025, harvest levels would be expected to be similar to, or lower than, the 4 being harvested in 2025. Alternatively, if catch rates and fish abundance increase, harvest could reasonably be expected to rise to approximately 12-25 trout; even at this level, harvest is unlikely to pose a sustainability risk considering the generally abundant trout populations across the interconnected fishery. In summary, a ballot schedule similar to the 2023-2025 schedule or one prescribing reduced angler use, is unlikely to risk the sustainability of the interconnected fishery.

Even if Spring Season angler harvest does not appreciably influence fish population sustainability due to the dominant influence of Ōhau B Canal harvest and recruitment from headwater lakes, there remains a social-licence risk associated with how the angling community views the management of the “add on” fishery in relation to the interconnected fishery, predominantly Ōhau B Canal fishery, in reaction to the poor 2025 season. If the Spring Season ballot remains unchanged in reaction to the matters of urgency raised, anglers may view this as a risky approach to canal fishery management and inconsistent with the low-risk approach for Spring Season management. Such perceptions could undermine confidence in CSIFG fishery management, regardless of whether populations sustainability is at risk or not.

A notable reduction in the ballot schedule and therefore fishing activity would be an option to manage and reduce the risk to sustainability while still maintaining an open season, and could be viewed as a proactive and precautionary reduced-risk management approach. However, a reduction of the ballot schedule would reduce the value of the Spring Season fishery to anglers through a reduction in participation. A temporary closure of the Spring Season would be a zero-risk management approach to sustainability risk and would eliminate any possible impact Spring Season fishing may have on the interconnected fishery. However, a temporary closure would also eliminate the value of the Spring Season fishery to anglers through loss of access. Protocols for reopening the Spring Season after a temporary closure would need to be developed.

In terms of maintaining angler values through ensuring satisfaction at 80% or greater, it is possible that without intervention, subject to 2025 catch levels, satisfaction could vary between around 75% and 82% just based on a different set of ballot-winning anglers with different set of expectations and experience of the Spring Season. As such, a matter of urgency may not be triggered in 2026 if catch, fish numbers and the ballot schedule remained the same as in 2025. If catch and fish numbers were to be lower than 2025, we can expect suboptimal satisfaction, alternatively, if catch and fish numbers are higher than 2025 we can expect to exceed the satisfaction threshold. It is likely that a notable reduction in angler numbers and or duration of the ballot schedule would increase angler satisfaction to some extent, through decreasing competition for productive fishing pools and through avoiding the later part of the season with generally diminishing fish numbers. With satisfaction only a few percent under the 80% threshold in 2025, reducing the ballot schedule notably is likely the best option to try increase satisfaction above the 80% threshold. Adjusting the ballot schedule to manipulate satisfaction may be successful in achieving 80% or greater angler satisfaction through a relative

increased in opportunity and catch rates, however, if spawning monitoring indicates low fish numbers a matter of urgency is likely to be identified if fish numbers reduce below 2025 levels.

In regard to maintaining the high-country aesthetics of the river, the 2023-25 ballot schedule has proven to do that as qualified by the low number of anglers identifying anglers' numbers and negative interactions as a concern to their experience and satisfaction. If catch and fish numbers were to drop below levels observed in 2025, then it is possible that fishing aesthetics could be compromised as use and competition for key fishing pools may increase. Therefore, any reduction in angler use could only further enhance the aesthetics by reducing or maintaining current levels of angler party encounters. The downside of reducing angler use is that less anglers will get to enjoy the fishery, despite all the management effort invested in supporting it.

8. Council Options

Option A, "no change": The 2026 Spring Season ballot will be a repeat of 2023-2025.

Option B, "risk-reducing reduction of ballot schedule": The proposed 2026 Spring Season Ballot Schedule (Schedule 1) aims to reduce sustainability risk, maintain an open Spring Season, increase catch rates, maintain fishery aesthetics, achieve 80+% satisfaction subject to a Spring Season subject to similar catch and fish numbers as available in 2025. The 2026 schedule provides for a significantly reduced angling opportunity from the 2023-2025 schedule with an overall reduction of approximately two-thirds of angler days, whereby the later four October-based allocations will be omitted and the maximum angler numbers per allocation will be reduced by half.

