

RIVER USK

Rising on the slopes of Mynydd Du (Black Mountain) in the western area of the Brecon Beacons, the Usk at first flows in a general easterly direction through Sennybridge and Brecon.

It then takes a more south easterly route through Abergavenny and finally turns south through Usk Town and, some 126km from its source, enters the Severn Estuary at Newport.

At just 4km longer than the Tywi, the Usk is the longest Welsh river to flow entirely in Wales.

SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION

to protect designated species and habitats:



ATLANTIC SALMON



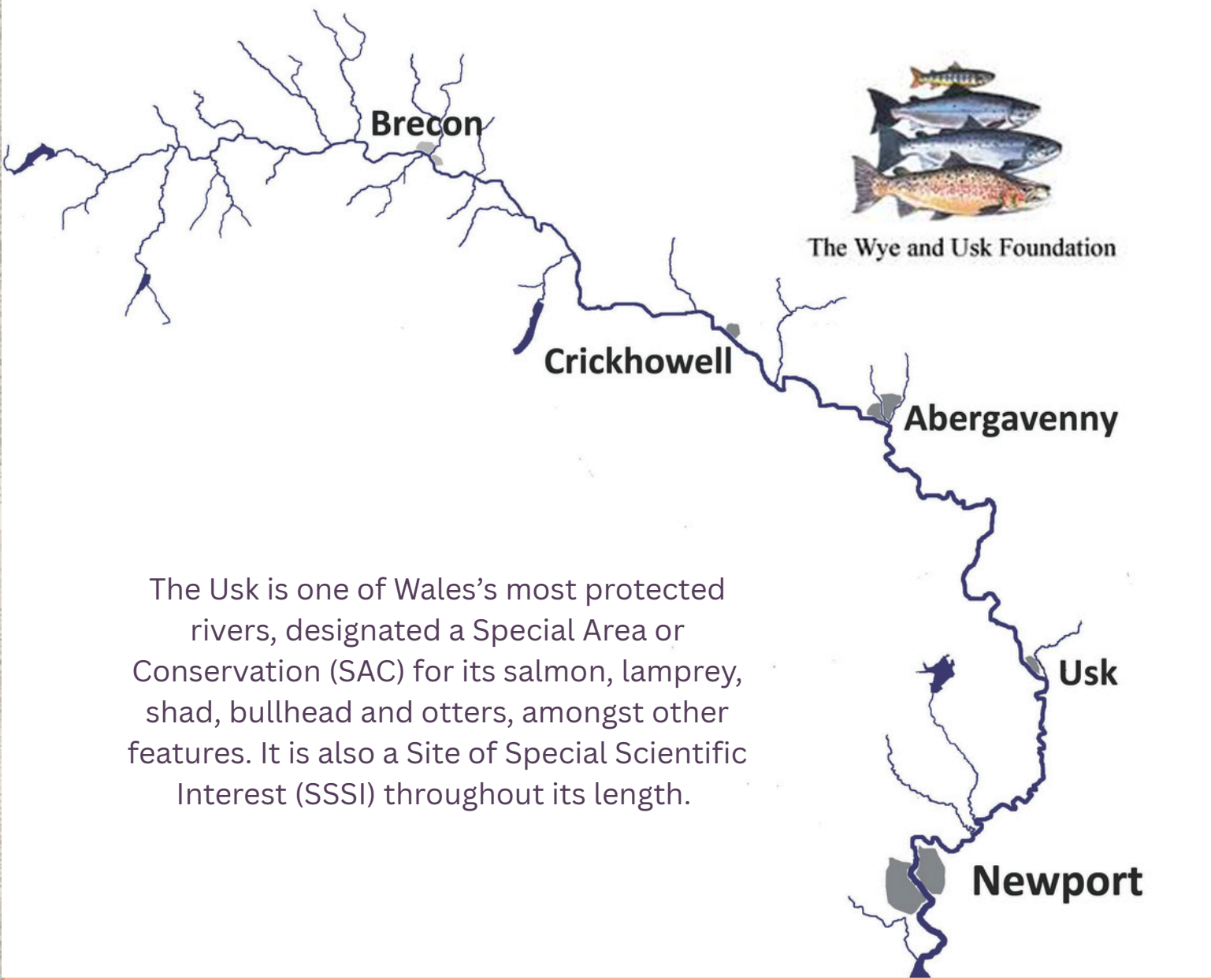
THWAITE SHAD



EUROPEAN OTTER



BROOK & RIVER LAMPREY



The Usk is one of Wales’s most protected rivers, designated a Special Area or Conservation (SAC) for its salmon, lamprey, shad, bullhead and otters, amongst other features. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) throughout its length.

RIVER LENGTH	CATCHMENT AREA	RIVER SOURCE
125 km	1160 km ²	Fan Brycheiniog

RIVER HEALTH

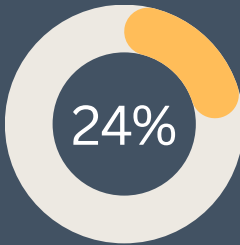
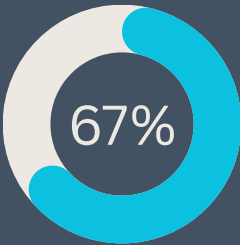
The health of our rivers is assessed using a range of ecological and chemical indicators. Under the Water Framework Directive, a river (or waterbody) can be classified as High, Good, Moderate, Poor or Bad. A High classification means it is close to natural conditions.

The Usk is in Moderate overall health

The driving element of the Moderate classification is PAH which stands for Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon. They are toxic pollutants that accumulate in the water as a result of Oil combustion, Industrial wastewater and Urban runoff.

SALMON SMOLTS

The survival of Salmon Smolts is highly dependent on flow levels, with drought conditions posing significant issues for them.



During wet years 67% of tagged Smolts reach the sea. This drops to just 24% on dry years which can have devastating impacts on the Salmon population on the Usk.

PHOSPHATE TARGETS

Rivers like the Usk that are SAC-designated under the EU Habitats Directive have targets for phosphate and other environmental standards that must be achieved.

The river has struggled to hit the target levels of Phosphates although it has improved significantly in recent years. Sources of the Phosphate pollution has been primarily Agricultural diffuse which contributes around 67% of Phosphates on the Usk.



Between 2017 and 2021 88% of the Usk waterbodies were at failing status for Phosphates. This has improved massively to only 46% in 2024 but there is still room for improvement.