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Conservation & Recreation: The Wye Challenge



TOWARDS

A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

FOR THE RIVER WYE

WYE *•CYNLLUN•*
PROJECT **GWY**



Conservation & Recreation: The Wye Challenge

REPORT OF
THE RIVER WYE PROJECT

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHS:

The Wye at Tintern (Countryside Commission), European otter (J. Birks), Canoeist (National Rivers Authority), Angling at Bigsweir Bridge (Wales Tourist Board), Leaping salmon (R. Edwards).

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Foreword

THE WYE PROJECT was set up principally because of the unease by public agencies which had planning and management responsibilities for the river and its corridor. On the one hand it is a superb river with scenery second to none and with wildlife and fishery resources of great value, and on the other hand it has more and more people wishing to visit the valley and enjoy those qualities. How might these resources be better protected and what steps need to be taken to minimise problems caused by increasing visitor numbers, not only to those who live and work in the valley but also between the different interest groups of visitors themselves?

The public agencies financially supporting this project agreed to appoint a project officer for a period of three years to obtain information on the environmental resources and the use made of them, to identify the key issues and to make proposals for improving the protection of the resources of the river and for sustaining the enjoyment of the river and its corridor by residents and visitors alike. In these crowded islands, the separation of activities is rarely possible and we must all make compromises for 'the greater good'. It is in this spirit that management proposals are made in this report of the project. They will not be to everyone's liking, indeed if they are given the wholehearted support of any single interest group we probably 'have it wrong'. But it is important that before action is taken on any of these proposals, those who have an interest in the river have an opportunity to inform us of their views. It is our intention that at the end of the consultation period (30th September), observations will be collated to assist those public bodies having responsibilities within the river corridor and considering action on the proposals.

This report and the work it encapsulates is very much the product of the project officer, Mr. Andy Neale. The Steering Committee, representing the sponsoring bodies, wishes to record its sincere thanks for his diligence, commitment and, not least, his forbearance and good humour, in the face of testing challenges both from 'within and without'. The Committee also wishes to record its gratitude to Dr. Richard Cresswell and latterly, Mr. John Gregory of the NRA who provided administrative support for the project.

Whilst the members of the Steering Committee are in broad agreement about the main conclusions in the Report, the sponsoring bodies, in eventually adopting policies, will, in no sense, be bound by the report's conclusions.

Ron Edwards.

Professor Ron Edwards
Chairman
Steering Committee

Preface

THE RIVER WYE PROJECT

The Wye Project was set up in 1990 by a partnership of public bodies, each with an interest in the management of the River Wye. Its main objective is to prepare a strategy for managing sport and recreation on the River Wye, which also recognises its importance for nature conservation. The project covers the full length of the Wye and relates to the river itself, its banks and interests associated with the river.

River Wye Project Funding

Countryside Commission
 Countryside Council for Wales
 English Nature
 Gloucestershire County Council
 Gwent County Council
 Hereford and Worcester County Council
 National Rivers Authority
 Powys County Council
 Sports Council for Wales
 Sports Council - West Midlands Region

The main tasks of the project are to:

- compile a data base of information about the river and its associated recreational uses and conservation interests.
- identify key management issues and conflicts of interest.
- suggest ways of reducing conflict and optimising the use of river so as to sustain its unique qualities.

THIS REPORT

This report has been prepared for two reasons:

- To provide the sponsors of the Wye Project with information to enable them to develop a detailed management strategy for the river
- To enable other organisations and individuals with an interest in the river to have an input into the final strategy. Comments are being sought on the report's recommendations. A summary of this report has been published and distributed to relevant organisations. A set of technical appendices accompanies this report.

MEMBERS OF THE WYE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Professor Ron Edwards	<i>National Rivers Authority (Chairman)</i>
Mr Rob Brain	<i>Gwent County Council</i>
Mr David Drewett	<i>Countryside Council for Wales</i>
Mr Jonathan Felton	<i>Sports Council</i>
Mr Richard Graves	<i>Hereford and Worcester County Council</i>
Mr John Gregory	<i>National Rivers Authority</i>
Mr Richard Howell	<i>National Rivers Authority</i>
Dr Huw Jones	<i>Sports Council for Wales</i>
Mr David Keast	<i>Powys County Council</i>
Mr James Marsden	<i>English Nature</i>
Mrs Fiona Moore	<i>Countryside Commission</i>
Mr Peter Russell	<i>Hereford and Worcester County Council</i>
Dr Peter Williams	<i>Countryside Council for Wales</i>

1. Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 From its source on the slopes of Plynlimon in Mid-Wales to Chepstow where it enters the Severn Estuary, the River Wye flows through some of the most attractive and varied countryside in Britain. After flowing through the moorlands and mountains of Powys, it enters the gentler, agricultural landscape of the Herefordshire Plain, before reaching the dramatic limestone gorge of the lower valley. During its journey the Wye descends 680 metres, and changes from a shallow mountain stream to a deep, slow flowing, meandering river. Below Bigsweir it is tidal and subject to large variations in water level. At approximately 244 km long, it is one of Britain's major rivers.
- 1.1.2 The Wye Valley is largely rural and is sparsely populated, though the Wye does pass through many settlements. These include several large towns and the city of Hereford.
- 1.1.3 The Wye is unusual for a river of its size in that its water is remarkably unpolluted. This, and the fact that it remains largely unspoilt by man, contributes to its outstanding importance for nature conservation. Throughout its length it provides a wide range of valuable wildlife habitats and supports a number of rare species. Its importance is acknowledged by its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one of only three rivers in Britain to be designated in this way for its entire length.
- 1.1.4 The Wye Valley is known for its great beauty and exhibits a range of high quality landscapes. The lower valley, below Hereford, is regarded as one of the most important lowland landscapes in Britain and is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); one of only 38 in England and Wales.
- 1.1.5 The River Wye and the Wye Valley provide a unique resource for sport and recreation. The river is regarded as one of the best salmon fisheries in Britain and also provides excellent opportunities for coarse fishing. In recent years it has become increasingly popular for many other water sports, and is particularly well used by canoeists. There is an established public right of navigation over much of the river. The Wye Valley is a major tourist attraction with an estimated two million visits a year to the AONB alone. The river provides the focus for many of these visits, with people attracted by its scenic beauty and tranquillity.
- 1.1.6 Besides its value for conservation and recreation, the Wye fulfils a number of other important functions, including water abstraction (for domestic and agricultural purposes), sewage disposal and land drainage.

1.2 CHANGING NEEDS

- 1.2.1 Like most major rivers, the Wye provides for a great many competing uses. Recent years have seen an expansion in its use for sport and recreation. Concern has been expressed that the management of the river has not kept pace with the changes brought about by the increase in these uses. Growing awareness of the problems associated with the recreational use has led to calls for the NRA and other public bodies to take a more active role in managing the river. The main concerns are:
- the growth in popularity of many countryside and water recreation activities, leading to higher levels of use and increasing demands for access to the river. This can cause congestion, inconvenience to local people and visitors, and diminished enjoyment;
 - conflicts between different recreational activities competing for use of the same limited water space;
 - the impact that large numbers of visitors and certain recreational activities may have on the river environment, particularly its conservation value;
 - the absence of an agreed framework for managing recreational use and tackling current and future problems.

1.3 AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.3.1 It is generally agreed that the future planning and management of recreational use for a large and important resource like the Wye can only be achieved by means of a carefully formulated strategy which considers the river as a whole. Following consideration by the relevant planning

and management authorities and a period of consultation with interested bodies, it is intended that this report will form the basis for the development of an agreed management strategy. This will provide the framework essential for guiding future management action. Once formally adopted by the project's sponsors, each agency will be responsible for implementing elements of the strategy and will be expected to incorporate specific proposals into their own programmes for action.

1.3.2 This report is guided by the firm belief that most of the conflicts of interest and environmental threats expressed on the Wye can be appreciably reduced by effective management and planning. The main purposes of the report are to:

- bring together information about the river and its uses;
- evaluate trends, issues, conflicts and opportunities associated with its use for sport and recreation;
- provide an aid to establishing clear and common objectives to which management action can be directed;
- suggest specific proposals for action which will help achieve these common objectives and provide the basis for the development of a detailed work programme;
- help bring together different agencies and encourage them to work collectively towards the coordinated management of the river;
- stimulate discussion about the river and raise awareness and understanding of some of the problems and pressures it is facing. In doing so it is hoped that widespread support for the measures proposed will be generated.

1.3.3 This report focuses mainly on the management of sport and recreation, and the interaction of these uses with the environment. Other aspects of the river's management, such as pollution, water resources and fisheries are not considered in detail, although it is recognised that these can have an important influence on recreation and conservation interests. These matters are the direct concern of the NRA and form part of its day to day responsibilities. This report deals with issues which are largely outside the NRA's normal statutory functions and which impinge upon the activities of other organisations.

1.4 STATUS

1.4.1 This report is an advisory document. As such, its conclusions and recommendations are not binding. Its role is to encourage greater cooperation and coordination and to stimulate and guide action towards commonly agreed objectives. Its implementation relies upon the goodwill and cooperation of all concerned with the river - not just public bodies but land owners and fishery owners, non-statutory organisations and recreational users.

1.5 CONSTRAINTS

1.5.1 It must be recognised that the agencies commissioning this report do not have absolute control



over the management of the Wye. Their ability to manage effectively is constrained by a variety of outside factors. These have a bearing on the scope of this report.

- Effective management is easier to achieve where most of the land or water is under the direct ownership or control of those responsible for management. The banks of the Wye and the river bed are mainly privately owned, by a great many different owners. Without powers of ownership the ability of public bodies to manage certain aspects of the river is dependent on the cooperation and goodwill of these landowners.
- Responsibility for managing the river does not rest with a single agency, but is shared by a number of public bodies. Implementation of any strategy will depend upon achieving a high level of cooperation between these bodies.
- There are clear difficulties associated with managing a resource the size of the Wye. For this reason it has been necessary to adopt a more strategic approach to management than is usual in plans prepared for smaller sites. It has not been possible to draw up a detailed work programme in this report, or to include precise details of costing or implementation. These will be required eventually and should form part of the final strategy.

1.6 REPORT STRUCTURE

1.6.1 This remainder of the report is divided into five sections. These broadly correspond to the sequence of stages undertaken during the report's preparation.

- The *context* for managing the River Wye.
- Description of *information* about the river.
- Discussion of *management issues*.
- The overall *vision and objectives* for future management.
- *Proposals* for improving management.

2. Context

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 The Wye cannot be managed in isolation. Any management strategy must operate within the existing legal and administrative framework and must recognise any overriding constraints. Factors which set the context for this report include:

- rights of navigation
- the administrative framework for managing the river
- local policy background
- statutory designations and protected areas
- present management initiatives

2.2 THE PUBLIC RIGHT OF NAVIGATION

2.2.1 There is evidence of navigation on the Wye at least as far back as the 12th Century. However, navigation was always difficult due to low water levels and a combination of natural and man made obstructions. In the 17th Century, Acts of Parliament were passed with the intention of improving navigation and opening up the river to trade. At various times weirs were removed, locks were built and the navigation channel was deepened.

2.2.2 These Acts also confirmed the river's status as a free and open navigation. This remains important today as it grants members of the public the legal right to travel by boat on the river, provided this right is exercised reasonably. Without doubt, the status of the Wye as a public navigation, at least as far upstream as Hay-on-Wye, has contributed to its popularity among canoeists and other boat users and has helped to secure its position as one of Britain's leading water recreation resources.

2.2.3 There is some confusion as to whether the various Acts were intended to imply a right of navigation upstream of the Herefordshire county boundary at Hay-on-Wye. This subject is extremely relevant to present day boat use on the upper Wye and has been a source of disagreement between fishery owners and navigation interests.

2.2.4 At the time of the Wye Navigation Acts, and for the next two hundred years or so, the bulk of boat traffic on the Wye was commercial. Barges were used to transport agricultural produce, coal and other goods between settlements along the river, and in particular to the City of Hereford. Sailing sloops came as far upstream as Llandogo, close to the tidal limit, and were used to transport goods to and from many parts of the world. Boat building was an important industry in many riverside towns, including Hereford, Monmouth and Chepstow.

2.2.5 During this period the Wye also began to develop as a tourist destination. It became fashionable to take a boat tour between Ross and Chepstow in search of picturesque scenery. By the end of the nineteenth century commercial traffic had all but ceased due to the development of the railways. Today, navigation is almost entirely recreational. Due to its shallowness in places and other physical constraints very few powered craft use the Wye.

2.2.6 One of the consequences of the Navigation Acts was the creation of a company responsible for improving and managing the navigation, and for collecting tolls from vessels using the river. Although there is no evidence that this company was ever formally dissolved, it appears to have stopped meeting in the 1860s, presumably because commercial navigation had by then declined, and management of the navigation was no longer profitable. Since then, and throughout the period of its growth as a recreation resource, most of the Wye has been unusual in having a right of navigation but no effective navigation authority. Consequently, navigation on the Wye is largely unregulated.

2.2.7 Responsibility for regulating navigation on the tidal Wye below Bigsweir, rests with the Gloucester Harbour Trustees, a statutory body set up in 1890 primarily to regulate vessels entering the port of Gloucester. Within Hereford, the City Council has powers under a local Act of Parliament which enable it to introduce bylaws to regulate navigation on the Wye.

2.2.8 Section 158 of the 1989 Water Act (as amended by the 1991 Water Resources Act) granted the National Rivers Authority new powers to regulate the recreational use of waters where there is

a public right of navigation and there is either no navigation authority, or the existing authority is defunct or not capable of exercising its powers. Consequently, the NRA is able to introduce bylaws to manage navigation on the non-tidal Wye where it considers this necessary in order to secure the orderly use of the river. Whilst the precise extent of these powers still needs detailed legal consideration, they do open up important management opportunities not previously available to the NRA's predecessor organisation with responsibility for the River Wye, the Welsh Water Authority.

2.3 ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

- 2.3.1 Responsibility for managing the Wye is both complex and fragmented. This creates an obstacle to achieving any degree of integrated management. These difficulties are due to its length and the fact that it straddles so many administrative boundaries (Figure 2). Not only does it span two countries, and indeed forms the boundary between England and Wales for part of its length, it flows through four counties and eight districts and boroughs, and in many cases forms the boundary between adjacent authorities. As a consequence, administrative responsibility for the Wye is often split between different local authorities or between regional offices of national bodies.
- 2.3.2 The difficulties with coordinating management action are compounded by the fact that the Wye is subject to the decisions of a large number of public agencies. Their actions will have a crucial bearing on the implementation of the management strategy. It is essential that a common understanding is reached between them.
- 2.3.3 The key agencies and groups with a role in managing the river are shown in Table 1. The main responsibilities of each are discussed below, together with an assessment of their potential future management input.

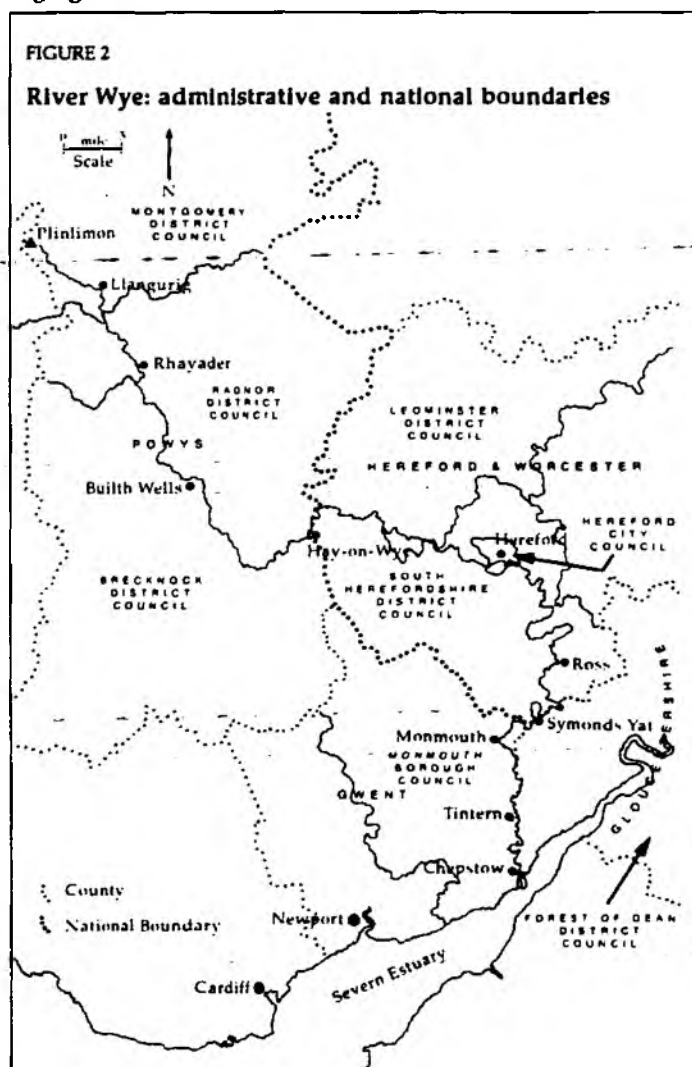
National Rivers Authority

- 2.3.4 The Wye lies within the Welsh Region of the NRA. The NRA was created in 1989 and inherited most of the environmental management functions previously administered by the Water Authorities. It is the only statutory body with a geographical remit over the entire length of the river. It also has a functional responsibility for many aspects of the river's management, including:-

- pollution control and water quality;
- flood defence;
- land drainage;
- water resources;
- fisheries;
- recreation and navigation;
- conservation.

- 2.3.5 The NRA has a direct interest in most of the issues considered in this report, and as the main authority for the river will have a key role in coordinating future management. The relevant responsibilities of the NRA are set out in Section 2 of the Water Resources Act 1991. This states that:

"it shall be the duty of the Authority, to such an extent as it considers desirable, generally to promote:-



a) the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of inland and coastal waters and of land associated with such waters;

b) the conservation of flora and fauna which are dependent on an aquatic environment: and,

c) the use of such waters and land for recreational purposes."

- 2.3.6 These duties are promoted through the exercise of its statutory functions, through the input of staff time and financial aid to assist specific projects, and may in the future involve the direct provision and management of recreation facilities. It employs a small number of staff locally to deal with fisheries, conservation and recreation matters.

Local authorities

- 2.3.7 Local authorities, at both county and district level, have a dual role as statutory planning authorities and as the owners and managers of land. It is essential that all local authorities bordering the Wye support the principle of a management strategy for the river and are actively involved in its implementation.
- 2.3.8 Local authorities are responsible for preparing strategic and detailed policies for the use of land in their area and for determining planning applications. These powers can have a major influence on the character and extent of development along the river. Any proposal to create additional recreation facilities will almost certainly require planning permission.
- 2.3.9 Local authorities are responsible for the management of land in their ownership, including several areas bordering the Wye. They also have powers to implement various countryside management initiatives. These include the creation and management of visitor facilities, supplying financial aid and technical advice to assist projects and providing countryside ranger services. They are also responsible for managing the public rights of way network, and have a role in helping to coordinate tourism promotion and supporting local economic development initiatives.

Wye Valley AONB JAC

- 2.3.10 The Wye Valley AONB JAC was set up in 1972 and consists of representatives from each local authority within the AONB, plus other statutory and non-statutory organisations. Its function is to make representations to the county and district authorities to:-
- secure consistent, coordinated policies on matters relating to the conservation of landscape, wildlife and other features for the enhancement of natural beauty within the AONB.
 - coordinate the provision and improvement of facilities for countryside recreation activities within the AONB.
- 2.3.11 These objectives are pursued through the production of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan and by directing the work of the WVCS. A separate landscape study of the AONB, commissioned by the JAC, has recently been published. The JAC has also coordinated the production of the recently published *Wye Valley Woodland Management Guidelines* which are intended to help secure the long term conservation interest and landscape value of the Wye Valley woodlands.
- 2.3.12 An AONB officer will be appointed shortly to be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the AONB management plan.

Wye Valley Countryside Service

- 2.3.13 The WVCS created in 1986 to provide a unified countryside management service for the AONB. It is an amalgam of countryside staff and resources from the county councils of Gwent and Hereford and Worcester, and consists of three full time wardens plus part time wardens and

TABLE 1

Key agencies and groups responsible for managing the river

National Rivers Authority (NRA)

Local Authorities

Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

Wye Valley Countryside Service (WVCS)

Countryside Commission

Countryside Council for Wales

English Nature

Sports Council/Sports Council for Wales

Forestry Commission

Gloucester Harbour Trustees

Tourism agencies

Landowners

Fishery owners

Voluntary conservation bodies

Sports clubs and recreation interests

volunteer support. The WVCS undertakes a range of activities including:

- the upkeep of local authority visitor facilities and Local Nature Reserves;
- the maintenance of public rights of way, including parts of the Wye Valley Walk and the Offa's Dyke national trail;
- the production of interpretive and publicity material, including the *Wye Valley Walk Map Pack* and the *Map and Guide to the Wye Valley and the Royal Forest of Dean*;
- organising interpretive walks and lectures;
- liaising with members of the public and visiting groups.

Countryside Commission / Countryside Council for Wales

- 2.3.14 The Countryside Commission and its Welsh counterpart for countryside issues, the Countryside Council for Wales, are the national organisations responsible for promoting access to the countryside for informal recreation and for the conservation of landscape. They are also responsible for designating AONBs and national trails such as Offa's Dyke which passes through parts of the Wye Valley.

- 2.3.15 These bodies will have an input into the management of the Wye through the provision of financial aid and advice, the development of national countryside policies and the promotion of specific management initiatives such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Between them they grant aid much of the work of the WVCS.

English Nature/Countryside Council for Wales

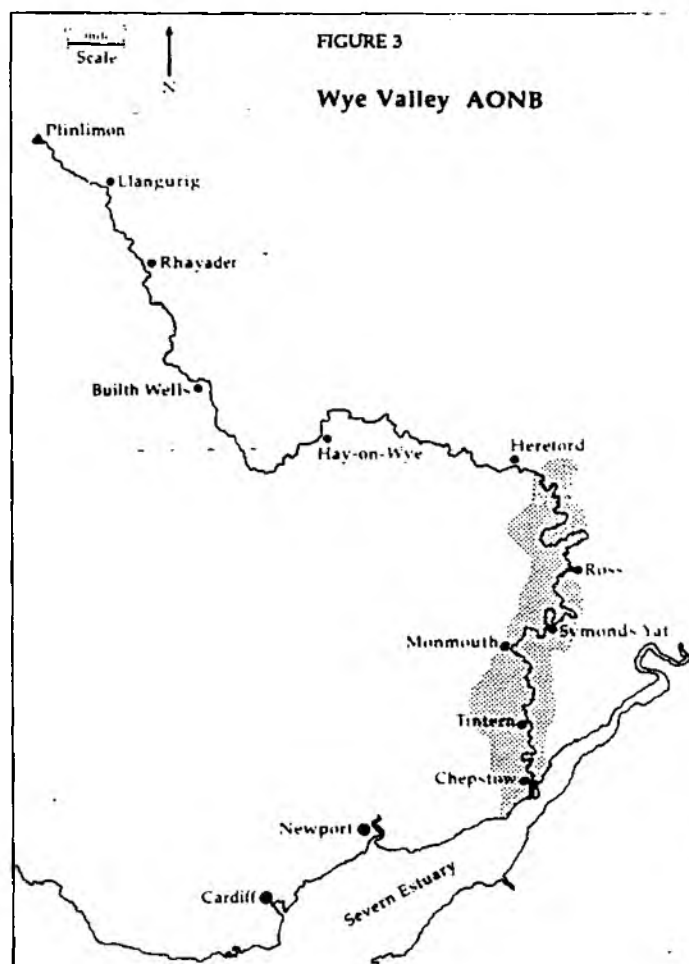
- 2.3.16 English Nature and its Welsh counterpart for nature conservation, the Countryside Council for Wales are the national bodies responsible for safeguarding nature conservation interests and the development of national policies for nature conservation. They, and their predecessor organisation the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), have had a long history of involvement with the Wye Valley, through the designation of SSSIs and the direct management of SSSIs and National Nature Reserves.

- 2.3.17 The NCC was involved in a number of surveys to identify sites of conservation interest in the Wye Valley and its successor organisations will have a continuing role to play in collecting and collating scientific information. Their primary concern in the context of this report is the potential impact of sport and recreation on the habitats and wildlife population of the river, and in the future they may be involved in coordinating further research in this area. Their responsibilities also include the provision of advice and grant aid for management activities.

- 2.3.18 The two agencies liaise regularly with the NRA and local authorities over engineering works and development proposals affecting the river. They are frequently asked to give advice on the ecological impact of new proposals and will need to be closely involved in any decisions concerning the location and design of new recreation facilities.

Sports Council/Sports Council for Wales

- 2.3.19 The two Sports Councils are responsible for coordinating the development and promotion of sport



and recreation nationally. They have an input into management through the development of national and regional policies for countryside recreation and water sports, and through the provision of grant aid and technical advice. They also act as the umbrella organisations for the national governing bodies of many sports and will provide an important link with clubs and organised groups.

Forestry Commission

- 2.3.20 The Forestry Commission does not have any direct management responsibility for the river. However, as a major landowner it plays an important role in managing woodlands in its ownership, many of which border the Wye, and giving advice and grant aid to private woodland owners. These activities can greatly influence the visual appearance of the valley. The Forestry Commission was instrumental in producing the *Wye Valley Woodland Management Guidelines*.
- 2.3.21 In recent years, the Forestry Commission has increasingly sought to promote conservation and recreation objectives in conjunction with its main aim of timber production. As such it has been active in the development of tourism and recreation facilities and in the publication of interpretive material. It can be expected to continue this role.

Gloucester Harbour Trustees

- 2.3.22 The Gloucester Harbour Trustees are the statutory navigation authority for the River Wye below Bigsweir Bridge. Their responsibilities include the maintenance of the navigation channel, river safety and regulating navigation use. In the past they have had little input into the management of the Wye. However, they are currently revising their navigation bylaws and, once adopted, these will enable them to exert greater control over the use of the tidal Wye. It is vital that the drafting and enforcement of these bylaws are undertaken in consultation with the NRA, and that they are consistent with the overall direction of policy for the rest of the river.

Tourism agencies

- 2.3.23 There are three regional Tourist Boards with an interest in the Wye Valley - Wales Tourist Board, Tourism South Wales and the Heart of England Tourist Board. These are supported by local authorities, and in South Herefordshire and the Forest of Dean by Tourism Action Plans developed by the district councils. Together with local authorities they help to promote the Wye Valley as a tourist destination and maintain a network of Tourism Information Centres. Their combined activities will influence both the future level of visitors to the Wye Valley and the nature of these visits. Besides official tourism agencies there are a number of non-statutory groupings and trade associations, often linked to specific areas or attractions, which help to promote tourism in the Wye Valley.

Landowners

- 2.3.24 In common with much of the countryside, the majority of land bordering the river and much of the bed of the river itself is privately owned, as are most of the sporting rights. The combined efforts of individual owners has a major influence on the management of the river - not least by their contribution to maintaining the river banks and their attitude to public access. The majority of riverside, or riparian, land is agricultural, and farming practices can have an important impact on the appearance of the river landscape and on water quality and quantity. Many activities of landowners take place outside any formal control.
- 2.3.25 The cooperation and support of landowners and fishery owners will be important to the success of the proposals contained in this report. Likewise, their ability to frustrate initiatives or restrict access must be recognised. The current problems affecting the farming economy and the drive towards agricultural diversification may provide opportunities for partnerships with landowners to improve access or promote measures to enhance the environment.

Fishery owners

- 2.3.26 Fishery owners, some of whom may also be landowners, can have a very direct input into the management of the river. Attempts to enhance angling quality by altering the river bed and banks can have a marked impact upon the natural appearance and ecological stability of the river unless

carefully controlled. In addition, the degree to which fishery owners are prepared to accept other recreational activities and cooperate with other river users will be critical to establishing the common vision required of this report. Most fishery owners on the Wye belong to the Wye Salmon Fishery Owners Association.

Voluntary conservation bodies

- 2.3.27 There are a number of non-statutory conservation groups with an interest in the Wye Valley. These include the six county nature trusts, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Lower Wye Valley Preservation Society and the National Trust. Some, especially the county trusts and the National Trust own or manage land bordering the river. As such they have an input into conserving and enhancing the landscape and wildlife interest of the river, and the provision of public access.
- 2.3.28 Between them these bodies possess a wealth of knowledge and experience of the river which it may be possible to utilise. They may be able to assist with undertaking habitat surveys or other research. Some have access to volunteers, many of whom are experienced in site maintenance work and may be willing to assist with practical management tasks.

Sports clubs and recreational interests

- 2.3.29 Those using the river for recreational purposes, whether as individuals or as represented by the many sports clubs, organised groups and governing bodies, are a key component in the success or failure of future management. Their acceptance of new initiatives and their willingness to face up to new responsibilities will be critical. Besides their contribution to providing and managing facilities, clubs and representative bodies have an important function in influencing and educating their members and helping to minimise the harmful impact of their activities. They will also be an important contact point for the dissemination of information. Progress will be difficult without the support and cooperation of these groups.

2.4 LOCAL POLICY BACKGROUND

- 2.4.1 The management strategy will need to take into account the policies of a variety of agencies and will hopefully, in time, provide a stimulus by which these agencies can review and update their policies relating to the river.

