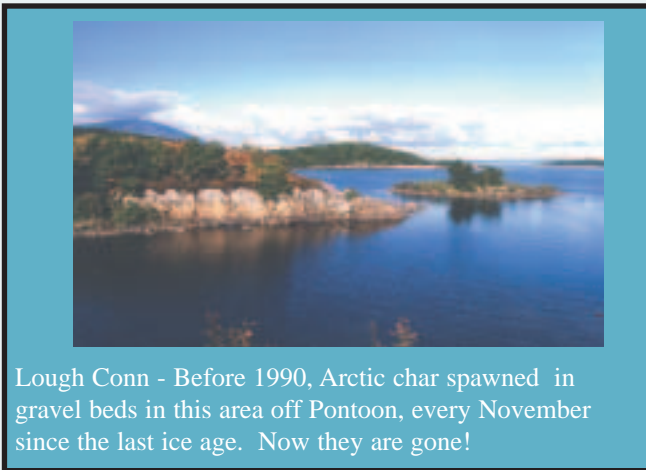


# LOUGH CONN - A LAKE IN TROUBLE

*What is happening to Lough Conn is nothing short of a national scandal*

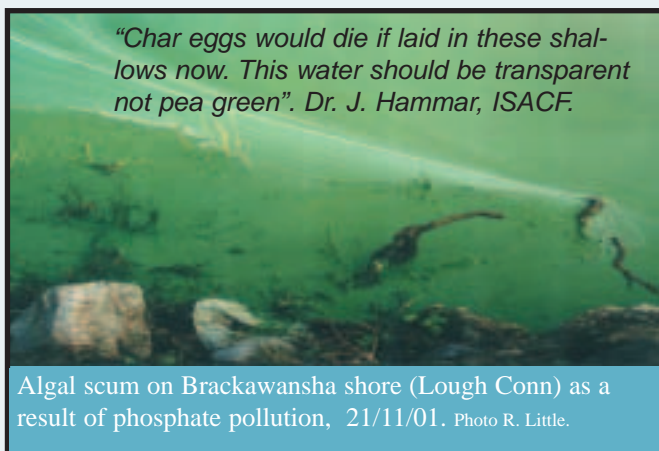
## Our heritage under threat



Lough Conn - Before 1990, Arctic char spawned in gravel beds in this area off Pontoon, every November since the last ice age. Now they are gone!

Lough Conn, world famous as a trout lake is drained by the River Moy and prized for its Atlantic salmon. However, it is believed the lake's ecology is being adversely affected by environmentally unsustainable agriculture, forestry activity, town sewage and septic tank runoff. A place of unique tranquility, beauty and majesty is losing some of its native fishlife that once made it famous. For thousands of years the lake remained unspoilt to be appreciated and enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. Thousands of anglers would wet their flies on the lake in the hope of catching its golden brown trout. Sadly this is all changing and anglers are becoming as rare as the fish they pursue. This is not good for tourism, the local economy or for the thousands of Irish anglers who take time out on the lake to relax and enjoy its natural beauty. What is more -

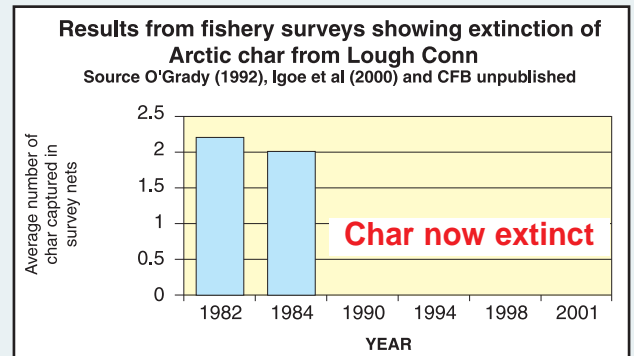
**THE ARCTIC CHAR ARE NOW EXTINCT IN LOUGH CONN** - the reason for this is- **NUTRIENT ENRICHMENT**.



*"Char eggs would die if laid in these shallows now. This water should be transparent not pea green". Dr. J. Hammar, ISACF.*

Algal scum on Brackawansha shore (Lough Conn) as a result of phosphate pollution, 21/11/01. Photo R. Little.

## Lough Conn and its unique fish fauna



Lough Conn is a lake with a high heritage value, particularly due to its ancient fish fauna. Regrettably Ireland's most Ancient freshwater fish, the mysterious Arctic char, often referred to in Ireland as char, became extinct from Lough Conn in the last 10 years. These beautiful trout-like



**Arctic char *Salvelinus alpinus***

fish were once common in Lough Conn and were amongst the largest char to be found in Ireland in recent times. Irish char are an important element of our native biodiversity and we should endeavor to preserve remaining populations for prosperity. Each population has unique attributes, due to their prolonged isolation and post glacial colonisation history.

### Gillaroo trout

Still present in the lake along with ordinary brown trout are distinct species of brown trout, including the red spotted "gillaroo". These fish are genetically distinct, rare, and a unique part of our glacial heritage and colonised Ireland long before man arrived to these shores. Sadly the gillaroo trout could also face extinction, just like the Irish Bear, the Golden Eagle and now the Arctic char.



