Running the gauntlet: Severn fish set for new lease

Clay fish workshop, Worcester Canal & River Trust

£10.8million of National Lottery players' money is being invested in ambitious plans to reinvigorate the River Severn. This is the largest wildlife project of its kind ever undertaken in Europe.

Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife is a joint initiative run by the Canal & River Trust, Severn Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and Natural England. Once completed, 158 miles of the River Severn will be opened up again to create routes for fish around physical barriers that currently prevent migration to critical spawning grounds. This will help secure the long-term future of many of the UK's declining and protected fish species, particularly the now-threatened twaite and allis shad.

The River Severn has historically played an important role in the UK's economy. Thanks to fishing, it provided food, employment and trade and was home to the shad, a staple part of many people's daily diet, particularly in the 18th century.

Five fishy facts

1. the River Severn was home to a large number of fish species such as salmon, sturgeon and shad that could only survive in rivers with substantial catchment areas and no locks or weirs

2. shad was a staple food in the 13th-century court of King Henry III
3. the Severn shad was known as ‘The Mother of Herring’
4. shad used to run in their hundreds of thousands each May before the construction of weirs in the 19th century
5. in 1781, stewed Severn shad was sent in barrels to the Empress of Russia

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> *Sir Peter Luff, Chair of The National Lottery Heritage Fund*

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of the National Lottery Heritage 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.”

New life, better biodiversity

Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife will bring new life and increased environmental benefits to a significant stretch of the longest river in the UK. It will also restore and reinvent historic buildings from the Severn’s industrial past.

The project will also deliver 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.

Boosting local economy

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

Tewkesbury school visit

project to help save rare fish

Dr Tom Tew

Focus on… natural heritage in the West Midlands