

United Usk Fishermen's Association



*Newsletter
No. 9
May 2006*

Chairman's Triennial Report 2006

Our association with the Wye Foundation started in 1999 when we joined forces to buy the drift nets and quota buy the putcher station at Goldcliffe. This resulted in saving at least another 2000 fish per year for our two rivers. At that time a large part of our river system was not productive and we needed management and funding similar to the Wye. Just before our Triennial General Meeting in December 2002 we formally joined the Wye Foundation to become a charity named the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF).

Within weeks WUF had not only formed a partnership with 8 other organisations but had prepared a three year Project named UP (Usk Project), and had submitted it to Welsh European Funding Office for funding from the EU.

It was agreed that five Trustees should represent the Usk on WUF. Of the five that represent the Usk three of your Committee were elected, the fourth is a UUFA member. I had been elected previously. Our job as Trustees is to monitor the overall performance of the Foundation. Two of us are on the Steering Group. The Steering Group represent the Partners and has responsibility for planning and overseeing the progress of each of the detailed projects.

Our Association's influence on the Trust has made a significant contribution as well as its participation on other committees and bodies to the extent that we have moved on from 'advising and bullying' to making a positive contribution to getting work done. We represent you, the important contributors, riparian owners and fishermen. You produce the seed corn, enabling the other partners to contribute which, in turn, attracts European money. Read in the centre pages how your contribution has been converted into completed projects creating more spawning and juvenile capacity. No such expenditure has been made in our living memory. It has led to a better understanding of all the factors that influence the management of the Usk. The educational influence of the Trust working with diverse partners is invaluable.

The Usk Project has covered 14 tributaries and has removed 12 blockages and completed 22.4 km of coppicing and fencing with 11.6 km still to do. All this activity will improve the quality and quantity of sought after game fishing which will lead to self sustaining management.

The Wye and Usk Passport run by WUF has made impressive strides in marketing fishing on Usk tributaries and the main stem, as a number of our members will testify. WUF is able to market much more. If you have beats to let speak to Seth on **01982 551520**.

People ask where the division lies between the UUFA and WUF. We are needed more now than ever. We are totally independent, able to criticise, promote, and suggest. Looking at our Constitution the UUFA has traditionally concerned itself with matters to do with fishing and its improvement and this has not changed.

We monitor the project progress, question the strategy, and advise on problems and listen to outside views. The result widens the interest and knowledge of our membership. We remain independent and influential on matters pertaining to the River Usk and continue to represent our members as laid down in our constitution. The communication between members and your Committee is impressive and we whole heartedly encourage it and wish it to expand.

Problems that we try to progress are reported in our Newsletters but continue to concern us:

- ★ Poaching
- ★ Pollution, on tributaries and the main stem (Abergavenny CSO)
- ★ Sheep Dip dangers
- ★ Water abstraction especially in Brecon for the canal and at Prioress Mill for Llandegfford
- ★ Eels and Elvers
- ★ Western Ireland drift net fisheries
- ★ Sand and Gravel Explotation in the Usk Valley

Other subjects reported are of a much more cheerful nature like:

- ★ Progress of UP!
- ★ Permanent closure of the Usk Driftnets
- ★ The status of the Usk as a SAC

Many of these are covered in more detail in this Newsletter.

Your Committee meets three times a year and also represents you on EAW matters including Fisheries, Ecology & Advisory Committee, Usk Local Fisheries Group, the Usk Salmon Action Plan, the Usk Catchment Abstraction and Management Strategy combined with the Water Framework Directive and, of course, on WUF. We attend other forums like the Association of River Trusts and anything that has a bearing on the Usk.

I thank Committee members for all their freely given time and advice in the knowledge that they have represented your interests diligently. They agreed to continue in their roles as I did. Their and my re-election was confirmed at our TGM on the 18th March 2006. As Chairman I have said that this is my last stint and a new Chairman will be elected in 2009.

Nick Brabner

ACA PRESS RELEASE

ACA Celebrates Sheep Dip U-Turn - "A massive victory for angling"

Thursday 23 February 2006

The Anglers' Conservation Association (ACA) is today celebrating an historic decision by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to suspend the sale of cypermethrin sheep dip in the UK, with immediate effect. Cypermethrin has caused catastrophic damage to the wildlife of river systems throughout the country. The ACA and the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) jointly called for a ban as long ago as 1997 when these dips became widely used. Only after the threat of legal action from the ACA, including judicial review, and concerted political pressure from the S&TA and others has the VMD agreed to relent.

The ACA:

- * Used the Freedom of Information Act to force the VMD to disclose the existing Environmental Risk Assessments for cypermethrin submitted by manufacturers;
- * Fought the VMD over the right of angling interests to participate in the re-authorisation process as required under the Aarhus Convention to which the UK is a signatory;
- * Openly criticised as a sham the draft "Pollution Reduction Plan" which the ACA argues was intended to fudge the re-authorisation process by issuing advisory information which has largely failed for at least a decade;
- * Instructed barristers to investigate bringing a multimillion pound claim directly against the manufacturers of cypermethrin sheep dip for damage to English and Welsh rivers and fishing rights. The ACA may still pursue this claim for the severe damage that has already been caused to date.

