



PRESS RELEASE

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MULTI-MILLION POUND PROJECT TO REOPEN UK'S LONGEST RIVER TO PROTECTED FISH SPECIES

Work begins this week on a major UK wildlife project on the River Severn thanks largely to £10.8 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) – using National Lottery players' money - and £6 million from the European Union LIFE programme.

The £19.7 million project is one of the largest of its kind ever attempted in Europe, and also one of the biggest natural environment schemes ever supported by HLF. *Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife* is being run by the Canal & River Trust, Severn Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and Natural England.

The project will reopen 158 miles of the River Severn to fish, by creating routes around physical barriers that currently prevent migration to critical spawning grounds. This will help to secure the long-term future of many of the UK's declining and protected fish species, particularly the now threatened twaite and allis shad which hundreds of years ago were a staple food in the court of Henry III.

Many of these species became extinct in the upper reaches of the River following the installation of locks and weirs required to allow navigation that powered the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s. State of the art fish passes will now be installed on four navigation weirs on the River Severn and fish passage improvements made at two sites on the River Teme.

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "The National Lottery is one of the biggest funders of the UK's natural heritage, so it's entirely fitting it is supporting *Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife*. The shad may be almost unknown now, but it was the fish of kings and queens, from Henry III to Elizabeth I and Charles II. The River Severn used to teem with the migratory activity of this species - and with other species that will also benefit from this investment. This project will bring new life and increased biodiversity to a significant stretch of the longest river in the UK and will also see historic buildings from the Severn's industrial past restored and given new uses."

Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife will also deliver ambitious heritage, education and science programmes that aim to reconnect eight million people with the River. This includes working with over 200 school classes, 100 community groups and creating thousands of volunteering opportunities.

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Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: First Floor North, Station House, 500 Elder Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BB

The project aims to have the knock-on effect of attracting more visitors to the region and boosting the local tourist economy. Recreational fishing on the River Severn currently contributes £13.5million per year to the local economy, and it is hoped that the project will boost this by a further £4million.

HLF has confirmed its support for the project, having already supported two years of research and planning by the project partners. Work will begin at Powick Weir and Knightsford Bridge weirs in July. Work at the other sites - Diglis, Holt, Bevere and Lincomb weirs - which have recently secured planning permission, will be carried out over the next three years.

Jason Leach, Canal & River Trust programme director, says: "This project has been in the waiting for over 150 years. While the Severn has been fundamental to the progress of communities along its length in that time, we now have the opportunity to return the eco-system on this stretch of the river to as close as possible to its natural state. If we can do this, it will have a vital impact in enabling protected and endangered species to thrive once more. The project will be ground-breaking in scale and will create best practice for natural heritage management, conservation and biological research across the world. We also believe it can have a positive impact on the local economy and create new opportunities for people to enjoy and benefit from the river."

Tony Bostock, Chief Executive Officer of the Severn Rivers Trust, says: "We are thrilled that the importance of this project and the wildlife of the UK's longest river has been recognised in this way. This is a once in a generation opportunity to make an extremely positive change to the ecology of the River Severn. The Severn Rivers Trust is delighted to be involved in this work moving forward and we can't wait to get going bringing the communities along the river into this project."

Paul Herickx, Project Manager, Environment Agency, says: "The Environment Agency hold significant responsibility in striving to improve our environment and it is through flagship internationally renowned projects such as Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife that these responsibilities can be brought to the fore. Working alongside all of the delivery partners for the scheme, we look forward to positively changing the Severn catchment for the benefit of a wide range of species of fish but also to the engagement of the local communities. The success of the scheme is equally as dependent on that engagement as it is the opening up of over 150 miles of breeding habitat on the Severn and the Teme. As someone that has grown up in Worcestershire, it is a privilege to be leading such a fantastic scheme to improve one of its greatest features."

Shad used to run in their hundreds of thousands each May before the construction of these weirs in the nineteenth century. From monitoring carried out in 2017 the surviving run was estimated at around 15,000 individuals, who make it as far as Upper Lode Weir in Tewkesbury. Initial results for the 2018 migration carried out at Upper Lode Weir, suggest the run estimate may be below 10,000, possibly a result of the cool spring.

For more information about *Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife* visit http://severnriverstrust.com/projects_categories/unlocking-the-severn/

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About the partners:



The **Canal & River Trust** cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk



The **Severn Rivers Trust** is an independent environmental charity established to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of the rivers, streams, watercourses and water bodies in the Severn catchment, and to advance the education of the public in the management of water and the wider environment.

Our vision is to have living, working landscapes that deliver employment, food and amenity without impacting on rivers and biodiversity, and without the need for heavy regulation and supervision.

www.severnriverstrust.com / SevernRiversTrust / @SevernRivers



The **Environment Agency** protect and improve the environment and make it a better place for people and wildlife. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

www.gov.uk/environment-agency @EnvAgencyMids / @EnvAgency



Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's natural heritage and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england / @NaturalEngland



Thanks to National Lottery players, the Heritage Lottery Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #HLFsupported and #NationalLottery.



LIFE is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU. Since 1992, LIFE has co-financed some 4306 projects. For the 2014-2020 funding period, LIFE will contribute approximately €3.4 billion to the protection of the environment and climate.

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/life-programme> @LIFEprogramme

More about *Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife*:

As part of the cultural and educational elements of the project an exciting new learning space is being developed on Diglis lock island in Worcester which will breathe life into a disused heritage building. Thousands of school children and visitors will be able to come to the site to see one of the huge fish passes in action and learn about industry and conservation on the river.

Work experience placements and specialist apprenticeships will provide young people with a flavour of jobs in conservation and build skills for their future careers. An interactive exhibition all about the project will be touring Gloucestershire Worcestershire and Shropshire, culminating in a spectacular finale festival in 2021 that will bring together schools, volunteers, engineers, scientists, historians and artists to showcase and celebrate the River Severn.

The project will need an army of citizen scientists to help collect data for the large-scale research to survey and monitor river wildlife. Not only this, enthusiastic nature lovers and culture-buffs can get involved by becoming education volunteers inspiring school children with site tours and hands-on learning to help them explore the river.

Volunteers will also be trained to research the river's history by exploring fascinating archives – photographs, paintings, maps, diaries and objects – as well as interviewing people who remember the river. Practical taskforce days along the riverbank will offer people the chance to

get involved by planting trees, controlling invasive species and collecting litter – they will spend time out in beautiful river environments and meeting new people while making improvements for wildlife at the same time.

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