

PRESS RELEASE

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NATURAL RESOURCES WALES REIGN OVER POTENTIAL EXTINCTION OF WYE SALMON

The new River Wye salmon fishing season opens on 03 March against a dire warning from Natural Resources Wales, who manage the Wye, that without drastic remedial action the river, and most others in Wales, will be devoid of salmon in ten to twenty years' time. A situation they have been repeatedly warned about for over twenty years.

Salmon are at the heart of the biodiversity of the Wye Valley. Without them, the populations of many other species of all types will continue to crash.

The latest warning given by scientists at a NRW Wales Fisheries Forum held online on 31st January, concluded 'Atlantic salmon and sea trout in Wales are declining at unprecedented rates and predictive modelling indicates that many populations may be threatened with extinction within two decades if current conditions remain'. They continued, 'Salmon populations may recover from complete extirpation if limiting factors and environmental constraints (including fishing) are removed, and if neighbouring populations remain healthy'.

Another warning to get fishers shaking in their waders: are NRW-prepared to consider closing the river for salmon fishing if numbers fail to recover under their, NRW's, beleaguered plans?

"Their efforts, to date, to achieve this recovery are an abject failure," says Stuart Smith, chairman of the Wye Salmon Association (photographed).

"Over the last twenty years an estimated £20 million has been spent on the river improving habitat, removing obstacles and, attempting to improve water quality to aid salmon recovery. Whilst now recognising the seriousness of the situation, their proposals are more of the same and clearly this is not an answer, as the past twenty years has proved.



"The truth is precisely the opposite. NRW reigns over the Wye, one of the most environmentally classified rivers in the UK (SAC and SSSI status) which is also one of the most polluted rivers in the UK. Salmon stocks, a key indicator species, have been declining for more than two decades, with no signs of a reversal. The 2021 season recorded the lowest salmon catch in the river's history.

“We are facing an apocalypse for Wye salmon unless NRW adopts a more holistic approach to recovery such as that which was successfully implemented on the River Skjern in Denmark. This must include reopening its hatchery for salmon restocking **within 12-months** using Wye brood stock, along with urgently implementing levels of future-proofing salmon stocks by Gene Banking and the use of Cryogenics. What they are doing now, and have been for at least 20 years, is simply not working. They are overseeing and effectively encouraging the potential extinction of the salmon in the Wye and on many other rivers throughout Wales.”

Another factor, following the crash in adult salmon numbers, and pointing towards the rapidly approaching salmon apocalypse on the Wye, is the lowest ever recorded juvenile salmon number counted in electro fishing programmes last year, another trend seen over many years.

“There appears to be a small cadre within NRW who, despite evidence from around the UK and Europe that hatcheries can improve salmon numbers, remain fundamentally opposed to reopening their hatchery at Abercynrig for salmon recovery. Their thinking is beyond comprehension. Why would you carry on doing what has not worked for 20 years and expect a different outcome? There is more than a touch of the Roman Emperor Nero’s fiddle playing about them, they are clearly hiding from the obvious for some reason” says Stuart.

A salmon hatchery requires catching Wye broodstock (cocks and hens) at the end of the season, stripping them of eggs and milt and creating a safe environment for eggs to incubate and juvenile fish to grow. At the parr stage, juveniles would be transferred to rearing ponds to grow on naturally to smolts that would be released, across the catchment, to grow and make their way to sea. This process is proven to yield six times more smolts than ‘in river’ rearing. The broodstock would be carefully reconditioned, returning to good health, before being released back into the river to head back to sea to grow again and return. Associated with this is a Gene Banking/Cryogenic programme protecting and future-proofing the Wye Salmon gene pool.

“Focussed management on river habitat improvements and control of the issues of predation within the river and estuary, along with water quality resolution, are vital, but unless we open the hatchery soon, to bolster failing stock, there will not be sufficient salmon left for the species to survive. We are not advocating a long term, forever, stocking programme, simply one that supports what is left until stock numbers significantly improve above the set conservation limits. Currently numbers are seriously below those internationally set conservation limits.

“Without a truly holistic plan, in place NOW, what the Wye salmon face will really be apocalypse now,” says Stuart.

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Notes to Editors:

For more information on this press release contact Graham Paskett, a salmon fishery owner on the Wye, on 07860 737 225 or email grahampaskett@paskett.co.uk

Link to image: <https://bit.ly/3E8xfet>

The Wye Salmon Association is the only organisation that is specifically tasked with protecting the long-term viability of the Wye salmon as a self-sustaining wild species. Parts of its role is to raise awareness of their plight from all in-river causes and the impact on the local economy of the reduction in salmon numbers. The current focus is on tackling pollution. Since 1975 the number of rod caught salmon in the Wye has plummeted.