Mark Lloyd, ACA Executive Director, said:

"We are delighted that many years of pollution by this sheep dip pesticide will now at last come to an end. This decision will have enormous benefits for wildlife, rural economies and damaged fish stocks. The process has highlighted serious shortcomings in the re-licensing process and the commitment of the VMD to public participation in decisions which affect the wider environment. The VMD has been at best opaque in its dealings with external organisations and has at times seemed to favour the interests of manufacturers before the health of our nation's water resources."

- * Synthetic pyrethroid (SP) chemicals, including cypermethrin, used in sheep dip are extremely toxic to aquatic invertebrate life when they get into rivers. Just a teaspoonful can cause almost total invertebrate kills for many miles downstream. Invertebrates are the principal food source of most fish, and many bird species.
- * The most effective way to protect sheep is to inject or use 'pour ons' and the cost will be reduced by wider use.
- * Sheep dip can find its way into rivers by a whole host of pathways: sheep walking into rivers after dipping; run-off from dripping sheep getting into drains and then streams; the disposal of used dip on land; effluent from fleece processing plants and accidental spillages.
- * Clubs or individuals wishing to join the ACA should phone 01568 620447 during office hours or download a subscription form from the web site: www.a-c-a.org

Contact point: Mark Lloyd (Director, ACA).

Tel: 01568 620447 Mobile: 07973 468198, [e-mail: mark@a-c-a.org](mailto:mark@a-c-a.org)

Further Action

"Whilst the ACA is delighted that the marketing licence for cypermethrin has been withdrawn, it is aware that significant stocks of the pesticide still remain on farms and in rural retail outlets. The Association has written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs urging her to use her powers to prohibit the supply of synthetic pyrethroid sheep dips and to require the manufacturers of these products to recall all such products from retailers and farmers."

Other Subjects

You will have read on the front page that there are a number of problems and subjects that we have not been able to report simply for the lack of space. The news in the main is of achievements and the future but there are many items which crop up on our agenda routinely, and if you want news on a particular problem or subject please either call or email me at the address or number on the back page.

Nick Brabner

Spring 2006 Eel Symposium

As readers recall I have written of the demise of our European Eel on many occasions even before ICES (International Council for the exploration of the Seas) declared in May 1998 that eel stocks were 'outside safe biological limits and that the current fishery is not sustainable'. Many of us have noticed over recent years that yellow eels, which we have taken for granted for so long, are almost a rarity. It is not unreasonable to suggest that large elver harvests in the 70s and early 80s have had a bearing on the reduced elver catches in recent years. Since 1998 events have slowly unfolded which will help to protect eels.

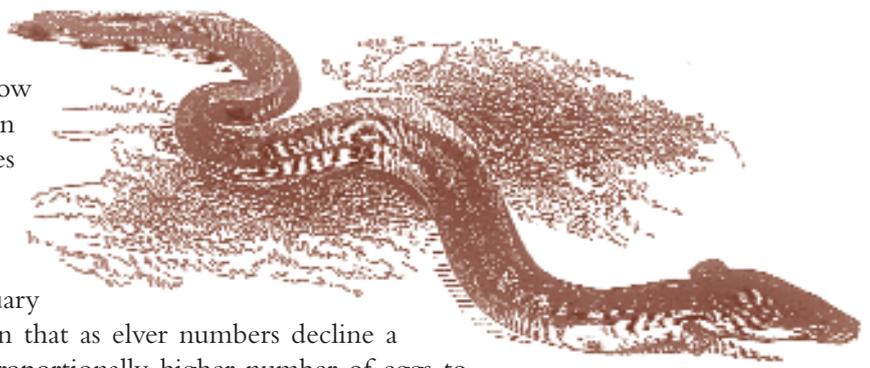
The Spring 2006 Eel Symposium organised by the Westcountry Rivers Trust in support of the Europe wide Indicang project, studying eels, was held in the Huxley Lecture Theatre of the Zoological Society of London seemed the ideal opportunity for an update. It was Tom Fort, who wrote that delightful book 'The Book of Eels' kicked the event off amusingly but not scientifically. The rest of the programme was fascinating:-

"Eels; a way of life"	Roger Castle, silver eel fisherman
"Eel recruitment and stock status in Britain"	Brian Knights, Univ. of Westminster /Kings Collage London
"Eels and elvers in the Thames"	Renata Kowalik, Zoological Soc. Of London
"The Indicang programme. From descriptors to indicators of the changes in stock, mortality and habitats of the European Eel: towards the implementation of a regional restoration plan"	Prof Eric Feunteun, Indicang Project
"Developments in the management of eel stocks in Europe: The EC Eel Recovery Plan and its implications for the UK"	Mike Pawson, CEFAS
"Severn eel management plan, compliance with targets and development of management actions"	Miran Aprahamian, EA
"Towards sustainable management of the Lough Neagh Fishery. The largest remaining wild eel fishery in Europe"	Robert Rosell, DARD, N.Ireland

