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**PRESS RELEASE**

**THE SALMON ARE COMING BACK TO THE WYE**

**Rod catches exceed 1000 for first time in 12-years**

Evidence that the £5 million improvements carried out on the River Wye over the past 12 years have started to pay dividends has been revealed with the news that, for the first time since 1996, salmon rod catches have exceeded 1000 fish.

Figures from the Wye and Usk Foundation, the registered charity that has driven major changes to help the salmon in these two rivers, show that 1066 rod-caught salmon were reported for the 2008 season in the Wye – and between 75% and 80% were returned by anglers.

“This is the first tangible sign of what is a huge achievement,” says Dr Stephen Marsh-Smith, chairman of the foundation. “Over the past 12 years we have devised an original method of correcting water acidification in the upper reaches of the river system. Together with our partners, we have removed barriers that previously prevented returning salmon from spawning. So far we have reinstated almost 50% of the entire Wye catchment area that was previously blocked to returning salmon. That is more than 450 km of spawning streams. We have fenced off more than 125 km of damaged tributary stream.

“The nets were bought off by us in 2000 and we have been instrumental in encouraging change to bye-laws that reduce salmon exploitation. Our catch and release scheme is clearly working, as the latest figures show.”

Dr Marsh-Smith added that although 1066 salmon is a milestone there is still a long way to go to reach the former glory days of the Wye when more than 3500 were regularly caught by anglers each season. The declines in the Wye started in the early 1970s.

“The exciting news”, according to Major Patrick Darling, chairman of the Wye Salmon Fishery Owners Association, “is that there should be more to come because the real benefits of all these improvements, in terms of the number of fish returning to spawn, will not be fully realised for several years. It is also worth noting that for the vast majority of the summer the river was in flood and not fishable so the total could, perhaps, have been higher.”

Pete Gough of the Environment Agency Wales said: “The partnership approach to addressing the problems on the Wye, prompted by the Wye and Usk Foundation, has been inspirational and together we have worked hard and spent a lot of money to improve the fish habitats and ensure that they can safely and successfully gain access to them.

“One result of this has been salmon spawning in remote places where they have not been seen for decades. In other locations we have higher numbers of fry. Importantly, much of the work has been of great benefit to the wider biodiversity of our river. Environment Agency Wales is pleased to announce that we are now building on this success by investing more money to achieve greater results for the environment.”

The majority of the £5 million has come from the EU, the owners and fishermen of the Wye and the Wye and Usk Foundation’s partners; the Environment Agency Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales.

“We work with an enormous number of different organisation as part of this improvement programme but none of it would have been possible without the help and support of the farmers and landowners, through whose land the river flows,” added Dr Marsh-Smith.

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