Relevant sources of policy include:

Statutory development plans

- 2.4.2 The statutory land use planning system, as operated by structure plans and local plans and by the development control system, is concerned primarily with the use of land rather than its management. Consequently, many of the proposals in this report fall outside its influence.
- 2.4.3 Planning policies affecting the river are contained in a number of documents, reflecting the river's administrative complexity. Few local authorities have policies relating specifically to the river. Where the river is affected, it is usually covered by general recreation, tourism or conservation policies, or by policies to control development within areas of landscape or conservation interest.
- 2.4.4 Whilst current planning policies do not place an undue constraint on the recommendations of this report, it is important that these do not conflict with existing planning policy. Elements of this report may be able to feed into structure and local plans as they are reviewed and updated and, where appropriate, policies can be adopted which help to meet this report's objectives. In this way, greater coordination of policy should be possible.
- 2.4.5 Some management activities, particularly those relating to the development of recreation facilities, physical works to the river and the erection of notices will require planning consent.

Non-statutory guidance

- 2.4.6 In addition to statutory development plans, some local authorities have prepared separate studies and strategies on specific topics. For example, Hereford and Worcester County Council and Gwent County Council have prepared countryside recreation strategies. Proposals arising from this report may need to be incorporated into local authority recreation programmes.

AONB Management Plan

- 2.4.7 Together with the NRA the other main unifying influence over the river is provided by the status of much of the lower Wye Valley as an AONB. Within the AONB, the JAC has sought to coordinate policies for the protection of the area's environmental quality and the management of informal recreation through the preparation of a management plan. The first plan was published in 1981. This has recently been reviewed and a final management plan is due to be published in August 1992. The parallel preparation of the AONB Management Plan and this report provides a sound platform for the development of an integrated strategy for managing the lower river and the wider AONB.
- 2.4.8 The draft Management Plan outlines a number of strategic issues and policies. These are summarised in a four point strategy:
- Zonal woodland and landscape management.
 - Symonds Yat area enhancement.
 - Wye Gorge landscape enhancement.
 - River Wye corridor management.

Symonds Yat Study

- 2.4.9 Hereford and Worcester County Council recently began an important study into the planning and management of this key area within the AONB under the aegis of the AONB Management Plan. This will look primarily at the problems of visitor management and environmental conservation, with a view to preparing an action plan for the area. The Symonds Yat Study will incorporate elements of this report, building strong links between the two.

NRA Catchment Management Plan

- 2.4.10 The NRA Welsh Region has embarked upon a programme of preparing management plans for each of its river catchments. The provisional date for completing the plan for the upper Wye, above Hay-on-Wye, is late 1993, and for the lower Wye, 1994. These plans will help to determine the NRA's policies and programmes for the Wye as they relate to each of its statutory functions. It is envisaged that they will form the vehicle by which proposals contained in this report, and approved after subsequent consultation, will be formally adopted and implemented by the NRA.

National Policy Framework

- 2.4.11 A variety of national policies and guidelines may have a bearing on the future management of the Wye. These include:
- Department of the Environment/Welsh Office Planning Policy Guidance Notes and circulars.
 - Countryside Commission/Countryside Council for Wales policies for AONBs and general guidance on countryside recreation, visitor management and access.
 - Sports Council/Sports Council for Wales strategies and guidance for the development of sport in the countryside.

2.5 STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS AND PROTECTED AREAS

- 2.5.1 Many areas within the Wye Valley have been designated for their environmental importance. The constraints imposed by these statutory and non-statutory designations will have a strong influence on future management. Relevant designations include:
- SSSIs;
 - the Wye Valley AONB;
 - the Brecon Beacons National Park;
 - National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves (NNRs/LNRs);
 - Key sites for nature conservation identified by county nature trusts and others;
 - Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other sites of archeological or historic interest.

2.6 PRESENT MANAGEMENT

2.6.1 At present there is very little active management of sport and recreation on the Wye. This is due in part to a previous lack of adequate regulatory powers and in part to the absence of overall managerial responsibility or an agreed action plan for the river. It has proved difficult to achieve the necessary degree of cooperation between the various responsible bodies or to agree firm objectives for management. As a result, management has been largely uncoordinated and opportunistic.

Examples of relevant current initiatives include:

Public amenity sites

2.6.2 Some local authorities have developed recreation sites and other facilities for visitors alongside the river, including public parks, picnic sites, car parks and canoe launching areas.

River Wye Handbook

2.6.3 The River Wye Project has published a handbook for visitors to the river. This contains factual information to help raise awareness and understanding of some of the many interests associated with the river. It also contains a code of conduct aimed at influencing the behaviour of river users. This is reproduced in Appendix 30.

Canoeists Guide to the Wye

2.6.4 The NRA publishes a *Canoeist's Guide to the Wye*. This contains information to help canoeists enjoy the Wye, including a detailed route inventory and information about access and accommodation.

Wye Calendar of Events

2.6.5 The NRA sponsors the production of the annual *Calendar of Major Events on the River Wye*. This is produced in conjunction with Hereford Sports Council and contains a list of events taking place on the river. Its intention is to help organisers plan their events so that dates do not clash, and to give advance warning to other river users about events planned to take place.

Speed limits

2.6.6 The NRA has imposed a speed limit over a small section of the river at Symonds Yat. This was introduced under a land drainage bylaw, and is intended primarily to reduce the risk of bank erosion.

Countryside management services

2.6.7 The Wye Valley Countryside Service and some individual local authorities provide countryside management services.

3. Background information

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 Good, up to date information is the cornerstone of successful management planning. Consequently, one of the main objectives of the Wye Project was to collect and collate background information about the Wye and its associated recreational uses and conservation interests. A computer database has been established to store much of this information and the location of sites and facilities has been plotted onto a series of large scale maps.
- 3.1.2 Information has been collected by a variety of means:
- Surveys of recreational use.
 - Examination of existing published and unpublished information.
 - Consultation with a broad range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the Wye.
- 3.1.3 This information is described below, and is considered under four headings:
- Environment and conservation.
 - Sport and recreation.
 - Ownership.
 - Historical and cultural interests.
- 3.1.4 It has not been possible in this volume to include all the information that has been collected. Additional information is contained in the separate volume of technical appendices.

3.2 ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

INTRODUCTION

- 3.2.1 The Wye is widely regarded as one of the finest rivers in Britain for nature conservation. In *A Nature Conservation Review* (NCC, 1977), an account of the most important conservation sites in Britain, it was described as being of outstanding national importance and was the only river to be granted grade one status.
- 3.2.2 Compared with most other rivers of its size, the Wye is relatively unaffected by pollution, or by engineering works resulting from land drainage, flood defence or navigation. Its catchment is predominantly rural and dominated by extensive rather than intensive agriculture. This naturalness is an important factor in its value for conservation.
- 3.2.3 The Wye flows through a variety of geological formations and landscapes. Along its course there is a wide diversity of physical features and habitats, resulting from changing geology and water velocity, and the natural processes of erosion and deposition. These include rocks and boulders, pools, riffles, shingle banks, cliffs and submerged gravel beds. Plant communities associated with these features add to the diversity.
- 3.2.4 Other valuable habitats associated with the river include ungrazed banks and islands, water meadows, areas of woodland and riverside trees. Along its tidal stretches areas of saltmarsh flank the river, especially near Beachley point. Exposed mud flats provide an important feeding habitat for wading birds.
- 3.2.5 Although the naturalness and diversity of the Wye are rare features in themselves, another measure of the Wye's conservation value is the number of nationally and locally rare species of plants and animals which it supports.
- 3.2.6 Like many natural ecosystems, and particularly wetlands, the Wye is susceptible to change and is easily damaged. This can arise from human interference and mismanagement, including pollution, engineering works, disturbance and unsuitable recreational activities. This fragility adds further to its importance and its need for protection.

SSSI STATUS

- 3.2.7 The special qualities of the Wye have been recognised by its designation, in 1978, as a SSSI under

the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. This designation applies to the river itself and includes both banks. This reflects the contribution made by the Wye to the national strategy for nature conservation.

- 3.2.8 The Wye has yet to be renotified as an SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. This is due mainly to the scale and complexity of the renotification process. Renotification is programmed to take place in 1994/1995. Until then the Wye is not afforded the full level of protection available under the 1981 Act.

LAND USE AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.2.9 In its upper reaches, the Wye flows largely through open moorland and pasture, with sheep farming the dominant land use. As it flows towards Herefordshire, the steep valley opens out and the land use becomes more mixed, with areas of arable farming and woodland. At this point the river is still relatively shallow and fast flowing.
- 3.2.10 As it enters Herefordshire the character of the valley changes. The river becomes slower and follows a tortuous route downstream through an extensive flood plain. Between Glasbury and Ross, relic features such as ox-bow lakes bear witness to the changing course of the river over the years. Mixed arable and livestock farming is the dominant land use, with some orchards and small woodlands.
- 3.2.11 Below Hereford, the river follows several large meanders before entering areas of limestone, first near Symonds Yat and again downstream of Monmouth. At these points the Wye flows through a steep gorge, created by the imposition of river meanders on the carboniferous rock below as sea levels fell during the last ice age. Within this gorge the river is generally deep and slow flowing, becoming tidal below Bigsweir. The limestone forms spectacular cliffs in places and provides the most dramatic scenery of the whole valley.

WILDLIFE

- 3.2.12 Whilst the Wye is primarily important as an example of a natural, unspoilt ecosystem, it is also important for the individual species of plants and animals it supports. These are considered below:

Mammals

- 3.2.13 Most of the Wye offers excellent habitat for otters and after a period of decline the otter population of the Wye appears to be increasing. Re-colonisation has been most marked on the upper Wye and on the tributaries, but there is evidence that the species has spread to the lower reaches, possibly as far downstream as Monmouth. An ongoing programme of field surveys, coordinated by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, is attempting to measure the changes in the otter population. Feral mink are established along much of the river and are regarded by some as a pest. There are good populations of water voles in some areas and the riverside sedge and reed beds provide a habitat for harvest mice.
- 3.2.14 Several species of bat hunt over the river, especially during the summer when insects are hatching. Riverside caves and disused railway tunnels adjoining the river are especially important for hibernating greater horseshoe bats.

Birds

- 3.2.15 The Wye provides valuable habitats for many species of birds. The most recent comprehensive survey of bird populations along the Wye was carried out in 1977 by the RSPB. This recorded a total of 129 species, 71 of which were breeding on the Wye or its banks. A limited number of individual species surveys and surveys of particular areas within the Wye catchment have also been carried out.
- 3.2.16 Ornithological interest on the Wye is widespread and it is difficult to single out stretches of particular importance. Valuable habitats include gravel shoals, particularly those above Llangurig and lower down the river near Glasbury and Whitney. These are important feeding and nesting areas for little ringed plovers and common sandpipers. Other important features include earth banks, which are home to kingfishers and extensive colonies of sand martins.

- 3.2.17 The Wye supports large populations of water fowl, including mallard, moorhens and mute swans, and the goosander, once a very rare species, is gaining in abundance. During the spring and early summer the emergent vegetation along the banks and islands provides shelter and safe nesting sites. Other key sites for water birds include the heronry at Piercefield Cliffs near Chepstow and a cormorant roost near Fownhope. Bankside bushes and reedbeds provide a habitat for a multitude of smaller songbirds, while the extensive woodland of the lower valley provides an excellent habitat for typical woodland species.

Fish

- 3.2.18 The Wye supports twenty nine species of fish. Most of these are resident all year round. Others like the eel and the salmon migrate to and from the sea to spawn. Species which contribute to the conservation value of the Wye include river-lamprey, sea-lamprey, sea trout, Twaitte shad and Allis shad. Above all, the Wye is known for its salmon. It experiences one of the largest runs of salmon in England and Wales. Each year adult fish return from the Atlantic and swim up river to spawn, mainly in the upper reaches and tributaries. The salmon has acquired a commercial and sporting importance in addition to its conservation value.

Invertebrates

- 3.2.19 The Wye is home to a range of insect species characteristic of unpolluted rivers. Groups such as stoneflies, damselflies, mayflies and dragonflies are well represented, by both common and rarer species. It supports a significant population of the rare club-tailed dragonfly. Bankside vegetation provides feeding and breeding habitats for many species of butterfly. There is an important population of native crayfish, although there is evidence that this is threatened by 'crayfish plague' which has decimated populations elsewhere in Britain. Shingle banks support important communities of beetles and other invertebrates.

Plants

- 3.2.20 The diversity of physical features found along the Wye has resulted in a very rich flora. Many of the more common aquatic plants grow in profusion, especially in the middle stretches, where there are extensive beds of water crowfoot and other submerged plants.
- 3.2.21 The fast flowing, rocky, upper reaches are a valuable habitat for mosses and lichens, including many rare species. The Wye is also notable for its shingle bank flora, again mostly in the upper reaches.
- 3.2.22 The banks of the Wye support a wide range of herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees. Notable among these are small populations of wild chives and the nationally rare rock cinquefoil. Parts of the river are fringed with reed and sedge beds and in the tidal reaches by saltmarsh species.

GEOLOGY AND GEOMORPHOLOGY

- 3.2.23 The Wye Valley has many features of national and international geological or geomorphological importance. Several sites along the river have been notified or proposed as SSSIs for their geomorphological interest. Riverside rock exposures are of geological importance.

SUMMARY

- 3.2.24 In conclusion, the fundamental characteristic of the Wye is a naturalness derived from its rich geological diversity. This is expressed not only in the diversity of natural habitats and plant and animal species, but also in its high water quality. The maintenance of this naturalness should be regarded as the most important nature conservation objective in managing the river. Any development or pressure which will result in a departure from this natural state should be regarded as damaging.

OTHER IMPORTANT SITES

- 3.2.25 Many habitats adjacent or close to the river are also valuable for nature conservation. These are discussed below:

SSSI's

- 3.2.26 Many other sites besides the Wye have been designated as SSSIs. A total of 15 SSSIs actually border the river. Most are areas of woodland, predominantly along the lower reaches of the river. Appendix 8 contains a full list of riparian SSSIs. An additional 45 SSSIs are located within approximately 2 km of the river. These are listed in Appendix 9.

Key Sites

- 3.2.27 Surveys have been carried out by a variety of bodies, including English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and some of the county nature trusts, to identify sites which, though not qualifying for SSSI status, nonetheless provide important local wildlife habitats. Some of this information has been collated by English Nature in a gazetteer of sites of nature conservation interest within the Wye Valley AONB.
- 3.2.28 Although the availability of key site information for parts of the Valley is variable, a total of 266 sites have been identified within 2 km of the river. Of these, 38 actually border the river. These are listed in Appendices 10 and 11.

Nature reserves

- 3.2.29 Several of these key wildlife habitats are managed as nature reserves. There are 47 reserves in the Wye Valley, although only 1, Clifford Common, actually borders the River. These include a small number of officially designated NNRs and LNRs. Some reserves are owned by statutory bodies, including County Councils and the Forestry Commission. Others are owned or managed under agreement by county nature trusts or other voluntary bodies. A full list of nature reserves in the Wye Valley is contained in Appendix 12.

Wye Valley woodlands

- 3.2.30 After the river itself, the woodlands of the lower Wye Valley are the most important wildlife habitat in the context of this report. Below Symonds Yat the Wye flows through a steep gorge of carboniferous limestone laid upon sandstone. These steep valley sides are covered by extensive tracts of ancient and semi-natural deciduous woodland and are home to a wide variety of plants and animals, including several rare species. Most native British species of trees and shrubs, some sixty in total, occur within these woodlands, in communities largely undisturbed by man.
- 3.2.31 The size and diversity of the Wye Valley woodlands make them some of the most important areas of woodland to be found in Britain. They are listed together as a single site in *A Nature Conservation Review*.

THREATS

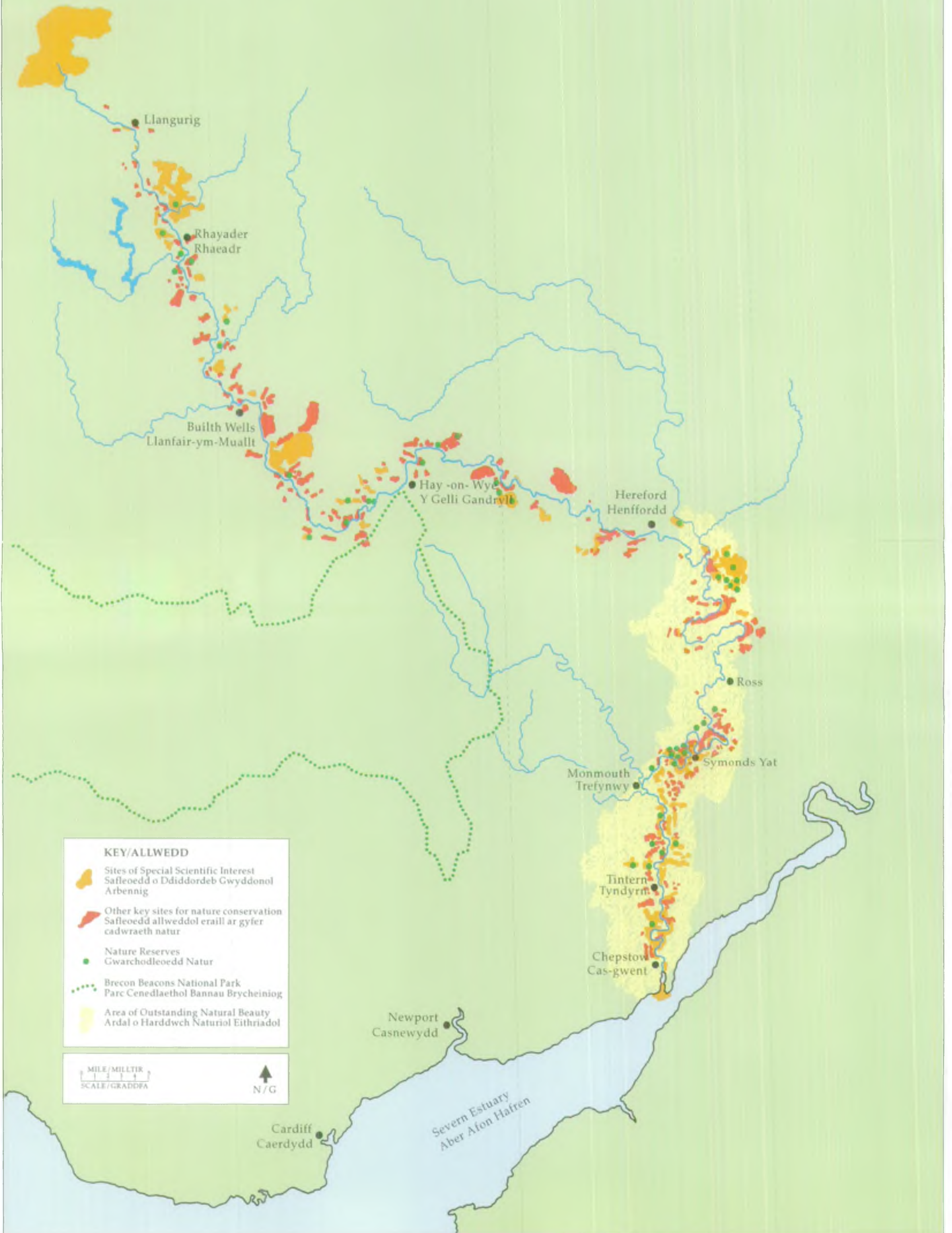
- 3.2.32 Besides recreational use, which forms the main topic of this report, the Wye is susceptible to a range of developments or changes which could adversely affect its conservation value. These include:-
- pollution - arising from a number of sources. These can include the discharge of industrial and sewage effluent, accidental chemical spillage, and contaminated run-off from industrial or residential development, though this is less likely to occur on the Wye than in some other catchments. Agricultural activities can lead to run-off of fertilisers, or contamination by pesticides, silage effluent or slurry. An increase in coniferous forestry in upland, acid sensitive parts of the catchment could lead to water acidification or increased siltation.
 - changes to the pattern and flow of the river caused by impoundment or abstraction. Although the Wye is already partially regulated by reservoirs in the Elan Valley any further impoundment leading to the transfer of water from the Wye to other catchments, or abstraction within the catchment, could have a significant impact on the river. Changes in the pattern of land use within the catchment could also affect water regimes.
 - alteration to the physical structure of the river, such as the strengthening of banks, dredging, and the construction of groynes and fishing platforms. These detract from the naturalness of the river, can adversely affect the conservation of geological or geomorphological features and can damage wildlife habitats.

- destruction or damage to adjoining habitats, as a result of new development, forestry, or agricultural intensification in the vicinity of the river. Loss of, or damage to, bankside habitats can affect the integrity of the river system as a whole.
- changes to temperature and rainfall regimes resulting from long term climatic change.
- the spread of non-native species such as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed.

Information sources

- 3.2.33 Appendix 26 contains a list of the most important and relevant sources of information about the natural environment of the Wye and the Wye Valley. Although much has been written about the Wye and many aspects of its ecology have been extensively studied, there is no single inventory of flora and fauna, together with habitat information, for the entire river. Coverage is variable. Some stretches are well documented whereas information about others is fragmented and of poor quality. Some of the information has not been verified recently and may be out of date.
- 3.2.34 The most useful reference is a corridor survey undertaken by the NCC in 1988. However, this only covered the river between Chepstow and Hay-on-Wye; it did not extend into Powys. In general, the level of information about the Wye Valley in Powys is less complete than for the remainder of the valley, though information collected by the University of Wales field station at Newbridge-on-Wye and by others is available. Information about some specific sites and species lists are held by the Countryside Council for Wales and by the county records office.
- 3.2.35 To date, no authoritative attempt has been made to examine the available information about the river objectively and present this in a form that can be easily interpreted by non-specialists. While the whole river has been recognised as important, such an evaluation could assist with identifying those stretches of river or individual habitats which are of critical importance, or which might be sensitive or vulnerable to change or particular forms of pressure. Similarly it could help to identify less sensitive areas which may be more able to accommodate recreational use without damage.

ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
YR AMGYLCHEDD A CHADWRAETH





3.3 SPORT AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

- 3.3.1 It is essential for the effective management of the river that good information is available about the level and distribution of the main recreational activities, and that something is known about the people visiting the river. Although the Wye has been an important recreational resource for many years, very few data have been collected previously about recreational use. This is due, in part, to the lack of effective management arrangements, which has meant that monitoring recreational activity has not been a high priority in the past. The absence of a navigation authority has meant that, unlike most other navigable waterways, levels of boating use have not been recorded.
- 3.3.2 Two fairly recent studies (Crease and Penning-Rowell 1985, and Foster 1988) attempted to quantify canoeing and angling use. However, doubts must be expressed about the survey methodology used in each study, and hence the accuracy of their estimates. In any case, recreational use has increased since these surveys were undertaken and their estimates cannot now be considered reliable. These reports are described in Appendix 27.
- 3.3.3 The collection of up to date information about recreational use was regarded as a high priority. This was undertaken by means of:
- questionnaire interviews with representatives of the main user groups;
 - surveys to measure the actual use of the river;
 - consultation with locally based recreation groups, including clubs, commercial organisations and organisers of competitive events.
- 3.3.4 The overall aims of the research were to:
- gain some understanding of the different recreational activities associated with the river, including the levels of use of each activity, and the variations in the geographical and temporal patterns of use;
 - collect information about recreational users, including their origin, the nature and frequency of their visits and the activities they undertake;
 - assess the attitudes and knowledge of users, including their perception of conflicts or problems, their likes and dislikes about the river and their suggestions for improvement

3.4 RECREATION SURVEYS

- 3.4.1 Much of the discussion about individual recreational activities in this section is based upon the results of surveys undertaken by the Wye Project. These were targeted primarily at the three main groups of users - anglers, canoeists and informal visitors. A brief outline of each is given below. Details of these surveys and their results are contained in Appendices 1 to 7.
1. Questionnaire surveys of informal visitors, 1990
- 3.4.2 Although the Wye is important for participants in active sports, for many it is a focus for informal uses such as walking, picnicing or simply enjoying the pleasant surroundings and tranquillity of the river. Numerically, these informal visitors far exceed active users. Information about this group is not widely available, though some private tourism businesses are known to have carried out their own market research.
- 3.4.3 Collecting information about informal visitors to the Wye was a high priority. During the summer of 1990, 3,864 people were interviewed at 9 sites along the river - Rhayader, Builth Wells, Glasbury, Ross, Kerne Bridge, Lydbrook, Symonds Yat East, The Biblins and Monmouth. These sites were selected on the basis of their geographical distribution, the level of recreational use and their suitability in terms of the survey procedure used. Questionnaires were used to collect basic information about:
- the origin of visitors and their demographic characteristics;

- details about their visit and the activities undertaken;
- the frequency of their visits to the Wye and the sites visited.

2. Questionnaire survey of Informal visitors - 1991

3.4.4 A second more detailed series of questionnaire interviews with informal visitors was carried out during the summer of 1991. These were intended to follow on from those undertaken in 1990 and included additional questions on visitors' 'likes' and 'dislikes'. Respondents were also asked what improvements or developments would enhance their enjoyment of the river. Responses were obtained by a combination of face to face interviews and self completion questionnaires distributed on site. 744 interviews took place and 684 self-completion forms were received. Surveys were undertaken at 12 sites - Glasbury, Hay-on-Wye, Whitney, Bredwardine, Hereford, Ross, Kerne Bridge, Lydbrook, Huntsham Bridge, Symonds Yat West, Symonds Yat East and Monmouth. Interviews took place on six separate days.

3. Postal survey of salmon anglers

3.4.5 A detailed questionnaire was sent to a sample of 432 anglers known to hold rod licences for salmon angling issued by the NRA. These were selected at random from records of licences sold by agents in the Wye Valley held by the NRA. Replies were received from 181 anglers. This represents a sample of around 14% of all anglers that bought salmon licences in the Wye Valley during the 1990 season.

3.4.6 This questionnaire was intended to collect information about:

- the level and distribution of salmon angling on the Wye;
- the reasons anglers choose to fish the Wye;
- their perceptions of problems or conflicts;
- their views on improving management;
- their suggestions for improving angling on the Wye.

4. Postal survey of fishery owners

3.4.7 Fishery owners have a substantial interest in the management of the river. In order to canvass their opinions on the overall pattern of recreation activity, to obtain details of problems and conflicts experienced and to gather suggestions for improving the management of the river, a questionnaire was sent to every known fishery owner on the Wye - 189 in total. These were identified from records held by the NRA. 110 replies were received.

5. Postal Survey of Organised Canoe Groups

3.4.8 It is known that organised groups account for a significant proportion of canoeists using the Wye. Questionnaires were sent to 390 canoe clubs, schools, field centres and other organisations believed to have used the Wye during 1990. These groups were identified from a number of sources, including records kept by accommodation points, scout and guide organisers, and from discussions with local canoeists. 150 replies were received.

3.4.9 Although the list of groups contacted is not exhaustive and the selection can be criticised for being biased, it does nonetheless represent a significant and hopefully representative cross-section of group canoe users.

3.4.10 The questionnaire used was similar to that employed in the angler's survey. It was intended to find out about each group's use of the river and to gauge opinion on a range of management issues, including the perceptions of conflict and suggestions for improvement.

6. Canoeing Census

3.4.11 There were no reliable data about the level and distribution of canoeing activity taking place on the river. In an attempt to obtain an estimate of daily canoe use, a series of counts was undertaken during the summer of 1991. The volume of canoeing activity was recorded throughout the day

at each of the main public canoe access points between Glasbury and Monmouth. This took place over six days, consisting of weekends and weekdays. The number of craft launching, landing and passing through each site was recorded, together with the time observed.

7. Riverside Survey of Canoeists

3.4.12 In order to collect information about those canoeists actually using the river, a series of questionnaire interviews was undertaken in conjunction with the canoe census. The aim was to interview representatives from groups of canoeists as they landed at each access point. The questionnaire used was similar to that used in the postal canoeist questionnaire. 220 interviews were completed.

3.4.13 NB. It should be noted that the results of the questionnaires only relate to the current use of the Wye. Inevitably, they do not take account of those people that might use the Wye but are discouraged from doing so for whatever reason, perhaps because of the high levels of use. Neither do they include those that are prevented from using the Wye at present but who intend to do so at some time in the future.

TABLE 2

Sport and recreation on the Wye

Water-based activities	Land-based activities
Angling - Game	Walking
- Coarse	Picnicing
Canoeing	Birdwatching/ Nature Study
Rowing	Cycling
Rafting	Horsesriding
Water-skiing	Rock climbing
Jet-skiing	Pleasure launches
Passenger cruisers	
Swimming	
Sailing	

3.5 INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

3.5.1 The Wye provides a unique resource for sport and recreation. It is the foremost salmon fishing river in England and Wales and also provides excellent opportunities for coarse fishing. Since the 1970s, it has developed into one of the most important canoeing rivers in the country, with conditions suitable for most standards and disciplines of the sport. There are well established rowing clubs at Hereford, Ross and Monmouth. In more recent years new activities have been introduced, including rafting, water-skiing and jet skiing.

3.5.2 The natural beauty and tranquillity of the Wye also attract a large number of informal visitors. Its banks are well used by walkers and picnickers, and are a popular destination for holiday makers and day trippers. Other land based activities include bird watching, cycling and horse riding. The various recreational activities are listed in Table 2.