Schedule 1 – The proposed 2026 Spring Season ballot schedule under option "B", a precautionary reduction of the ballot schedule including the 2023-2025 ballot schedule with strikethrough for reference.

Fishing Dates	Allocation	Max anglers	Days	Max Allocation Angler Days
5 - 6 September	1 - Opening Weekend	20 10	2	40 20
09 - 10 September	2 - Mid Week	12 6	2	24 12
12 - 13 September	3 - Weekend	16 8	2	32 16
16 - 17 September	4 - Mid Week	12 6	2	24 12
19 - 20 September	5 - Weekend	16 8	2	32 16
23 - 24 September	6 - Mid Week	12 6	2	24 12
26 - 27 September	7 - Weekend	12 6	2	24 12
30 October - 01 September	8 - Mid Week	12 0	2	24 0
03 - 04 October	9 - Weekend	12 0	2	24 0
07 - 08 October	10 - Mid Week	12 0	2	24 0
10- 11 October	11 - Weekend	12 0	2	24 0
	Maximum Total	148 50	22	296 100
	Non-Fishing Dates	-	39 47	-

Option C, "A zero-risk temporary closure": The Spring Season ballot will not be undertaken in 2026 and further review of spawning data will be undertaken to design re-opening protocols.

9. Recommendation

OPTION B - PROVIDE A SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED 2026 BALLOT SCHEDULE FROM THE 2023-2025 SCHEDULE WITH AN OVERALL REDUCTION OF APPROXIMATELY TWO-THIRDS OF AVAILABLE ANGLING DAYS AS PRESENTED IN SCHEDULE 2. *ADOPTED BY CSIFGC 05 February 2026*

Schedule 2 – proposed 2026 Spring Season ballot schedule under option “B”, a precautionary reduction of the ballot schedule.

Fishing Dates	Allocation	Max anglers	Days	Max Allocation Angler Days
5 - 6 September	1 - Opening Weekend	10	2	20
09 - 10 September	2 - Mid Week	6	2	12
12 - 13 September	3 - Weekend	8	2	16
16 - 17 September	4 - Mid Week	6	2	12
19 - 20 September	5 - Weekend	8	2	16
23 - 24 September	6 - Mid Week	6	2	12
26 - 27 September	7 - Weekend	6	2	12
	Maximum Total	50	14	100
	Non-Fishing Dates		47	

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Angler code of conduct supplied with controlled period licences.

Ōhau River Spring Season Code of Conduct:

Central South Island Fish & Game (CSIFG) provide this code of conduct to encourage ballot winners to amicably share the river and act responsibly while enjoying the one-of-a-kind high-country trophy trout fishing provided by the controlled fishery.

For the most part, Ōhau River Spring Season anglers concentrate their efforts at favourite pools or runs and usually drive between different spots rather than walk. However, anglers that choose to walk long stretches of the river may need to bypass pools and runs already occupied by other anglers.

Communicate before casting

Before fishing an occupied area, talk to the occupants to see if they are happy for you to share that area. If they are unwilling, be polite and find a different spot. If the individual or party occupying an area agrees to share, then communicate and agree on how that will work. For example, you may decide that each party occupies opposite banks, or you could split a pool by top and bottom. You may decide that all anglers steadily rotate through the area moving in a bottom to top direction. In any case, communication is the key to sharing a small area amicably.

Fish a different spot each morning and afternoon

We recommend you and your party fish a different pool or area each morning and afternoon. This will help ensure that all ballot winners get at least one morning or afternoon session at one of the more productive spots and encourages you to explore more of what the river offers.

Land fish quick and handle with care

There is a responsibility for every angler practising catch and release to handle their fish with care. Here are our best practice tips for catch and release.

1. A short fight is a good fight – big trout require a strong tippet for a quick landing; we recommend using a minimum breaking strain of 8lb /3.5kg tippet.
2. Cool and wet your hands and landing net before touching the fish – dip them in the river first.
3. Use a large landing net for large trout.
4. Keep trout wet – keep the fish in the water while dehooking.
5. Give trout time to revive - face trout headfirst into a gentle current until they regain the strength to swim away unaided.

