

SOUTH CUMBRIA RIVERS TRUST

Caring for the lakes, rivers and wetlands in the southern Lake District

This newsletter is directed at anglers and riparian owners in the southern Lake District. Its purpose is to advise that we now have a single Rivers Trust covering all of South Cumbria.

Nationally the formation of River Trusts has become an increasingly important feature of efforts to protect and preserve water quality and ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of our natural fresh water fisheries. In the past we would have expected the NRA or EA to do this type of work, but current EA funding falls well short of what is required. To be effective locally we need to recognise and operate within today's environment. Since 1995 over £10 million has been granted by various bodies towards work initiated and progressed by River Trusts. Some of these river trusts are now very large and successful, such as the one covering the Eden. We aim to emulate their success in South Cumbria and we will be part of a national network under the auspices of the Association of River Trusts (ART)

We received a serious wake up call in 2003 when the EA imposed a compulsory catch and release for salmon on the Leven and Crake catchments. While there may not have been universal acceptance of the need for such a severe restriction, it did highlight the critical need that we have in South Cumbria to organise ourselves, and to protect and preserve what we have in terms of our natural fisheries and aquatic ecosystems.

The Trust is not an angling club, or part of the NAFAC consultative structure. Our business activities are habitat restoration, conservation, education and lobbying. We will work at the identification of problems in the aquatic environment, consult and do research to find solutions, procure funding and manage projects through to completion. We will work within the current political realities to maximise our chances of procuring funds. We recognise that effective partnerships with other stakeholders with overlapping interests will be key to our success.

Start Up and Funding

The Trust has now entered a six month development phase. This phase will be managed by John Cleaver, who has been appointed Executive Director for the period. We already have start up funding of £11,200 committed, with major contributions from WADAA, Leven Angling Association and the Association of River Trusts. Given the major commitment from the two local clubs, it would be very much appreciated if other clubs could review what donation they could make to SCRT start up funding. As a guideline £1 or more per club member is suggested depending on the circumstances of the Club. Individual donations are also sought, see later.

Background and History

The Leven and Crake Conservation Trust (LCCT) was formed as a direct response to reducing salmon runs. The main impetus came from the Holker Estate and the Leven Angling Association. The Crake Catchment Improvement Association (CCIA) already existed. Subsequently it was agreed that these two organisations should merge.

Meanwhile the Kent Rivers Improvement Group (KRIG) had been running in parallel along much the same lines and timescales. Towards the end of 2005 the two organisations started to explore the possibility and potential benefits of combining to form a single rivers trust covering the whole of South Cumbria. In January each organisation gave the go ahead, and on January 30th 2006 the new organisation **South Cumbria Rivers Trust (SCRT)** came into existence. The organisation has been registered as a Company limited by guarantee, and an application to be a charitable trust is in progress.

Scope

Duddon interests had already decided to join LCCT, while KRIG covered the Kent, Mint, Sprint, Bela and Gilpin. Thus the scope for the combined SCRT will be all catchments between the Bela, near Milnthorpe, and the Duddon near Millom. It is acknowledged that the Trust has not yet engaged with all fishery interests in all of these catchments.

The Eden and Ribble have their own Trusts; and the Lune a habitat group, but some parts of Cumbria are not covered. There is therefore a possibility that the Trust could cover the west coast in addition, if invited at some point by local interests. At present however there is more than enough to do within our current scope.

The areas that will receive the benefits will be those that are surveyed by volunteers working in collaboration with the EA, to identify problems and solutions. For example fencing to keep stock away from the water and promote bank side vegetation, or measures to prevent erosion and silting, or contamination by farm stock. If you want to get involved in this sort of work, please advise. People with local knowledge and an eye for the environment will be very welcome.

Recent Improvement work carried out on our rivers.

Apart from the administrative activity of forming the new Trust, a great deal of the work has been carried out in the last few years by the historic Trusts and other parties on the key issues of water quality, and habitat improvement.