3.5.3 The use made of the Wye by each of the main activities is considered in the following sections.

ANGLING

Introduction

3.5.4 Access to the Wye for angling is controlled by the owners of fishing rights. Permission to fish is acquired through private arrangements with the fishery owner, and ultimately by the purchase or lease of fishing rights. The majority of fishing rights on the Wye are privately owned, either by individuals, clubs or syndicates. A few stretches, mainly in some of the towns, are owned by local authorities. Downstream of Tintern the fishing rights are owned by the NRA. This dependence on private rights of access enables fishery owners to exert considerable control over fishing on their waters and to impose conditions or limit the number of anglers. The NRA has no direct powers to regulate angling effort.

3.5.5 Besides consent from the fishery owner, an angler must obtain a rod licence from the NRA before fishing. Angling on the Wye is only permitted during open seasons set by the NRA. For coarse fish this is from 16th June through to 14th March following, and for salmon and sea trout from 26th January to 17th October (25th October above Llanwrthwl Bridge).

3.5.6 The unpolluted water and relatively natural topography of the River Wye provides a good habitat for many species of fish. As a result, it offers exceptionally good opportunities for both coarse and game angling. In its middle and lower reaches, chub, dace, barbel, roach, eels and pike are the main quarry of coarse anglers. At particular locations or under certain conditions carp, tench,

breem and bleak are also caught. The best trout and grayling fishing is to be found in the upper Wye and the tributaries.

- 3.5.7 Salmon are caught throughout the river, with the catch at any fishery dependant upon river conditions. The middle and upper Wye tends to fish best during the spring and autumn when there is usually sufficient water to encourage salmon to swim upstream. During the summer and periods of low water salmon fishing is generally at its best on the lower Wye.

GAME ANGLING

- 3.5.8 The Wye is best known for game angling, and especially the high quality of its salmon fishing. It is renowned both for the number of fish caught and their large average size. The Wye is regarded as the best salmon river outside Scotland, with an average annual rod catch over the 10 years to 1990 of 3,276 fish. The annual rod catch on the Wye represents between 12% (1990) and 19% (1988) of the total salmon rod catch in England and Wales.
- 3.5.9 There is a long history of salmon fishing on the Wye, though in the past few years the number of fish caught has declined from its peak in the 1970s. The decline has been most noticeable among the large spring run fish for which the Wye was once renowned. Nevertheless, very large sums of money have been invested in salmon fishing on the Wye. The best fisheries on the Wye are valued at several hundred thousand pounds. The value of each Wye salmon in the annual catch has been estimated at around £3,000, as reflected in the capital value of the fishery. Salmon angling is an important direct and indirect source of employment for many people.
- 3.5.10 Many salmon fisheries operate on a commercial basis and access is often determined by some form of financial transaction. On many waters anglers lease a 'rod' for a season. This usually entitles them to fish a particular fishery for one day a week throughout the season, in return for an annual payment. The postal survey of salmon anglers showed that this was the most common means of acquiring access (44% of all anglers), followed by membership of a club (33%). It can cost several hundred pounds a year to fish a high quality stretch. As a result, salmon angling on the Wye tends to be a rather exclusive activity.

Reasons for fishing the Wye

- 3.5.11 When asked why they chose to fish the River Wye, 54% of salmon anglers cited the quality of the fishing. However, closeness and convenience were the most frequently mentioned reasons at 68%. The natural beauty and scenery of the river was the only other significant reason, mentioned by 28% of anglers.

Years of experience

- 3.5.12 Many salmon anglers on the Wye have a great deal of experience of fishing the river. Of those questioned, 71% had been regularly fishing the Wye for more than 5 years, and 51% for over 10 years. 30% of anglers had fished the Wye for more than 20 years. The mean number of years was 17.

Number of anglers

- 3.5.13 It is difficult to estimate the total number of salmon anglers fishing the Wye each year. Although records of rod licence sales are kept by the NRA, these entitle anglers to fish other waters besides the Wye. In 1990, approximately 1,300 salmon angling licences were sold by agents located in the Wye Valley, and it is reasonable to assume that the majority of these anglers fished the Wye at some time in the season. (The introduction in 1992 of a single national licence for both game and coarse fishing will make future estimates more difficult).

Geographical distribution

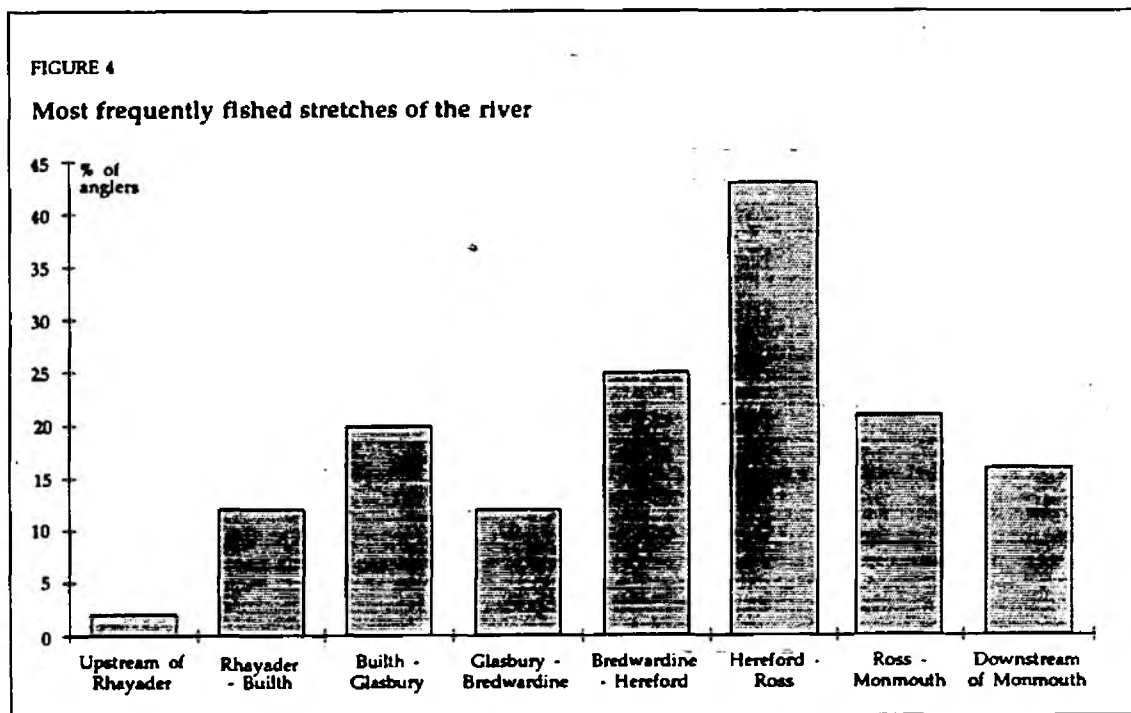
- 3.5.14 The most relevant measure of angling activity is not the total number of anglers but the level of angling effort, measured, for instance, by the number of angling days per year. Again, this is difficult to estimate, though because access to the Wye for fishing is tightly controlled we do know more about angling on the Wye than many other activities. Most salmon fisheries limit the number of rods per day, so there is a theoretical upper limit to the number of anglers that could be fishing at any one time.

TABLE 3
Percentage of salmon catch taken in each section of river

River section	Long average 1909/1969	Long average 1970/1989	1990
Above Builth Wells	8.7	9.8	3.5
Builth Wells to Hay-on-Wye	20.9	11.3	6.0
Hay-on-Wye to Hereford	14.5	11.6	5.3
Hereford to Ross	27.6	30.4	25.1
Ross to sea	28.3	36.9	60.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

(Source - NRA Welsh Region - Wye Annual Report 1990)

- 3.5.15 Crease and Penning-Rowse estimated that between Glasbury and Tintern, there could be up to 315 salmon anglers on any one day, using a realistic estimate of 1.25 rods per km of bank. However, they did recognise that calculating angling effort in this way can lead to an over-estimate. It is very unlikely that every potential angler will be fishing at any one time, and there are some stretches where fishing is not possible or where the owner does not exercise his right to fish. Some fisheries are fished far more intensively than others.
- 3.5.16 Salmon angling takes place over virtually the whole length of the river, although the quality of fishing is relatively poor in the upper reaches. Angling is not permitted below Tintern, where the NRA own the fishing rights. In terms of fish catches, statistics collated by the NRA show that the most productive stretches for salmon are downstream of Ross, and between Hereford and Ross (Table 3). However, there is variation within these stretches. Natural features of the river and improvements undertaken by the fishery owner mean that some fisheries will provide better fishing than others.
- 3.5.17 A more reliable indication of angling effort is provided by the results of the postal survey. This showed that the most popular and frequently fished stretch of river was between Hereford and Ross, followed by the stretch between Glasbury and Hereford. Very little angling appears to take place upstream of Rhayader (Figure 4)



Timing and frequency

- 3.5.18 The postal survey showed that there is no single preferred time for salmon angling. Most anglers appear to fish at any time of the day, though the best times for fishing are generally considered to be early mornings and evenings. The most popular days appear to be weekends, although 56% of anglers questioned fish both weekdays and weekends.
- 3.5.19 Although salmon angling takes place throughout the season, the two most important factors influencing when fishing takes place, and the quality of the fishing, are the condition of the water and the likelihood of fish being present. There is likely to be very little angling activity during periods of very high or very low water, or when the river is heavily coloured after rain. Being a migratory fish, salmon will only be present in reasonable numbers at certain times of the season and will only move up river when water conditions are suitable.
- 3.5.20 The survey showed that, on average, salmon anglers fished the Wye for 37 days per year (out of a possible maximum of 265 days in a season), although it is likely that some anglers over estimated the number of days they actually fished.
- 3.5.21 Although it is difficult to estimate the extent to which angling activity varies throughout the season, an indication of angling quality during each month is provided by records of salmon catches held by the NRA. Table 4 shows the mean monthly catch for each stretch of the river. This indicates that the most productive time of the season is the early summer, during May and June, with a gradual fall in numbers caught throughout the remainder of the season. Very few fish are caught between January and March. This is due to a combination of the low numbers of fish in the river, and the poor weather and high water levels common at this time of the year which will affect angling adversely.

COARSE ANGLING

- 3.5.22 Most fisheries on the Wye are managed for salmon and access for coarse fishing is generally restricted. Several fisheries are owned by angling clubs, including substantial stretches of river near Builth Wells, Hereford, Symonds Yat and Monmouth. These are generally open to coarse anglers throughout the coarse fishing season. Day tickets are available for non-members on some

TABLE 4

Mean monthly salmon catch by stretch of river 1986 - 1990

Month	NUMBER OF SALMON CAUGHT					TOTALS
	Above Builth Wells	Builth Wells to Hay	Hay to Hereford	Hereford to Ross	Ross to sea	
January	0	0	0	0	0	0
February	0	2	5	10	6	23
March	3	5	14	39	22	83
April	16	44	68	126	101	355
May	35	85	65	189	250	624
June	55	92	85	191	251	674
July	23	48	38	144	277	530
August	25	59	30	167	220	501
September	26	66	21	111	201	425
October	78	68	21	59	80	306
TOTALS	261	469	347	1026	1408	3521

(Source - NRA Welsh Region - Wye Area Annual Reports 1986 - 1990).

club waters. Many fishery owners make their waters available to coarse angling clubs in the winter, during the game fishing close season. Local authorities generally allow coarse fishing on waters in their ownership.

- 3.5.23 The Wye provides very good quality coarse fishing and attracts anglers from all over the country, particularly the Midlands and South Wales. There is a mixture of pleasure and match angling. Some of the larger events have more than two hundred participants. Most coarse fishing, and particularly matches, takes place during the winter months, from October to January, when there are fewer other recreationalists using the river. This is due in part to the lack of access during the salmon season, though the Wye is not attractive to many coarse anglers because of a ban on the use of maggots as bait which operates on most fisheries during the summer.
- 3.5.24 It has not been possible to undertake a survey of coarse anglers equivalent to that undertaken of salmon anglers. This is due to the different method used by the NRA for recording coarse licence sales and the difficulty identifying anglers who fish the Wye. Consequently less is known about coarse anglers than salmon anglers.

CANOEING

Introduction

- 3.5.25 Canoeing was originally introduced to the Wye during Victorian times. It continued to be popular throughout the first half of the century, although numbers remained low. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that canoeing began to expand substantially. This was due primarily to the replacement of wood and canvas canoes with cheaper, more durable fibreglass models, and the increase in personal mobility which made it easier for people to transport their boats.
- 3.5.26 There are no historical data on the level of canoeing activity on the Wye. The absence of craft registration has meant that there are no records of canoe numbers. However, it is generally accepted that the main period of growth in canoeing occurred in the 1970s. It continued to rise steadily in subsequent years, though at a lower rate, and appears to be undergoing a period of rapid expansion at present. In recent years the development of lightweight plastic canoes has further extended the scope of the sport. These are more flexible and hard-wearing than fibreglass canoes and have allowed greater use of shallower, rocky waters. Better insulated clothing now allows canoeing to take place throughout the winter.
- 3.5.27 An indication of the popularity of canoeing nationally can be gained from statistics provided by the British Canoe Union (BCU). Together with the Welsh Canoeing Association (WCA) and the Scottish Canoeing Association, it has 16,000 individual members, and over 600 affiliated clubs with an additional membership of 10,500. The BCU estimate that there are approximately 100,000 regular, boat owning canoeists in Britain. Annual sales of kayaks and canoes are around 25,000. Between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people are estimated to 'have a go' at canoeing each year.
- 3.5.28 Much of this section on canoeing is based upon the results of the three canoeing surveys undertaken in 1991 - the canoe census, the postal survey of canoe groups and the riverside survey of informal canoeists.

The Importance of the Wye for canoeing

- 3.5.29 Canoeing ranks alongside angling as one of the two most popular recreational activities on the river. The Wye is one of the most frequently canoed rivers in Britain and is regarded by the BCU as crucially important to the development of the sport. It is valuable for a number of reasons:
- It offers a variety of different water conditions suitable for use by all canoeing disciplines.
 - It is suitable for use by canoeists of all levels of ability from novices to experts.
 - There is an established right of navigation over much of its length.
 - Most of the river is physically navigable at some time of the year, amounting to approximately 230 km.
 - It is very accessible to a large number of people, with good road access to the conurbations of the West Midlands, South Wales and Bristol

- It has a number of places where canoeists can gain legal access to the water.
- It provides areas of white water at all times of the year, one of very few rivers with a public right of navigation to do so.
- The water is largely unpolluted.

3.5.30 Respondents to the two canoeing questionnaires were asked to rank their reasons for choosing to canoe on the Wye according to their importance. Among organised groups, the two most important reasons were its suitability for training and instruction and the presence of rapids. These were closely followed by its convenience and accessibility.

3.5.31 Among informal canoeists the most important reasons by far were the river's convenience and accessibility, and the attractiveness of the environment. From these results it would appear that organised groups place greater emphasis on the purely canoeing related attributes of the river than canoeists in general.

Access

3.5.32 The availability of suitable launching and landing sites is a major factor influencing canoeing on the Wye. Most land adjacent to the river is privately owned and there is no automatic right to launch or land. Consequently, access is limited to a small number of locations. A full assessment of access points known to be used by canoeists is contained in Appendix 13.

3.5.33 Only 9 sites are 'official' in the sense that they are owned by public bodies and/or there is no restriction on their use. A further 9 are privately owned and are used by the public either with the owner's permission or without apparent hindrance. There is a small number of privately owned launch points where public access is generally not permitted. These are mostly linked to commercial centres and accommodation points.

3.5.34 Besides these, there are several sites which are used by canoeists either against the owners' wishes or without their apparent knowledge. In some cases their legal status is not known. Many of these are on the upper river where there is no established right of navigation. This list is not exhaustive. It is known that canoeists have attempted to gain access at many places, often over private land, though probably not on a regular basis.

Geographical distribution

3.5.35 Although virtually the entire river is used for canoeing at some time or other, some stretches are more intensively canoed than others. Below Glasbury, there is normally sufficient water to allow canoeing all year round. However, the tidal stretch below Bigsweir can be dangerous and is infrequently canoed. Above Glasbury, the character of the river changes. It becomes shallower and more rocky, and is generally only canoeable during the winter when water levels are high, or when the river is in spate. This stretch offers the most challenging conditions on the Wye and is generally only suitable for more experienced canoeists. It tends not to be canoed as frequently as the lower river. A further complication arises above Hay-on-Wye as a result of the controversy over navigation rights and the difficulties negotiating access agreements. This uncertainty has probably dissuaded some canoeists from using these upstream reaches.

3.5.36 As part of the riverside questionnaire interview, canoeists were asked which launching and landing sites they use, in order of frequency. A similar question was asked in the postal survey of canoe groups. The results show a remarkable degree of similarity (Figures 5 and 6). The most popular stretch of river appears to be between Ross and Monmouth, with a concentration of activity at Symonds Yat. This confirms the findings of Crease and Penning Rowsell and accords with the observations of many people involved with the river.

3.5.37 A major attraction of this stretch are the rapids at Symonds Yat and the attractive scenery of the Wye gorge. It is also well provided with access points, with purpose built steps at Ross, Kerne Bridge and Lydbrook. Monmouth is primarily used for landing, and there is comparatively little use of the river further downstream, though this is partly due to the absence of suitable landing sites.

3.5.38 The stretch of river between Glasbury and Hay-on-Wye is also very popular, and is known to be well used by several outdoor activity centres in the vicinity. Use of the river between Hay-on-Wye and Ross appears to be relatively light.

FIGURE 5

Access points used by Informal canoeists (sample size = 230)

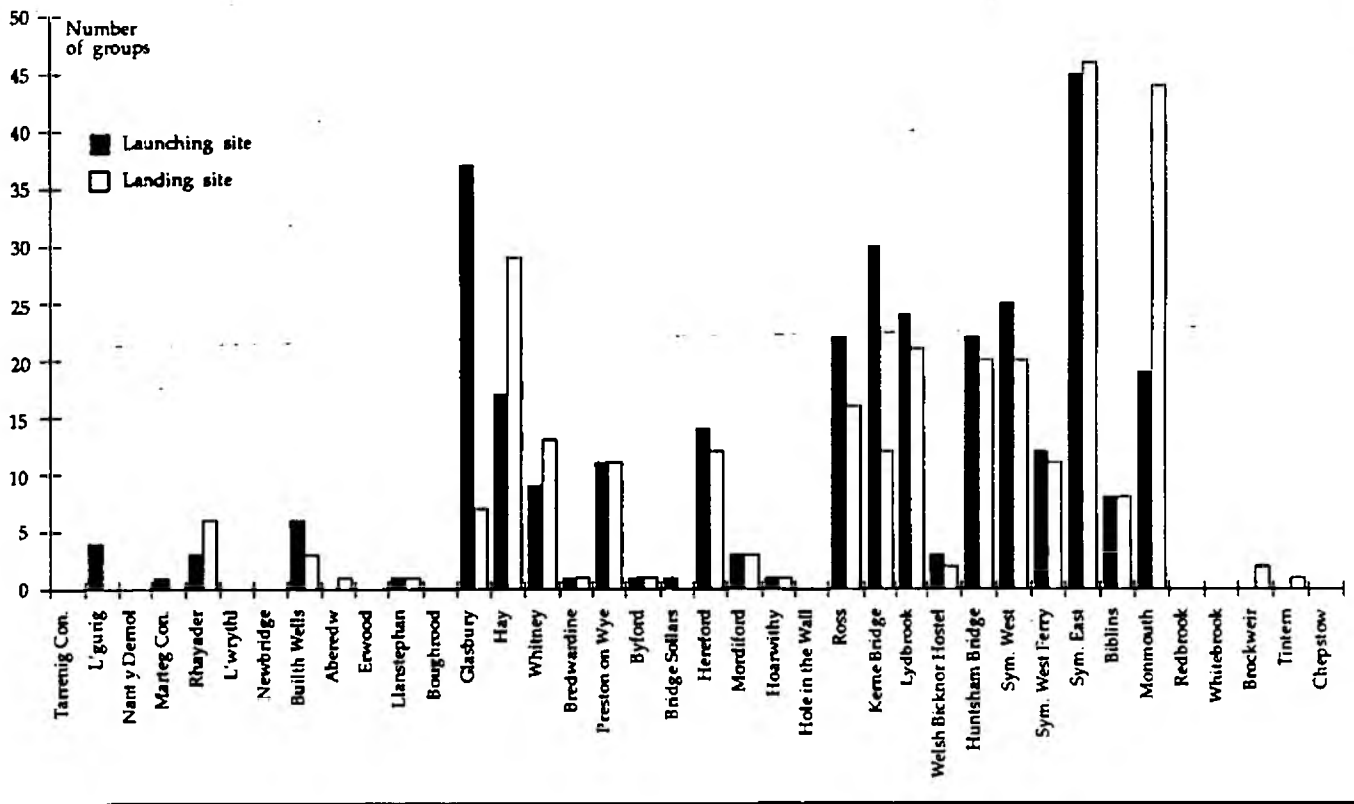


FIGURE 6

Access points used by organised groups (sample size = 150)

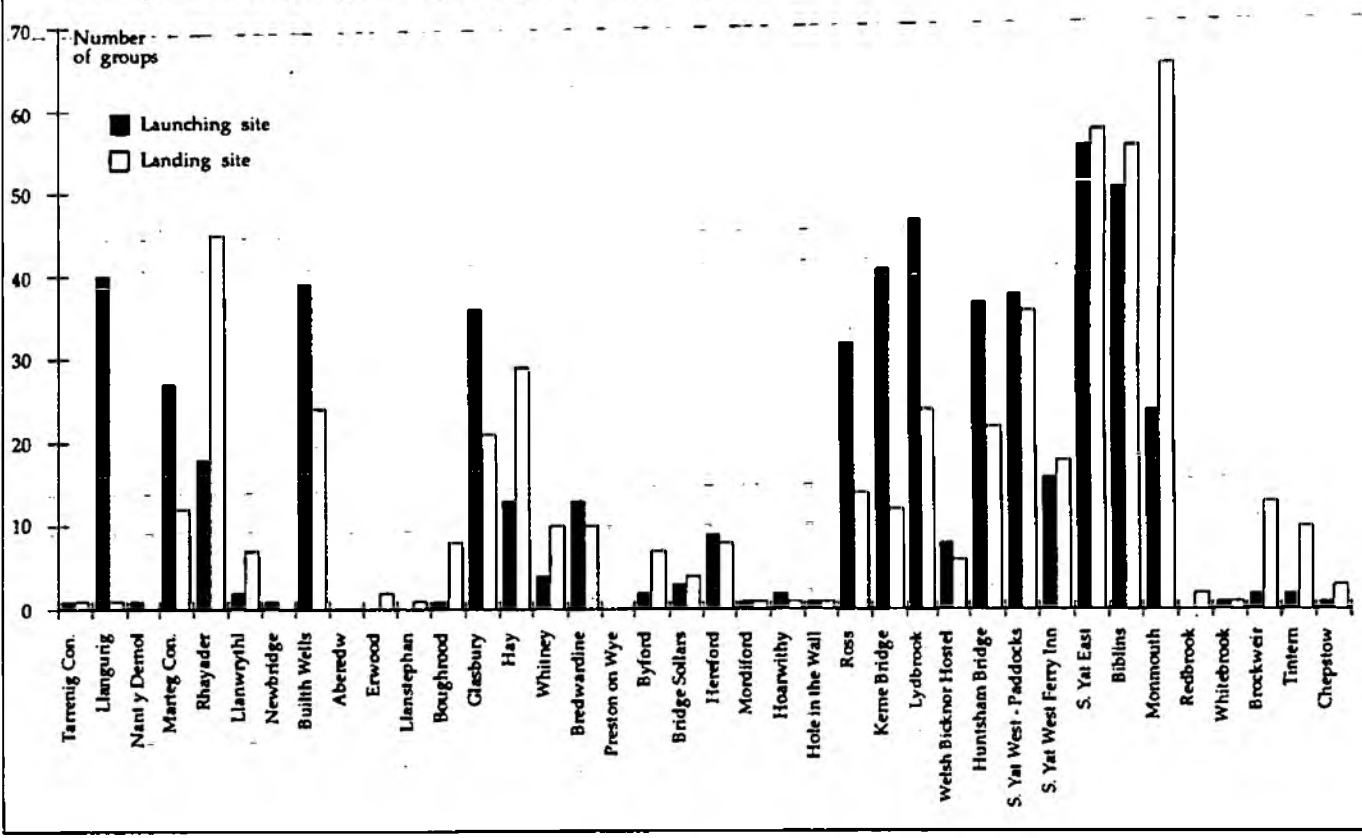
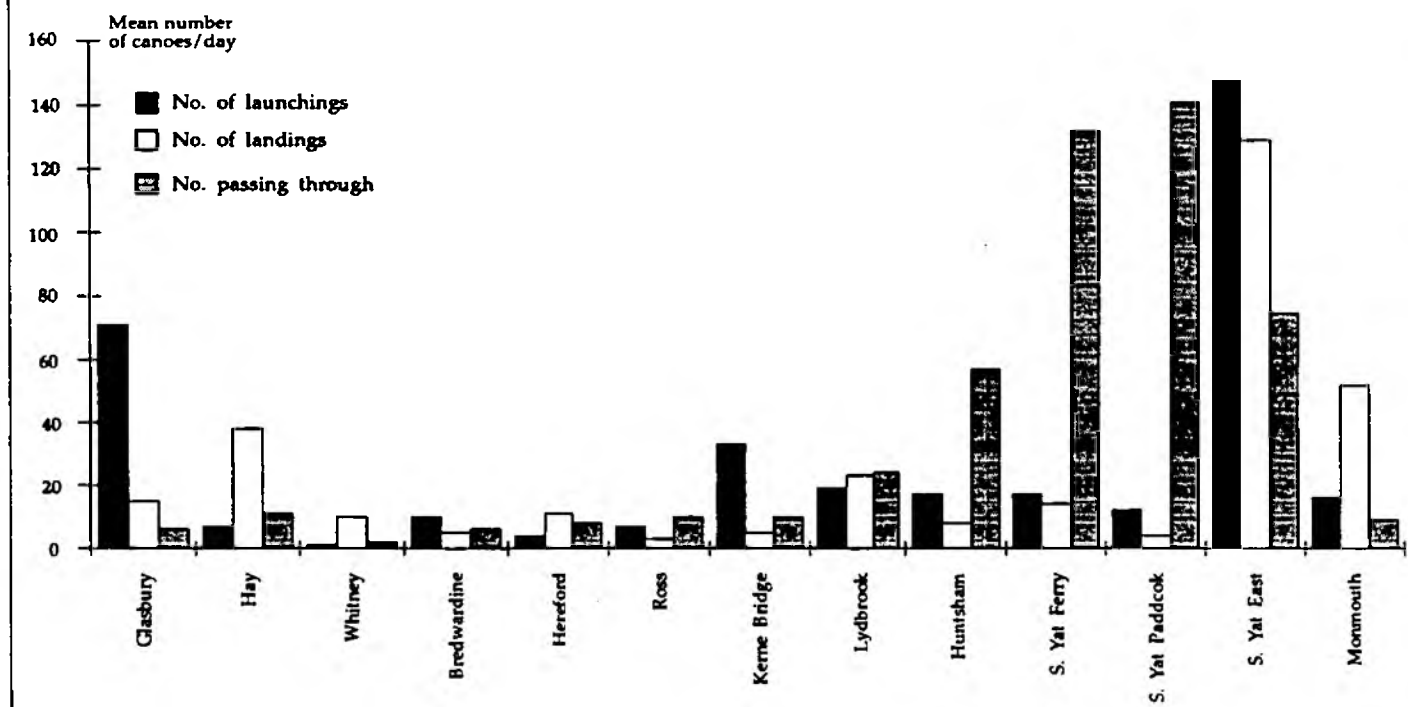


FIGURE 7

Distribution of use recorded by canoe census



3.5.39 Among organised groups especially, considerable use appears to be made of the river upstream of Glasbury, and particularly between Llangurig and Builth. The most frequently used access points on this stretch are at Llangurig, the confluence with the River Marteg, Rhayader and Builth - with several other sites used to some degree. Many groups restrict their use of the Wye to these upstream sites, reflecting their preference for more challenging white water canoeing.

3.5.40 The canoe census carried out in 1991 revealed a similar pattern of use to the questionnaires, (Figure 7) This showed a marked concentration of activity, with most launching and landing taking place between Kerne Bridge and Monmouth. The busiest site by far was the canoeing centre at Symonds Yat East, just upstream of the rapids, which accounted for 41% of launches and 40% of landings recorded during the survey period. The census also showed a peak of activity between Glasbury and Hay-on-Wye, with Glasbury accounting for 20% of all recorded launches.

Choice of access points

3.5.41 Informal canoeists and organised groups were both asked what factors influenced their choice of access points. (Tables 5 and 6). The most important reasons outlined in both surveys were the closeness to suitable canoeing water and convenience to their base. Other important factors appear to be the ease of entry to the water and the proximity to rapids. This probably accounts for the high levels of use at Symonds Yat.