There is an enormous amount going on but, as yet, nothing concrete to explain why recruitment is down. All those involved in field work say that although there has been a 80% reduction in elver returns since 1983, they have not collected sufficient data to conclude that the eel as a species is in danger and if it is 'why'. One of the aspects that is apparent is that eels are not penetrating as far from the sea as they did in the past. This means that numbers in estuaries and lower river reaches remain good but vast tracts of the middle and upper catchments have few if any eels. Blockages in a river system combining with reduced elver runs is the usual cause. Study over such a short period is unlikely to bring results in a breeding cycle of 12 to 18 years. It is highly satisfactory that all this scientific monitoring is in progress and that one day scientists will come up with an explanation. In the meantime, just before eels disappear off the face of the globe is it not sensible to apply a simple management strategy that will spread elvers into the areas of our river basins in which eels are now rarely seen but were commonly present 30 years ago. A large part of that strategy is already in place in the form of blockage removal and environment enhancement carried out by our own river trust, WUF. The elver fishermen should be recruited to fish for elvers for relocation in areas of need for a part of their fishing time. They could continue their commercial fishing for the remaining period. It would also be prudent to limit fishing to a particular period.

One of the extraordinary facts about the larvae of eels is that they take about two years to drift across the Atlantic after hatching in the Sargasso Sea and that 99.3% of the original hatched stock are predated or perish leaving only 0.7% to represent the whole of the European Stock in any one breeding season. Imagine how much the elver population would increase if 1% more of the larvae survived the Atlantic crossing. This is why a large (5lb+) silver eel will produce 2-5million eggs!

Another interesting fact that came from the conference is that the sex of an eel is determined by how many of them there are. When eel numbers are low a much higher proportion are the larger females than when you have plenty. It is likely that in the past times of plenty, most of the females came from the eastern edge of the range (Baltic, Mediterrean etc.) where elver numbers are low whilst the males came from regions of large elver runs such as the Severn estuary and Garonde. This creates a natural compensation in that as elver numbers decline a higher proportion of eels are female leading to a proportionally higher number of eggs to rebuild the population.



Brian Knights, of Univ. of Westminster/Kings College of London believes “There is insufficient evidence to prove whether the eel’s range has contracted to the extent of endangering the species, or that my compensation theory is correct. All I can say is that during the last major Ice Age, the range definitely shrank to refuges in N. Africa - yet the species survived! And that all the constraints and high fisheries mortality we have put on the eel in past centuries has not killed it off. On shorter (decadal) time-scale cycles, I think that we will return to ‘highish’ patterns observed back in the 1940-50s, possibly to the real ‘highs’ of the 1970-80s whereas we are currently at a position not dissimilar from the 1890s and 1920s ‘lows’.”

Robert Rosell of DARD in Northern Ireland talked of the eel Co-operative owned and run by about 150 part and whole time fishermen and their families. The 400 sq km Lough Neagh is the largest wild eel fishery in Europe harvesting about 500 tons of yellow and silver eels per year. Here they have a well developed 45 year old management system for catching, processing, marketing and recording both yellow and silver eels as well as elver trapping for distribution in Lough Neagh and surrounding feeder streams. As a supplement they buy elvers from the Severn elver fishery. Their catches are strictly controlled and recorded especially of silver eels so that there they only harvest about 25% of the total of emigrating population. For all this careful management the future of the fishery is not secure, because they too have seen a diminution of their elver immigration and the young people are not as keen to take up the hard work of eel fishing.

I conclude that the European proposal to set a percentage of silver eels for emigration and a like figure for elver immigration should be decided as soon as possible. How the member States comply is another question. The WFD is gradually being rolled out so it would be sensible to consider the River Basin District as areas within which control is administered. River Foundations have proved to be the most effective method of improving and protecting ecological standards of our rivers and with an incentive from Europe to enhance the migratory routes for eels we could comply relatively easily. Then that vital part of the food chain on our rivers could be preserved.

The final conundrum is do silver eels ever reach their breeding ground in or near the Sargasso? If not is the European Eel derived from that which migrates to the USA and Canada because that too is in a dire state. Fascinating, but no answers yet.

POACHING

Over the past few years we have seen an upturn in poaching especially in areas near townships. Usually the poachers are known on the waters and it is extremely frustrating not to be able stop this type of ‘theft’. As we all know the EAW just do not have the staff to frustrate the antics of trout poachers using rod and line and, indeed, they have to take the view that salmon poaching (the endangered species) takes precedence. The overall monitoring of illegal activity is still important. Reporting all instances of poaching to the EAW is vital so that they can build an accurate view of frequency and problem areas. However, it is not simple since the number they ask us to call cannot be called from a mobile, we have to call from a land line by which time the poacher has poached! We have an assurance that solving the problem is a priority.

In the meantime the advice is:

Always go in pairs, always take photographs of what you find and notes of what is said, always avoid using force. Always inform the EAW and Police of what has occurred.

If you are alone photographs are a real aid especially if the poacher(s) does not know you are there. Above all do not put yourself in any danger.

