

# Trusting the future of the Nore and our salmon to those who care



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The need to preserve our salmon stocks was never so important. Sean Keane looks at how the angling clubs on the river Nore have banded together to ensure that man-made impediments to salmon returning to spawn are removed. He spoke to Bob Wemyss about the collapse of the species and what is being done to help bring numbers back up.

generation gets to fish our most important native species and is handed down a river where there is plentiful supply of the species which has played such a major part in our history and folklore.

The 15 fishing clubs dotted along the River Nore are now more interested in preserving and conserving salmon stocks than killing the fish. It's a big transformation and one which could ultimately lead to the survival of the species.

The Nore has huge tourism potential and this seems to be a point that is missed by many people in the tourism industry.

Those in the hospitality sector, including hotels, guest houses, bars and restaurants (with the exception it would seem of the Brennan's in the Club house hotel, Patrick Street, Kilkenny) still have still not grasped how lucrative salmon fishing can become.

If the clubs, working with State agencies can get salmon stocks back up then the money will come flooding in. Bob Wemyss, secretary of the South East Salmon Federation, pointed out that tourist anglers, particularly fly fishermen, love the Nore because of the fast streamy nature of the river. Leading fishing guides such as the prestigious Robert Gillespie, regards the Nore as one of the best fly fishing

river in Ireland.

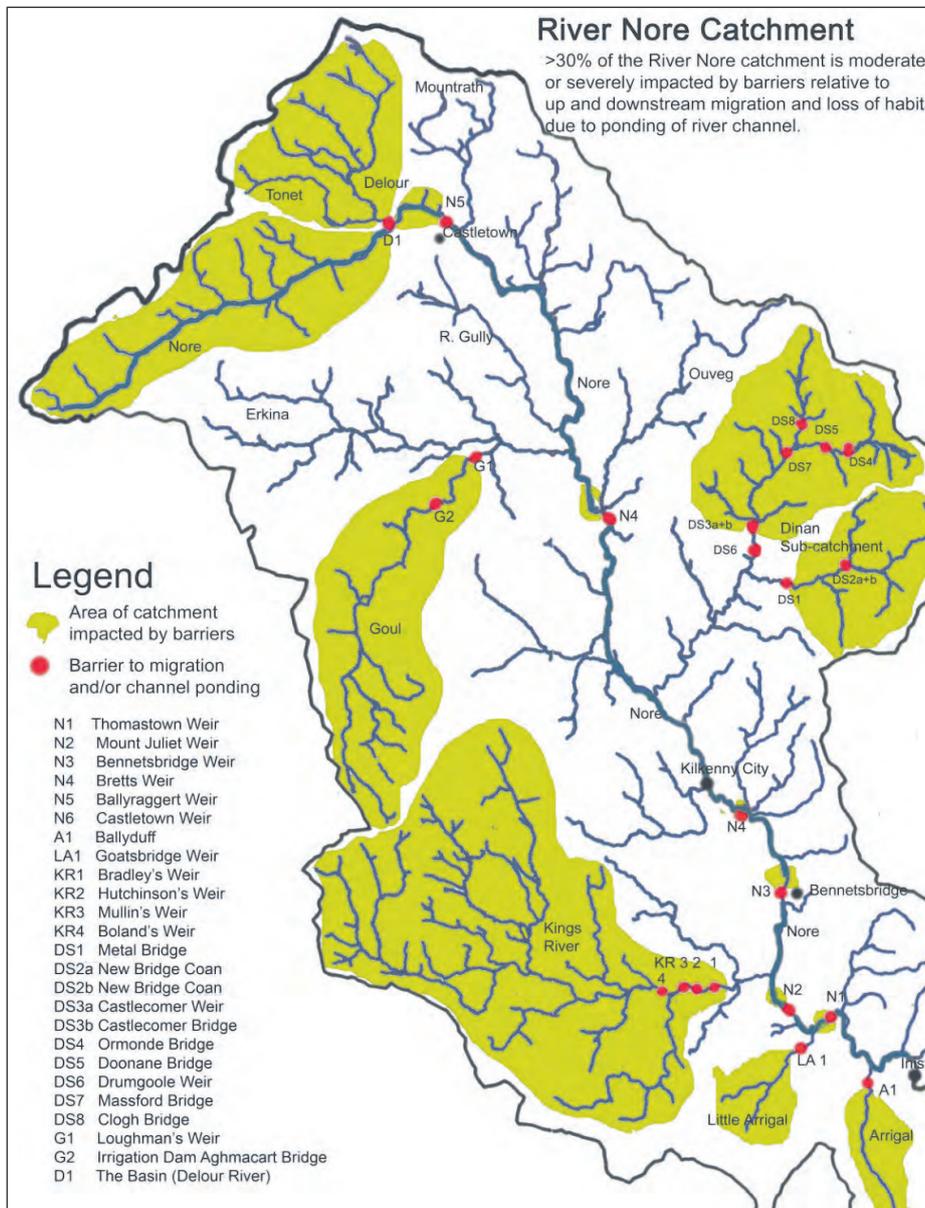
The December 2009 issue of Salmon and Trout magazine, which is the leading UK fishing magazine, suggested that the Nore could be considered the best salmon river in Ireland. Visiting anglers are less likely to want to kill fish and most angling destinations have a strict no-kill or limited kill policy so their enjoyment will not be marred by not having the opportunity to bring a salmon home.