Levels of canoeing

3.5.42 It is very difficult to estimate the overall level of canoeing on the Wye. The only recent attempts to quantify canoeing use were those undertaken by Foster, and Crease and Penning Rowsell. Both studies attempted to estimate the total number of 'canoe days' per year, but arrived at very different totals (13,472 and 30-35,000 respectively). Much of the discrepancy can be attributed to the methodology used and assumptions made in arriving at the final figure. Only Foster's figure was based upon direct observation but due to the limitations inherent in the survey techniques used this figure cannot be regarded as reliable.

3.5.43 A more useful measure of canoeing use is the number of canoeists using the river on a daily basis. An attempt was made to estimate the number of canoeists using the river on six typical days, including weekdays and weekends, during July, August and September - perhaps the busiest time of the year - as part of the 1991 canoe census. This was done by counting the number of canoes using each of the main access points identified in the postal survey of canoe groups. The mean

TABLE 5 Reasons for choice of launch points - organised groups			TABLE 6 Reasons for choice of launch points - informal canoeists		
	No of groups	% of groups		No of canoeists	% of canoeists
Close to suitable water	99	66	Close to base	92	40
Close to base	58	39	Close to suitable water	61	27
Close to rapids	56	37	Ease of entry to water	54	23
Ease of entry to water	35	23	Close to rapids	38	17
Car parking	24	16	Car parking	35	15
Proximity to intended exit	11	7	Proximity to intended exit	23	10
Good facilities on the bank	3	2	Good facilities on bank	23	10
Uncrowded stretch of river	2	1	Part of longer tour	13	6
Other	7	5	Uncrowded stretch of river	10	4
			Other	36	16

number of canoes launched per day at all 12 survey sites was 361. However, this is likely to underestimate the total launch figure for the following reasons:

- Counts only took place between 9 am and 6 pm, and therefore would not have included canoes launched outside this period.
- No counts were undertaken above Glasbury or below Monmouth. However, it is unlikely that very much canoeing took place above Glasbury during the survey period because of low water levels. Below Monmouth, it is known from observations that very little canoeing takes place, and that much of what does originate at Monmouth itself and therefore would have been included in the results.
- The survey did not include some of the lesser used, informal access points. Neither did it include privately owned sites, such as camp sites or the major launch areas at the Biblins campsite and PGL Holidays at Hole-in-the-Wall.

3.5.44 Taking these factors into account it is likely that the typical number of canoes launched on the river per day in mid-summer is not less than 500.

Monthly pattern

3.4.45 Canoeing takes place on the Wye all year round, though there are seasonal variations in the level of use. Informal canoeists and organised groups were both asked which months of the year they canoed on the Wye. (Table 7). In both cases the results showed a distinct pattern, with a peak during the summer and less use at either end of the year. Among informal canoeists there was a pronounced peak in July and August, with a significant decline outside these months. However, these figures will be slightly biased as most of the interviews took place during these months.

3.5.46 Use of the Wye among organised groups seems to be more evenly distributed throughout the year, with around one-third of those groups surveyed canoeing during the months of December, January and February, when the water conditions are likely to be more challenging.

TABLE 7

Months of the year canoed

Month	Organised groups		Informal canoeists	
	Total no.	%	Total no.	%
January	48	32	32	14
February	47	31	39	7
March	58	39	46	20
April	67	45	55	24
May	82	55	69	30
June	88	59	89	39
July	85	57	111	48
August	68	45	146	63
September	71	47	78	34
October	67	45	50	22
November	63	42	37	16
December	50	33	29	13

Weekly pattern

- 3.5.47 Because the canoe census only took place over a very limited number of days it is not possible to draw from it any conclusions about the variation in the level of use between different days of the week. In both the group survey and the riverside interviews, the largest proportion of respondents said that they canoed on the Wye at both weekends and weekdays. However, it is clear from direct observations and from anecdotal evidence that the total number of canoeists using the river is greatest at weekends and bank holidays, when there are likely to be more individual, casual and club canoeists. To some extent this is balanced during the week when institutional users (youth groups, LEA centres and activity holiday operators) are more numerous.

Daily pattern

- 3.5.48 In an attempt to determine whether there is any variation in the pattern of canoeing during the course of the day, the time was recorded as canoeists launched, landed and passed through each site. For most individual sites it was difficult to determine a regular pattern, mainly because the total number of canoeists was too small. Figure 8 shows the mean daily pattern of activity, aggregated for all sites. This shows quite clearly that the two peak periods for launching are between 10.00 and midday, and just after lunch. As we would expect, the peak times for landing are somewhat later, with 16.00 to 17.00 the most frequently recorded period.

Types of canoeing undertaken

- 3.5.49 As has been previously stated, the Wye provides opportunities for a wide variety of canoeing activities. In order to determine the most common activities, group users and informal canoeists were asked which type of canoeing they undertook on the Wye. Their replies are shown in Table 8.
- 3.5.50 It appears that the use of the river by organised groups is relatively evenly spread between three activities - training and instruction, white water canoeing and general pleasure paddling. Among informal canoeists, the emphasis appears to be on pleasure paddling, with 76% of all respondents listing this as one of their activities.

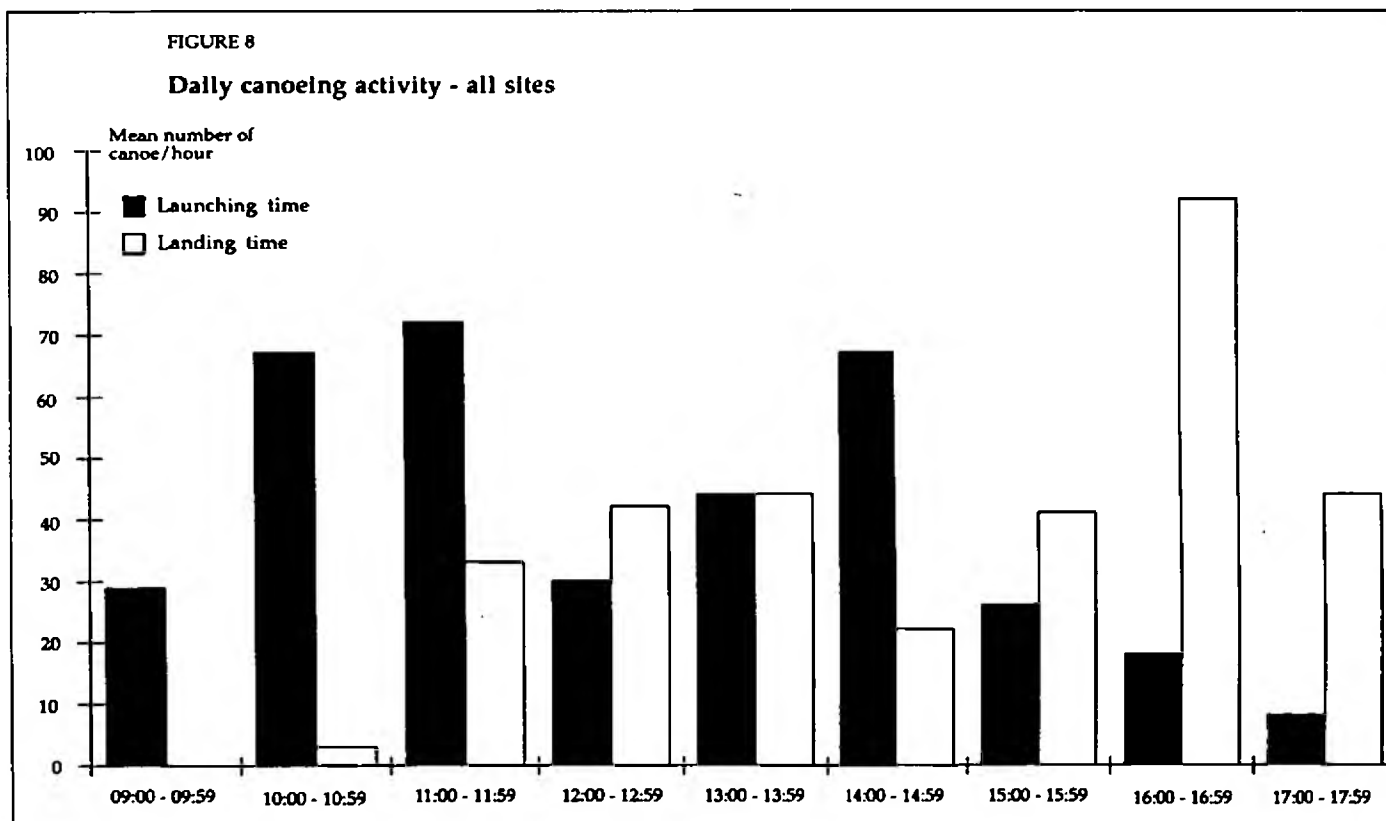


TABLE 8

Types of canoeing undertaken

	Organised groups		Informal canoeists	
	Total	%	Total	%
Training/instruction	126	84	62	27
White water	104	69	72	31
General	99	66	175	76
Touring	60	40	49	21
Racing	11	7	12	5
Other	11	7	7	3

3.5.51 These findings emphasise the value of the Wye for all disciplines and standards of ability. It is not just used by recreational canoeists, but plays an important role in outdoor pursuits education and as a training area for competitive, club level canoeists.

3.5.52 Many canoeists, both in discussion and in their questionnaire replies, highlighted the importance of the rapids at Symonds Yat for white water canoeing. This short stretch of river is very heavily used by organised groups and individuals alike, and is of great regional importance to the sport.

3.5.53 Another important use is canoe touring. Long distance touring with overnight stays at camp-sites or other accommodation points has become increasingly popular on the Wye, among both families and youth groups. Several companies offer canoe touring holidays on the Wye. The BCU predicts that 'family' canoeing, using open Canadian canoes, will be the major growth area in canoeing in the future.

Who canoes on the Wye?

3.5.54 A great variety of groups and individuals canoe on the Wye. Besides the general public, these include school groups, local education authority centres, commercial activity holiday operators and canoe clubs. Several independent instructors regularly take groups of canoeists on to the river, and there are established canoe hire centres at Glasbury, Symonds Yat and Monmouth.

3.5.55 It is important to know what proportion of canoeists using the river are part of an organised group. Of those canoeists interviewed in the riverside survey, 32% were with fellow members of a club or other organisation. The remainder were with friends or relatives.

3.5.56 Only 30% of canoeists interviewed in the riverside survey were members the BCU or the WCA, or belonged to an affiliated organisation. 57% of organised groups replying to the postal survey were affiliated to one of the governing bodies.

Length of visit

3.5.57 The largest percentage of canoeists interviewed during the riverside survey were visiting the Wye for one day only; 46%. The remaining 54% were staying in the Wye Valley overnight, with 18% staying for more than 6 nights. The pattern among organised groups was different, with 63% usually staying for at least one night. The greatest proportion, 40%, usually stay for 1 - 2 nights.

Length of canoeing trip

3.5.58 As part of the riverside questionnaire, canoeists were asked at what time they started canoeing. The length of time on the water can be calculated by comparing this with the time of the interview, which took place as they were landing. Among the 230 canoeists interviewed, the average time spent canoeing was 2 hours 37 minutes.

Origin of canoeists

3.5.59 The Wye attracts canoeists from a very wide area. It was apparent from the list of organised groups and the results of the riverside survey that many canoeists travel long distances to get to the Wye. 54% of canoeists interviewed either lived locally or had travelled to the Wye on a day visit. However, a large percentage, 43%, had travelled from a temporary address and were on holiday in the Wye Valley.

Accommodation

3.5.60 The most popular form of accommodation used by those informal canoeists that were staying overnight was camping, with a similar pattern among organised groups. Field centres and youth hostels were also popular among organised groups, though these figures should be treated with

Frequency of visits

- 3.5.61 Both groups of respondents were asked how frequently they visited the Wye for canoeing. A high proportion of informal canoeists interviewed were infrequent visitors - 43% were on their first visit. A further 19% canoed the Wye less than once a year. 18% visited the Wye more than eight times a year.
- 3.5.62 Among organised groups the picture was slightly different, with a tendency towards more frequent usage. Only 5% of groups canoed less than once a year. The majority, 37%, canoed between one and two times a year, and a large proportion, 28%, canoed more than eight times a year.

Size of canoe groups

- 3.5.63 The large size of some canoe groups is often the source of complaint by angling interests. In order to try and establish the usual size of groups, informal canoeists were asked how many people there were in their party. The majority of groups were quite small, and as we might expect, larger groups were progressively less common. 58% of all groups sampled were between 1 - 5 in number. 20% were between 6 and 10, and only 6% contained more than 20 canoeists.
- 3.5.64 Among organised groups, group sizes tend to be larger, with 54% averaging between 6 and 10 in size and 23% between 11 and 15. Again the proportion of groups larger than 20 is low, at 5%.

Other activities undertaken by canoeists

- 3.5.65 It is apparent from the surveys that very few canoeists or canoeing groups visit the Wye Valley solely for canoeing. When asked what other recreational activities they undertake during their visits, 77% of groups and 64% of informal canoeists said that they took part in at least one other activity. Walking was the most frequently mentioned by both sets of users - with climbing, caving and general sightseeing also popular.

RAFTING**Introduction**

- 3.5.66 Rafting is a comparatively recent activity on the Wye. Most takes place under the aegis of the Committee of Herefordshire Amateur Rafters (CHAR). CHAR was formed around 15 years ago. Its main purpose is to raise money for charity through holding raft races. Unlike the developing sport of white water rafting which uses inflatable rafts, CHAR rafts are rigid 10 person catamaran craft and are usually home made..
- 3.5.67 CHAR's use of the river is two fold - the races themselves, which take place over a very limited of days each year and more frequent practice sessions, which are concentrated in the period leading up to races. This form of rafting has become very competitive over the years.
- 3.5.68 Besides CHAR's use of the river, several 'fun' raft races are held each year. These are organised by a variety of bodies and are usually held to raise money for charity. This use is confined to about four events each year, and in terms of overall recreational activity is a comparatively minor use of the river. Raft building is a common exercise among youth groups as part of their outdoor pursuits programmes.

Races

- 3.5.69 CHAR organise three main races a year. The main event is the '100 mile' race between Hay-on-Wye and Chepstow. This takes place in May each year, over one of the bank holiday weekends. It lasts three days, with overnight stops at Hereford and Huntsham Bridge. This race is limited to 70 - 80 rafts, with teams drawn equally from Herefordshire and further afield.
- 3.5.70 The second main event takes place in September, a two day ladies race between Hereford and Goodrich consisting of 40 rafts. There is also a one day sprint race in July between Hereford and Hoarwithy which attracts approximately 40 rafts.

Practice

- 3.5.71 Of the 70 - 80 rafts which take part in the main race, CHAR estimate that 35 are based on the Wye, and use it regularly for training. Many of these are moored permanently on the river at various sites, mostly close to Hereford. In an attempt to reach a voluntary compromise with other users, CHAR have agreed to restrict their practice sessions to a limited number of dates each year. In 1992 this amounted to 62 days between March and September, with restrictions on the use of certain stretches on some dates.
- 3.5.72 A survey carried out by CHAR in 1990 showed that most practice sessions take place at weekends and on weekday evenings, and are at their most frequent in March and April, immediately prior to the main race. CHAR estimate that there is usually a maximum of 10 rafts on the river on any one evening, and up to 15 per day during the five weekends proceeding a race.
- 3.5.73 Most practice sessions take place close to Hereford and are usually determined by where the rafts are moored. Use of the river is often very localised. The most frequently used stretch is between Bredwardine and Hereford, with crews only using other stretches immediately before the main races. CHAR do not use the river upstream of Hay-on-Wye.

Growth

- 3.5.74 The level of rafting on the Wye has remained fairly constant in recent years, due mainly to self-regulation by CHAR. However, there does appear to be an increase in other rafting events. The largest of these is held in September each year between Monmouth and Whitebrook. This event is organised by Monmouth Conservative Association, and involves over 200 craft of varying standards and designs. Charity races appear to be increasing in popularity and at present there are no restrictions on these taking place.
- 3.5.75 White water rafting, as recognised by the Sports Council, has not yet developed to any great extent on the Wye. However, there is suitable water on some of the upper reaches, and should access arrangements be agreed this may develop as a significant activity in the future.

Regulation

- 3.5.76 The only regulation over rafting is that exercised by CHAR and applies only to their rafts. Besides defining practice dates, they have rules and regulations covering such matters as the design and safety of rafts, and the conduct of participants.

ROWING**Introduction**

- 3.5.77 Rowing is a well established activity at three locations along the Wye - Hereford, Ross and Monmouth. It is exclusively club-based, with major clubs in each town. There are also three school clubs based in Hereford and two in Monmouth. The limited extent of rowing on the Wye is due mainly to the sport's particular needs. It requires access to water of a suitable depth, with a sufficiently long, straight course which is free from obstructions and a boat house with landing steps. Proximity to a sizeable population centre is necessary to provide sufficient club members. Each of the town clubs has its own club house on the river, as does Monmouth School.
- 3.5.78 The emphasis within each club is very much upon competition and training rather than purely recreational use. The craft range from 19 metre long 'eights' to single sculls which are about 8 metres long.
- 3.5.79 The Wye is extremely important regionally for rowing, with all three main clubs reaching high standards of achievement in competition. Hereford and Monmouth, in particular, possess very high quality rowing water and attract many visiting clubs to train. A further benefit of the Wye is that, compared with many other rivers, there is very little other boat traffic to obstruct use.

Patterns of use

- 3.5.80 Rowing tends to be limited to relatively short stretches of river close to each club's base. The length of river used varies according to the water levels and the amount of weed present during the summer, but is generally 3 - 5 km. The use of the river varies from club to club but is generally at its heaviest at weekends and at weekday evenings during the summer.

Regattas

- 3.5.81 The most intensive use of the river for rowing occurs on regatta days. All three main clubs hold major one-day regattas during the summer, each attracting over two hundred visiting crews. In addition to these regattas, the clubs run a small number of 'head of the river' races, sprints and internal club events throughout the year.

Future development

- 3.5.82 When questioned, all three clubs felt that the use of the Wye for rowing has peaked and if anything is declining slightly. They do not foresee any substantial increase in rowing activity and feel that the existing facilities are being used at close to their capacity. It is unlikely that rowing will become established on other stretches of the river.

MOTOR LAUNCHES

- 3.5.83 Although there is an established right of navigation over much of the Wye, very little is physically navigable to motor boats of a substantial size or draft. Underwater obstructions and shallows render most of the river too hazardous. Besides some local traffic elsewhere, usually with small outboard motor driven boats, use by pleasure launches and canal narrow boats is restricted to tidal waters. The current level of use is low, due to three main factors; low demand, the difficulties associated with navigating tidal waters, and a lack of facilities to moor and come ashore once on the river.

- 3.5.84 Although the Wye is connected to the main waterway network via the Severn estuary, very few boats venture up river each year. At high tide it is generally possible to navigate as far upstream as Bigsweir, and occasionally as far as Redbrook. There is a small group of active users who are campaigning to improve the maintenance of the navigation and improve facilities so as to make it easier for more motor cruisers to travel up the Wye. A scheme being considered by Monmouth Borough Council to develop a landing stage at Tintern may encourage further usage.

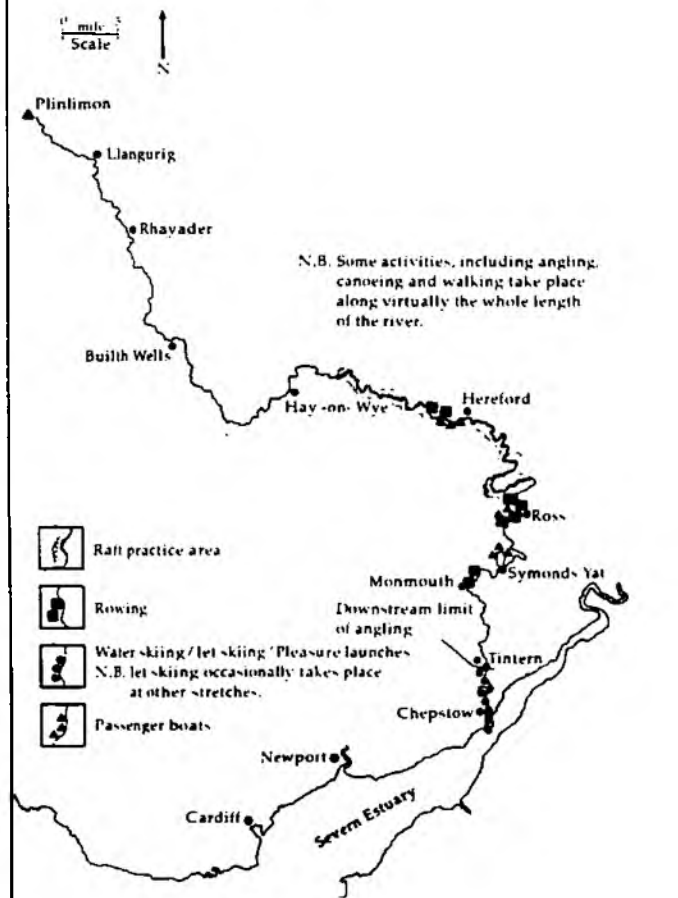
PASSENGER CRUISERS

- 3.5.85 The main centre for passenger cruisers on the Wye is Symonds Yat, where a small fleet of 'water buses' operates. There are 6 large cruisers in total, each seating between 50 and 70 fare paying passengers, plus one smaller craft. These operate from two sites - the Saracens Head at Symonds Yat East and the Leisure Park at Symonds Yat West - and are an important tourist attraction. Business tends to be seasonal, with most use during the summer.

- 3.5.86 There is a long history of pleasure boats at Symonds Yat, and at one time rowing boats were used to take visitors as far downstream as Monmouth. Today, boats are mainly restricted to a short stretch of river

FIGURE 9

Distribution of main activities



- 3.5.86 There is a long history of pleasure boats at Symonds Yat, and at one time rowing boats were used to take visitors as far downstream as Monmouth. Today, boats are mainly restricted to a short stretch of river between the rapids and a shelf of shallow water 2.5 km upstream. There is some demand to extend the length of the trips further upstream if agreement could be reached to remove the physical constraint to navigation by dredging. Some of the boats are licensed to travel downstream as far as Monmouth but rarely do so.
- 3.5.87 Single, smaller passenger boats operate from Hereford and Ross during the summer. Again the length of river they use is limited by physical factors. All the larger passenger carrying craft are regulated by the Department of Transport and the boatmen are licensed. Those operating at Symonds Yat and Ross are inspected annually by South Herefordshire District Council and are required to obtain a licence from the Council.

WATER-SKIING

- 3.5.88 Water-skiing is at present confined to the tidal reaches of the Wye. This is determined by two factors - the physical unsuitability of much of the river further upstream and the limited availability of slipways for launching motor boats. Most boats are launched from slipways at Beachley Point and Chepstow. The upstream limit of water-skiing is generally considered to be Tintern, though it is mostly concentrated in the Chepstow area. It mainly takes place during periods of high tide.
- 3.5.89 Several stretches of river upstream could physically accommodate water-skiing, provided boats can gain access to the river. It must be regarded as a possibility that skiers will attempt to use other parts of the river in the future.
- 3.5.90 There is little data available about the level of water-skiing. Observations suggest that the periods of peak activity are at weekends, mainly during the summer, when there might be between 20 and 30 boats on the river during the course of a day, and to a lesser extent during summer evenings.
- 3.5.91 Water-skiing on the Wye is generally informal and unorganised. There are no clubs based on the Wye and it is thought that most skiers are either from outside clubs or are unaffiliated to any recognised organisation. The governing bodies of the sport in England and Wales have no information about water-skiing on the Wye and the Wye is not recognised by the Sports Councils as a water-skiing venue.

JET-SKIING

- 3.5.92 Jet-skiing is a relatively recent activity to the Wye. There are no data on levels of use and little is known about its participants. They are not thought to be members of a club or other organisation. Like water-skiing, the greatest concentration of use is in the Chepstow area, but there have been occasional reports of jet-skiing elsewhere on the river, including the Symonds Yat area, Ross and Monmouth. Numerically, jet-skiing is not a major activity, though there is concern that use may increase unless the activity is regulated.
- 3.5.93 To date, jet skiing has been a fairly restricted, expensive sport, but as it becomes more affordable the overall number of participants is likely to increase. One of the attractions of the Wye for jet-skiers is probably the absence of usual navigation controls such as speed limits. In addition, jet-skis are easily transportable and can be launched at several places without restriction.

OTHER WATER ACTIVITIES

- 3.5.94 Swimming occurs at many locations along the river, especially in urban areas and at many public amenity sites. A small amount of sailing takes place, mainly near Chepstow, and parts of the river are used for sub-aqua diving, though neither activity is numerically significant. There have been occurrences of hovercraft on the Wye, but not for several years.

CALENDAR OF MAJOR EVENTS

on the

RIVER WYE



1992



Hereford
Sports
Council



COMPETITIVE EVENTS

- 3.5.95 The Wye is used for a growing number of competitive events each year. An event can be defined as a regatta, race, procession or similar event in which a number of craft or people are likely to participate or assemble on the river. These include canoe slaloms, canoe marathons, rowing regattas, angling matches, raft races and a variety of novel events such as bath tub racing. An indication of the scale and variety of these uses can be gained from the extract from the *River Wye Calendar of Major Events*, contained in Appendix 31.

INFORMAL VISITS

- 3.5.96 The Wye attracts a great many people besides those actively using the river. Its banks are a popular destination for walkers, and the Wye Valley Walk and Offa's Dyke paths are both well used. The river is popular with birdwatchers and naturalists and several riverside routes are open to horse riders and cyclists. A number of sites along the river are used by picnickers and there are many well known tourist destinations, including Symonds Yat, Tintern Abbey and Hay-on-Wye. During the summer some riverside locations can get extremely busy.
- 3.5.97 A high proportion of visits to the Wye are informal. Many people appear to be attracted by the peace and quiet and scenic beauty of the river rather than any specific recreation opportunities it offers. It is fair to conclude that the number of people who derive enjoyment from just being close to the Wye exceeds those who use it directly. Providing for these uses should form a key component of any future management strategy and may turn out to be more problematical than accommodating active users.
- 3.5.98 Information about informal visitors was collected by means of questionnaire surveys undertaken in 1990 and 1991. The main conclusions of these surveys are summarised below. Full results are contained in Appendices 1 and 2.

Distance travelled

- 3.5.99 As part of the 1990 survey visitors were asked from where they had travelled to get to the Wye. Overall, the greatest proportion of visitors, 40%, had travelled less than 20 km, with progressively fewer visitors from further afield. This pattern was consistent for each site.

Origin

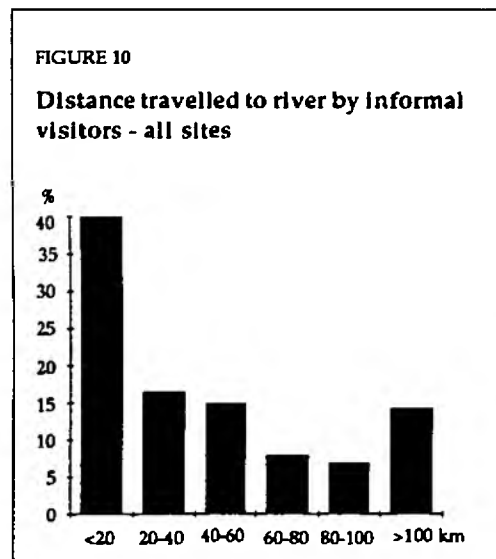
- 3.5.100 Approximately two thirds of visitors interviewed had travelled from home, mostly on day trips. The remaining third were staying at a temporary address, with most on holiday in the area. There was some variation between survey sites.