"Gillaroo qualify as a discrete species under 'the species concept'" Prof. A. Ferguson.



Please ask for phosphate free detergents when shopping



# THE LOUGH CONN CHAR - NOW EXTINCT!

Arctic char were the first fish to colonise Lough Conn after the last ice age, and because of their isolation, would have been genetically different from other populations. Fishery board surveys show that they were common until the late 1980's. However, by the early 1990's they had become extinct. Scientific evidence for the cause of this extinction points strongly to lake ecological changes (e.g., algal blooms, sedimentation of spawning beds, etc.) due to organic enrichment of the lake. These changes favour introduced fish species, like roach and rudd. They

**FACT - "UP TO 40% OF IRISH ARCTIC CHAR POPULATIONS ARE NOW EXTINCT!"**

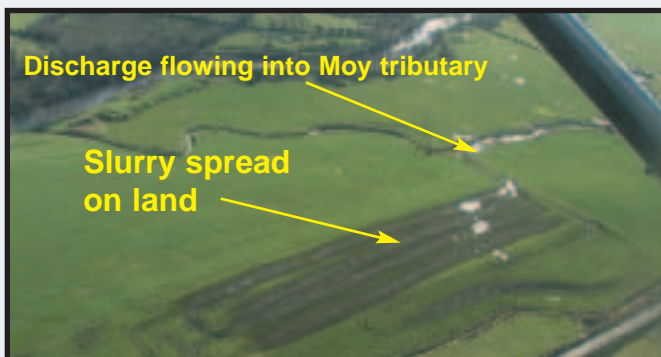


**The char of Lough Conn:** One of the last char ever to be taken from Lough Conn. Before the 1990's Arctic char were common in Lough Conn. Now they are extinct!

can make lake conditions worse by grazing on the zooplankton (water fleas) that feed off the algae. This upsets the lakes normal nutrient cycle. A downward spiral in the lake ecology can result, which is impossible to reverse without firstly addressing the root cause, **ENRICHMENT**.

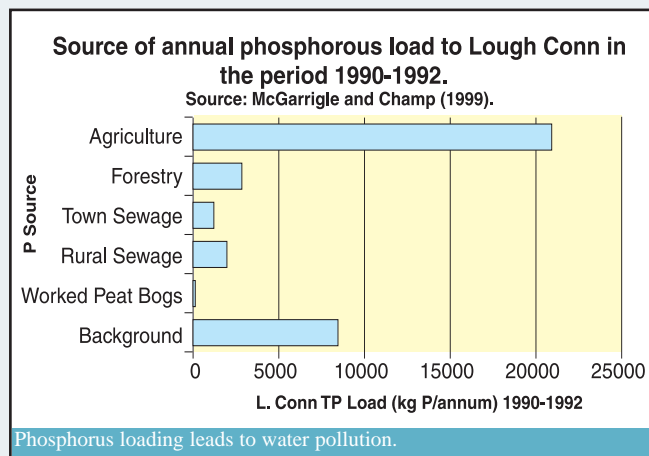
## Why has enrichment in the lake happened?

The answer is simple. Excessive nutrient inputs from a variety of sources, particularly agriculture (other sources also contribute; see graph opposite) have entered the lake. A recent report by Fehily, et al (2000), estimated that currently 5.7 times more phosphate is produced in County Mayo than required for fertilisation. This is a serious problem not only in



Slurry spreading still continues in the Lough Conn catchment during wet weather contrary to Best Farm Practice. Photo taken in February, 2002 during very wet conditions. No doubt much of this slurry ended up in the river (Deel River), eventually polluting Lough Conn.

Lough Conn but all over the country. Proper nutrient management planning, particularly in sensitive areas, needs to be utilised, if we are to preserve our native fish populations and



angling resource. The action that has been taken to date, is too little too late. Not only are the char extinct but the famous wild trout in Lough Conn are now also under serious threat. This is in spite of substantial sums of EU and Irish Exchequer money being spent on projects to increase trout numbers in the catchment.

## What can you do

Don't just sit there and watch this jewel of the west lose its native fish biodiversity and its importance as a wild brown trout fishery and a highly valuable tourist resource to Co. Mayo.

Let the policy makers and local politicians know that the kind of neglect that Lough Conn has faced and is still facing is unacceptable and contravenes EU legislation.

While we all need to play our part in preventing pollution, it is essential that local and national government take responsibility by educating and taking direct action.

The cleaning up of Lough Conn is in all of our interests whether it is for good clean drinking water, angling, tourism or just general public enjoyment.

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Produced by the Irish Char Conservation Group Ltd, in consultation with the The Lough Conn and Cullin Trout Angling Federation and The Carra/Mask/Corrib Water Protection Group Ltd.

For more information on char contact us at our web site, [www.charr.org](http://www.charr.org), or write to ICCG, 11 Poddle Green, Kimmage, Dublin 12. Supported by the The Lough Conn and Cullin Trout Angling Federation and the Carra/Mask/Corrib Water Protection Group.