Photography

There's every chance you will catch a trophy rainbow trout during your allocation, and you will want to get some photos as a memento of your unique catch. We recommend you take the photo of the fish in the water or at water level – that way, if the fish slips out of your hands, there is no “fall”, and it can only end up safely in the water. Also, be super quick if you lift the trout out of the water – a maximum of 5 seconds at a time.

Fishery Support

CSIFG wishes to acknowledge Meridian Energy for valued contributions toward spawning habitat enhancement and aerial spawning monitoring. These contributions help CSIFG to manage, monitor and maintain the long-term sustainability of the Ōhau River Spring Season.

Appendix 2 – Explanations provided by anglers reported to be “unsatisfied” with their overall Upper Ōhau River allocation experience in the 2025 Spring Season.

Allocation / dates	Briefly tell us why you were <u>unsatisfied</u> with your overall fishing experience?
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Didn't see many fish in the pools compared to what I had seen on YouTube from previous years.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	The river was beautiful just expected to see more fish when scouting and was hoping to catch one
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Lack of sighted fish. Only sighted two pods of fish. Didymo! Fishing in many areas where water was shallow, slippery and high levels of didymo meant clearing lures and flies on every cast. Low flow -<9 cumics. Difficult access (matagouri & briar rose) to areas that contained, or might contain, fish. (My lack of experience will account for some of this difficulty)
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Didn't see many fish. The ones I did see while watching other people. The fish didn't seem interested. For all the hype on big fish and big schools of fish. No better than when I've fished during the summer season.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Just difficult fishing for someone with not much experience. Spinning caught lots of weed and didimo.
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Couldn't catch the buggers
Allocation 5 - Weekend - Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 September	Just average weather, and just struggled but that's my problem haha
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	I wouldn't say unsatisfied. I enjoy fishing even when it's slow. I just think the period is late in the season the ballot targets and the fish have already been up and back down, very few fish of size spotted in pools and runs. A-lot of dead spawned fish in the river i think 9 in total, ranging in size from ca. 12-20lb
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	didn't see many fish, fish seem to only be in a couple of areas
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Low number of fish spotted both days and majority of fish spotted were under 10lb, but very grateful having the ballot!
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	During our allocation, we seen very little fish numbers, big & small sized. Scouting & fishing most of the top half of the river. Potentially needs a season or 2 closed completely, to replenish fish numbers. I think this would be a great benefit for the future fishery of this amazing spot. Really unfortunate to not get stuck into many fish at all, but still a great weekend on the water none the less. Really appreciate getting a ballot, it was still a great experience to fish during closed period. All the best, thanks team for you're efforts.
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Unfortunately we found no pools/schools of fish big or small, unsure of this is due to the late allocation or if the numbers have decreased dramatically. This river ballot may been to be close for a season in order to repopulate. Very grateful to get this opportunity so thank you team much appreciated from our groups as a whole!

Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Lower fish numbers than expected compared to previous years but all and all grateful for getting ballot and looking forward to trying it again one day
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	I found the experience was not exciting. Saw fish and hooked one that was 20lb plus but it was lackluster and more of a battery hen than a wild trout. The didymo was a constant menace. My feeling is the river should be closed permanently and these big trout left to spawn without pressure. These beautiful fish need to spawn without our presence.
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	We saw about 6 fish on the day and hooked and lost one big one. So, not many fish and difficult spotting in some pools. Fish were not behaving like wild feeding trout. Also, there were other anglers around competing for a limited number of fish.
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	Didn't catch any
Allocation 9 - Saturday 04 & 05 October	Late in the season very little fish seen and caught . Lots of Didymo in the river.
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Only one pool had fish. The season was already over all fisherman were at the same pool. Some had flown from the North Island which we thought was very unfair on them to come all this way just to fish one pool.
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Conditions poor, windy and little sun. Only saw 4 trout throughout the length. The same trout that others also saw and fished. We were very happy to view 2 very good young fisherman from the NI land a trout each out of this group of 4.
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Very few fish left in the system and the quality of the fish was very in mid October . I would imagine the start of September it would be pretty good , and much better quality fish . Didymo was very bad . It would be better to start the ballot earlier in my opinion .
Allocation 11 - Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 October	well, the reason I was not satisfied was cause of the weather, the wind was too strong to fish and I did not have a chance to explore that area. I will be trying again to join the draw next year. I just wish that if the weather is not favourable the slot can be moved to a new date. Instead of waiting for another year. Even catch and release only. Overall I am happy for the schem. Hope that you will apply that for the whole length of the canals, to give the fisheries to recover. I really want to see how it was 10 yrs ago...I am a big fan of the canals.
Allocation 11 - Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 October	Very challenging winds did not help! However compared to what we had been told by other anglers, the numbers of fish were lower and more challenging to get the bite. Overall it was a cool experience but I would not be in a rush to do it again.