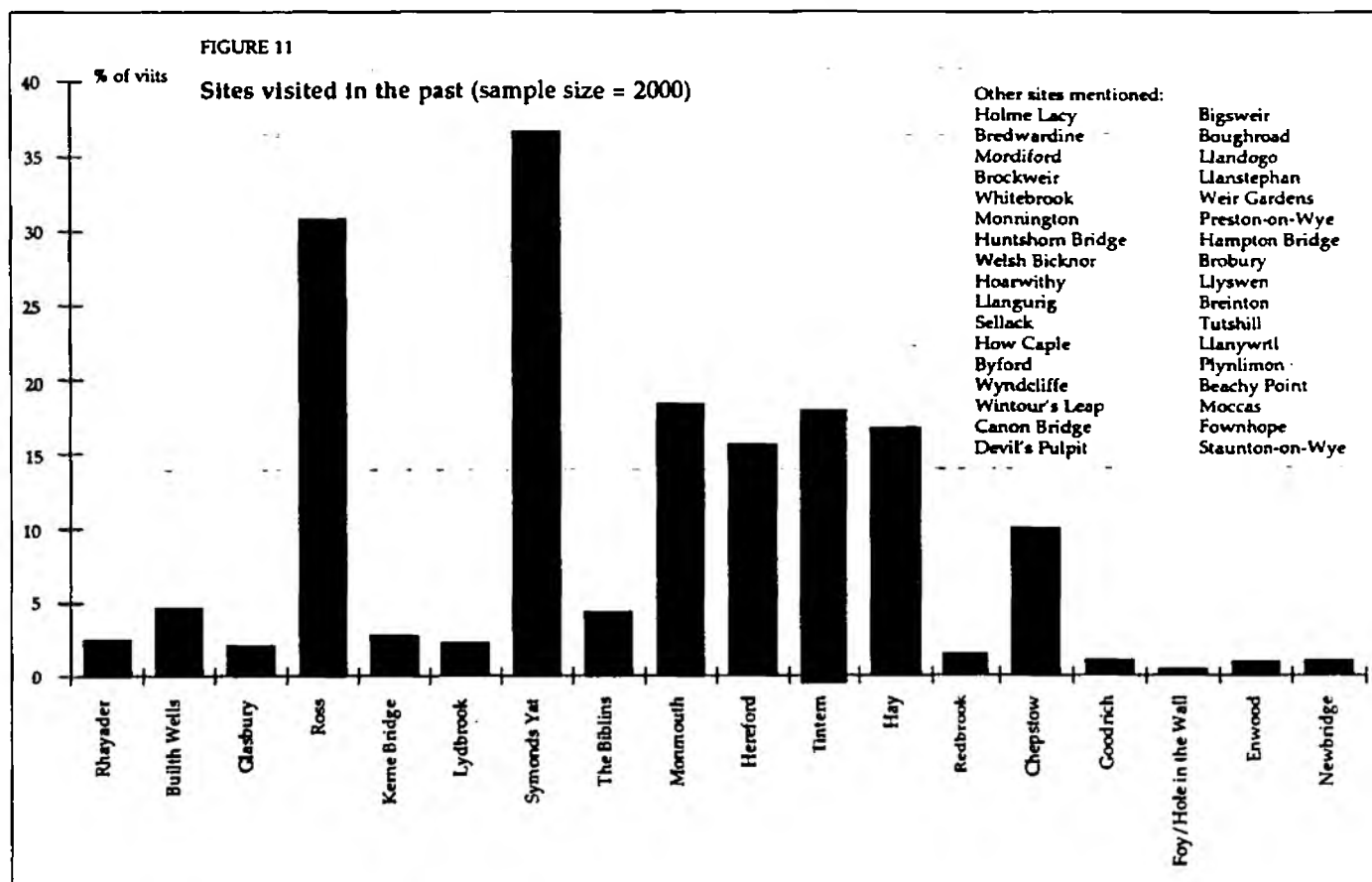
Transport used

- 3.5.101 The greatest percentage of visitors, 83% overall, travelled to the river by car. 11% walked. Again there was some variation between sites, though no other form of transport was used to a significant extent.

Previous visits to the Wye

- 3.5.102 Most visitors to the Wye have visited the river previously. The 1991 survey showed that 81% of visitors interviewed had been to the Wye before. This varied between 74% and 90% at different sites. Of those that have visited the Wye before, most appear to be regular visitors. Though there was some variation between sites, both the 1990 and 1991 surveys showed that approximately 70% visit the Wye at least once a year and, of these, around half visit at least monthly. 59% of those interviewed had visited the survey site in the past.





Sites visited

- 3.5.103 As part of the 1990 survey, visitors who had visited other sites along the river in the past were asked which the other sites they had visited previously and which sites they intended to visit during their stay. The results provide an indication of the awareness among visitors of alternative sites and their relative popularity.
- 3.5.104 Around half of all those interviewed had previously visited other sites along the Wye, though again there was some variation between sites. A wide range of sites was mentioned - 53 in total. These spanned the full length of the river and ranged from well known, popular locations to smaller, low key sites: The most frequently mentioned sites by far were the major towns and the well established tourist attractions. Chepstow, Tintern, Monmouth, Symonds Yat, Ross, Hereford and Hay-on-Wye were all mentioned by at least 10% of visitors (Figure 11).
- 3.5.105 82% of visitors interviewed only intended to visit one site during their visit to the river. A further 15% had visited, or intended to visit, one other site besides the survey site. Again, these sites were mainly confined to a small number of well known destinations.

3.6 ACCESS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

PUBLIC AMENITY SITES

- 3.6.1 Public access is crucially important to the value of the Wye as a recreational resource. Such access is obtained primarily through the right of navigation and the rights of way network. Because the majority of land alongside the river is privately owned, access to the river for the general public is limited. For this reason, and because much of the river is isolated from settlements or public roads, visitors to the river tend to be concentrated at a small number of locations. These are often linked to riverside towns and villages where shops and other facilities are available. Some towns, including Rhayader, Builth Wells, Hereford and Ross have public parks fronting the river.
- 3.6.2 Below the level of public parks there is a small number of low key sites, some of which have been developed by local authorities. These range from small picnic sites to areas of informal open space and car parks, and may be linked to view points or the start of local walks. Some of these sites have a full range of facilities, including toilet blocks and refreshment kiosks, whereas others may lack any formal facilities. Outside these areas, access to the river bank is mainly restricted to public footpaths.

- 3.6.3 Public amenity areas adjacent to the river are important in that they provide a place where people can relax and enjoy being by the river. They can also assist with diverting pressure away from sensitive or overused areas and can help to influence the overall pattern of use. They are particularly important for those who are new to the area and who lack the knowledge or confidence to explore further afield, and for people with restricted mobility, such as the elderly or disabled, or those with young children.
- 3.6.4 Public amenity areas can also act as gateways to the wider countryside. They often provide links into the rights of way network or have facilities for launching canoes, both of which enable people to explore the more natural, undeveloped parts of the river. The provision of information boards at these sites can stimulate interest in the river and raise understanding of some of its special, natural qualities.
- 3.6.5 It is essential to have good information about the quality and distribution of public access and visitor facilities in order to assess the need for improvements. An inventory of recreation sites has been established. This includes:
- public amenity areas and picnic sites;
 - canoe launching and landing sites;
 - rural car parks;
 - toilets;
 - public houses;
 - camp sites and youth hostels

The distribution of these facilities is illustrated on Map 2. A full list of these sites is contained in Appendices 13 to 19

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Introduction

- 3.6.6 The public rights of way network is widely recognised as being central to the development of informal recreation in the countryside. In the context of this report it is the single most important means of enabling the public to gain access to the river after the right of navigation. Although most riparian land is privately owned, long stretches of river bank are traversed by designated rights of way. These entitle members of the public to walk across the land and, in the case of bridleways, to travel on horseback or cycle.
- 3.6.7 Although rights of way are an important component of public access, they are only a right of passage. They do not by themselves entitle users to, for instance, picnic on the river bank, fish or launch a canoe. Nonetheless, they are a vitally important recreational resource and are well used by active ramblers and casual walkers alike.
- 3.6.8 Responsibility for maintaining rights of way and keeping them free from obstructions rests jointly with the relevant county council and the landowner. Most routes are signposted from public roads and other public access areas and many are way marked to make route finding easier.

Regional routes

- 3.6.9 There are two long distance footpaths relevant to the Wye - the Wye Valley Walk and the Offa's Dyke Path. The Wye Valley Walk was developed by the four County Councils bordering the river. It extends for virtually the entire valley, from Rhayader to Chepstow, and is 171 km long. Although the theme of the route is the Wye Valley as a whole, much of the route follows the line of the river. Most of the walk is on existing rights of way, though some sections have been developed on permissive routes with the agreement of the landowner. The route is way-marked for much of its length.
- 3.6.10 The 117 km stretch between Hay-on-Wye and Chepstow is described in a map pack published jointly by Hereford and Worcester County Council and the WVCS. This divides the route into sections and contains a route description, details of interesting features and information on transport and accommodation.

- 3.6.11 Between Hay-on-Wye and Rhayader responsibility for the Wye Valley Walk rests with Powys County Council. Four leaflets has been produced which describe the route.
- 3.6.12 Until 1990 the Wye Valley Walk existed in two isolated section - Rhayader to Hay-on-Wye and Hereford to Chepstow. The link between Hereford and Hay-on-Wye was established in 1990. Although the route is now complete to Rhayader, the path in Powys has not been actively maintained for many years and has become difficult to use in places. In recognition of this, Powys County Council have employed a project officer to look at ways of upgrading the route and to institute a programme of maintenance. In the longer term it is possible that the County Council may consider re-routing parts of the walk to follow the line of the river more closely, and may extend it to the river's source.
- 3.6.13 Discussions are taking place between Powys County Council, Hereford and Worcester County Council and the Wye Valley JAC with a view to integrating standards of way-marking and maintenance, and to agree a joint approach to marketing and publicising the route. In the longer term it is hoped that the Wye Valley Walk will be designated a national trail.
- 3.6.14 The other long distance route to converge on the Wye is the Offa's Dyke national trail. This follows the opposite bank of the river to the Wye Valley Walk between Chepstow and Monmouth, upstream of which it leaves the river. It then crosses rural eastern Gwent before crossing the Wye again at Hay-on-Wye.
- 3.6.15 In addition to these long distance routes, the County Councils and other agencies including the Forestry Commission have an on-going programme of developing loop walks and theme trails in the Wye Valley as a means of encouraging more people to use the footpath network.

Extent of public access

- 3.6.16 Although the rights of way network is well used and provides an important means of access to many parts of the Wye, substantial stretches of riverbank do not benefit from a right of way and are effectively closed to public access.

TABLE 9

Public access and rights of way

Stretch of river	Overall length of river km	Length of bank with public access				Overall length of river with public access	
		Left bank		Right bank			
		km	%	km	%	km	%
Source - Rhayader	31.1	2.5	8	0.1	0	2.6	8
Rhayder - Builth	25.5	0.3	1	8.2	32	9.0	35
Builth - Hay	34.5	7.2	21	7.2	21	13.8	40
Hay - Bredwardine	21.8	0.9	4	0.0	0	0.9	4
Bredwardine - Hereford	25.8	3.9	15	3.4	13	6.9	27
Hereford - Ross	45.8	12.7	28	15.5	34	23.9	52
Ross - Monmouth	30.9	11.7	38	28.5	92	29.7	96
Monmouth - Chepstow	32.6	10.0	31	11.7	36	18.0	55
Total (entire river)	248.0	49.2	20	74.6	30	104.8	42

NB These figures were calculated from the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey pathfinder series maps and not the definitive rights of way maps. There may be slight discrepancies between the two.

- 3.6.17 In order to assess the extent of riverside access, the length of riverside rights of way was measured, together with other areas of riverside land where public access is permitted. The results for each stretch of river are shown in Table 9.
- 3.6.18 The overall length of the river from source to mouth was calculated at 248 km. If both banks are taken together this amounts to 496 km of river bank. Of this, a total of 123.8 km is accessible to the public. This comprises 20% of the left bank and 30% of the right bank. Taking both banks together, only 42% of the river's length has any public access to either one or both of its banks.
- 3.6.19 The level of access varies considerably along the length of the river. Between Ross and Monmouth it is exceptionally good with 96% of the river accessible from at least one bank. No other stretch approaches this level of access. Only the stretches between Hereford and Ross, and between Monmouth and Chepstow offer access to more than half their length. For most stretches access is very restricted and is at its worst between Hay-on-Wye and Bredwardine (4%) and upstream of Rhayader (8%).
- 3.6.20 In reality, public access may be more restricted than is immediately apparent. Even on stretches which are well provided with access, some lengths of right of way are short or difficult to join, and are of limited recreational value. Other are difficult to use because the footpath switches from one side of the river to the other without any means of crossing.

RECREATION AND VISITOR FACILITIES
CYFLEUSTERAU HAMDDEN AC YMWELWR





3.7 OWNERSHIP

Introduction

- 3.7.1 In common with most of the British countryside, the land bordering the Wye is mainly privately owned. This also applies to the ownership of fishing rights. Individual landowners and fishery owners can have a major influence on the management of the river. It will be important to liaise closely with individual owners when considering future management proposals.
- 3.7.2 Individual owners can have a major influence on the management of the river, particularly through the development of riverside paths and access sites and, in sections where no established navigation rights exist, through access agreements for the passage of river craft. Management agreements between local authorities and private owners could provide additional opportunities for access.

Land ownership

- 3.7.3 The pattern of land ownership is consistent along the length of the Wye. Most riparian land is agricultural, with ownership divided between a small number of large estates and many individual farms. Along some stretches, particularly where the river passes through towns or villages, the riverbank is owned by individual householders whose gardens back onto the river.
- 3.7.4 Several areas of land are owned by public bodies, mainly local authorities, but also the Forestry Commission and the National Trust. These could provide important new opportunities to improve access and recreation provision. Many areas of land owned by local authorities are already managed for recreational purposes and are accessible to the public. These include public parks and informal access sites. Other holdings include limited areas of highways or waste disposal land. The extent of publicly owned land is shown on Map 3. Appendix 24 contains details of all known sites.

Information about land ownership

- 3.7.5 Unfortunately there is no comprehensive register of land ownership and the identity of some landowners is not known. Some information is held by public bodies, including the NRA, local authorities, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales, but this is by no means comprehensive.
- 3.7.6 Lack of information about land ownership is one of the main factors delaying re-notification of the Wye as an SSSI. Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales are required to notify every landowner and fishery owner with an interest in the river. In order to do this a register of ownership will need to be compiled.
- 3.7.7 A pilot survey to assess the scale of this task was undertaken in 1988 by the NCC. This attempted to map land ownership along the Powys stretch of the Wye. This register is quite comprehensive and is unlikely to have changed dramatically in the intervening years. There is no comparable source of information for the remainder of the river.

Common land

- 3.7.8 Examination of the county registers of common land showed that there are 32 registered commons adjacent to or very close to the Wye. These vary from small pockets of land, often remnants of larger holdings, to extensive tracts of woodland or heath. Ownership varies - some are privately owned, some are owned by local authorities (either county, district or parish councils) and some have no registered owner. Commons are shown on Map 3 and full details are contained in Appendix 25.
- 3.7.9 Despite the widespread belief that there is a general right of access over common land, this is not always the case. Rights of access may be difficult to establish given the complexities of commons legislation. There are proposals to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations of the Countryside Commission's Common Land Forum. If implemented this should provide a new approach to the management of common land and is likely to create a presumption in favour of public access on foot to most commons.

- 3.7.10 Provided the ecological value of commons can be maintained and the rights of commoners adequately protected, commons could provide an important resource for informal recreation once the question of access is resolved.





Fishing rights

- 3.7.11 The Wye is divided into approximately 200 separate fisheries. Historically, the right to fish was linked to the ownership of riparian land. However, over time the fishing rights to some of this land have been sold off, and are now bought and sold independently. Many stretches have since been fragmented into smaller fisheries. This has resulted in a complicated pattern of ownership.
- 3.7.12 Fishery ownership only entitles owners to take fish. Unless they actually own the river bed or adjacent land they do not have other proprietary rights. For example, possession of fishing rights does not in itself entitle an owner to carry out work to modify the river bank or empower him to restrict other recreational uses of the river, other than where these are having a demonstrable and unreasonable impact on his fishing.
- 3.7.13 The NRA has a substantial amount of information on fishery ownership. It is about to launch a discussion paper on the levying of contributions on all fishery owners and occupiers under the provisions of the Water Resources Act 1991. To this end it has been updating its information about fishery ownership in recent months. This data is held on a computer database and it is proposed that the NRA will be notified of any future changes of ownership.

LAND OWNERSHIP PERCHNOGAETH TIR



KEY/ALLWEDD

-  Local Authorities
Awdurdodau Lleol
-  Forestry Commission
Comisiwn Coedwigaeth
-  Other
Eraill
-  Registered common land
Tir comin wedi ei gofrestru

MILE/MILLTIR
SCALE/GRADDFIA



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HISTORICAL INTERESTS DIDDORDEBAU HANESYDDOL

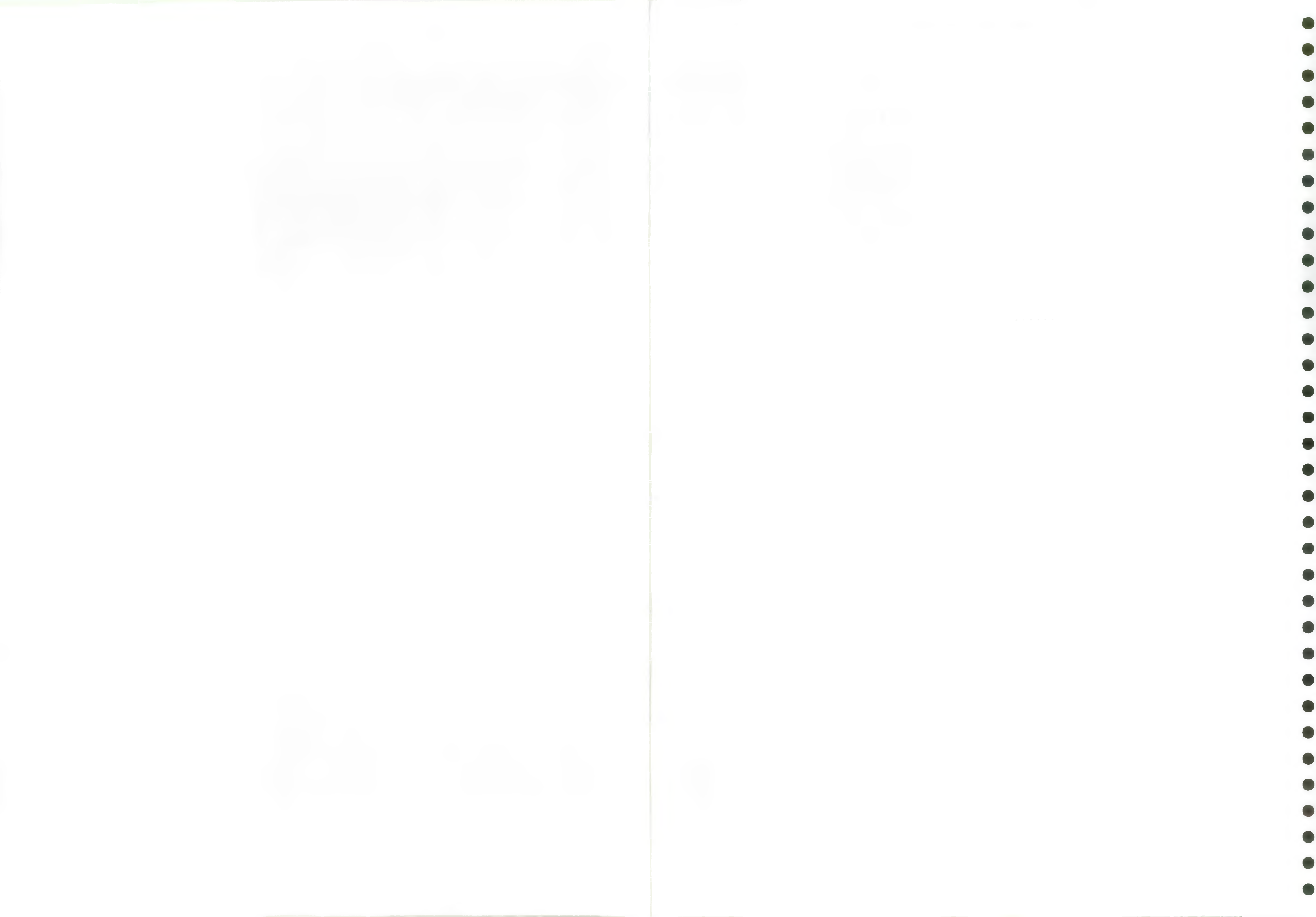


KEY/ALLWEDD

-  Scheduled Ancient Monuments
Henebion wedi eu rhestru
-  Other important archaeological or historic sites
Olion archaeolegol neu hanesyddol pwysig eraill
-  Sites or remains of wharves
Safleoedd neu olion glanfeydd
-  Route of dismantled railway
Llwybr hen reilffordd

MILE/MILLTIR
SCALE/GRADDEFA

N/G



3.8 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INTERESTS

- 3.8.1 Although the Wye today gives the impression of being largely natural and unspoilt, it has in fact been heavily influenced by man in the past. There is a long history of human settlement in the Wye Valley, dating back to the Romans and beyond. Until the end of the last century the lower Wye Valley was an important industrial centre. Iron furnaces and other industries exploited the natural raw materials and power provided, initially, by the river itself, and latterly by coal mined in the Forest of Dean.
- 3.8.2 The Wye at this time was an important artery for communication. Sailing ships and barges were used to transport raw materials and manufactured goods to and from settlements along the river. Boats were also used to carry passengers. In the middle of the nineteenth century commercial navigation was superseded by the introduction of the railways. At one time much of the Wye Valley was served by train. Several stretches of line ran alongside the river and, although these are now all disused, their routes can still be traced. Many artefacts such as bridges and tunnels remain.
- 3.8.3 This historical use of the river has left a legacy of built structures and other historical remains. These help us to understand the river's history and to appreciate the processes and developments which have helped to create the river we see today. As such they make a valuable contribution to the overall interest and importance of the river.
- 3.8.4 The range of historic artefacts associated with the Wye is considerable. Of greatest interest in the context of this report perhaps are those features associated with communication and transport, and particularly navigation. Old quayside warehouses still stand at several locations, including Hereford, Ross and Chepstow, and the remains of some wharves still survive. The remnants of some old weirs are still present - some are natural, others were built to aid the passage of boats or to power mills. The sites of many ferry crossings and fords can still be traced and the route of the old towing path can be identified from old maps, although it no longer exists on the ground.
- 3.8.5 It is important to be aware of sites of archaeological or historic interest when considering the future management and distribution of recreational use. In many cases there are no physical remains and historical evidence is only documentary. Each county has a Sites and Monuments Record containing details of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other key archaeological sites. In addition, several articles have been published about navigation on the Wye which refer to historical sites.
- 3.8.6 Although it has not been possible to carry out a full investigation into the river's historical and cultural interests, all the main sources of information have been examined and details of the following have been collated:
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
 - other sites of archaeological or historic interest;
 - sites of disused fords, ferries and wharves.

Much of this information is illustrated on Map 4. Details of historical sites are contained in Appendices 20 to 23.

4. Management issues

4.1 OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

- 4.1.1 A number of outside influences could affect the future management of the Wye. It is difficult to predict what impact many of these will have but they do at least need to be recognised. The most important are considered below:

Changes In recreational demand

- 4.1.2 A major consideration is the likely future demand for recreational use. Various surveys undertaken by the Countryside Commission and the Sports Councils have shown that visiting the countryside is one of the most popular leisure time activities nationwide.
- 4.1.3 The majority of visitors to the countryside are merely seeking a pleasant place in which to relax. Others are interested in the countryside for its intrinsic qualities and may take part in a variety of informal activities. A smaller minority are involved in active, formal sports which have specific needs. These frequently take place in the countryside but not exclusively so, and in some cases their location is incidental. Among all three groups the trend appears to be towards either an increasing number of participants or an increasing frequency of use.
- 4.1.4 People appear to be becoming more aware of the countryside and the opportunities for recreation it offers. As they become more knowledgeable, they are increasingly willing to travel further afield and seek out new opportunities for fulfilment. With the young in particular there appears to be a trend towards more exciting and novel activities - rafting and jet-skiing are good examples on the Wye - and there is growing demand for access to more remote, previously little frequented parts of the river. A continuation of these trends could have significant implications for the management of the Wye. The degree to which the river is able to accommodate such demands will need careful consideration.

Alternative venues

- 4.1.5 Although this report is concerned exclusively with the Wye, its importance for sport and recreation has to be seen in the context of the general shortage of comparable opportunities elsewhere in the region. Many activities which take place on or close to the Wye could just as easily take place elsewhere if alternative sites were available. The development of alternative facilities or a general improvement in access to other waterways could have a significant impact on the level of some activities on the Wye.
- 4.1.6 For example, only a small proportion of British rivers possess public rights of navigation. Consequently, legal access for canoeing is restricted unless private agreements can be negotiated. Any future changes in national or European Community policy towards navigation rights, or an increase in the number of voluntary agreements to improve access to other rivers, could help to absorb some of the latent or unsatisfied demand for canoeing and may result in a reduction in the level of canoeing on the Wye.
- 4.1.7 The BCU and WCA have been campaigning for many years to improve access for canoeists, but with little success. Changes to the law covering access and navigation rights have been suggested but it may be several years before there are substantial improvements for canoeists throughout the country. It is unrealistic to rely on these possible changes to ease the pressures on the Wye.

Declining angling quality

- 4.1.8 Like many rivers, the past few years have seen a gradual but marked decline in the quality of fishing for salmon and sea trout on the Wye compared to the recent past. This is of concern to fishery owners and anglers alike. Not only does it affect the enjoyment experienced by anglers but it has an impact upon the financial value of some fisheries.
- 4.1.9 The decline in salmon catches stems largely from a reduction in the number of fish in the river. The reasons for this are not fully understood, but are thought to include legal and illegal exploitation of stocks, both at sea and in the river, changes to the marine environment where salmon spend most of their adult life, and the acidification of parts of the headwaters and some of the tributaries, which may affect breeding success. The NRA is actively investigating the cause of the salmon decline. However, if catches continue to fall the position of the Wye as a leading salmon fishery could be seriously threatened.

- 4.1.10 Against this background it is perhaps inevitable that the attitude of some anglers to further pressure from other recreation activities has become less sympathetic. It is clear from the results of the anglers survey and from discussions with angling interests that activities such as canoeing and rafting are perceived by some people as one reason for poor catches.
- 4.1.11 Poor catches are likely to result in efforts by fishery owners to maximise their share of the catch in order to protect their financial investment. The future is likely to see further stretches being opened up to fishing and pressure for further physical modifications to the river.

Water quality

- 4.1.12 The Wye's most important single attribute is its high water quality. This is critical to its future status, both as a recreational resource and as a site of outstanding conservation value. Any significant decline in water quality will affect this status. The maintenance of water quality is an important objective of the NRA. However, it can be threatened by unpredictable outside forces, including changes in agricultural practices, isolated pollution incidents and other unforeseen developments within the catchment.

Water quantity

- 4.1.13 The demands of society for water continue to grow, and the Wye is under increasing pressure from water abstraction, for both domestic and agricultural purposes. The summers of 1990 and 1991 have seen the flow of water in the Wye reach particularly low levels for prolonged periods. This has caused difficulties for anglers and boat users alike, and may have important environmental consequences. Although the lack of water is due partly to low rainfall, it is not clear whether this is a symptom of more serious, long term climatic change. If this is the case and dry summers become more prevalent, the limited water resources of the Wye will need to be carefully conserved, otherwise its value as a recreation and wildlife resource will decline.

Re-notification of the River Wye SSSI

- 4.1.14 It seems certain that English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will begin the process of renotifying the Wye as a SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This could have implications for the future management of the river by granting enhanced powers to control certain potentially damaging operations. These could include some bankside engineering works, including croys and other fishery improvements. However, the new powers will only have a limited influence over sport and recreation activities. It is unlikely that they could be used to prevent accidental damage by recreationalists and other third party interests outside the direct control of the land owner or fishery owner.
- 4.1.15 It is likely that further biological surveys will be necessary prior to renotification. As well as contributing to our overall knowledge of the Wye, these could reveal hitherto unknown pressures or conflicts which will need to be addressed through future management policy.

4.2 DEMAND FOR SPORT AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

- 4.2.1 The level of demand for sport and recreation has an important bearing on the management of the river. Those responsible for managing the river will need to consider carefully how to respond to these demands. Their response will influence the provision of access and facilities, and any decisions to regulate or restrict use. As well as current levels of use, the likely future use will also need to be considered. The two elements of demand are discussed below.

Current demand

- 4.2.2 Current demand consists of two elements; expressed demand and latent demand. Expressed demand comprises those people that have already shown an ability and willingness to use the river in some form, and can be quantified relatively easily. Latent demand is the level of demand that exists but is prevented from expressing itself for some reason. These reasons can include lack of knowledge about the river, a lack of adequate facilities, or outside factors such as cost, transport

or lack of equipment. Latent demand is extremely difficult to measure and can only be gauged through household surveys. No information is available about the latent demand for sport and recreation on the Wye.

- 4.2.3 It is generally considered that the overall level of sporting and recreational use of the Wye has increased in recent years. In particular, pressure from informal visitors and canoeists has increased substantially. However, we know little about those factors which influence demand. It is reasonable to assume that the growth in activity is, in part, a reflection of national trends towards increased visits to the countryside and the general growth in the popularity of water sports. However, the questionnaires revealed that many people are attracted to the Wye for its intrinsic qualities - its scenic beauty, wildlife and peace and quiet. It is not known what impact the current level of management is having on the expression of demand - for example, to what extent demand is influenced by the availability of access and visitor facilities or by attempts to publicise the river.

Future demand

- 4.2.4 Whilst recognising that current recreational demand needs to be managed, it is equally important to try to anticipate future levels of use, though estimating future demand is notoriously difficult. Left to itself it has to be assumed that overall demand is likely to increase, reflecting national trends and the continuing appeal of the Wye Valley. There is little evidence that the recreational carrying capacity of the Wye is close to being approached, as expressed, for example, by the reluctance of canoeists to tolerate existing levels of use, except in very localised areas such as Symonds Yat, and then only at certain times.
- 4.2.5 The actual levels of participation in any activity will be affected by a number of factors:
- changing fashions or technical developments, leading to the expansion of some activities or the introduction of new ones;
 - changes in the equipment and travel costs associated with different activities;
 - the extent to which alternative venues become available;
 - the availability of access and the provision of facilities;
 - the effectiveness of efforts to promote or restrict the use of the river;
 - the quality of recreation experience;
 - the extent to which the enjoyment of users is diminished by increasingly high levels of use or by conflict with other users. This can lead to self imposed regulation.

