



**ADVISORY VISIT TO THE RIVER TAW,
EGGESFORD BARTON, DEVON
UNDERTAKEN BY VAUGHAN LEWIS,
WINDRUSH AEC LTD, ON BEHALF OF Mr.
R.DAVIES
JULY 2005**

1.0 Introduction

This report forms the output of a site visit undertaken on 26 July 2005 to the River Taw at Eggesford Barton, Devon on behalf of Mr Rodney Davies. Information for the report was gathered during the site visit. Additional information was provided by Mr. Davies. Throughout the report, normal convention is followed, with banks identified as RB (right bank) and LB (left bank) when facing downstream.

2.0 Habitat assessment

The River Taw at Eggesford Barton lay downstream of the confluence of the River Yeo. The Eggesford Barton fishery comprised some 800m of the LB of the main river upstream of the railway bridge.

The instream habitat of the river was generally good, with well-developed pools, riffles and shallow glides. The riffles were generally comprised on pebbles, cobbles and bed-rock of a size larger than the optimum for brown trout *Salmo trutta* spawning. However, small pockets of suitable sized gravel were noted in places.



Shallow riffle formed largely from bedrock and cobbles

Instream cover was provided by boulders/cobbles, undercut banks and tree roots. There was little Large Woody Debris present, with the exception of one woody debris dam caught on the railway bridge stanchion.



Woody debris dam caught on bridge stanchion

Access to the fishery was difficult, due to the heavy growth of bankside trees and shrubs and to the steep nature of the banks in place. The tree and shrub growth also shade the channel, reducing light penetration and suppressing low fringing vegetation. The main species of trees present were ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and hazel *Corylus avellana*.

3.0 Fish stocks

The fishery has not been stocked in the recent past. Environment Agency electrofishing surveys undertaken at Chenson (upstream) and Chawleigh Week (downstream) have consistently shown a low density of fry and >0+ parr of both Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* and brown trout at these sites. This reflects observations relating to the large grain size of the substrate. It may also reflect issues connected with the water quality and sediment loading in the River Taw.

4.0 Management recommendations

- The Eggesford Barton fishery appeared ideal for entry into the West Country Rivers Trust Angling 2000 scheme. (<http://www.angling2000.org.uk/>). In essence, the scheme aims to link access to small sections of river and lake fishing via a permit scheme for the West Country. Anglers purchase a booklet of tickets that allow access for fishing under a series of agreed rules to a number of different river reaches. At the end of the fishing season, the owner of each reach is reimbursed a sum according to usage of his river. Not only does the scheme generate income for the fishery owner, it also creates a network of waters for anglers to fish and develops contact with

the West Country Rivers Trust, a charity dedicated to the development and well being of rivers in Devon and Cornwall.

- Fishing in the reach will generally be for brown trout, although it is likely that small numbers of sea trout *Salmo trutta* and salmon may be caught in high water or towards the end of the fishing season as they run upstream to spawn.
- The heavy shading of the channel has reduced the growth of riparian vegetation. This is detrimental in that it increases the risk of significant bank erosion and reduces valuable fringing cover for juvenile salmonids. In order to address this issue, it would be of benefit if a regime of rotational coppicing/pollarding of the hardwood trees could be established alongside sections of the watercourse. The aim of this should be to produce 'dappled' shading over the water's surface, allowing the growth of vegetation on the banks, whilst retaining valuable tree root systems. The ecological and landscape value of the mature trees should not be underestimated.

In addition to managing the trees to reduce shading, some will need to be managed to improve access for angling. Low branches will need to be trimmed over holding pools and runs in order to allow anglers to cast effectively. Sections of tree will also need to be cut to allow safe access along the bank

- A felling licence may be required from the Forestry Commission for coppicing/pollarding of riparian trees.
- The sorting of bed material and in particular spawning gravel could be improved further by strategic positioning of Large Woody Debris (LWD), in the form of tree trunks and limbs. These will from time to time naturally fall into the river. Unless flood defence or migratory fish access requirements dictate, they should not be removed. Rather, they should be stabilised and trimmed to allow angling access whilst retaining the bulk of the woody debris in the river. These will have a significantly beneficial impact on the river by sorting the substrate, providing variation in bed profile, providing cover for a range of invertebrates and fish, and detaining leaf litter for subsequent consumption by shredding macroinvertebrates.

LWD can actively be encouraged into the river in strategic locations (generally on riffles or shallow glide areas) by selective felling of trees. Leaving a 'hinge' at the base of the trees during felling will allow control of the placement of the timber, and will also act to stabilise the tree by keeping the tree butt attached to the bank. Ideally, the top of the fallen tree would be angled in an upstream direction in order to reduce the risk of bankside erosion.

- It is recommended that the fishery joins the local rivers trust in order to lend its support to addressing catchment-based issues. The Environment Agency should be able to provide the secretary's contact details. It may be worth speaking to Nigel Reader (Fisheries Technical Specialist) at the Agency's Exeter Office in the first instance (Tel: 0870 8506506).
- Note that all works to bed or banks of the river or within 8m of its banks requires the written consent from the Environment Agency under the Land Drainage legislation. The introduction of any fish or eggs into any inland water requires the

consent of the EA under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act, 1975. It is imperative that all relevant consents are obtained by the club.

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