The river Nore will be the only river in the South East this year where salmon can be taken and killed. That's because the scientists and regulators have decided that there is a surplus of 2,227 salmon over the 12,000 needed to maintain stocks along the river.

The angling clubs and the cot net fisherman (who fish with small flat bottom boats in the tidal areas of the Suir and Nore) know from their observations, on the ground, that this figure is perhaps too high but it's the only scientific advice available.

Bob Wemyss and others have spent the last number of weeks, going around to the streams where the salmon spawn (lay their fertilised eggs) and the results have been very disappointing. In a little stream, a tributary of the Little Arrigle between Jerpoint and Ballyconway, outside Thomastown he found just one fish returning. There were few to be seen at all of the spawning streams in the lower Nore. In other years there would be 100 plus salmon in these locations. This means that the salmon season in four and five years time will be poor because no returning fish means no spawning and no new salmon to stock the beloved river.

However, the anglers and the cot net men have agreed that later this season, if they do not see any sign of enough salmon coming into the Nore they will cut the figure of 2,227 downwards to protect stocks. It's an incredible turn around because 25 years ago, there would have been calls for more salmon to be killed not less by these two groups. These river people are totally committed to the survival of the species and feel they



of Ireland's natural heritage.

A survey of the Nore by Dr. Martin O'Grady and Tom Sullivan published in 1994 identified the barriers on the Kings River as a primary limiting factor to the production of salmon and trout in the entire catchment. The Trust engaged Alan Sullivan BSc MIFM to produce plans for fish passage on Boland's and Bradley's weirs.

"We engaged with the owners of these weirs and received unstinting support from them. The angling clubs and communities on the Kings River also came on board with support and financial pledges. Both the National Parks and Wildlife and the Fishery Board also gave their blessing to the projects," Bob pointed out.

"The total cost of almost €40,000 came from the angling community with Kilkenny Anglers Association covering the entire cost of the fish pass at Boland's Weir. In their centenary year this is a fitting way to celebrate their interaction with the Nore. Mount Juliet and Thomastown Anglers Association were also major contributors with the balance coming from other clubs, personal donations from anglers and our own resources," he said.

He pointed out that there are many other barriers on the tributaries of the Nore which need attention and he hopes the trust can work with the Southern Fisheries Board and OPW to relieve these.

"And there are literally thousands of kilometres of spawning and nursery habitat within the catchment which need surveying and attention and which cannot be undertaken without local initiatives," he added.

"We would like to get to a situation where local groups would adopt a section of stream and, under direction, carry out the regular maintenance needed to bring it to best quality. This would also need the support of the farming community and would also be a great way to introduce youngsters to the streams and the interwoven ecology of bugs, fish, animals and birds. And fun of course," he said.

"We need to expand the membership of the Trust and details and application forms can be found on our website, [www.noresuir-rivertrust.org](http://www.noresuir-rivertrust.org). We also need funding. Cheques / postal orders payable to the Nore Suir River Trust Limited would be most welcome. Alternatively transfer funds to the Nore Suir River Trust Limited, Bank of Ireland, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. Account No. 56347249 Sort Code 90-60-99.

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have a moral obligation to pass on the rivers and the salmon in it, in a good condition, to the next generation.

Of the 2,227 salmon which might be killed on the Nore this year, 577 have been allotted to tourist anglers which will help the local economy.

The potential on the Nore is in stark contrast to the Barrow where there is a strict catch and release policy that will be in force for many years while stocks remain ominously

low. Compared to the Barrow and Suir, the Nore is actually doing well and it will be a long time before anyone is legally able to catch and kill a salmon from the Barrow while the Suir is still below their safe limit, the cot netmen cannot fish and angling is catch & release only.

One of the main reasons the Nore is so good is because it has never been dredged (keeping it fast flowing) and because the natural gravel beds remain intact.

So salmon can return to breed in the fantastic tributary network and because of the improving water quality. There are however serious man-made impediments to these spawning grounds and are marked in green on the map.

Another voluntary organisation, The Nore Suir River Trust, a sister like entity to the fishing clubs is doing tremendous, almost unseen work to make sure the salmon can return to their natural spawning grounds to reproduce and ensure the continuation of the species.

Lacken weir was a issue some years ago and the OPW with the cooperation of local anglers installed a nature like rock ramp which fixed the problem. Bob Wemyss is rightly proud of this collaboration and points out that you would never see a salmon jump at this weir anymore - they just swim through. Bob pointed out that salmon only jump at obstacles placed in their way because they have to and that, doing so requires great effort.

And because the salmon's body temperature is that of the river, it means that in cold temperatures the salmon are sluggish and find it hard to get past the man made structures.

The experience of Lacken weir spawned the Nore Suir River Trust.



The new Boland's Weir on the Kings River which was put in place by the Nore Suir River Trust in conjunction with the Boland family

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