ACCOMMODATING DEMAND

- 4.2.6 It is widely accepted that encouraging countryside recreation and enhancing the enjoyment of visitors to the countryside provides benefits for society as a whole. As well as promoting physical and mental health, countryside recreation can raise environmental awareness and stimulate greater understanding of the countryside and the need for conservation. As a matter of general policy, the use of the Wye for sport and recreation should be encouraged, provided it is compatible with the primary aim of maintaining the ecological interest of the river, recognises legal rights of ownership and is managed so as to minimise inter-user conflict. The aim should be to make recreational visits to the Wye a pleasurable and fulfilling experience.
- 4.2.7 Major difficulties are assessing the level of recreational use that is sustainable in landscape or ecological terms, and the limited extent to which it is possible to influence the pattern of recreational use so as to minimise problems or conflicts. Areas experiencing intensive pressure may need to be managed in a way that reduces numbers or restricts access. However, it must be recognised that the ability to influence demand is very limited. Most access to the river is obtained as of public right, either via the public right of way network or the right of navigation. Consideration will therefore need to be given to determining the best form of management to accommodate the likely increase in recreation use and the growth of particular activities.

4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SPORT AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

- 4.3.1 Many people have expressed concern about the effect that increasing levels of recreational use may be having on the ecology of the Wye. This concern is likely to increase in the future as the pressures for recreation and access increase and society demands ever higher environmental standards and levels of protection.
- 4.3.2 Assessing the environmental impact of sport and recreation in the countryside is notoriously difficult. The impact is often not obvious, and where there is an impact, the mechanisms can be complicated. It is often difficult to isolate the impact of sport and recreation from other harmful changes. The potential for damage can arise in two ways, by direct physical damage or as a result of disturbance.
- 4.3.3 Physical damage normally arises from direct human contact with the environment, leading to habitat change. It usually affects riparian habitats or vegetation, and can be caused by trampling, erosion and litter. There are varying degrees of physical damage and not all damage is necessarily significant. Damage is normally observable and relatively straightforward to measure.
- 4.3.4 Disturbance normally affects fauna, especially birds and mammals, and is caused when human activities of whatever kind cause a disruption in the normal behaviour pattern of the animal. The effects of disturbance on the Wye include wildfowl taking flight, or salmon moving away from their spawning bed, as a result of human presence. Disturbance is not always significant, but can lead to damage if disruption to breeding or feeding results in long term population decline. It is normally difficult to measure.
- 4.3.5 These two potential forms of impact are discussed below in relation to the Wye.

PHYSICAL DAMAGE

- 4.3.6 To some degree, a certain amount of physical damage is inevitable. It can include for example:
- damage to banks and vegetation caused by the launching and landing of canoes, or by canoeists paddling too close to the banks;
 - damage to banks and bankside vegetation caused by anglers, including the cutting of fishing platforms and the creation of swims;
 - litter, including anglers' hooks and nylon line;
 - bank erosion and damage to marginal vegetation caused by the wash from boats;
 - damage to aquatic plants caused by boats;
 - erosion of riverside footpaths and banks caused by trampling and general over use.
- 4.3.7 There is little observable evidence that these forms of physical damage have reached serious levels on the Wye. Where damage does occur it is usually light or intermittent and is not a cause for widespread concern, though there can be significant damage in localised areas. The rapids at Symonds Yat are an example, where the banks and island have been seriously eroded by the activities of canoeists and intensive pressure from informal visitors. This has necessitated repairs to safeguard the stability of the bank. Heavily used sections of the Wye Valley Walk have also suffered erosion.
- Fishing croys**
- 4.3.8 One aspect of recreational use which does have a measurable impact on the river environment is the physical modification to the river carried out by some fishery owners in order to improve the quality of their fishing. Examples include the construction of croys, the creation of underwater obstructions to create artificial fish lies, and excavation of the river bed to create holding pools for salmon. These practices are widespread and have been taking place for many years. A survey undertaken by the NRA in 1989 identified 513 croys between Rhayader and Chepstow.
- 4.3.9 The visual impact of some of these structures can be significant. Although it is possible to construct croys from sympathetic materials such as natural boulders, many are built using concrete or wire

gabions and extend several metres into the river. Individual croys can be an eyesore by themselves, and several together can substantially affect the 'natural' appearance of the river. There is also some concern about the effect that croys and other structures can have on water velocity patterns and underwater wildlife habitats. Conversely, it has been suggested that under some circumstances they can benefit the river's ecology by introducing a greater diversity of habitats and features.

- 4.3.10 Fishery improvements are generally considered to be engineering works and are covered by the NRA's system of land drainage consents. They may also fall within the scope of planning control. In reality, most croys have been in existence for many years, and many apparent 'new' croys are merely repairs to existing ones. As such they are exempt from the need to obtain land drainage consent and planning permission.
- 4.3.11 There is concern that the powers of the NRA to oppose new developments on purely landscape or aesthetic grounds are limited. In such circumstances it may be necessary for planning authorities, where appropriate acting on advice from bodies like the AONB JAC, to take a more active interest in fishery improvements and adopt firmer planning policies to control them. In the longer term, re-notification of the Wye as a SSSI could give English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales stronger powers to control damaging engineering works.

DISTURBANCE

Introduction

- 4.3.12 Disturbance is inevitable and frequent, and occurs wherever wildlife and human activities impinge on each other. What matters is whether this disturbance is damaging. The disturbance effects of recreational use are usually more difficult to quantify and are less obvious than physical damage.
- 4.3.13 Although some research has been undertaken in this area, mostly involving wildfowl, much of this has been in relation to still waters. These are very different habitats from rivers and some of the results may not be applicable to the Wye. Very little research has been undertaken on rivers, and none on the Wye. As a result our understanding of disturbance, and its possible significance, is limited.
- 4.3.14 Disturbance can manifest itself in a number of ways. It can result in an animal taking temporary cover until the threat has passed, a cessation of feeding activity, temporary movement to another part of the river or permanent relocation to another area.
- 4.3.15 It is important to understand both the causes of disturbance and its possible long term effects. The balance between recreation and disturbance is influenced by several factors, including the timing, intrusiveness and location of a particular activity. It will also be influenced by the needs of the affected species, in terms of its noise or space requirements or the vulnerability of its population. All forms of recreational activity can cause disturbance, but it is likely to be greatest where:
- the activity itself is inherently noisy or disruptive;
 - the scale or frequency of an activity is high over extensive stretches of river;
 - it is concentrated in a small but particularly sensitive area;
 - it takes place at times of the year when certain species are susceptible to disturbance.
- 4.3.16 Much of the concern about disturbance relates to navigation. This needs to be considered more fully. Most boats on the Wye are unpowered. They create little wash and leave no pollution. In particular, canoes are generally quiet and leave little evidence of their passing. Individual canoeists and small groups are unlikely to cause much disturbance, except where their use is frequent or repetitive. The potential threat comes largely from a minority of inconsiderate individuals, and from large groups of noisy, inexperienced canoeists. Likewise with rafting, individual rafts are unlikely to have a significant impact, but intensive training exercise and races could be more serious.
- 4.3.17 It cannot be assumed that only active sports like canoeing or rafting are disruptive. Even angling, which many fisherman consider to cause little disturbance, can have an impact. A solitary angler may cause significant disturbance if, for example, by remaining in one place for a long period he prevents a bird from returning to its nest.

Does disturbance matter?

- 4.3.18 This is an extremely difficult question to answer. If disturbance is affecting the sustainability of a species' then it does matter, especially if the species concerned is rare. However, we know little about the complex relationships which govern population levels, breeding success and feeding patterns of animals. To prove a link, it would not only have to be established that a population is under threat, it would also need to be demonstrated that recreation use is the likely cause. The impact of recreation has to be considered against the many other potentially damaging impacts on the river.
- 4.3.19 Conclusive evidence of impact will be difficult to collect, but if people are to be expected to accept restrictions to their activities it is desirable that any link is clearly established, and preferably quantified, beforehand. Many species are very adaptable to human activity and it needs to be recognised that the diverse range of species present today in the Wye Valley has been maintained in spite of the relatively high level of visitors and recreational use over many years. Although insufficient research has been undertaken, there is little to suggest that there has been a serious decline in ecological value in recent years.

Specific concerns

- 4.3.20 So far, the discussion about disturbance has been in terms of broad principles. However, a number of specific concerns have been expressed regarding the impact of particular recreational activities on the wildlife of the Wye. In each case it must be emphasised that a direct causal link between the recreational activity and damage has not been proven. The concerns are based largely upon direct observation of disturbance and an acknowledgement that there is potential for damage. The main concerns are discussed below:-

Spawning salmon

- 4.3.21 Many anglers and fishery owners have expressed concern that canoeing on the upper Wye may disturb spawning salmon. The concern is shared by the NRA. It is largely based upon the observation that salmon in the process of spawning have been seen to take cover as canoeists have passed. The risk of disturbance is greatest in shallow, gravel bottomed water in the upper reaches, and is mainly confined to the months of November and December. Wilful disturbance of spawning fish is an offence under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.
- 4.3.22 Canoeing may disrupt the spawning process in several ways. Firstly, it may disturb fish as they are preparing to spawn, though there is little evidence to suggest that this causes significant disturbance as fish generally wait under cover, usually in deeper water. Secondly, it is thought that canoeists can interrupt fish while they are on the spawning beds, leading to lower fertilisation rates and higher egg mortality. Since salmon mainly spawn at night, significant disturbance from canoeists is unlikely. Thirdly, trampling on spawning gravels may damage unhatched eggs and fry. There is no evidence that this is a frequent occurrence and the simple passage of canoes downstream is unlikely to have an impact.
- 4.3.23 It has not been established that canoeing has had any significant impact on the salmon population. Evidence would suggest that the salmon population of the Wye has declined, but that this is due to a number of factors, of which disturbance by canoeists is likely to be an almost insignificant factor. Proper scientific assessment is necessary to establish, firstly, the scale of any disturbance and extent of damage, and secondly its overall impact on fish stocks. The NRA is planning to undertake a national programme of research into the environmental impact of recreation, part of which may address this issue.

Disturbance to birds

- 4.3.24 Birds are possibly the most susceptible of all animals to disturbance. The Wye is an important refuge for many species of wildfowl. These are at their most vulnerable during the breeding season which runs from the beginning of April to mid-July. This coincides with the period when recreational activity is at its greatest and there is concern that excessive activity could disturb nesting wildfowl and disrupt newly hatched broods of chicks. Islands and heavily vegetated banks are particularly important as refuges and breeding sites, and are sensitive to pressures for access.

- 4.3.25 One activity of particular concern is the annual CHAR raft race between Hay-on-Wye and Chepstow. This major event takes place in May, at a time when there are a great many mallard ducklings and other young birds on the river. It is claimed by some people that intensive disturbance caused by the passage of seventy or so rafts causes nests to be swamped and adult birds to take flight. This may cause broods to be separated and expose young birds to risk from drowning or predators. These anxieties have led to requests that the race be stopped or alternatively moved to a less sensitive time of the year.
- 4.3.26 The evidence to support this claim is largely subjective. It is not known if any birds are killed, nor whether there is any impact on the overall population of mallard on the river. Mallard is not an endangered species, and even if it is established that large numbers are killed this may not be important in conservation terms. Nevertheless the issue may be one of animal welfare. A research project funded by the NRA and undertaken by the British Trust for Ornithology looked at the extent of disturbance during the 1992 raft race and its effect on the survival rate of chicks. The results will hopefully provide a quantified assessment of the problem.
- 4.3.27 Other birds thought to be susceptible to recreational disturbance include sand martins and kingfishers which nest in sand banks. Gravel shoals are frequently used as resting places by canoeists but are important habitats for breeding little ringed plovers and sandpipers, both of which are known to be sensitive to human activity. Again, little information is available about the scale or significance of any disturbance, though a recent study commissioned by the NRA confirmed that disturbance had resulted in nest losses among little ringed plovers on other rivers in Wales.

Otters

- 4.3.28 It has been claimed that increasing recreational use may have a detrimental impact on the otter population of the Wye. There is particular concern about angling and boating, and about disturbance from people and dogs on the bank, especially where this is associated with mink hunting. Otters are known to be shy and reclusive, and are sensitive to human disturbance. Some impact is inevitable, though there is no evidence from the regular population surveys that have been undertaken that otters are threatened on the Wye. If anything, the range and population of the otter is expanding in the Wye catchment.
- 4.3.29 Radio tracking studies indicate that otters are probably more tolerant of disturbance than many people think, and in most cases will be able to avoid human contact by swimming underwater or by using bankside vegetation as cover. Moreover, lowland otters are known to be largely nocturnal and are likely to be under cover, possibly away from the river, during the period of the day when most human activity is taking place. In conclusion, the impact of recreational activity is probably not a major factor governing otter populations, and is likely to be less important than environmental factors and other forms of disturbance.

Noisy and high speed activities

- 4.3.30 The likelihood of disturbance and long term damage is much greater with some activities than others. Activities like jet-skiing or water-skiing or events which attract large numbers of participants in a small area are inherently more disruptive than canoeing, angling or other 'quiet' sports. However, they will usually only create disturbance in a localised area and their overall impact may be small, depending on the vulnerability of that area. The degree of impact will depend upon the scale and frequency of the activity, its location and the time of the year. It must be accepted that any significant increase in these activities could begin to cause long term damage to the population of some sensitive species.

APPROACHES TO MINIMISING IMPACT

- 4.3.31 Much of the concern about the impact of recreation is based upon a belief that recreation is inherently harmful. While there may be some justification for such a belief in the context of pristine wilderness areas, it is inappropriate in the context of the intensively managed British countryside. Many visitors to the Wye place a high value on an attractive, high quality environment and regard this as an integral part of their visit. There is a strong vested interest among most recreational users in protecting the environment and many share the concerns expressed by conservationists.

- 4.3.36 This information is not likely to be available in the short term. It is unlikely that resources will be available to fund the necessary programme of research, and any study into population change will, of necessity, take several years to complete. In the absence of such information, it is wise to adopt a cautious approach and rely on common sense and what circumstantial evidence exists when considering the potential for disturbance caused by different recreational activities.
- 4.3.37 In the absence of clear evidence of damage, there is little justification for widespread restrictions on existing recreational activities. However, it will be important to minimise the potential for damage and be in a position to act if necessary. It is suggested that any approach to countering environmental impact should encompass the following broad principles:
- There should be an informed assessment of the likely environmental impact of new or developing activities, or proposals for new recreation facilities, using the best available information.
 - Careful control should be exercised over those activities which by their nature are likely to be most disruptive, including high speed and noisy activities, and competitive events.
 - Research will be required in order to identify the causes of disturbance and monitor its long term impact.
 - If a link is suspected, standards need to be set by which changes resulting from recreation disturbance can be judged.
 - Restraint measures need to be agreed in advance so that they can be introduced if these standards are breached.
- 4.3.38 When considering the best approach to adopt in order to minimise the impact of disturbance, it must be recognised that many of the commonly accepted solutions to managing competing uses cannot easily be introduced on the Wye. The conventional approach on many still waters is to zone conflicting uses in space in order to create quiet refuges for wildlife, or to restrict recreational activity to set times. This approach is generally only possible where the resource is owned or controlled by a single authority, and rights of access are permissive. The enclosed nature of still waters makes physical separation relatively straightforward.
- 4.3.39 There are substantial difficulties with trying to adopt this zoning approach on the Wye. The main constraint is that access to the river for many activities is generally granted by public right and cannot be withdrawn readily. For instance, it is difficult to prevent the use of the river where there is a public right of navigation or to restrict the use of public footpaths. The linear nature of the river makes geographical zoning inappropriate.

4.4 NAVIGATION

ABSENCE OF REGULATION

- 4.4.1 Unlike many other major rivers, navigation on the Wye is almost entirely unregulated. There is no general speed limit and no restriction on the type or number of craft that can use the river. This situation can create problems for other river uses and impose pressure on the environment. There is no requirement to obtain a licence before taking a boat on the Wye. As a consequence, essential information about the numbers of craft using the Wye and the identity of boat users is not readily available.
- 4.4.2 The NRA has certain powers to introduce bylaws to regulate navigation. Consideration should be given to whether these powers should be exercised, and if so how they can be used most effectively. When determining the need for bylaws, the key questions are:
- Is there a problem or might there be a problem in the future?
 - Are bylaws the best way to remedy this problem?
 - Will the particular bylaws being proposed resolve the problem?

CONSTRAINTS TO BYLAW POWERS

- 4.4.3 It must be borne in mind at the outset that the right of navigation is generally paramount to other

uses of the river, provided it is exercised reasonably, and to substantially interfere with such a right would probably require primary legislation. Although the bylaw making powers available to the NRA are extremely wide ranging (see Appendix 28) it is unlikely that they can be used to restrict or prohibit boat use, except possibly where such use is causing insurmountable problems or conflicts.

- 4.4.4 It will be difficult for the NRA to limit the total number of boats entitled to use the river or the number that may use the river at any one time. It is also unlikely that the use of particular stretches can be prevented, and provided the craft being used is acceptable it will be difficult to restrict use of the river by particular groups or individuals.

EXTENT OF NAVIGATION RIGHTS

- 4.4.5 There is some uncertainty as to what activities are included within the legal concept of navigation. It is generally accepted in law that the right of navigation is a right to pass and repass along the river and to carry out activities which are essential to the normal course of navigation. It is also established in case law that the right of navigation includes recreational use, even though the right to navigate on the Wye was originally determined by commercial needs.
- 4.4.6 Where a right of navigation exists, it is generally paramount to other rights, including the right to fish. However, there is a presumption that the right must be exercised reasonably. It does not necessarily follow that every conceivable use of the navigation which modern developments or technical expertise make possible is reasonable. Activities on the Wye which might be regarded as abnormal uses of the navigation include:
- races and other competitive events;
 - high speed activities such as water-skiing and jet-skiing;
 - certain activities undertaken by canoeists including intensive, repeated use of short stretches of river, such as the rapids at Symonds Yat.

These arguments are advanced by many fishery interests, who claim that the activities of some boat users are unreasonable or excessive.

- 4.4.7 Anglers and fishery owners are clearly not in a position to object if the navigation is used in a normal and reasonable manner. However, if the right of navigation is being abused then remedial action could be considered. It is very difficult to define in law what constitutes a reasonable use of the river. The test of reasonableness will depend on a number of factors, including the depth and width of the river, its vulnerability to environmental damage and the presence of other users. A particular problem is posed by noisy, high speed activities. These high profile uses raise a number of concerns, including disruption to other users, wave erosion and disturbance to wildlife. On busy stretches they could constitute a safety hazard to other boat users and swimmers.
- 4.4.8 Establishing what uses are permitted by the right of navigation is a dilemma for those responsible for managing navigation and attempting to reach a balance between conflicting uses. A judgment will have to be made as to what activities are reasonable and acceptable for different stretches of river and what control, if any, is possible for those that may be inappropriate.

COMPETITIVE EVENTS

- 4.4.9 Although races, regattas and other competitive events might not be regarded as normal uses of the navigation, unlike many other navigable waterways events on the Wye are not covered by any form of control. Provided they do not contravene other relevant legal requirements there are no powers to regulate the way events are organised or to prevent an inappropriate event from taking place.
- 4.4.10 Under the current system there is no requirement for event organisers to get permission before holding an event, other than where the consent of the landowner or fishery owner is necessary. As a result, events can take place without anybody's prior knowledge. This can cause inconvenience to other river users and can lead to clashes if more than one event has been organised for the same time. The present Calendar of Events does help to raise awareness of events but is dependant on organisers notifying the NRA voluntarily. Inclusion in the calendar does not imply that an event any form of official consent.

- 4.4.11 There is concern about the increasing number and variety of events and the capacity of the river to accommodate them all. As well as the disruption they can cause to other users, there is concern about the impact that certain events can have on wildlife. Concern has also been expressed about the conduct of the participants in some events and the disruption that can arise from unruly or inconsiderate behaviour. There is generally little control over the safety of participants or over such things as litter or pollution.
- 4.4.12 Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that where events take place, they are properly organised and not likely to cause disruption to other interests. There should be a mechanism to prevent inappropriate events from taking place. This will only be possible if a proper system of regulation is introduced.

MAINTENANCE OF THE NAVIGATION

- 4.4.13 Because there is no active navigation authority for the Wye, and because most boat traffic on the river is unpowered and of fairly recent history, the Wye has not been actively managed for the benefit of navigation since the nineteenth century. As a consequence, most of the improvements carried out in the days of commercial navigation no longer exist. The Wye today flows through a largely naturalised channel, which is part of its attraction for many users.
- 4.4.14 The deteriorating physical condition of parts of the navigation channel, brought about by natural processes such as siltation and the movement of gravel is causing difficulties for some boat users in certain areas. The largely uncontrolled growth of aquatic plants and bankside vegetation can also cause problems. Whilst there appears to be a consensus that the naturalness of the river should not be compromised by widespread deepening or widening of the channel, consideration does need to be given to whether the navigation should be managed to some degree, in order to enable craft to exercise their right of navigation freely. Any improvements must recognise the natural constraints of the river and should largely be for the benefit of existing uses. There is no suggestion that the river should be modified to facilitate widespread use by large, motorised craft.
- 4.4.15 In addition to natural obstructions, there are many man-made features in the river which can cause an obstacle to navigation. These include fishing croys, and rocks which have been placed on the bed of the river to act as fish lies. These have been introduced over many years, sometimes without reference to the right of navigation. Where land drainage consent has been granted, navigation was not seen as a legitimate concern until recently and was overlooked when granting many old consents. Not only do these obstructions cause an inconvenience to boat users, there have been several incidents where canoeists have accidentally collided with unseen obstacles. As well as being a danger to personal safety they have caused considerable damage to some boats.
- 4.4.16 The right of navigation covers the full width of the river and any artificial obstacle in the channel could be regarded as an infringement of that right. In the past, the interests of navigation may not have been regarded as a high priority, but with the current levels of use and the increased expectations of users consideration should be given to ensuring that the navigation channel remains largely free from avoidable obstructions.

USE BY MOTOR LAUNCHES

- 4.4.17 Although most of the Wye is inaccessible to powered launches, there is some demand to use the lower river between Bigsweir and Chepstow, primarily from craft entering the Wye from the River Severn and from boat owners wanting to carry fare paying passengers between Chepstow and Tintern. This stretch is physically capable of accommodating motorised craft and provided they navigate responsibly this must be regarded as a legitimate use of navigation. However, due to a lack of mooring facilities and several man-made underwater obstructions, the lower Wye is inconvenient and can be dangerous to use. The desirability of improving this stretch to provide safe navigation for all craft during suitable tides needs to be considered.

TOWING PATH

- 4.4.18 One of the consequences of the Wye Navigation Acts of Parliament was the establishment of a towing path between Lydbrook and Hereford. This was created to assist the passage of barges up river. The route of the path was clearly shown on a map and there was an obligation on riparian landowners to keep the path open and free from obstruction. Over the years since the decline

of commercial navigation the path has fallen into disrepair and is no longer recognisable as a towpath. However, it almost certainly still exists in law, and although it is no longer needed as a towing path, there may be other legal rights of access associated with it, such as a right of pedestrian access or a right to moor boats. The uncertainties surrounding the towing path needs to be resolved by further legal investigation, and it needs to be determined whether there is still an obligation to maintain it for public use.

4.5 ANGLING - NAVIGATION CONFLICTS

INTRODUCTION

- 4.5.1 The only significant area of inter-recreation conflict on the Wye is between angling and the various forms of navigation. The fact that there is tension between the two groups is well established. In recent years there have been complaints from some anglers and fishery owners who have claimed that boating use, and particularly canoeing and rafting, is disrupting their fishing, affecting their enjoyment of the river and reducing the financial value of their fisheries.
- 4.5.2 This conflict is not unique to the Wye. It is common to many rivers and lakes where both activities share use of the same limited water space. On waters such as canals, angling/boating interactions are generally accepted, even if not always welcome. However, the potential for conflict on the Wye is undoubtedly increased by the high levels of recreational use and the special regard in which the Wye is held by both anglers and canoeists.
- 4.5.3 Although it is widely accepted that conflicts do occur, there does not appear to be any consensus about the precise nature of conflict. A widespread programme of consultation was carried out among representatives of both angling and navigation interests in order to identify the various causes of conflict.
- 4.5.4 A postal questionnaire was circulated to individual salmon anglers and fishery owners. Both groups were asked what problems or conflicts they had experienced. 66% of anglers and 70% of owners said they had experienced problems caused by other recreation users. Among anglers, 79% of those that had experienced problems thought that the difficulties had become more apparent in recent years.
- 4.5.5 The majority of problems experienced relate to an intensification of existing uses, mainly canoeing, and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of novel activities like rafting. However, the perception of conflict and the mechanisms involved vary considerably. There does not appear to be one single aspect of navigation which causes problems above all others. The wide variety of conflicts experienced is illustrated by the results of the surveys contained in Appendices 6 and 7.
- 4.5.6 It is convenient to consider conflict under two headings - direct conflict and indirect conflict.

DIRECT CONFLICT

- 4.5.7 Physical contact is the most obvious potential cause of direct conflict. This can include collisions between boats and anglers or the snagging of an anglers' line, and can occur wherever the two activities coexist on the same stretch of river. However, this form of conflict does not appear to be a major problem on the Wye. The large size of the river and the general absence of powered craft mean that this is of lesser concern than on many other waterways.
- 4.5.8 Another aspect of direct conflict which may be important is the impact of the passage of boats on fish behaviour. Many anglers believe that the presence of canoes, and to a lesser extent rafts, can affect the behaviour of fish, so reducing their chances of being caught. 61% of anglers surveyed who said that they had experienced problems felt that their catch had been affected as a result of disturbance by other users.
- 4.5.9 Whilst it must be accepted that the presence of boats in large numbers or particularly noisy and disruptive activities could have an effect on fish, at least temporarily, there is no objective, scientific evidence to suggest that this is a common problem or is having a significant impact on fish catches. Neither is there any evidence that increasing boat use is responsible for a decline in fish stocks. Any possible link would need to be considered in the context of all the other factors affecting angling success, including poaching, changes in water quality and quantity, and natural trends in fish populations.

- 4.5.10 Referring back to chapter 3, if we compare the distribution of canoeing activity along the length of the river with records of salmon catches from each stretch, it is interesting to note that the most productive fishing stretches, i.e. downstream of Ross, correspond with the most popular canoeing stretches.

INDIRECT CONFLICT

- 4.5.11 Although physical contact is infrequent and evidence of fish disturbance is unproven, the presence of other users on the river does appear to affect the enjoyment of many salmon anglers and hence the quality of their recreational experience. Part of this may be due to the perceived impact on their fish catch, but the relationship appears to be more complicated than this. This can be referred to as indirect conflict.
- 4.5.12 Undoubtedly, some of the ill feeling felt by anglers stems from unreasonable behaviour and a basic lack of understanding among some boat users about the needs of angling. However, conflict may be more deeply rooted than this. There are basic differences in the prevailing values of the two sports, which make some conflict inevitable. Angling tends to be a quiet, contemplative and largely solitary sport, with an emphasis on enjoying the intrinsic qualities of the river. A minimum level of disturbance is required and any other activity can be regarded as at least potentially disturbing.
- 4.5.13 Canoeing and rafting, on the other hand, are more active by nature and tend to be practised in larger groups. It is also reasonable to conclude that canoeists and rafters tend to be younger than most salmon anglers, and are likely to hold different sets of values and attitudes. It is interesting to note that only 4% of salmon anglers interviewed also canoe on the Wye, and that only 3% of canoeists also fish. It is, perhaps, not surprising if there is some lack of understanding and appreciation of each other's needs.
- 4.5.14 Angling has been an important activity on the Wye for hundreds of years and many anglers have had long personal experience of fishing the Wye. Recreational navigation, by contrast, is relatively recent and is still growing. Some anglers and owners may still be coming to terms with having to share the river after such a long period where their sport was the exclusive or dominant use. As a result many regard navigation as a threat to the position of salmon angling as the leading recreational interest.
- 4.5.15 Many salmon anglers and fishery owners have expressed very clear opinions about what they consider to be the correct status of navigation use. They feel frustration and irritation because they are unable to do anything to control what they regard to be an unacceptable, unregulated expansion of navigation. In such cases conflict is symptomatic of more deep seated dissatisfaction. It is likely that many of the problems on the Wye fall into this category.
- 4.5.16 The fact that salmon angling generally involves a substantial financial outlay probably serves to heighten the awareness of conflict. Anglers require a NRA rod licence and generally have to pay in some way for the right to fish. Fishery owners have substantial capital tied up in their fishery, may invest large sums of money carrying out improvements and may soon be expected to pay a contribution to the NRA. There is a great deal of concern among some fishery owners and ghillies that the growth in other recreational activities could damage the value of their fishery and reduce their income.
- 4.5.17 Another major cause for resentment among angling interests is the fact that angling is, on the face of it, a highly regulated activity. Anglers are regulated both by statute and by bylaws specifying when they can fish and what angling methods they can use. In contrast, boat users are largely unrestricted by legal controls and do not need to buy a licence. They are perceived by many to make very little financial contribution to the management of the river, a situation many anglers and fishery owners believe to be inequitable.
- 4.5.18 Although it is true that boat users are largely unregulated and do not require a licence, their position cannot be directly compared with that of anglers. Anglers are regulated primarily in order to protect fish stocks and to control their exploitation of the resource. Boat users do not make the same demands on the river. In terms of payment, the money raised by angling licence sales contributes to the costs incurred by the NRA in carrying out its statutory duty to protect and develop fisheries. Anglers and fishery owners get a direct service from the NRA and it is

fair that they should pay part of the cost of providing that service. Boat users do not currently receive an equivalent level of service.