The EAW number is on your fishing license 0800 80 70 60

Anthony Rees MBE

We are delighted that Tony Rees was recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2005, just after our last Newsletter, for services to fishing in the Merthyr Tydfil area. As Hon. Treasurer of Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association he has been a part of their healthy expansion on the Usk. He has served on the Fisheries Ecology & Recreation Advisory Committee for EAW for sixteen years as well as the South East Area Environment Group and the EAW's Committee for water Abstraction Management Plans. He is a highly respected member of your own UUFA Committee and the Usk Local Fishery Group. He is currently Chairman of the Taff Local Fishery Group and Chairman of Welsh Salmon and Trout South East branch. A member of the Executive Committee of WSTAA he also serves on their Conservation Committee. He has put more into fishing than ever he has fished out! Congratulations from us all.

INQUIRY PROTECTS BRECON BEACONS FROM FUTURE SAND AND GRAVEL EXTRACTION

he Council for National Parks (1) is today rejoicing at the news that an independent planning inspector has rejected a policy that could have led to damaging sand and gravel extraction in sensitive areas of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The National Park Authority's Plan had set aside several areas of countryside which would not be developed because they might be needed for future sand and gravel extraction.

Following a public inquiry, the Inspector concluded (2) that sufficient evidence in respect of the quality of the sand and gravel had not been provided in order to meet the requirements set out by the Welsh Assembly Government. She also found that the environmental constraints of quarrying in the National Park had not been given sufficient consideration and recommended deletion of the policy.

Ruth Chambers, Head of Policy at the Council for National Parks, says "We are delighted that the Inspector has agreed with the evidence which we and others (3) presented at the public inquiry that was held in October 2005. We argued that this so-called 'safeguarding' of sand and gravel resources for future extraction was neither necessary nor appropriate in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

"We fully support the Inspector's conclusion that a policy that could have led to damaging sand and gravel extraction in the future has no place in the National Park Authority's Plan. Her resounding rejection of this policy has sent a clear signal to the National Park Authority which must now consult the public on any final changes to the plan. We hope that the Inspector's recommendation will prompt a rethink by the Welsh Assembly Government which had directed the Park Authority to include this policy in its plan. CNP has always maintained that because of the special environment of the National Park it is not appropriate to highlight sand and gravel resources in this way as they are unlikely ever to be worked.

This policy would have undermined the strong protection which the Brecon Beacons National Park is afforded".

Notes of Interest

1. The Council for National Parks is the national charity that works to protect and enhance the National Parks of England and Wales, and areas that merit National Park status, and promote understanding and quiet enjoyment of them for the benefit of all.
2. The Inspector's Report into the Brecon Beacons National Park Unitary Development Plan was prepared following a public inquiry held between 18th October 2005 and 14th December 2005 and can be viewed on the National Park Authority's website at

<http://www.breconbeacons.org/authority/localplan/BreconUDPRReportCoveringLetter.pdf>

<http://www.breconbeacons.org/authority/localplan/BreconUDPRReport.pdf>

The National Park Authority is expected to consult on proposed modifications to the Unitary Development Plan in the summer of 2006.

3. CNP joined forces with other objectors to present evidence to the Inspector at a round table discussion on the sand and gravel safeguarding policy. These included Talybont-on-Usk Community Council and local residents.

**Contact: Ruth Chambers, Head of Policy,
Tel 020 7924 4077 ext. 222**

Released 12th April 2006

I had the great pleasure of reporting the projects achievements and plans at last month's UUFA TGM. For those of you who where there please read on for a synopsis of the two talks while I hope those that couldn't make it will be able to see how far the project has come in the past twelve months.

At the TGM Stephen Marsh-Smith followed my talk with a presentation that placed the current state of the Usk on a ladder of fishery productivity that determines what actions we should be undertaking and provides the rationale for the UP project. In short the Usk is currently in a state where 'raising the bar' through improving the habitat and opening up of new areas will reap considerable long-term benefits. The basic concept is that there are enough fish in the river (both salmon and trout) to fully stock the majority of the catchment and in consequence surplus juvenile fish are dying until the natural carrying capacity is being reached. The main aim of the UP project is to raise this carrying capacity through providing more homes for the juveniles, thereby reducing the number that die which will increase in the medium term the number of fish in the river.

The headlines of what we have achieved in the past year are:

- We have now tackled most of the access issues in the catchment. Only the 'killer culverts' remain
- Almost 25km of stream has been coppiced and fenced. Another 9km is currently awaiting work.
- The Usk passport exceeded even our most optimistic expectations last year bringing over £75,000 into the local economy and now includes 2 roving voucher beats and 10 booking office beats in 2006.
- We have bid for an additional year of investment in the river to WEFO.

New homes

The quickest and most cost effective way of improving fish populations is to let them fully use the available habitat. This means that they need access to this habitat. In the case of the Usk much of the best salmon and trout nursery areas where blocked off with wiers, culverts and debris dams.

Building on the work that took place in 2004 and during the summer of 2005, two major obstructions were tackled in the middle river. The upper weir at Llanfrynach on the Menasgin, Fig 1, has long been an obstruction to fish on this potentially prime tributary. It provided us with considerable problems in that it was in too derelict a state to install a fish pass on its face yet the leet that came off it provided an important source of water for a couple of farms and a country wildlife site. In the end a novel solution was found that allowed us to remove the weir and yet preserve the flow in the leet through a screened pipe taking water from further upstream. This can be seen on the right hand side of the after photo in Fig 2.

