



REAY FOREST ESTATE

ATLANTIC SALMON TRUST AND GROSVENOR'S REAY FOREST ESTATE LAUNCH SALMON RESTORATION PROJECT IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

"A dynamic 10-year study working to restore the numbers of wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout in one of the most renowned rivers in the Scottish Highlands has been launched. The project hopes to gain a better understanding of the Laxford catchment, improve the quality and habitat of the river and become an exemplar for catchment management, with the lessons learnt being directly applicable to other river systems."

Foremost evidence-based salmon conservation charity, the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) is working in partnership with Grosvenor's Reay Forest Estate to restore salmon and sea trout populations in the River Laxford, historically one of the Highland's most renowned and productive rivers.

This dynamic 10-year study, which is also supported by Marine Scotland Science and West Sutherland Fisheries Trust, aims to better understand the River Laxford catchment and to restore the numbers of wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout – a barometer for the health of the whole ecosystem – by improving the quality and habitat of the river.

Welcoming the partnership, CEO of the Atlantic Salmon Trust, Mark Bilsby, comments:

"It is deeply encouraging to be working in partnership with Grosvenor's Reay Forest Estate on this ground-breaking project and we welcome their support and cooperation for this important work. By combining the scientific acumen of the Trust and the sustainable approach to land management and conservation of the estate's skilled employees, we can work together to give these iconic species the best future."

The scheme is the AST's first catchment restoration project, which includes the whole river from its source to sea. It benefits from being under single ownership, avoiding any conflicts of interest and optimising the positive impacts of the works.

The Duke of Westminster, whose Grosvenor Estate manages the Reay Forest, has driven the partnership with the AST forward and will continue to play a central role in the scheme's development, such is the importance he attaches to the issue.

The Duke of Westminster said: *"The dwindling number of salmon and sea trout in the River Laxford is extremely worrying. The data we collect from the study will not only be vital for the salmon restoration project, but also the biodiversity of the entire Reay Forest, and surrounding areas in Scotland."*

Nicholas Dobbs, Head of Grosvenor's rural estates, said: *"The River Laxford has been a stronghold of Scottish salmon and sea trout for centuries but in recent years their populations have seen a rapid decline, mirroring conditions throughout the world."*

“In keeping with our aims of protecting and enabling our rare habitats and the flora and fauna they support, we believe this long-term project will support the conservation of these important and iconic species, delivering a lasting environmental benefit.”

Works on the estate will include stabilising the riverbanks to stop sediment entering the watercourse; planting native tree species to develop new woodlands, helping to cool the water and improve its quality; and removing instream barriers and blockages.

Newly appointed Technical Project Manager, Chris Conroy, joined the Trust in October 2021 to launch this ambitious project, explaining the importance of this study he said: *“With Atlantic salmon populations in decline right across their native range, it is vitally important that we take decisive action to maximise the number of healthy wild juvenile salmon smolts going to sea from our rivers.*

“The long-term partnership approach underpinning the project will allow us to not only apply a range of practical management actions within the freshwater, estuarine and coastal areas of the catchment, but also to closely monitor the effectiveness of these actions over time using robust science and cutting-edge monitoring techniques.

“We hope that this will provide an exemplar for catchment management, with the lessons learnt being directly applicable to other river systems.”

Grounded by sound science and monitoring, this work proposes to establish the Laxford as an index river and support the development of more similarly designated rivers in Scotland – forming a system that provides an indication of marine survival, populations and, critically, how they respond to the restoration of the catchment.

Linking with the network of similar rivers across Europe, ranging from the south of England to the north east coast of Iceland, the index river network aims to provide valuable information for river managers and policy makers to deliver impactful management actions, resulting in the better protection of Scotland’s flagship fish.

About Atlantic Salmon Trust

The Atlantic Salmon Trust exists solely for the protection of wild salmon and sea trout. Their aim is to create a positive future for these threatened species; using scientific research to understand their decline and put evidence-based solutions into practice to better protect them. atlanticsalmontrust.org

For further information about the Atlantic Salmon Trust, please contact Lindsay Wrapson, Communications Co-ordinator, by emailing lindsay@atlanticsalmontrust.org

About Grosvenor’s Reay Forest Estate

Grosvenor’s Reay Forest Estate is a traditional sporting estate famed for its deer stalking and trout and salmon fishing as well as its wild beauty and remote landscapes.

In 2019, the estate was reaccredited by Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES) for its conservation, habitat and wildlife management.

As part of the Grosvenor Estate, its purpose is for its activities to contribute to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the communities in which it operates.

For further information about Reay Forest Estate, please contact Public Relations and Communications Manager, Paul Mannion, by emailing paul.mannion@grosvenor.com.