- 4.5.19 Canoeists and other boat users appear to be less concerned about conflict. Although anglers were the greatest source of conflict among those canoeists surveyed, only a small minority regarded this as a serious problem. Many thought that relations between boat users and anglers are generally good. However, there was a widely held view among those questioned that some anglers are not sufficiently tolerant or understanding, and are antagonistic towards navigation interests. Some canoeists have experienced abusive language and, occasionally, physical violence from anglers.

WHERE AND WHEN DOES CONFLICT OCCUR?

- 4.5.20 It is difficult to judge whether the experience of conflict varies along the length of the river. It would seem logical to assume that the potential for conflict is greater where navigation use is most intensive. To some extent this is borne out by the results of the fishery owners survey. This showed that problems are experienced more frequently by owners below Ross. However, anglers and owners on busy stretches are possibly more accustomed to other recreational users and may have a different perception of conflict than those on quieter stretches.
- 4.5.21 A degree of conflict is inevitable, especially when water levels are low and during the summer when there is pressure from both groups of users to make use of the lighter evenings, weekends and bank holidays. Equally, if an angler has few opportunities to fish the Wye and/or has travelled a long distance to fish he is likely to be more sensitive to any disruption.
- 4.5.22 It is probably fair to conclude that conflict can occur at any time of the day, and at any place where the two uses are sharing the river. It is more likely to occur during periods of heavy use and in places where activity is concentrated. Beyond this, much will depend upon individual incidents. Certain activities are more likely to cause conflict. The questionnaire results highlight a number of canoeing and rafting practices which can be particularly disrupting. A great deal depends on the attitude of individual boat users and anglers and the level of tolerance and understanding exercised by both groups. Different individuals will have different opinions as to what constitutes a serious conflict.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

- 4.5.23 Conflict is of concern where it affects the rights and abilities of people to enjoy their sport and when it begins to affect their attitude towards other users. In general, the incidence of serious conflict is probably quite low and does not appear to have affected the overall use of the river. However, almost half of all anglers experiencing problems had felt sufficiently motivated to change their pattern of fishing; either by fishing at different times or on different days.
- 4.5.24 Over the years a progressive climate of distrust has developed between the two groups, to the extent that there is a heightened awareness and expectation of conflict. It is clear that many anglers and fishery owners have become frustrated by the lack of management action and by their own powerlessness to control the situation. Many feel that the reliance in the past on encouraging voluntary cooperation and understanding has failed and are demanding more rigorous management.

4.6 CANOEING ON THE UPPER WYE

THE RIGHT OF NAVIGATION

- 4.6.1 Although it is commonly accepted that there is an established right of navigation over much of the river, there is some ambiguity about the extent of the right of navigation above Hay-on-Wye. Access to this stretch of river for canoeing has been a source of dispute for many years. The majority of fishery owners contend that there is no public right of navigation and that canoeing may only take place with their permission. However, many canoeists do not accept this and maintain that there is no upper limit to the right of navigation.
- 4.6.2 The legal arguments are complicated and are as yet untested. They centre mainly upon differing interpretations placed upon the wording of the various statutes which established the public right

of navigation, and also on the past use of the river. These arguments are considered more fully in Appendix 29.

- 4.6.3 This dispute came to a head initially in the 1970s. Before then it appears that canoeists paddled the upper Wye without apparent hindrance, albeit in smaller numbers. Since then, the number of canoeists using these upper reaches has increased substantially. Opinion has become increasingly polarised between the two sides and there have been active efforts by angling interests to restrict the level of canoeing.
- 4.6.4 For practical reasons it has proved to be extremely difficult for owners to prevent canoeists using the river. As a consequence, they have threatened legal action against canoeists who they consider to be trespassing. The BCU/WCA, representing canoeists, have also considered going to court to establish the true legal position. Both parties have commissioned legal opinions to support their case, but to date no action has been taken.
- 4.6.5 The concern of fishery owners is that if it is established that there is a right of navigation, this will open up the river to large numbers of additional canoeists who are currently dissuaded from using this stretch. They believe that this would have a detrimental impact on their fishing. They also express concern that canoeing in the autumn and winter could disturb salmon as they are spawning, or damage newly laid eggs.
- 4.6.6 From a canoeing point of view, the upper river offers some 80 km of high quality canoeing water, with special attractions for white water canoeing. There is a strong feeling that the restrictive attitude of owners is both unreasonable and unlawful, and that canoeists should be allowed greater access to this stretch of river.
- 4.6.7 This uncertainty over rights of navigation has led to a great deal of conflict. There has been a hardening of attitudes among fishery owners and there have been instances of physical and verbal abuse, though these are probably infrequent. Despite this, canoeing still takes place on a regular basis and by substantial numbers of canoeists. This is evidenced by the results of the canoeist surveys and from discussions with local canoeists. The stretch between Glasbury and Hay-on-Wye is one of the most intensively canoed stretches of the entire river. However, the quality of this recreational experience is bound to be affected if it takes place against a background of ill feeling and an expectation of conflict.
- 4.6.8 Leaving aside arguments about the legal status of the navigation, the potential for conflict on these upper reaches is inherently greater than on the rest of the river. The river tends to be narrower and shallower, and is less able to accommodate canoeists without disturbance to anglers. Other than between Glasbury and Hay-on-Wye, most canoeing on the upper Wye takes place during the winter months, as this is the only period when there is a sufficient depth of water. Consequently, the potential for direct conflict is largely limited to the short period at the end of the salmon season, in late October; and between 27th January, when the new season starts, and the spring, when water levels start to fall. A certain amount of canoeing also takes place through the summer when the river is in spate.

ACCESS AGREEMENTS

- 4.6.9 The only certain way for canoeists to gain permanent, undisputed access given the current situation is for them to acquire rights of ownership over the river bed. Currently this is neither practical nor financially affordable. In recognition of the need to find a solution which is acceptable to fishery owners and canoeists, attempts have been made to negotiate specific access agreements. These are intended to allow canoeing at certain times of the year, largely outside the salmon season and during periods when the river is in spate, and to enforce a code of conduct. They also usually specify agreed access points.
- 4.6.10 The only agreement currently in force on the Wye is between the Rhayader and District Angling Association and the BCU/WCA. This covers a 6 km stretch of river between the confluence with the River Marteg and a point just below Rhayader, and allows canoeing between December and March.
- 4.6.11 The stretch between Llanyrwil and Glasbury was previously covered by an agreement but this lapsed in 1986. Attempts are being made by a consortium of fishery owners and the WCA, with assistance from the NRA, to negotiate a new agreement, and although they are close to agreement

at the time of writing, negotiation has proved to be a difficult and lengthy process. Similar attempts are also being made to secure an agreement between Glasbury and Hay-on-Wye. If completed, both agreements would be confined to members of the BCU or WCA.

4.6.12 So long as neither party has been willing to make concessions on the fundamental question of navigation rights, access agreements have been regarded as the only practicable way of ensuring the balanced use of the river. Both sides recognise that the only obvious alternative is a costly and divisive legal battle. However, access agreements do have a number of significant drawbacks:

- The only competent bodies to negotiate access agreements on behalf of canoeists on the upper Wye are the BCU and WCA. Any agreements reached will only apply to their members. Although the BCU and WCA are attempting to recruit new members, they only represent around 25% of all regular canoeists and any agreement will only apply to a minority of canoeists. There is no suggestion that agreements will be extended to the majority of canoeists who are not members of the BCU or WCA.
- Left to themselves, the two parties have found it extremely difficult to reach a workable agreement. Access agreements rely upon a degree of goodwill and cooperation which does not always exist. Even if a workable agreement is reached, it may be difficult to sustain in the long term.
- Access agreements for the Wye depend upon the cooperation of many different individual landowners and fishery owners. An agreement will be undermined if a single owner in the middle of a stretch refuses access, or withdraws from the agreement.
- To date, negotiations over access agreements have involved only canoeists and fishery owners. Whilst recognising that fishery owners are directly affected by canoeing activity; in a strictly legal sense, control over access and power to take action for trespass lies primarily with the riparian land owner, unless the fishery owner also owns the bed of the river. The rights of fishery owners only extend to protecting their right to fish from activities which are causing unreasonable damage or nuisance and do not usually extend to prohibiting navigation. There is some doubt therefore about the legal validity of current and proposed agreements so long as they do not also involve all affected riparian owners.
- The BCU/WCA will only agree to an agreement which does not prejudice their claim that the whole river is navigable. They recognise the need to foster amicable relationships with fishery owners and see an agreement as the only way of securing relatively trouble free access. The position of the owners is very different. They maintain that by reaching an agreement with canoeists they are in effect granting permission to use the river and that this permission may be withdrawn. The negotiating positions of the two parties are very different, which reduces the likelihood of reaching a lasting, workable agreement.
- Enforcement is a major problem. Access agreements will have little influence on the minority of canoeists who will not be abide by voluntary measures and may not be members of any recognised organisation. Besides the problem of use by unaffiliated canoeists, some BCU/WCA members may breach the conditions of an agreement. The BCU/WCA are not in a position to account for the actions of all their members and have only a limited influence on whether they comply with the terms of the agreement.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT

4.6.13 If one accepts that it is desirable to find a solution which continues to allow access for canoeing above Hay-on-Wye, enabling canoeists to enjoy the river without the threat of intimidation or conflict, then there are essentially two options for the future. One is to continue to encourage the completion of access agreements over the disputed length of the river. These would have to ensure a reasonable degree of access as well as protect the interests of wildlife and fisheries. After re-notification of the Wye as a SSSI any such agreements would be subject to approval by the Countryside Council for Wales. However, for the reasons already outlined, there is some doubt whether access agreements will provide a stable, long term solution.

4.6.14 The second option is for the NRA to take greater responsibility for managing navigation on the upper Wye. Access agreements do not address the key issue of the extent of navigation rights. So long as this remains unresolved, access for navigation will remain essentially a private matter

between canoeists and owners. Resolution of this uncertainty will determine whether the NRA has powers to introduce bylaws to regulate navigation on the upper Wye. It has no power to act where there is no public right of navigation. It might be argued that in the interests of the river's overall management it would be sensible if a consistent approach could be adopted for the whole river. A continuation of the current situation might lead to considerable confusion if, in the future, bylaws are introduced for the middle and lower reaches.

- 4.6.15 The popularly accepted view among angling interests that there is no right of navigation on the upper part of the river is unproven. Some legal opinions suggest that the original legislation did not intend to impose a geographical limit on the right of navigation and that therefore it is possible that such a right could be established on the upper Wye. This would enable the NRA to assume a more prominent role in managing the upper reaches.
- 4.6.16 Although this approach may lend support to those who claim a public right of navigation, the NRA would be able to exert a much greater level of control over navigation than is possible by owners alone. Once the question of access is resolved, the way is still open for voluntary agreements on the timing and location of canoeing activities so as to protect wildlife and fishery interests. These would be in the interests of reaching an acceptable balance between conservation and recreation and not motivated solely by the desire of canoeists to secure access.
- 4.6.17 Any proposal to resolve the problem of canoe access to the upper Wye must recognise the increased environmental sensitivity of this part of the river. In particular, there is potential conflict between canoe access and breeding birds. These are particularly susceptible to disturbance on the upper Wye due to the smaller size of the river. Although there is unlikely to be a dramatic increase in canoeing on the upper Wye during the main breeding period due to the prevailing low water levels, it may be necessary to consider the desirability of agreements to restrict use during the most sensitive months.
- 4.6.18 Likewise, a major consideration concerning canoe access is its impact on spawning salmon. If there is legitimate concern that canoeing is having a detrimental impact on spawning then appropriate restrictions on access may need to be sought during the main spawning period. It is unlikely that the NRA has the legal powers to prohibit canoeing, particularly if a right of navigation is established. If this is the case, success will depend largely on persuading canoeists to accept voluntary restrictions at certain times of the year. This issue will need to be addressed in consultation with the WCA and major institutional canoe users.

4.7 ACCESS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

- 4.7.1 Access is critical to the value of the Wye as a recreational resource. With angling this is controlled by the fishery owner and access for the general public is tightly controlled. Most other activities gain access by some form of public right, such as the right of navigation, rights of way or public amenity sites alongside the river.
- 4.7.2 Public access to the Wye is very restricted. Only 42% of the entire river is accessible by foot and there are long stretches with no access whatsoever. There are very few public parks and other riverside amenity areas, and these are largely confined to a urban areas. Visitors to the Wye Valley naturally want to visit the river and can be disappointed by the lack of access. Although the river can frequently be seen clearly from the road, it is often very difficult to find somewhere to stop and get down to the riverbank.
- 4.7.3 One consequence of poor access is that the ability of the public to explore and appreciate the Wye is diminished. Lack of access can also lead to an over concentration of visitor pressure at the few available sites and reduces the scope for influencing the distribution of recreational activity. A shortage of access can also lead to problems of trespass over private land. Given the likely increase in the levels of use and the problems that are currently being experienced, the provision of well located, good quality and properly managed opportunities for access must be an important component of any strategy to manage visitor pressure.
- 4.7.4 One school of thought maintains that any increase in access should be opposed as it will lead to greater environmental pressure and further conflict. This view needs to be questioned. It is

acknowledged that it will not always be desirable to allow free, unlimited access to all parts of the river, especially where this would have an impact on sensitive wildlife sites. However, it should be possible to achieve a balance which allows an appropriate increase in the level of access, provided this is managed in a responsible manner and is compatible with the protection of other interests.

- 4.7.5 The current laws governing access and property rights, including rights of way and the right of navigation, were developed a long time ago, when the needs of society were very different from today. It is being increasingly recognised that these may no longer be useful for managing current recreational pressures. The use of the countryside is changing and support for farming is becoming increasingly based on conservation and public enjoyment. As a consequence, the public is less willing to accept unreasonable restrictions on access. While there is pressure to review the laws on access, any changes are some years away and more immediate approaches to improving access to the Wye need to be explored.
- 4.7.6 When considering the need for improving access and developing facilities it is important to ensure that any proposals are in line with the needs and preferences of users. These can be difficult to determine. There is no established 'market' for informal recreation and it cannot be left to the private sector to cater for any demand. Decisions will need to be taken by public bodies.
- 4.7.7 There is no sure way of assessing the demand for improvements. Market research can help, and in each of the main user questionnaires respondents were asked what could be done to improve their enjoyment of the river. Discussions with key individuals and interest groups were also useful in identifying any deficiencies in the current level of access and the need for improved facilities. In future, far greater cooperation with the private sector should be encouraged with a view to collaborating over market research.

PUBLIC AMENITY SITES

- 4.7.8 As can be seen in Map 2, public amenity areas are very unevenly distributed. Some sections of river, particularly between Ross and Monmouth are well provided for, with, for example, purpose built sites at Kerne Bridge and Lydbrook. However, beyond this stretch there are very few places where people can stop and spend time by the river. Where opportunities do exist, they are usually confined to the main towns, usually in fairly conventional public park settings which do little to enhance visitors' understanding or appreciation of the river.
- 4.7.9 The provision of sites is particularly poor upstream of Glasbury, where the only recognised facilities are at Bulth Wells and Rhayader. Between Hay-on-Wye and Hereford access is again limited, with access mainly confined to the privately owned Whitney Toll Bridge, the Weir Gardens at Kenchester and at Bredwardine, where an informal area of land beside the river is used with the landowner's permission. There are few opportunities for access between Hereford and Ross, and below Monmouth the only recognised sites are at Tintern and Chepstow.
- 4.7.10 In addition to access itself, the experience of visitors is influenced by the standard of facilities available. Several sites lack basic facilities such as toilets, proper car parking and seating areas. Many of those interviewed in the informal visitor surveys felt that improved facilities would increase their enjoyment of the river. In order to enhance the public's enjoyment and appreciation of the river, and to encourage a more even distribution of visitors, the overall provision of public amenity sites and the standard of facilities provided will need to be improved.

RIGHTS OF WAY

- 4.7.11 The right of way network is the foremost means of gaining access to the Wye. It is used primarily by walkers but certain routes are also open to cyclists and horse-riders. Many riverside routes appear to be well used. However, the majority of river has no public right of access to its banks. Where there are paths these are often private and recreational use is confined largely to anglers. This severely restricts the ability of the public to enjoy many stretches of river. The distribution of rights of way was considered more fully in chapter 3.
- 4.7.12 Many of those interviewed in the informal visitor surveys had experienced difficulties using some footpaths, either because of the poor physical condition of some routes, or because of obstructions or inadequate way marking. The proportion of footpaths which fall below acceptable standards is not known and will need to be determined.

CANOE LAUNCHING SITES

Number and distribution

- 4.7.13 Although there is an established right of navigation over much of the river, the ability to exercise this right is limited by the availability of access points. There is a strong feeling among canoeists that the number of places where they can get safe, legal access to the river is insufficient. This is apparent from the results of the questionnaire surveys and from discussions with local canoeing organisations. Although a relatively large number of access points has been identified (Appendix 14), only a small number is freely available for public use.
- 4.7.14 The availability of access is undoubtedly a factor behind the geographical distribution of canoeing revealed by the questionnaire surveys and canoe census. Canoeing tends to be concentrated on those stretches of river which are well provided with access points. Over concentration can inconvenience other river users, particularly anglers, can lead to pressure on facilities such as car parking and may cause unacceptable environmental impact.
- 4.7.15 The current distribution of access points has developed in an entirely ad hoc manner with little regard to the needs of navigation or the protection of other interests. Access tends to be unevenly distributed, which means that the distance between sites is too great in places for safe, comfortable canoeing. The only stretches of the river where the level of access is adequate are between Glasbury and Whitney and between Ross and Monmouth. Elsewhere, the availability of access is poor.
- 4.7.16 The proper, planned provision of launching and landing sites is essential to the management of canoeing and is one of the main means of accommodating any future growth and reducing conflict with other interests. As canoeing on the Wye continues to develop, the number and location of sites will help to determine the scope for influencing the distribution of canoeing activity. Good access is also important for ensuring the safety and enjoyment of canoeists. Additional canoe launching and landing sites may need to be developed on stretches of river where access is currently restricted.

Support facilities

- 4.7.17 Although access itself is the key requirement, the use of the river can be considerably enhanced by the provision of support facilities. The quality of facilities at most access points is generally poor. Road access and car parking at some sites are inadequate. Very few have toilet or changing facilities, or even running water which is an important health requirement for people taking part in immersion sports like canoeing.
- 4.7.18 The provision of steps down to the water can make the launching and landing canoes safer and more convenient. Some sites such as Hay-on-Wye, Kerne Bridge and Lydbrook have purpose built steps. However, access at many sites is inconvenient and potentially dangerous, with canoeists having to manoeuvre their canoes up and down steep banks.

Information about canoe access

- 4.7.19 There is considerable confusion among canoeists about where they are entitled to launch and land. Many do not appear to be aware of the legal status of some sites and do not appreciate the complexities of rights of access and trespass. This confusion needs to be resolved. Canoeists must be informed about their legal rights and responsibilities and should know where they can legally gain access. This will enable them to enjoy the river to the full, and should help to ensure that they use the river responsibly, with the minimum of disruption to other interests.

ACCOMMODATION

- 4.7.20 Although many visitors to the Wye are from outside the local area and use some form of temporary accommodation, the provision of most forms of accommodation is outside the scope of this report. It is generally accepted that the private tourism sector will be the main provider of accommodation, and will react to market demands. There is, however, a small but important demand for simple, low cost accommodation linked to the river to cater for the needs of touring canoeists, long distance walkers and others for whom an overnight stay is an integral part of their use of the river. This form of accommodation is not readily provided by the private sector.
- 4.7.21 A limited amount of accommodation is available at existing camp sites, field centres and youth hostels, but further provision is needed in some places. There is a particular need for riverside

camping, possibly linked to farms, and other forms of basic accommodation such as camping barns. Although the actual development of such accommodation will still be largely dependent upon the private sector, public bodies may need to offer encouragement and assistance to ensure that it is provided.

4.8 INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION

GENERAL

- 4.8.1 There is a lack of awareness among some river users about the available opportunities for access and recreation. As a result, they may lack the knowledge or confidence to explore beyond a small number of well used sites and the quality of their recreation experience may be reduced. Many of the problems that exist with regard to trespass and unauthorised access occur because visitors are unaware of the legal complexities surrounding access and navigation rights. Information is needed to make them aware of any agreements or legal restrictions on access, and any bylaws that may affect them.
- 4.8.2 The existing provision of information and interpretive material about the river is uncoordinated and lacks a clear message. As a consequence, many visitors do not appreciate the special qualities of the Wye and the standard of conduct required in order to protect these qualities. They may not appreciate the environmental importance of the Wye and may not be aware of the impact their activities could have on wildlife or on the enjoyment of other recreational users.
- 4.8.3 Greater awareness can only be achieved through the planned provision of information. This should aim to disseminate factual information about the river, including opportunities for access, specific attractions and accommodation, and should direct people to further sources of information. The special qualities of the Wye need to be highlighted, including its conservation and historical interest.
- 4.8.4 There are clear problems with getting information across to the large number of people that visit the Wye. At present, information is generally available only to those who actively seek it. Very little is available on the river bank, and existing initiatives such as the *River Wye Handbook* and the *Canoeists Guide to the Wye* only reach a small minority of visitors. The provision of information needs to be expanded so as to reach a much wider audience, and should be presented in an accessible and attractive form.
- 4.8.5 Once people are aware of where to go and what to do, a well targeted programme of interpretation is needed to help provide them with a better understanding of the river, and increase their level of enjoyment and appreciation of its natural, unspoilt qualities. Guided trails, information boards and leaflets can help to inform visitors about the wildlife and historical interest of the river. If the interest of visitors can be stimulated in this way, they can begin to appreciate the impact they can have on the environment and other interests. Hopefully, they will then be more likely to adopt a positive attitude towards protecting the river and it will be easier to persuade them of the need for better management and the regulation of certain activities.

NAVIGATIONS NOTICES

- 4.8.6 Over the years there has been a proliferation of signs and notices erected along parts of the river aimed at canoeists. These have mainly been erected by landowners or fishery owners, and are intended to dissuade canoeists from launching or landing, or to urge them to keep to certain parts of the river in order not to disturb anglers.
- 4.8.7 This situation raises a number of concerns:
- The legal status of some of these signs is uncertain; for example, signs asking canoeists to avoid canoeing close to particular banks. The right of navigation covers the full width of the river and whilst it might be reasonable and desirable to ask canoeists to avoid important fishing areas, many signs make excessive demands and could be regarded as an infringement of navigation rights.
 - Many of the signs are anonymous. It is not clear who is making the request and what authorisation, if any, they have.
 - The tone of some signs is antagonistic. This does little to encourage good relations between different users.

- The uncoordinated erection of notices on the river means that the message reaching canoeists is often confused and misleading. There are many variations in the wording, style and type of notice.
- Lack of control over the design and siting of notices can have a detrimental visual impact, especially when viewed from the river. This can affect the natural appearance of some stretches.

4.9 CONDUCT

- 4.9.1 Many of the current conflicts concerning recreational use, particularly between navigation and angling, are the result of ignorance and lack of understanding rather than wilful misconduct. Likewise, many of the potential environmental impacts are due to inconsiderate behaviour. People need to be made more aware of the consequences of their actions and persuaded of the need for tolerance and restraint. Only then will there be any realistic scope for influencing individual conduct and therefore reducing conflict.
- 4.9.2 Many users of the river already appear to recognise this need. Unfortunately, however well intentioned they may be, there appears to be a gap between people's desire not to create problems and their actions. Due to a lack of knowledge or understanding, they do not always appreciate the impact they can have, and while they may express a willingness to cooperate and avoid conflict, they continue to behave in a disruptive manner.
- 4.9.3 There is a clear need for better education and training to raise awareness about the needs of other recreation users and the damage that certain activities can inflict upon the environment. The most effective ways of improving the overall standard of conduct and promoting greater awareness of other interests need to be explored.
- 4.9.4 This will be difficult to achieve for two reasons. Firstly, the degree to which environmental awareness, and an acceptance of the need for shared access, forms part of the prevailing culture among participants varies between sports. Participants in sports such as canoeing and angling, where an appreciation of the natural surroundings is an important component and where there are already well established organisational structures and codes of conduct, are most likely to accept the need for restraints. Others may be less understanding and less willing to accept the need for change. This needs to be recognised when determining the most effective ways of influencing behaviour.
- 4.9.5 Secondly, there is the problem of getting the message across to the enormous range of people who use the Wye. It is relatively easy to reach people where they are members of a recognised club or governing body. However, in common with many countryside recreation activities, most users of the Wye are unaffiliated to any organisation. It will be necessary to examine the most effective ways of targeting these people. Different people will have different needs and it may be necessary to target specific information at particular audiences. In all cases the message must be clear and relevant to the needs of the Wye.

4.10 RESEARCH NEEDS

- 4.10.1 Although a great deal of information about the Wye has been collated in this report, further information is needed. The most effective ways of collecting this information will need to be examined.
- 4.10.2 Accurate information about the level and distribution of recreational use is essential. There has been no systematic monitoring of recreational activity on the Wye in the past and prior to the Wye Project very little was known about recreational use. The surveys described in this report provide a start, but are not a substitute for regular, systematic monitoring. This is required to record trends in recreational use and to assess the effectiveness of future management action.
- 4.10.3 It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the extent of environmental impact arising from sport and recreation activities because the necessary scientific information is not available. Little is known about the causes or long term effects of disturbance, and there has been no authoritative assessment of the overall conservation value of the river. This makes it difficult to identify stretches of river where recreational use could be damaging, or those where further recreational use could be accommodated without damage.

5. Management objectives

5.1 INTRODUCTION

- 5.1.1 Navigation and various other forms of recreation are legitimate uses of the river and can no longer be regarded as something that must, at best, be tolerated. Levels of use and demands for access are likely to remain high and may increase. Without careful management, the current problems are likely to become more serious. The principle adopted in this report is that it is far better to plan for and attempt to accommodate recreational demand than to ignore it and suffer the consequences.
- 5.1.2 Sport and recreation on the Wye needs to be managed in a way that ensures that the level and distribution of use, and the activities undertaken, are sustainable in ecological and landscape terms. While it is important to plan for the public's continued enjoyment of the river, the long term survival of its natural resources should not be prejudiced by short term recreational gains. The River Wye has an intrinsic environmental value which must not be jeopardised by recreation and tourism. With sound management there is no reason why an appropriate level of public access and most forms of recreation cannot be compatible with the maintenance of environmental interest.
- 5.1.3 The Wye should be managed so as to provide for a wide variety of interests. People should generally be free to enjoy the special qualities and opportunities of the river and to take part in a broad range of sporting and recreational activities, provided these are properly managed. This concept of multiple use can only be successful if forms of management are introduced which enable different recreational uses to share the river amicably, without serious conflict.
- 5.1.4 Proposals need to be carefully balanced and should not discriminate unfairly against particular activities. They should be realistic and capable of being implemented. There is no single solution to the issues and conflicts identified in this report. They cannot be resolved solely by physical improvements, such as the development of facilities and other site works, or by the introduction of statutory controls alone. For future management to be effective, a range of techniques must be employed. Much can be achieved by better education of river users, the provision of information, and voluntary restrictions on activity. In some cases these indirect forms of management may be the only options available.
- 5.1.5 In the past, 'consensus management' was regarded as the most appropriate means of managing recreational pressures on the Wye. There was an emphasis on encouraging voluntary cooperation and trying to promote greater awareness and understanding of other interests. Although a great deal can still be achieved by this approach, it is recognised that non-statutory measures alone will not be sufficient to tackle all of the problems and conflicts on the Wye. They rely too heavily on human nature, which despite all efforts at persuasion and education, can be unresponsive. Some rules and sanctions will be necessary, though these will only be fully successful if they are introduced with the support and consent of users, rather than imposed against their will.
- 5.1.6 Management should be appropriate to the specific needs of the Wye and should not be too conspicuous or heavy handed. Many people derive enjoyment from the natural, 'unmanaged' nature of the river and value freedom from over-restrictive controls. Too much control or excessive management could destroy the river's natural, undeveloped character and damage the very enjoyment it seeks to promote.
- 5.1.7 Management needs to be flexible and subject to review to take account of changing circumstances. Its objectives may need to change to reflect new recreational pressures or conservation needs, or as new information is collected - for example about the impact of recreation on wildlife. The agencies involved with managing the river must be ready to respond to such changes.

5.2 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- 5.2.1 Proposals for managing the river should be guided by three overriding strategic objectives:
- There is an overriding need to *safeguard the special environment of the Wye Valley* from detrimental impact resulting from sport and recreation.
 - Management should attempt to make *appropriate use of the river for the widest possible benefit*. It should seek to achieve a balance between different legitimate interests and reduce conflict between competing interest groups.

- *Opportunities for access and the range and quality of recreation facilities should be improved so as to enable people to continue to enjoy the river, within the constraints imposed by the need to safeguard the environment and rights of ownership.*

5.3 DETAILED OBJECTIVES

Detailed management objectives are outlined below in relation to the key management issues.

