

# Tree-planting along rivers to save Scotland's wild salmon

Friday May 06 2022, The Times - Paul Simons

Trees are being planted along rivers and streams in Scotland to help protect wild salmon from climate change. The number of Atlantic salmon in Scotland has suffered a catastrophic decline. In the mid-1980s there were eight to ten million salmon along the west coast but now there are only about two to three million.

Warming and increasingly acidic oceans are partly to blame but the streams that salmon breed in are also warming and causing them great harm. Salmon are hardy, cold-water creatures but the average temperature of streams in Scotland rose by 0.22C between 2000 and 2009, and temperatures are projected to be 2.5C higher in 60 years' time.

The increasingly warm waters harm the health of the salmon, especially the young, and in 2018 there was a record lowest number of salmon caught by anglers. Planting trees along riverbanks provides shade that helps cool the overheated streams. In the most ambitious project so far, fisheries on the River Dee have planted 250,000 saplings of native trees along key tributaries, with plans for a million more by 2035. Urgent action was needed as salmon catches on the Dee have collapsed by 80 per cent since 1957. Fishery boards across Scotland are following suit with similar tree-planting programmes.

"We've seen situations where the temperatures in our rivers are approaching critical levels for our salmon, temperatures that they can't tolerate. This will get worse. We need to grow trees now to create that cooling shade," said Dr Alan Wells, the chief executive of Fisheries Management Scotland.

Atlantic salmon make extraordinary migrations. As young fish they migrate from their tributaries towards the coast before travelling across the North Atlantic, reaching Greenland and even North American waters. They can remain in the ocean for one to four years before returning to their ancestral streams, swimming and leaping their way upstream to spawn.