UP!

Two years and still going

Simon Evans
Deputy Director,
Wye and Usk Foundation



Figure 1 - the derelict weir on the Menasgin



Figure 2 - Directly after removal.
Note the pipe preserving the flow down the leet)

On the Cynrig at Abercynrig the weir that takes water off for the EA's hatchery has also stopped fish migrating upstream into some prime potential salmon nursery area. By the end of the summer the site had been prepared and the back wall of an eventual 2-box pass had been installed raising the water height on the weir face by almost 2ft. Encouragingly even with the work only half completed (the middle wall will go in this summer) salmon and trout succeeded in passing the weir during last autumn's high water and after further work this summer they will skip over!

These two sites have opened up over 11km of prime salmon nursery area. A much-versed argument is the hatchery vs habitat debate. In the case of the Usk project the river is still in a state where we can achieve a lot for relatively little spend and these two fish passes are a great example. These two passes will cost around £20,000 when complete despite being complicated and relatively expensive, and the reopened river is first class habitat. When fully populated in a couple of years time the likely smolt output will be in the region of 6,000-8,000 p/a, free of charge of wild hardy fish with a concurrent high sea survival rate. Achieving this same output through the stocking of hatchery fry at the normal rate of 2/m² would cost around £15,000 per year. Over ten years this work will produce fish at less than 1/8th of the cost of a hatchery and most importantly at very low risk compared to a hatchery. Over twenty years the cost is a barely credible 5% of the cost of running a hatchery!



Fig 3. The Cynrig at Cantref, great parr habitat and a natural hatchery

A further piece of work targeted at trout took place on the Nant Ychen (trib of Rhiangoll) After last years work to let fish past the bridge footings at Cwmdu we looked upstream and found a redundant weir blocking trout migration in an important spawning stream - see Fig 4. Consent was obtained easily and work planned and implemented. In total it took less than a day to open about 2km of trout nursery stream.



Fig 4. A redundant weir on a trout stream in the Rhiangoll system

An example of the access work was shown in the EA's recent electrofishing results for 2005. In 2004 no salmon fry were recorded in the Honddu despite it consistently having fry before. The cause was identified at the start of the project as a large debris dam which was removed in the first summer (2004). In 2005 salmon fry were back at both Honddu electro-fishing sites showing successful spawning had occurred. Had the blockage been left in place every year would have cost many hundred returning salmon.



Fig 5. 2 hours later!

More bums on seats!

In last year's UUFA newsletter there was a sheet devoted to pictures of four severely degraded stretches of stream in the Usk catchment (alongside two blocking weirs). These sites were on the Honddu, Bran, and Ysgir. I am pleased to be able to say that all these sites have now been addressed as part of the substantial fish habitat improvement project that is a key part of UP. In total we are looking to do 36km of double bank stream length and with over 25km now completed things are on target. If you drive around the catchment you can be assured that any high quality riparian fencing is more than likely to be as a result of this project. Thanks to the initial survey this work has been targeted for maximum benefit to the whole river. The focus is currently on the Ysgir, Tarell and Honddu

Although some benefits are immediate the real returns accrue after a couple of years when the streams have narrowed and deepened and the weed growth established. In the Wye system we have a record of work stretching back to 1998 and streams such as the Edw and Llynfi Dulas are now showing the real benefit of past habitat improvement works. Any one on our recent autumn river walks will bear testament to this and we hope to report fully in the upcoming WUF newsletter on some of the results.

An example of this work with the Usk on Eppynt is shown in Figures 6 and 7.



Fig. 6 and 7 Before and after coppicing and stock exclusion on the Nant Bran

Passport scheme

A critical part of this work is to improve not only the fishery but also the value of the fishery to the local economy. This ensures the fishery being able to look after itself in the future. The Usk passport has unearthed a huge and growing demand for affordable fishing on the two rivers and through our novel booking office scheme the owners have been able to retain as much or as little control as they wish over the number and extent of fishing. This proved a huge success last year and we are fairly desperate for more water this year, if anyone feels they can spare a day or two on their fishery for some valuable day ticket revenue (perhaps to invest through the project back into the river!). Please contact Seth at the foundation (01982 551520) if you want to make use of the scheme

Last year the Passport contributed almost £100,000 to the economy of the Usk catchment and this year we have already sold for owners as much fishing as the whole of last year, we are only in early May!

Plans for this coming year

Two important things are happening this year. The first is that we are set to wrap up the Usk project as it was originally envisaged. This has been the single greatest investment in the freshwater part of the Usk for many years and sees a considerable amount of improvement 'in the bank'. I hope to write next year on what legacy it will have left. Secondly the one thing that the original survey pointed out was that there is so much potential within this river system and although this project will have gone along way to realising that there is still scope for more work. On this basis and the fact that European funds are starting to be withdrawn from Wales (possibly for good) the Foundation has submitted for a further years work upstream of Brecon. This extra boost of another £250,000. BBNP, EAW, CCW and the Welsh European Funding Office are all on board and have allocated over £200,000 to this project and we now need to raise a further year of support from the river to unlock this money.