On the **Leven** the fish counter has been re-built and returned to operation in September 2005, some fencing of becks has been completed, spawning gravel has been improved and the hatchery has continued to supplement salmon stocking levels. RES Funding has recently been granted for some fencing work on Cunsey Beck.

On the **Crake** about 400m of fencing on Smithy Beck was completed and a number of pools re-instated. In addition over the winters 2001 to 2003 a seemingly very successful stocking of salmon ova in Scottie boxes was carried out in various locations. A fish pass has been completed at Yew Tree Tarn. Above Bouthrey Bridge various in-river features have been added to try to improve the quality of the gravel for spawning.

On the **Kent** several projects have been identified and funding is being sought. In addition various clubs have completed projects on their own waters.

On the **Bela** fishery owners have carried out substantial habitat improvement work.

The above work has been initiated, funded and managed by a number of organisations including the EA, DEFRA, LCCT, CCIA, KRIG, KWAA, C&TAA, M&DAA, Dallam Estate and WADAA. In future SCRT will play the pivotal role in initiating and progressing activities such as this. We hope that all angling interests and riparian owners will join, and work with us on endeavours such as these.

The Catch and Release Restriction on the Leven and Crake

SCRT believes that an appropriate and sustainable level of exploitation by anglers is an essential element of our efforts to protect and preserve our Salmonid fisheries. Our experience three years into catch and release on the Leven and Crake, is that angling effort has been drastically reduced and that interest in these rivers is waning. The Trust believes that this is detrimental to our efforts to protect and improve the habitat and that the salmon run on both of these rivers is sufficient to allow a level of sustainable exploitation by anglers without detriment.

In 2006 SCRT will work closely with the EA to review all the evidence and assess the future of the restriction.

Current and Future Structure of SCRT

At present SCRT comprises a Management Committee who are both Directors and Trustees. Lord Cavendish of Furness is the President, Fred French Vice President, Mark Southern of Penny Bridge is the Chairman, Dickon Knight, Holker Estate Agent, is Secretary and Treasurer, John Cleaver is Executive Director and Chris Potts is Project Officer. Other Directors and Trustees are John Chaplin and Julius Barratt of Leven Angling Association, Grahame Hall of WAADA, Jeff Carroll of Coniston and Torver, Hal Bagot of Levens Hall, Chris Preston from Kent (Westmorland) and Dr Roger Sweeting of the Freshwater Biological Association.

The above structure will see us through the six month development phase, and during this period we will define the permanent organisation and representation that we will need to take us forward. This is likely to be a two-tier structure of Trustees and Executive Committee, plus Supporters. The Executive Committee is likely to include one or more paid employees. The Trust is firmly of the opinion that having the best people we can find in appropriate positions as Trustees and Executive Officers is far more important than having specific geographic representation. All catchments will have an executive officer as their point of contact.

We are looking for Supporters, both organisations and individuals, who can help us financially, and/or with their time and skills.

Anyone with an interest in preserving the local aquatic environment can become a supporter, not just anglers. We encourage you to join your local rivers trust and help ensure a healthy future for our waters. If you have some time available and would like to play a more active role, say doing river surveys, project management, or executive/administrative work please do let us know. Perhaps you have good local knowledge of the landowners, farmers and who have the fishing rights; if so we are interested. The catchments that benefit the most will be those with keen volunteers walking the river banks, talking to the riparian owners and farmers, and assisting with, or managing, projects.

If you would like further information, or would simply like to comment, please do not hesitate to contact us.

<i>Please donate and become a supporter. Contact details :</i>
For Information please contact : John Cleaver on 01229 885665 or e-mail : john@scrt.co.uk
To donate (guideline: Individuals: £15 Organisations: £50) please contact Niovi Ducker, The Estate Office, Cark in Cartmel, Grange over Sands, Cumbria LA11 7PH. Tel: 015395 58313 or e-mail : office@scrt.co.uk