Appendix 3 – Feedback provided by anglers in response to the question “Is there anything you would like to tell us about the Ōhau River Controlled Fishery?”. *Anglers names have been removed where provided to protect their privacy.

Which allocation (fishing dates) did you win in the ballot?	How do you rate your overall fishing experience during your allocation?	Before submitting this survey, is there anything you would like to tell us about the Ōhau River Controlled Fishery?

Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Unsatisfied	Beautiful river with amazingly clear water, just expected to see more fish, not necessarily catch them.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Unsatisfied	Thank you for this opportunity, I was very excited to be selected as a younger angler and see a couple of big fish. The track does have some large holes/bumps that could do with a bit of work and it would help if some of the bushes / branches were trimmed to avoid scratching vehicles.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	Great thing and working well! Looking forward to the next draw
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Unsatisfied	On the Sunday afternoon we came across a few anglers watching while two pairs of anglers fish to small groups sighted trout. Didn't see any trout caught. Did spot 4 trout up at the weir but access down the steep bank was a bit beyond our physical limits, especially after two days fishing. Did have one fish on briefly, in a deep pool, using a weighted glo bug. Enjoyed the experience, in good company, I hope others had better results. Thanks for the opportunity.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	I had an enjoyable weekend on the Ohau River Controlled Fishery. the weather was superb, and the sight-fishing conditions couldn't have been better. Compared to a previous later allocation I fished (where fish were visible but very hard to catch), this opening weekend held a lot of promise. Based on past catch rates, we thought it would be a sure thing, but that wasn't the case. Fish were few and far between, with only a handful holding in very deep water. The fish we did catch were in good condition and had not yet spawned. All fish seen and caught were below the ford. It seemed that either the trout had already spawned or hadn't moved up yet, as the numbers were far lower than on my previous visit. The fish were holding deep and easily spooked, but appeared healthy. A few large fish were seen porpoising, taking something off the surface, though I could not determine what. Water clarity was very good, and the riverbanks appeared normal. However, the didymo was much worse than I remember, and insect life was sparse, with only a few very small hatches in the evening. I suspect this is having a large impact on potential sedge and caddis life. Angler numbers appeared lower fewer than the 19 anglers reported, with only a few present on Saturday and even fewer on Sunday. Only one other party was seen on the water. Access is good, and repairs to the track near the siphon have made a noticeable difference. I am concerned that the low flow may make successful fish migration upstream difficult, particularly given the size of some fish. I also wonder about the effectiveness of the fish ladder at the head of the river; it seems very unnatural for a fish to climb up and then pass through a dark underground tunnel. One other disappointing observation was finding two freshly dead trout of significant size on the riverbank, both showing clear line burns and hand marks suggesting poor handling and insufficient recovery before release. Overall, it was a positive experience, but certainly not as productive as expected given the catch rates reported in previous years.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 &	Unsatisfied	I would be very interested to see some results from other people for this particular weekend.