We alongside the UUFA will shortly be writing to everyone seeking support for this project and detailing what it will achieve. Please take this last opportunity to lever down a substantial amount of money from Europe for the Usk.

THE USK SALMON

Action Plan (SAP)

In December 2001 a SAP consultation document was produced for the River Usk. Following extensive consultation the River Usk SAP was itself launched a little more than 1 year later (April 2003). The Usk SAP was one of more than 50 such documents covering all of the principal salmon rivers in England and Wales.

It describes the status of the Usk salmon population, those factors which currently limit the fish stocks and what actions need to be undertaken within the five year period of the plan to address the limiting factors. The Usk SAP process was one of engagement with all of those individuals and organizations with an interest in the management of salmon in the catchment and to agree on priority actions. The Usk Local Fishery Group was an important element of the action plan creation and today the plan is reviewed annually by the group to chart progress.

We know that today reported salmon catches do not compare favourably with the historic highs but apart from the overall decline in larger multi seawinter salmon we believe that the current level of spawning and recruitment are relatively healthy. The Usk has achieved its spawning target (14.2 million eggs, about 6000 adult salmon returning to the catchment annually) for the last 10 years. Nevertheless those involved with salmon management on the Usk recognise that there is no room for complacency and there is more to be done to safeguard the future of the Usk salmon and to restore fish numbers to previous levels.

Progress

The SAP partners have targetted actions at all stages of the salmon life history. In river, degraded juvenile habitat has been restored on the River Bran, adult salmon have been afforded better access at Brecon weir, anglers have been releasing ever greater numbers of salmon and exploitation by licensed nets in the Bristol channel has become a thing of the past. The safeguarding of these long term benefits has been enhanced by the encouragement of sustainable use of the salmon resource through angling marketing.

Some examples of the actions completed

The Wye and Usk Foundation has successfully garnered substantial European funds to match against those of key partners like the Riparian owners (essentially UUFA members), CCW and EA Wales. The "UP! Project" has delivered real benefits to improve the recruitment of salmon and trout through its work with local landowners to rehabilitate areas of damaged habitat and to increase access to spawning areas. The highly successful Wye and Usk passport scheme has promoted Usk angling very effectively and led to more angler visits to take advantage of restoration work.

During the lifetime of the plan Agency monitoring has revealed that whilst point source pollution is less problematic than previously "diffuse pollution" from rural land use remains a substantial problem in the catchment. Riparian zone improvement work will be beneficial but there is more to be done and the partnership of organizations behind the SAP are already working together effectively to promote catchment sensitive farming initiatives.

The Usk is a regulated river and has been notified under European legislation as a Special Area of Conservation. Under the Habitats Directive Review of Consents the Agency has investigated all of the consents we control in order to determine their impact on the interest features and several major abstractions are still in the process of determination. This links closely with the Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMs) which process is currently underway and has modelled water budgets in the catchment to determine areas of risk from over abstraction or over licensing of water.

Copies of the Usk SAP are available from the Environment Agency's Cardiff Office. Please contact Paul Greest (02920 245175) if you would like a copy of the document, or you can visit the EA website, www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Bill Purvis,
Team Leader Fisheries Technical Team
5th May 2006

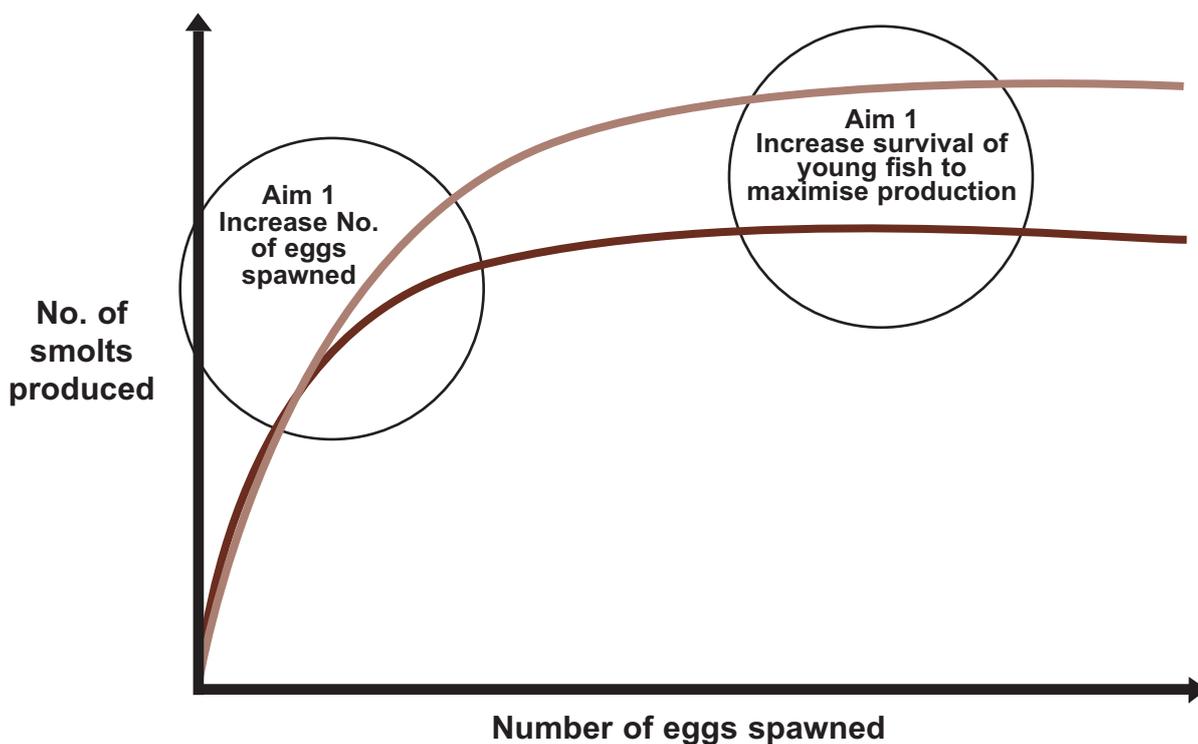
What Next ?????

