

31 May 2017

## Protecting our wildlife: EU project to improve management of Salmon and Sea Trout Populations in the English Channel

The EU Interreg France (Channel) England programme has today (31 May 2017) announced that it will fund 5.4 million euros towards an environmental project led by Hampshire based Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust that will provide vital research on the populations of salmonids (salmon and sea trout) in the Channel area to better inform the management of these populations.

With Atlantic salmon and sea trout populations declining by as much as 70% since the 1970s<sup>6</sup>, the project known as SAMARCH (SAlmonid MAnagement Round the CHannel) aims to gather information on salmonid populations which will then be used to improve the management and protection of these populations. The research will focus on several key areas including tracking the movements of salmonid populations in estuaries and coastal waters to determine what proportion of fish die in these areas. The project will use DNA analysis, to map areas in the Channel that are important for sea trout and analyse how males and female can respond to climate change.

The information gathered from the 5 year project will then be used to improve the tools used by the regulatory bodies in England and France to manage salmonids stocks and to push through changes in regulations on the management of salmonids in estuaries and coastal waters which, if implemented, could lead to a 6-9% increase in adult populations of salmonid in the Channel area. These changes in regulation will also have a direct impact on the water quality in estuaries and coastal waters.

The research is vitally important as Atlantic salmon and sea trout play a major role in coastal and river ecosystems, with juveniles providing a key source of food for other fish such as sea bass and lamprey, sea birds and otters. Whereas the adults provide a food source for dolphins, porpoise and seals. Salmonids also have a considerable economic importance through angling in Europe, estimated to be worth as much as €1.2 billion<sup>7</sup>.

Dylan Roberts of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Project Manager commented: *“Until recently, management has focused largely on addressing issues in freshwater, however we know that over 90% of salmon that leave our rivers for their feeding grounds in the north Atlantic die at sea.*

*“Recent developments in fish tracking technology, DNA analysis and data modelling now enable us to investigate what proportion of this mortality occurs in the estuary and coastal areas, their movements through these areas, as well as an improvement in the tools used to manage salmon.*

*“This work is particularly important because of the growth of coastal renewable energy schemes such as underwater turbines which could harm fish. We are delighted that the Interreg France (Channel) England programme has decided to support our project and we look forward to working with our partners over the next 5 years.”*

The project with a total budget of 7.8 million euros with 69% funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, representing a European Regional Development Fund contribution of 5.4 million euros. A total of 10 organisations from France and the UK will be involved in the project.

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**For further information, please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors**

1. The Interreg FCE Programme is a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to fund high quality cooperation projects in the Channel border region between France and England. It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies. The Programme has a total of €223 million of ERDF funds to distribute by 2023 and is managed by Managing Authority Norfolk County Council.
2. Project approval is subject to the Grant Offer Letter being signed.
3. Project Partners:
  - Lead Partner: Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (UK)
  - Institut National de Recherche Agronomique (France)
  - Institut National Supérieur des Sciences Agronomiques, Agroalimentaires, Horticoles et du Paysage (France)
  - University of Exeter (UK)
  - Bournemouth University (UK)
  - Environment Agency (UK)
  - Salmon and Trout Conservation (UK)
  - Aence Française pour la Biodiversité (France)
  - Normandie Grands Migrateurs (France)
  - Bretagne Grands Migrateurs (France)
4. The Programme operates within a clearly defined eligible area, covering the South and East Coasts of England from Cornwall to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Finistère to Pas-de-Calais. The programme area can be found [here](#).
5. More information about the Programme can be found at <https://interreg5a-fce.eu/>.
6. Centre for Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science, 2014
7. Le Quesne and Selby Report, 2007