

River watch on poachers



POACHER WATCH . . . PC Iain Leggett, left, and head bailiff Michael Fearn, based at Moffat, are cracking down on poaching on the River Annan

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PC Iain Leggett

A CRACKDOWN on illegal poaching is being conducted on the length of the River Annan.

And the partnership between Police Scotland and the River Annan and District Salmon Fisheries Board will see stake-outs conducted on the river from its source in upper Annandale down to the Solway in a bid to deter the illegal practice.

Head bailiff Michael Fearn, based in Moffat, said: “We do have issues on the River Annan with a small amount of organised poaching but it’s not as serious as it was 20 or 30 years ago.

“However, it is still seen by some as an easy option to make money and Annan is an up-and-coming river with improving salmon runs so we want to be prepared.

“We are looking to do a bit of community work highlighting the issues we face with poachers and getting the local community on board.”

Michael, who operates with a team of eight volunteer water bailiffs, will be working with local police officers until the end of the fishing season — particularly concentrating on the

By Lisa Herbert

lh@dngonline.co.uk

summer months when salmon stocks are at their peak.

He added: “Salmon are worth quite a lot of money to the local economy in terms of the impact fishermen have on the hotels and shops so if these stocks are destroyed it will affect local businesses.

“From our point of view it is an advantage to have a police presence as the bailiffs are not always respected and the police have very specific knowledge of the fisheries law.”

Wildlife crime officer PC Iain Leggett is urging those who visit the river to be aware of poachers and to report any suspicious activity immediately.

He added: “People don’t always realise that if they see a couple of people walking down opposite sides of the river they could be poaching.

“There will certainly be people in properties overlooking the river that will have seen poaching but maybe not realised what they were doing.

“We want to send out a strong message that offenders will be caught and dealt with robustly as they are destroying the river’s fish stocks.”