Dr. Stephen Marsh-Smith of the Wye & Usk Foundation looks ahead

There will come a time when the current works such as fish passes construction and habitat restoration will be substantially complete. What will then be the management requirements for the Usk salmon fishery? This is very much an opportunity for those in the Foundation to stick our heads above the parapet and try and predict what the future holds.

There are not many rivers that have had this sort of opportunity, most battle with diminishing stocks, but the Tweed is one shining example of success. After a decade of removing barriers, habitat restoration and net buy outs, their rod catch has peaked at over 15,000. Indeed it seems that it is only the weather that is the limiting factor, as during their productive autumn fishing they can sometimes lose many otherwise productive days fishing. I am indebted to Dr Ron Campbell, the Tweed Foundations scientist for his vision and forward thinking in formulating this concept. This is adapted from one of his presentations.

To understand how salmon should be managed against an increasing population, there are a number of important points to consider. The graph below shows that an increasing egg deposition does not, after a certain point, result in increased smolt production.

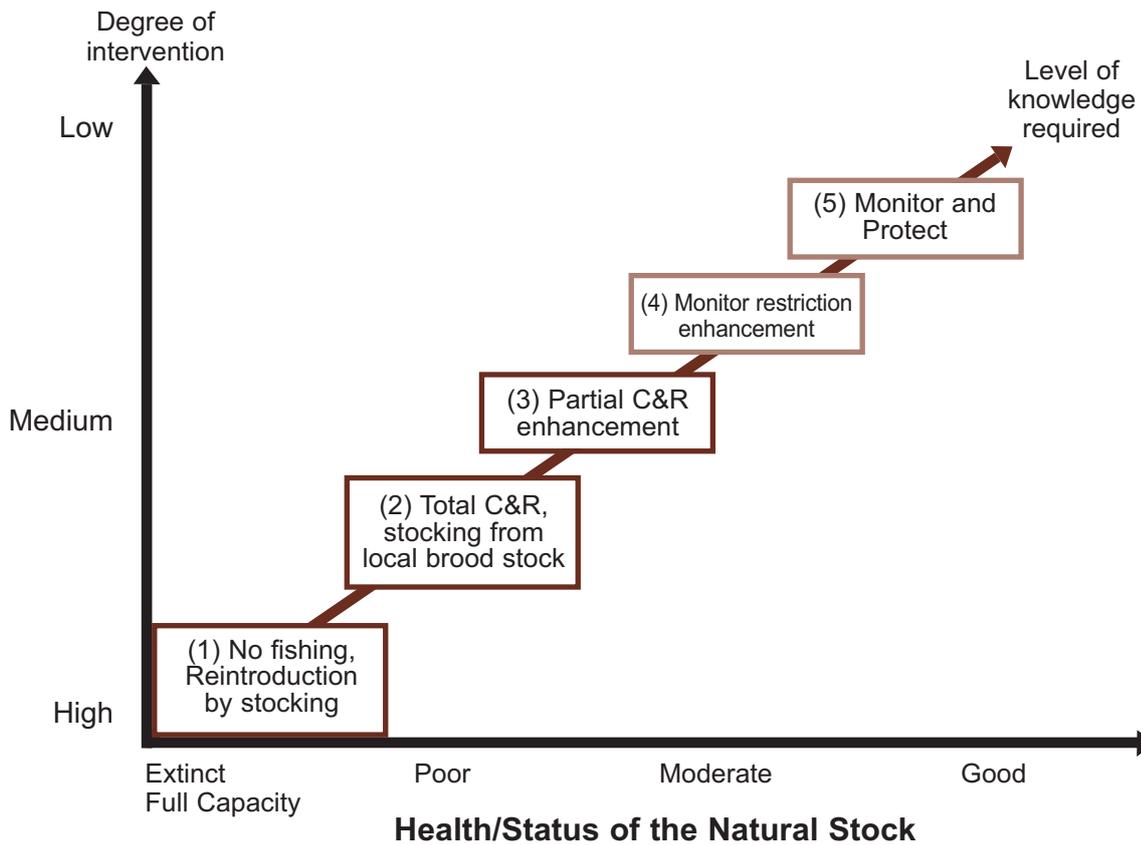


This phenomenon is due to the fact that at the parr life stage, the population is self limiting or “density dependent”. That is the river systems capacity to hold fish is at full and because of factors such as food and shelter, their numbers can rise no further, with the excess being lost typically to predation.