Sunday 07 September		
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	Was shocked by the amount of didymo. Did not see any fish on first day. Had one on briefly on second day. Highlight was being able to see some trout from top of cliffs when we stopped on our way out. It was good to be able to suss out the river on both sides for future fishing trips. Did not see anyone catch a fish.
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	It is special a opportunity to fish on and you have to hunt them out, a great experience
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	Great idea, would like the ballot process to continue but with catch and release only
Allocation 1 - Opening Weekend - Saturday 06 & Sunday 07 September	Satisfied	Had a great time!
Allocation 2 - Mid Week - Wednesday 10 & Thursday 11 September	Satisfied	This year the fish numbers appear to be down somewhat. Will be interested to see how the totals add up for this year and if it matches my experience
Allocation 2 - Mid Week - Wednesday 10 & Thursday 11 September	Satisfied	It's an extraordinary fishery and a real privilege to fish. Well done you guys for making it happen. I personally don't think Spin fishing should be allowed. It is a sensitive resource with a limited number of monsters. Interestingly 2 of our fish were caught twice. Once each day. Thanks Rhys. Loved it.
Allocation 2 - Mid Week - Wednesday 10 & Thursday 11 September	Satisfied	Pity about the didymo.
Allocation 2 - Mid Week - Wednesday 10 & Thursday 11 September	Satisfied	Didymo was a problem - that was the only negative
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	First time visiting the river. The information provided by F&G was great - really helpful. I only saw 2 fish (together - both huge) over the two days, albeit Saturday was very challenging with gusty winds and cloud. From speaking with a couple of other groups of anglers - they seem to have had a similar experience. Blind fished a number of pools on the Saturday, not a single knock and did not cast a line on Sunday as no fish spotted during the morning - so finished early. Still a great experience in a pretty wild place.
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	surprised by the amount of river that didn't hold fish. a very different fishing experience, very grateful that this is open to both Spin and fly fishing methods. wise fish, much persistence is required.

Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	All large fish over 10lb caught were Jacks. Seemed to be more of them about. Came across a few paired up fish too, still spawning so let them be. Harder than I thought to find fish, but overall a great experience.
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	I had heard that there were lots of good sized fish in the river but only had one sighting of a fish jumping in the 2 days
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	Great experience
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	I had a lot of fun and was pleased to have caught a fish
Allocation 3 - Weekend - Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 September	Satisfied	A well done ballot. Area was good. Shame we did not get a fish to bring home.
Allocation 4 - Mid Week - Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 September	Satisfied	Had a great time, enjoyed talking to the other anglers.
Allocation 4 - Mid Week - Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 September	Satisfied	Was with mate, we both had our 7 year olds with us on the ballot, they both got fish. Great day out. Overall, significantly less fish around than previous years, especially at a couple of the key spots higher up.
Allocation 4 - Mid Week - Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 September	Satisfied	Awesome experience I felt privileged to be able to participate, thanks to all who made this possible.
Allocation 4 - Mid Week - Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 September	Satisfied	Thank you for a fantastic experience
Allocation 4 - Mid Week - Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 September	Satisfied	Good couple of days. Thanks
Allocation 5 - Weekend - Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 September	Satisfied	I feel as though it should be fly fishing only. To then give a real satisfaction of success to anglers. And potentially to give more odds to the big fish in and the area. After hooking 4 large trout and successfully landing one it was really enjoyable experience for me as me angler to just get one to the net and appreciate the opportunity I was given
Allocation 5 - Weekend - Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 September	Satisfied	My instincts tell me that someone or some people have been poaching those spawning pools just down from that caravan we were talking about. Despite that i absolutely loved being given the chance, first time seeing trout spawning and it can not be replicated anywhere. Where else do ya see two 20lb trout, a Jack and a Hen spawning?? Never intended to keep no matter the size. i know how important these fish are to the entire district. Thanks guys!!!

Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	Unsatisfied	No license checks conducted or F&G presence. Spoke to one unlicensed fisherman at the weir, he was of Asian character. I educated him briefly before he departed.
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	Satisfied	Amazing. Good numbers
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	Satisfied	A huge privilege to fish such a unique fishery.
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	Satisfied	found 1 large fish looked like had died recently
Allocation 6 - Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 September	Satisfied	Thank you so much for the opportunity to fish this amazing Fishery. It is like paradise in there, such a beautiful Piece of NZ Would have loved 2 days in there but family emergencies came first. I did notice a lot more Didymo this year and it caused me to lose a really good Fish, everyone has a hard luck story I'm sure, but if you are looking for volunteers in a weekend managing this or any fishery I would put my hand up and would love to help. Many thanks
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Satisfied	Spot a few rainbows in 1 single pool but was not feeding and actively spawning. Many pools were empty. The only fish I hooked up was good size brown feeding on egg behind spawning rainbows but lost the fish after hook up. Did not see any anglers except 2 were packing up on the last day by the Weir.
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Unsatisfied	Great spot, amazing waters, but little fish numbers. Closing for a year or so would be beneficial through spawning.
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Unsatisfied	Close the ballot for a season in order to repopulate
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Satisfied	It was a slow few days fishing with the river badly affected by didymo. On day two the river level appeared lower than the previous day and with strong winds we only had a half day's fishing. Some large fish spotted with one of our party landing a 25lbs rainbow trout in very good condition.
Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Satisfied	Satisfied with the experience though did expect to see more fish in the river. We spotted 6 decent fish over 2 pools despite a day and a half of looking and plenty of walking, mainly the lower and middle section. Of the fish we spotted, 4 were paired up and seemed to be actively spawning so we left alone. Managed to hook one fish but unfortunately was lost. Found fish spotting difficult, although weather didn't help. Did not have a drone ourselves but can see how it would prove a massive advantage due to how spread out the fish were. Was also surprised, despite lots of blind fishing, not to pick up any smaller resident fish despite lots of good looking water. Only saw two other anglers in the distance during our whole trip on the last day, looked like they had fished the top weir pool before we got there though did not speak to them. Great opportunity and challenge regardless of the result though. Thank you.

Allocation 7 - Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 September	Unsatisfied	Needs a break from being fished during spawning to let the fish numbers build up again
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	Unsatisfied	Didymo needs to be flushed out as it ruins the experience.
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	Unsatisfied	An interesting experience but I suggest you limit the anglers to four per day and do fly only. Also, it is possible that the fishing was better in September?? Didymo is a great pity but nothing to be done about that, sadly. Thanks for the opportunity and the pre outing information. It was not a great fishing experience but perhaps I should try it again, if I get the chance. We only fished one day because of travel and work commitments.
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	Satisfied	The place is truly unique, and I definitely support the current ballot system. Thanks so much, Rhys, for running the system for this amazing fishery. We only fished on the first day as we were feeling under the weather with a cold on the second. We didn't see a huge number of fish, but that's understandable given it's a bit late in the spawning season.
Allocation 8 - Wednesday 01 & Thursday 02 October	Unsatisfied	Fish run was too low, F&G should release more fish into Ruataniwha
Allocation 9 - Saturday 04 & 05 October	Satisfied	I thought you guys got the right amount of people on the river each day not too busy and I felt like I had enough space and pools to try. Nice amount of people fishing , we had enough river to ourselves for a quality experience I took my partner and our over the weekend and we had a great time. Thanks again we loved it!
Allocation 9 - Saturday 04 & 05 October	Satisfied	Very few fish and the didymo is out of control
Allocation 9 - Saturday 04 & 05 October	Satisfied	its great
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Satisfied	Not a lot of fish around in upper section, found only one - two pools holding fish down lower, didymo was a pain to deal with. Good experience, would we interested to come back to see if more pools are holding fish at different times and more fish if they are there
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Satisfied	Very good unique fishery
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Unsatisfied	The ballot should only be open when the fish are there.
Allocation 10 - Wednesday 08 & Thursday 09 October	Unsatisfied	One could limit it to fly fishing only? Also believe there were very few spawning rainbows left in the river by 8th and 9th October. But very grateful to have had the opportunity to fish this lovely stretch of water. Catching no fish did not worry us.
Allocation 11 - Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 October	Unsatisfied	hope you continue to control the overfishing ,if you apply the restricted access to the whole of the canals to restore its former health like it was 10 years ago..

Allocation 11 - Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 October	Satisfied	I only fished 1 day of my allotted 2 days since the 2nd day the wind was a lot stronger and the forecast for that day is the wind will be high for the whole day. There were a lot of good fishing spots where access to the river bank was an issue due to the matagouri bush was so thick, it was impossible to go through them without getting punctured in the process. If I were to win the ballot again next year, I might bring something to clear a path through it if that is allowed. I saw a number of schools of big trout in different pools along the river which was very good to see however i only hooked 2 of the torpedoes since they weren't interested on the many flies i presented to them, I guess because of my poor technique and they were just not interested. The high amount of didymo also made fly fishing a bit more admin intensive because I had to clean my flies and the line every cast.
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