

news release

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River Wear highlighted for its improvements

The River Wear has been named by the Environment Agency as one of the most improved rivers in England and Wales.

Ten rivers, including the Wear, has been selected for shrugging off their industrial past to become havens for wildlife, walkers and anglers once again.

In 1965 just two salmon were caught on the then-polluted River Wear which contrasts with 2010 when 1,531 were caught - the best every salmon rod catches ever recorded for the river.

The transformation of the river has been achieved thanks to habitat improvement projects, tighter regulation of polluting industries and work with farms and businesses to reduce pollution and improve water quality.

Phil Rippon, fisheries technical specialist for the Environment Agency, said: "There has been a lot of work done to improve water quality and fish passage and now the results are really paying off.

"Salmon can only thrive in good quality water and the Wear is now the second best salmon river in England and Wales, after the Tyne."

He said that there was still more work to be done on the River Wear to encourage the development of coarse fish such as dace and chub.

Earlier this year the Environment Agency stocked the Wear with chub and bream to help recovering fish stocks, and provide increased angling opportunities. Work by the fisheries enforcement team to crack down on illegal fishing also means that more mature fish are now reaching their spawning grounds.

Staff have also been working with angling groups to improve fish passage on the Wear and its tributaries such as the River Gaunless, and Cong Burn near Chester-le-Street, by removing obstructions and installing fish passes.

The team is also reinstating reed beds on Cong Burn, which were once a common feature of the floodplain in England and Wales. Reed beds attract a variety of wildlife from invertebrates to otters but many have been lost due to land development.

The Environment Agency has also directed improvements in the river's water quality which have led to the rebuilding of all the sewage treatment works in the Wear catchment and improvements in the sewerage network.

The River Wear rises in the Pennines and flows eastward to join the North Sea at Sunderland. It is approximately 100 kilometres long from its source to where it becomes tidal at Lamb Bridge between Chester-le-Street and Washington.

By 2015 the UK must meet tough new EU targets on the water quality and ecology of its rivers and lakes. This year the Environment Agency, with partners such as Natural England, is targeting £18 million of Defra funding to help more rivers meet the new EU targets.

Notes to editors

The ten most improved rivers (in no particular order) are:

River Wandle, London
River Thames
River Wear in County Durham
River Stour in Worcestershire
River Darent, Kent
River Dee in the North West, England and Wales
River Nar in Norfolk
River Taff in South Wales
River Stour, Dorset
The Mersey Basin, North West.