The gap between the dark and the light curve represent any potential improvement to this limitation that can be achieved by habitat restoration or enhancement, water quality improvements or increasing the area available for juvenile production by opening up new territories with fish passes etc. Nonetheless there remains a ceiling for every system.

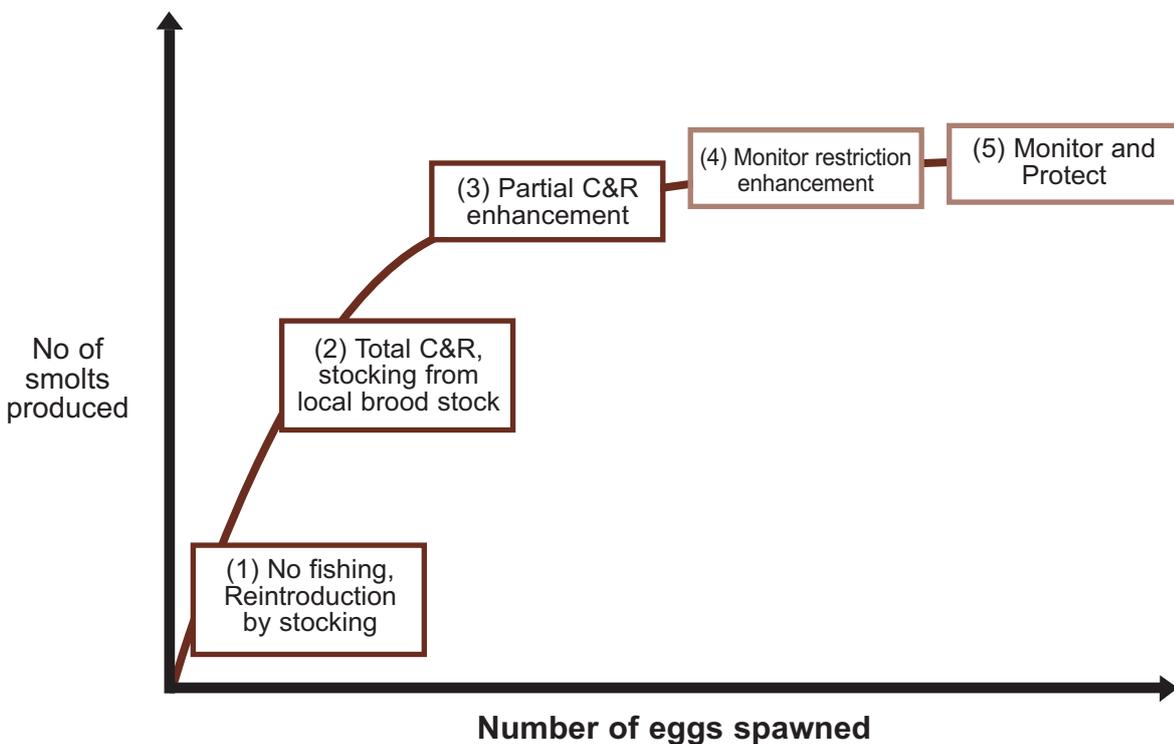
The implication is that once this ceiling is reached, fish can safely be harvested without any fear of long term damage to stocks, provided a core number is left for future generations. That core number being unique to each river. The lowering of estuarial exploitation in this situation frees up more fish for exploitation. However, at any point on the curve below the flat section, each fish removed, negatively impacts on future generations.

The next graph illustrates the actions required to manage a salmon fishery against increasing levels of success:



Quite simply, the more fish – the less active management is required. At the ‘best’ end, only monitoring is needed to check continued health, while at the other end when stocks are extremely low, cessation of fishing is required combined with stocking from stock obtained elsewhere. It goes without saying that at all levels, fish need to be protected from poaching.

Putting the two concepts together:



The management actions are now related to the “Stock Recruitment Curve” as it is known. No one would have any difficulty in say selecting the position the Tweed would occupy on this scale or indeed, at the other end – the Mersey, where a handful of fish have been spotted. The crucial question is where on the curve should we pin the Usk salmon stocks?

UNITED USK FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

INCOME	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Membership	1090	1195	1170
Donations	165	192	252
Interest	30.81	15.01	39.05
Total Income	1285.81	1402.01	1461.85
EXPENDITURE			
Sub's ACA	15	0	15
Sub's S & TA	40	40	50
Postage	0	117.95	79.10
Newsletter	828.2	949.20	885
Adverts AGM	0	128.78	0
Loss Dinner AGM	0	132.5	0
Brecon Weir	3000	0	0
Total Expenditure	3883.2	1368.43	1029.1
Excess / deficit	(2597.39)	33.58	432.75
Current A/c:	balance as at end August 05	£705.00	
Savings A/c:	balance as at end August 05	£2,623.60	

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