

WYE & USK FOUNDATION NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

SALMON RETURN TO THE RIVERS LUGG AND ARROW

For the first time in thirty years significant numbers of Atlantic salmon have been observed in the River Lugg and its main tributary the River Arrow, a sub-catchment of the Wye. The discovery adds to recent evidence gathered by anglers and scientists of a recovery in the population of this iconic species throughout the Wye.

Salmon and other fish species rely on free access to their spawning grounds in the headwaters of rivers. The rivers Lugg and Arrow had been closed off to migrating fish by a series of man-made weirs, some of them built hundreds of years ago, others in the 1970s. This increasing lack of access was one of the reasons for the dramatic decline in Wye salmon numbers in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2003, a partnership of the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) and Environment Agency (EA) embarked on a programme to re-open the rivers, starting that year with the EA-built fish pass on the weir at Hampton Court near Leominster. Since then, 31 more passes have been completed. The fish passage work has also been complimented by improvements to habitat and water quality, enabling the rivers to support more fish. It is estimated that when operating at full capacity, the Lugg and Arrow catchment could add a further 3,000 to 4,000 fish to the Wye salmon run.

Surveys this autumn found encouraging numbers of young salmon distributed throughout much of the Lugg and Arrow catchments. These wild fish will spend just over another year in the river before migrating to sea where they stay for a further two years before returning to spawn in their rivers of origin. The surveys also found brown trout numbers had improved – they too rely on free access to the very small tributaries at the top of the rivers.

Dr Stephen Marsh-Smith, Executive Director of the Wye & Usk Foundation said *“It’s taken a decade to build these fish passes. The paperwork has been as big a task as actually building them. However, once built, they will last for years, ensuring continuity of salmon and trout populations for decades to come. We would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that help fund the work, especially the Lugg and Arrow Fisheries Association.”*

David Forbes, Chairman of the Lugg and Arrow Fisheries Association (LAFA), the organisation that provided the core money for much of the programme, commented that: *“These results are*

testament to 10 years of river improvement jointly carried out with the WUF rivers team. There are, however, still some areas of the catchment where we need to address pollution.”

For the Environment Agency, Pete Gough (who started the project and has now moved to Natural Resources Wales) and Chris Bell stated: *“It’s taken a long time to make the rivers available for salmon again, starting with the high-cost fish passes at Hampton Court and Leominster. There will be more effort required in future to fully restore connections for all species of fish in the river, as is required under the EU’s Water Framework Directive, but these results show what we can achieve.”*

Mick Palfrey, a local angler and member of Hereford & District Angling Association, said: *“There seems to be a lot more salmon in the river than there has been for a while. Our club members caught 14 this year, compared to a yearly average of 2 over the previous 5 years. This is good news for all anglers and for the river’s future.”*

****ENDS****

Notes for Editors

For more information and photos, please contact Stephen Marsh-Smith at the Wye & Usk Foundation on 07812 118 065 or stephen@wyeuskfoundation.org
A Powerpoint presentation of the results of the Lugg and Arrow survey is also available by request.

The Organisations:

The Wye & Usk Foundation is a registered charity concerned with restoring the habitat, water quality and fisheries of the rivers Wye (of which the Lugg and Arrow are tributaries) and Usk. For more information please see: www.wyeuskfoundation.org

Natural Resources Wales brings together the work of the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, as well as some functions of Welsh Government. Their purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and in the future. See www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk for more details.

The Environment Agency is an executive non-departmental Public Body responsible to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Their principal aims are to protect and improve the environment, and to promote sustainable development. They play a central role in delivering the environmental priorities of central government through their functions and roles. For more information, please see www.environment-agency.gov.uk

The Lugg and Arrow Fisheries Association is made up of anglers, riparian owners and other individuals interested in the health of these rivers. The Association raises significant sums for river restoration work and represents Lugg and Arrow interests on various external committees.

The Work:

The 10-year programme to re-open the Lugg and Arrow was carried out by a partnership of the Wye & Usk Foundation and Environment Agency. The funding for WUF's work came from a variety of organisations including: the Lugg & Arrow Fisheries Association; SITA Trust, the European Fisheries Fund; European Regional Development Fund; Herefordshire Rivers Leader+ Programme and Defra's Catchment Restoration Fund. Please see www.wyeuskfoundation.org/projects for more details.

The Rivers:

The Lugg is the major Wye tributary. It rises in the heart of the Radnorshire Forest. It flows in an easterly direction through Presteigne and on to Leominster, where it turns south to join the Wye just downstream of Hereford. The Arrow also rises in the Radnorshire Forest flowing east before joining the Lugg just south of Leominster. Both are host to an array of wildlife and sections of the Lugg have been designated both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Extensive work has been carried out in recent years by LAFA, WUF and the Environment Agency to improve habitat and water quality of both rivers, as well as re-establish access to spawning grounds for migrating salmon and trout.

The river Wye rises on the slopes of Pumlumon in the Cambrian Mountains and flows for approximately 152 miles in a generally south easterly direction, through Builth Wells, Hay-on-Wye, Hereford, Ross-on-Wye and Monmouth, before joining the Severn Estuary at Chepstow. The river is host an array of wildlife and is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for most of its length.