

Snake Lane Fish Pass Project

A project to bring wild salmon back into the heart of Derbyshire for the first time in over a century will take place in Duffield in 2022. The weir at Snake Lane on the River Ecclesbourne will be replaced by a series of stone rapids, making miles of good breeding habitat accessible to salmon, which have been returning via the Rivers Trent and Derwent in recent years.

The project, a partnership between the Wild Trout Trust, Environment Agency and local landowners, builds on much hard work that has taken place to re-open our rivers to migratory fish, lost when migration routes were blocked with weirs following the Industrial Revolution. On the River Derwent, fish passes built in 2012-13 at Borrowash and Darley Abbey have allowed salmon to reach the river upstream of Derby and breed successfully. Salmon returning all the way from their ocean feeding grounds off Greenland now enter the River Ecclesbourne and swim through Duffield – but only as far as the formidable barrier presented by Snake Lane weir.



Snake Lane weir – impossible for fish to ascend

Dr. Tim Jacklin, project manager for the Wild Trout Trust said “It is important that salmon can access as much of the river network as possible – more access equals more young fish produced, which in turn creates a sustainable and resilient population. And it’s not just salmon that benefit – currently only eight fish species are recorded in the Ecclesbourne upstream of Snake Lane, compared with sixteen downstream, so the weir is clearly causing a bottleneck. Once removed, we should see not only improved fish populations, but a better environment for otters, herons, kingfishers and other aquatic wildlife.”

This short film by wildlife cameraman Jack Perks provides a great introduction to the project: www.wildtrout.org/news/river-ecclesbourne-derbyshire

This storyboard gives more detail on the background to the project: <https://bit.ly/3xOqljb>

When will this happen?

Preparation work will take place in January and February 2022 with the coppicing of around thirty trees along the river banks upstream of the weir (see below). The construction works on the weir will take place in summer 2022 and take 8 – 12 weeks to complete, depending on the weather and river levels.

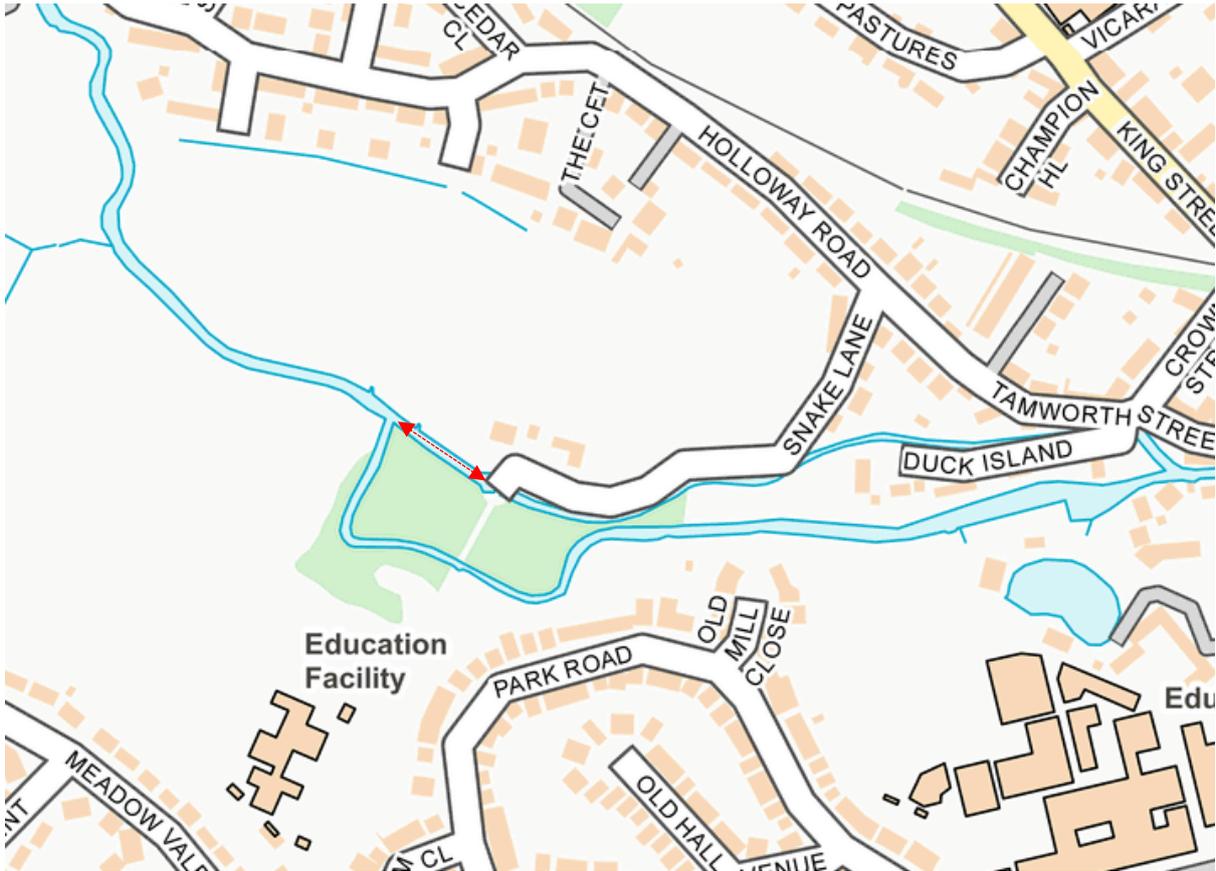
Tree Works

The removal of the weir will lower water levels upstream over a river length of 50 metres. Past experience has shown that this can cause banks to slump, resulting in the loss of trees as they fall into the river. To prevent this and preserve trees for the future, the trees will be coppiced (cut to ground level) in advance of the weir work. Initially the banks will look very bare, but the coppiced trees, which are mostly alders, will quickly re-grow from their stumps (see example below). In addition, new trees will be planted to create a diverse mix of native species.

A detailed survey has been carried out to ensure protected bat species and their habitats are not damaged, and bat boxes will be installed as part of the project. The winter works will avoid the bird nesting season.



Coppiced alder trees on the River Dane, Cheshire (left) and the same site three-and-a-half years later (right).



Section of river where tree coppicing will take place (red arrow).

How will the weir works be carried out?

The construction works will take place in summer when river levels are low. The contractors will have a site compound on Ecclesbourne Meadow and access the river from there. Some access will also be required via Snake Lane. Footpaths will remain open during the project. Deliveries to site will take place via Ecclesbourne Meadows and William Close and these will be timed to avoid busy periods and minimise inconvenience. During the works, the river will be diverted via the channel around Duck Island. A fish rescue and ecological surveys will be carried out to ensure minimal impact on existing wildlife.

Who is carrying out the works?

The project is being carried out by the Environment Agency in partnership with the Wild Trout Trust, an environmental charity. For further information please use the contacts below:

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