5.3.1 DEMAND FOR SPORT AND RECREATION

- To accommodate present demands for recreation and access in a way that is acceptable to the majority of interests.
- To plan for and manage future demands so as to avoid potential problems.

5.3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- To achieve the best possible standards of conduct among recreational users.
- To regulate and, if necessary, restrict recreational activities which by their nature present an unacceptable threat to the environment.
- To discourage access to specific stretches of river where there is an overriding need to protect the environment.
- To encourage recreational activities which impact least on the environment and which take advantage of the intrinsic qualities of the Wye.

5.3.3 NAVIGATION

- To make effective use of legal powers to regulate navigation.
- To resolve as far as is possible the uncertainties surrounding navigation on the upper Wye in a way that is acceptable to all parties.
- To investigate the legal position concerning other unresolved aspects of access and navigation rights.
- To safeguard the value of the river for navigation by ensuring that the navigation channel is kept free from unreasonable obstructions.

5.3.4 ANGLING - NAVIGATION CONFLICTS

- To reduce conflicts between navigation and angling.
- To encourage the best possible standards of conduct among river users.
- To encourage recreational users to meet and discuss problems so as to gain a better understanding of each other's needs.

5.3.5 ACCESS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

- To improve the quality of recreational experience enjoyed by visitors to the river.
- To promote opportunities for recreation and access which will encourage the 'quiet enjoyment' of the river.
- To increase the length of the river with access for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders as a means of increasing the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the river.
- To support the development of low key, high quality recreational facilities in appropriate locations, where these are needed and where this is compatible with protecting the river's environmental interests.
- To support the development of camp sites and other forms of low key accommodation in appropriate locations.
- To support the improvement of launching and landing facilities for canoeists in appropriate locations.

5.3.6 INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION

- To improve the provision and dissemination of information in order to facilitate better use of the river, and improve awareness of its special qualities and recreational opportunities.
- To regularise and improve the quality of navigation notices.

5.3.7 RESEARCH NEEDS

- To maintain accurate information about the conservation interest of the river.
- To maintain accurate information about the level and distribution of recreational activities.
- To promote research to measure the environmental impact of recreation.
- To ensure that any changes in the use of the river or its wildlife resources are monitored and to provide a sound basis for the review of management policies and practices.

6. *Proposals*

Proposals fall into six categories:-

- FUTURE MANAGEMENT.
- PROMOTING COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING.
- INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION.
- STATUTORY REGULATION.
- ACCESS AND VISITOR FACILITIES..
- MONITORING AND RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS.

6.1 FUTURE MANAGEMENT

STEERING COMMITTEE

1. A steering committee of public agencies should be established to ensure close cooperation in the development and implementation of the management strategy and work programme which should emerge from these proposals after due consultation and determination by the agencies concerned.

LEAD AGENCY

2. As the key agency responsible for the river, the NRA should take the initiative in seeking collaboration through the steering committee over future management action.
- 6.1.1 Following a period of consultation during which the conclusions of this report will be considered, those public agencies with responsibility for managing the river should agree a joint strategy to enable proposals to be brought forward in a coordinated manner. This should incorporate a work programme, containing details of:
- the agency or agencies responsible for implementing each proposal and any outside partners that need to be involved;
 - priorities and time scale for implementation;
 - resource implications and sources of finance.
- 6.1.2 Responsibility for drawing up the work programme and coordinating its implementation should rest with a steering committee consisting of each of the public agencies responsible for the river. These should include the current members of the Wye Project steering committee, together with district local authorities.
- 6.1.3 Overall responsibility for initiating action through the steering committee should rest with the NRA. It is widely perceived by the public as the principal management authority for the Wye and has responsibility over several aspects of the river's management, including conservation, fisheries and recreation. It is the only body with a geographical remit covering the whole river.
- 6.1.4 Consideration should be given to employing an officer, to be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the management strategy and liaising with various outside interests. Indeed, this may be essential to ensure the continued momentum that will be necessary to convert the proposals of this report into action.
- 6.1.5 It is essential that the work programme is formulated in parallel with that of the Wye Valley AONB management plan, and that the two are dovetailed together in due course. There will need to be close cooperation during the implementation of the two plans. The proposed AONB officer will play a key role in this process. Close coordination will also be necessary during the preparation of the NRA's catchment management plans.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

3. The management strategy should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. This will be necessary to measure its effectiveness and to ensure that it remains up to date and relevant to changing circumstances.

- 6.1.6 A regular monitoring programme should form an essential component of the final management strategy and should be incorporated into the work programme. Monitoring is necessary in order to:
- evaluate progress towards achieving the targets set in the work programme;
 - measure the effectiveness of management initiatives;
 - identify changing circumstances, including new recreation pressures and changes to the wildlife resource, which may have a bearing on management.
- 6.1.7 The strategy and work programme should be periodically reviewed and, if necessary, should be revised to take account of:
- the successes and failures of past management;
 - changing recreational trends or pressures;
 - findings of research into the environmental impact of recreational use;
 - new management opportunities;
 - changes in national and local priorities.

6.2 PROMOTING COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING

LIAISON GROUP

4. A liaison group representing river users and other relevant interests should be established to ensure that these interests are fully consulted and involved in the management of the river and in carrying forward the proposals of the management strategy. This group should work in association with and advise the steering committee.

- 6.2.1 The functions of the group should be to:
- assist with reaching a common understanding about the management of the river and thereby encourage greater cooperation between interested bodies;
 - act as a forum for discussing problems and issues as they arise. In this way any necessary action can be taken at an early stage, so helping to reduce tension and ill feeling;
 - give advice to those directly responsible for managing the river and to suggest new ideas. In this way it is hoped that river users will be encouraged to play a greater role in the river's management;
 - act as a means of exchanging information and keeping informed of the policies and activities of member organisations and outside bodies;
 - review progress towards the implementation of the management plan and discuss the success or failure of new initiatives.

Composition

- 6.2.2 In order to achieve an acceptable balance between the various interests on the Wye. The group should consist of representatives from the following:
- Each of the main recreational activities;
 - Conservation and amenity groups;
 - Landowners and fishery owners;
 - Commercial river users and outdoor activity organisations.
- 6.2.3 It will be important to ensure that members of the group are truly representative, and are accepted as such by those they claim to represent. This may be difficult to achieve. There is also a risk that dominant personalities may have a disproportionate influence within the group. It is important that the group does not become merely a vehicle for members to express their personal opinions, but remains constructive and objective.

Size

- 6.2.4 The size of the group will need careful consideration. This will have a major influence on its effectiveness. It needs to be large enough to ensure that all legitimate interests are adequately represented, but not so large that it becomes unwieldy and ineffective.

Organisation

- 6.2.5 Although not a formal committee, the liaison group will need to be organised effectively. A formal agenda will be required to direct discussions and an effective chairperson will be necessary. It is recommended that the NRA takes responsibility for coordinating the group. Although such measures might seem very formal and bureaucratic, they are essential if the group is to remain within its remit, maintain a sense of direction and retain the support and commitment of its members. It is likely that the group will need to meet approximately twice a year.

CODE OF CONDUCT

5. A code of conduct based on that contained in the 'River Wye Handbook' should be adopted and actively promoted in an attempt to encourage responsible conduct and foster a spirit of goodwill and cooperation between river users.
- 6.2.6 The code should be promoted by:
- its inclusion in a river users guide;
 - the production of a widely circulated, easy to read, leaflet;
 - including extracts from the code on riverside information boards.
- 6.2.7 Consideration should be given to producing a separate leaflet giving advice to the two main user groups - anglers and canoeists.
- 6.2.8 Whilst there have been few adverse comments about the present code of conduct, it has only operated for one year and is not yet widely known. It will be necessary to review the code periodically, to ensure that its message remains relevant and effective.
- 6.2.9 It will be important to ensure that the greatest possible number of people are aware of the code. Frequent users of the river such as canoe group leaders, commercial canoe hire companies and fishing ghillies should be encouraged to assist with bringing the code to the attention of those that might otherwise not be aware of it. With their regular presence on the river, they come into frequent contact with other river users.

NB The present Code of Conduct is reproduced in Appendix 30.

CANOEING ASSOCIATION

6. The Sports Councils and the canoeing governing bodies should encourage major locally based commercial and institutional canoe users to form themselves into an association, one of its aims being to agree codes of good practice and behaviour. Canoeists should be encouraged to become members of the BCU or the WCA.
- 6.2.10 The role of the association should be to:
- agree mutual codes of good practice and standards of behaviour, possibly through the introduction of a voluntary certification scheme;
 - set an example to other users by their conduct on the river and help to promote the Wye Code of Conduct;
 - agree voluntary standards for such things as size of groups, instructor:pupil ratios, safety practices and the standard of instruction;
 - agree voluntary restrictions on the timing and location of certain training practices so as to reduce inconvenience to others or damage to the environment;
 - act as a contact point for the dissemination of information from the NRA and others

- to discuss problems and common concerns among themselves and bring these to the attention of responsible agencies.
- 6.2.11 Members of the association should include canoe hire companies, independent instructors and outdoor pursuit leaders, commercial outdoor activity holiday companies, local education authority field centres and local canoe clubs.
- 6.2.12 The formation of such a group would have significant benefits to its members. It will help to improve the image of canoe groups, especially among other potentially conflicting users. It will also give them a strong unified voice in shaping the way the river is managed. The element of self-policing and peer pressure should ensure that overall standards among organised canoeists are raised.

6.3 INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION

INFORMATION

7. The overall standard and distribution of information about the river should be improved and a common house style adopted for the whole river.
- 6.3.1 A coherent information and interpretation strategy should be prepared for the Wye. The overall level of information available to the public about the river should be increased and the different organisations concerned with the river corridor need to coordinate their provision of information more effectively. The quality of printed material, notices and signposts should be improved and a consistent 'house style' should be developed to promote a clearer identity for the river. The distribution of information needs to be as effective as possible in order to reach the maximum audience.

RIVER USERS GUIDE

8. A comprehensive guide for river users should be produced to give advice on conduct, raise awareness of the importance of the river and provide information about recreational opportunities and facilities.
- 6.3.2 Its purpose should be to:
- give advice on conduct;
 - educate visitors and raise awareness about the special qualities of the river, including its natural and cultural attractions;
 - provide information about recreational opportunities and facilities.
- 6.3.3 This need is currently being met in part by the *River Wye Handbook*. The publication of any future guide should be coordinated by the NRA. This will give it a much stronger identity and greater authority.
- 6.3.4 Although much of the information contained in the *River Wye Handbook* will remain relevant, the opportunity should be taken to examine the overall scope and content of the handbook and to review its effectiveness. The new guide should be more comprehensive. In due course it should include details about navigation bylaws, and information about recreation and tourism facilities will need to be periodically revised. It should be an on-going commitment to revise and update the guide. The guide should continue to be produced to a reasonably high design standard, be easy to read and attractive to look at.

DISTRIBUTION AND COSTS

- 6.3.5 The guide will only be effective in getting information to users if it is readily available. It will need to be actively marketed via the media and Tourist Information Centres, and through other publications and information points. Copies should be distributed to known user organisations.
- 6.3.6 The current Wye Handbook was funded by contributions from a number of public agencies. This may not be possible with future editions and ways should be explored to make the guide as self-supporting as possible. There is considerable scope for commercial sponsorship and for carrying advertisements - especially from some of the many businesses associated with the river.

RIVERSIDE INFORMATION BOARDS

9. A range of notice boards and interpretive panels should be established at strategic points along the river.
- 6.3.7 The NRA should coordinate the establishment of a comprehensive range of notice boards and interpretive panels, to be located at strategic points along the length of the river. Where necessary these should be provided in collaboration with other agencies such as local authorities.
- 6.3.8 Boards should include the following:
- extracts from the 'Wye Code of Conduct', together with an explanation of its importance and where to obtain the full code;
 - information about navigation bylaws;
 - map of the river showing the location of facilities such as canoe access points, picnic sites, camp sites, local walks and other visitor facilities;
 - further sources of information, including a list of relevant publications and useful contact addresses;
 - an explanation of rights of access and navigation.
- 6.3.9 At certain locations it may be appropriate to include interpretive panels explaining various aspects of the river, including its geography, conservation interest and historical associations.
- Target audience and location**
- 6.3.10 Information needs to be available to all those using the river; informal visitors as well as active users. Boards should be erected at locations where people tend to congregate by the river, including all the main canoe launching and landing areas.
- Format**
- 6.3.11 It is important that a consistent 'house style' is adopted for all boards along the length of the river. They should be attractive, informative and easy to understand. Care should be taken over their design and siting, to avoid visual intrusion. Planning permission may be required.
- 6.3.12 While boards should be permanent and designed with a life of several years, provision will need to be made for updating information in response to changing circumstance and for the inclusion of special features or additional information.

NAVIGATION NOTICES

10. Tighter control should be exercised over the erection of signposts and notices directed at canoeists and other boat users. The NRA should coordinate the development of a standardised system of navigation notices, in consultation with landowners, fishery owners and boat users.
- 6.3.13 A consistent approach needs to be adopted for the provision of navigation notices. This should be coordinated by the NRA and should aim to achieve a higher standard of notices than exists at present and promote a clearer, more consistent message. The continued ad-hoc signposting by owners should be discouraged, especially where they are making unreasonable or unlawful requests. There is a role for Local Planning Authorities in those instances where notices fall within the scope of planning control.
- 6.3.14 The NRA should aim to liaise closely with owners and canoeists with a view to reaching a balanced and consistent approach to signposting along the river. A private initiative which has operated with some success at Lydbrook and Foy is the use of red and green discs to indicate the preferred route for canoeists. A similar scheme, using a uniform system of markers or written notices could be extended to other stretches if considered necessary, drawing attention to important salmon pools and angling swims, and giving advice to canoeists on what to do to avoid conflict, e.g. to keep to the opposite bank.

- 6.3.15 Such a system should be promoted and coordinated by the NRA. The NRA is in a position to assess the need for such notices independently - in response to requests from fishery owners and in consultation with canoeists. This will help to ensure that notices are fair and reasonable and do not infringe navigation rights. Such signs would have to remain purely advisory. In time it is to be hoped that they will attract the support of canoeists and owners alike, and will carry more authority than private, 'unofficial' notices.
- 6.3.16 A consistent style should be adopted for all signs. The wording should be simple and straightforward, and be legally and factually accurate. The NRA should seek to minimise the overall number of signs on the river and only erect them where absolutely necessary.

EVENTS CALENDAR

11. The NRA should continue to coordinate the production of an annual calendar of events for the River Wye and ensure that it is widely available.
- 6.3.17 For a number of years the NRA and Hereford Sports Council have collaborated in producing an annual calendar, detailing competitive events planned to take place on the river. This fulfils an important function in informing other organisers and users about events and ensuring that rival events do not clash. The calendar has been very well received and should be continued.
- 6.3.18 One of the shortcomings of the calendar is that it is purely a voluntary initiative. There is no requirement for event organisers to notify the NRA or other authorities in advance that they intend to hold an event. The publishers rely on the voluntary cooperation of organisers to notify them of events. Consequently it is only as accurate as the information provided. There have been several instances of major events being omitted, which undermines the calendar's credibility.
- 6.3.19 Another problem is that the calendar can only record events. Inclusion on the calendar does not imply that events have been 'officially sanctioned', as there are currently no powers to grant or refuse permission. In the longer term, if bylaws are introduced requiring the NRA's permission to be obtained before an event can be held, the calendar will play an increasingly important role by including only authorised events.

CANOEING AND ANGLING GUIDES

12. The NRA should continue to produce guides for canoeists and anglers using the River Wye.
- 6.3.20 For a number of years, the NRA has published a guide for canoeists using the river Wye. This contains a detailed description of the river for canoeing, and contains details of access points and camp sites. It also contains general information about river safety and advice on conduct. Over the years, the guide has proved to be popular and is very well used. There is a continuing need for such a guide. The current guide needs to be revised in places and future editions should contain information about navigation bylaws.
- 6.3.21 The NRA also produces a guide for anglers, containing details of where to fish on the Wye and its tributaries, and how to obtain day tickets. It also produce a leaflet detailing angling bylaws. There is a continuing need for such information.
- 6.3.22 Besides these specific proposals, consideration should be given to producing the following:
- An information pack for use by schools and other visiting groups, consisting of information sheets on a variety of topics relating to the river. These could include its natural history, fisheries, historical use and navigation, recreation and water quality.
 - A range of general interpretation leaflets on various subjects to promote appreciation and enjoyment of the river.

6.4 STATUTORY REGULATION

RECREATION BYLAWS

13. The NRA should, where possible, introduce bylaws to regulate recreation on the Wye,

in order to ensure its continued enjoyment as a recreational waterway, protect the environment and safeguard other interests. Bylaws should be used to:

- Introduce a registration and identification scheme for all craft using the Wye;
- Introduce speed limits for craft;
- Impose restrictions, where necessary and so far as is possible, on the location and periods over which certain navigation activities take place - including competitive events and high speed water sports;
- Prescribe standards of behaviour for those using the river and its banks to reinforce the voluntary code of conduct.

6.4.1 These regulations should be introduced for that stretch of the non-tidal Wye over which the NRA has bylaw making powers. In due course the NRA will need to decide whether its powers extend to the upper river, above Hay-on-Wye, bearing in mind the legal considerations rehearsed in Appendix 29. If the NRA takes the view that there is no upstream limit to the right of navigation, the introduction of bylaws should be considered between the river's source and Bigsweir Bridge, the point at which navigation becomes the responsibility of the Gloucester Harbour Trustees.

6.4.2 Bylaws will need to be drafted in consultation with the Gloucester Harbour Trustees and Hereford City Council to ensure compatibility.

CRAFT REGISTRATION

6.4.3 Bylaws should be introduced to ensure that all craft using the Wye, including canoes and rafts, are registered by the NRA before using the river. Except in cases of specific exception, it should be an offence to use a boat, or allow a boat to be used, on the river unless it is registered.

6.4.4 The introduction of an identification scheme will also be necessary to enable licensed craft to be clearly recognised. It will also allow those who are contravening navigation bylaws, or who are otherwise causing problems on the river, to be more readily identified.

6.4.5 Anybody wanting to use a boat on the river should be required to apply in advance to the NRA or its agent and provide certain information. This information should include:

- the name and address of the owner;
- the type of craft;
- the length of the craft;
- whether it is to be used for private or commercial use;
- the usual mooring and method of propulsion (for powered craft).

6.4.6 The issue of a registration certificate should be subject to conditions requiring the holder to comply with other recreational bylaws and adhere to agreed codes of conduct.

6.4.7 Owners should be required to display an identification sticker on their craft. This should show a registration number, indicate the date of expiry and be non-transferable. It should be a requirement that these stickers are affixed conspicuously to the craft, where they can be clearly seen from the bank.

6.4.8 At present, information about numbers of craft and the identity of boat users is not readily available. This information is essential to monitoring future trends in the pattern and level of use. A major benefit of a registration scheme is that it would provide reliable, up to date statistics about the number and type of craft, and will allow individual users to be more readily identified. This will also make it easier to disseminate information to boat users, such as educational material and questionnaire surveys.

Charges

6.4.9 Although the exact means of administering a registration scheme will need to be resolved in consultation with users, any system will inevitably incur operating costs. It is appropriate that these costs should be met, at least in part, by those using the river. For this reason a registration

fee should be levied. Once administrative costs have been met, any remaining income should be used to help meet the costs of managing the navigation and improving facilities. The registration charge should be set at a reasonable level, bearing in mind the following:

- The costs of administering the registration scheme and the income it is likely to generate.
- Charges levied on other waterways.
- The level of 'service' being provided.
- The ability of users to pay. It is important that people are not prohibited from using the river by high registration charges. Charges should not be seen as a mechanism for reducing the number of boats using the river.

6.4.10 Although most licences should be renewable annually, consideration should be given to making short term licences available for infrequent users and visitors from outside the local area,

Exemptions and reductions

6.4.11 The NRA should have the ability to waive or reduce the registration charge where it feels this is desirable, for example where it will help to encourage or promote certain activities. If such a concession is granted the applicant should still be required to display an identification sticker.

6.4.12 Reductions or exemptions could be considered for:

- craft used for the purpose of training, racing or specific events;
- craft owned by organisations such as Local Education Authorities, scouts and guides, rowing clubs and canoe clubs;
- members of sports governing bodies such as the BCU or the WCA. This may act as an incentive for participants to become members;
- private owners registering more than one craft. A reduction should be available to second and third boats etc. on the basis that they are only likely to be using one boat at a time. To levy a standard charge on all craft would be an unfair burden on many people.

Size limits

6.4.13 It is not considered necessary to seek to impose a maximum limit on the size of craft navigating the river. The natural difficulties and dangers of the river will deter most owners of large boats from attempting to navigate the Wye, particularly the non-tidal stretches. Besides a small number of passenger carrying pleasure boats, there have been very few instances of large powered craft using the river.

6.4.14 However, it is recognised that unusually large craft could potentially have a detrimental impact on the environment and other river users, and could cause a flood hazard in the event of an accident. For this reason the NRA should be able, through the registration scheme, to impose conditions on the use of the river by craft over a certain size to ensure that the navigation is used reasonably and with due regard to other interests.

6.4.15 Unlike many rivers, there is no physical limit to the length of boat that can use the Wye; i.e. there are no locks or other man made restrictions. Historically some very large boats regularly used the Wye when the river conditions were suitable. The role of the NRA should be to ensure that if such use takes place, it is subject to safeguards to protect the environment, the NRA's other statutory functions and other legitimate interests.

6.4.16 It is recommended that the owners of craft above a certain size (to be determined) should be required to notify the NRA and obtain a registration certificate before entering the river. This permission could be granted subject to any reasonable conditions which the NRA considers necessary.

6.4.17 When considering the size of craft which should have to comply with these requirements, the NRA should consider all the various parameters which will affect a craft's ability to manoeuvre and navigate freely, and its likely impact on the environment. Besides length, these will include its draught, beam and height above water.

SPEED LIMITS

- 6.4.18 General speed limits should be set for craft using the river. These are required to ensure the safety of all river users and to minimise the risk of wash damage. The limits should reflect the background flow of the river and the needs of safe navigation. Varying limits may need to be set for upstream and downstream travel.
- 6.4.19 The upper limit should be set so as to discourage use by water-skis, jet-skis, hovercraft and other craft which depend upon travelling at high speed. 15km/h is considered to be the lowest speed at which jet-skis can operate effectively. Use by such craft is not considered to be an appropriate use of the navigation by virtue of their potential environmental impact and the danger they create for other users.
- 6.4.20 It may be appropriate to impose varying speed limits for different stretches, depending in particular on the level of recreational use and the vulnerability of the local environment.

Exemptions

- 6.4.21 Speed limits should generally only affect powered craft, and should not apply to rowing craft, canoes and rafts, which may on occasion and at certain locations exceed the maximum speed. Exemptions may also be required for motorised craft used for approved events and training. In such cases the owners should be able to apply to the NRA for an exemption certificate. There would also have to be general exemptions for safety and rescue boats, for law enforcement purposes and during occasions when the speed of the current prevents adherence to limits.

HIGH SPEED WATER SPORTS

- 6.4.22 The Wye is generally not considered suitable for use by water-skis, jet-skis, hovercraft and other high powered, high speed activities. The concerns have already been discussed and relate to:
- the general noise and disturbance to wildlife, other recreational users and local communities;
 - the safety of other users;
 - the possible link between wave wash and bank erosion.
- 6.4.23 Although these activities would be deterred by the introduction of a speed limit, the NRA should introduce a bylaw to generally prohibit their use on the non-tidal Wye.
- 6.4.24 It should be recognised that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to permit such uses; for example, if an acceptable agreement could be reached over the timing and zoning of use, if use were under the control of an approved club, or if permission were being given for a 'one off' event. In such cases, the NRA should be able to grant specific exemptions and attach appropriate conditions to ensure that these activities only take place under its strict control.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- 6.4.25 Special events, such as races and regattas, should be regarded as extraordinary uses of the navigation should be subject to regulation by the NRA to protect other interests and ensure that they cause the minimum of disruption.
- 6.4.26 Bylaws should be introduced requiring any person organising an event on the Wye to notify the NRA beforehand. The NRA's written consent should be obtained before the event can take place and unauthorised events should not be permitted. The organiser should be required to provide the NRA with information necessary to enable it to assess the application. This may include the following:-
- the name and address of the organiser;
 - the number and type of craft involved;
 - the date of the event;
 - the location of the event;
 - start and finish times;

- 6.4.27 The NRA should be able to refuse permission for an event if, for example:
- the event is considered unsuitable because of its size, its likely disturbance to others or its detrimental impact on other NRA functions;
 - it is likely to have a damaging environmental impact;
 - it clashes with a previously authorised event.
- 6.4.28 Although it may be necessary to refuse permission for some events, it is envisaged that prior notification will more usually provide an opportunity for discussion to ensure that an event takes place in an acceptable manner.
- 6.4.29 If permission is granted, the NRA should be able to impose conditions, if it considers this necessary, to ensure that:
- it is clear that the event takes place entirely at the organiser's and participants' risk and that the NRA cannot be held responsible for any accidents;
 - the event does not obstruct other river traffic unreasonably;
 - participants conduct themselves in a considerate manner and do not prevent other river users from exercising their rights to enjoy the river;
 - organisers and participants follow the instructions of NRA officers during the event;;
 - marshals are present to direct participants and maintain good conduct;
 - notices are erected to warn other users;
 - there is adequate safety cover;
 - third party insurance is obtained.

Event charges

- 6.4.30 A charge should be levied for each event. This would permit the temporary use of the river by otherwise non-registered boats and would raise some revenue. This could be used directly to:
- pay for production of the 'Wye Calendar of Events';
 - notify outside interests who might be directly affected by the event;
 - provide staff to oversee certain events; to ensure that bylaws and conditions are complied with and that the event runs smoothly.
- 6.4.31 The most straightforward charging system would be to levy a fixed sum per event, depending on the number of participants. The charge should not be set at a level which would discourage events from taking place.

GENERAL BYLAWS

Standards of behaviour

- 6.4.32 Bylaws should be introduced to underline the need for considerate behaviour and orderly conduct when using the river. Although much can be achieved by the promotion of a voluntary code of conduct, legal measures will be necessary to remedy extreme or persistent instances of misconduct. Bylaws should seek to ensure that:
- those responsible for craft navigate with care and attention, and do not act in a manner likely to endanger lives, or causes injury to people, other craft, the river bank or property;
 - those responsible for craft do not act with intent to harass other river users, or prevent them from exercising rights or using facilities to which they are entitled. This should include wilful and deliberate disruption to other boat users, anglers and riparian owners.

The powers of the NRA to regulate recreation are not confined to navigation. Consideration should also be given to regulating the conduct of anglers and others on the bank, and prohibiting conduct likely to disrupt the exercise of navigation rights;

Motorised craft

- 6.4.33 Aside from high speed craft which should be expressly prohibited, it is not considered a high priority to introduce specific measures to regulate motorised craft. If bylaws are considered necessary, they should seek to ensure that all craft using the river are fit for navigation, are in a safe and water tight condition, and that they obey the general rules of navigation. Many of these interests could be secured through the craft registration process. NB. craft using the tidal stretches will be subject to the detailed requirements of the Gloucester Harbour Trustee's bylaws.

EFFECTIVENESS OF BYLAWS

- 6.4.34 The introduction of navigation bylaws would be a radical change in the way the river is managed and will need to be introduced sensitively. A number of factors will influence their effectiveness:
- The awareness of the bylaws among river users
 - The reaction of river users to bylaws and their acceptance and understanding of their need
 - The manner in which bylaws are introduced and enforced.

Promoting awareness

- 6.4.35 It will be important to ensure that the majority of users are fully aware of any new requirements. The NRA will need to advertise its intention to promote bylaws and is likely to consult beforehand. There will also be an opportunity to object to the Secretary of State and have objections heard at a public enquiry. A reasonable lead in period should be allowed before any bylaws come into force and suitable publicity should be given to their introduction. Organised groups that are known to use the river should be notified wherever possible. It will also be necessary to publicise the new measures in the press and at the main access points.

Promoting cooperation among river users

- 6.4.36 Bylaws will only be fully effective if they are accepted by the majority of river users. Hopefully, they will be seen as reasonable rules of conduct for the proper management of the river. However some boat users believe that the problems on the Wye have been exaggerated and that they can be resolved without recourse to statutory control. They may regard any attempt to regulate their use as an infringement of their right of navigation.
- 6.4.37 It is important that the reasons for introducing bylaws are properly explained. Much of the potential opposition can be overcome by involving representatives from the main user groups during the period prior to introduction. This will provide an opportunity for comment and adjustment at an early stage, so minimising later objections. The proposed liaison group could play an important role during this phase.
- 6.4.38 While any bylaws will need to be rigorously enforced it will be desirable that prosecutions are kept to a minimum. The NRA should seek the cooperation of organised groups and clubs to deal with problems caused by their own members. This will hopefully reduce the need for legal action.

Staffing

- 6.4.39 Effective monitoring and enforcement will be essential to ensure that bylaws are upheld. Staff will need to be employed to check registration stickers and deal with any breaches of regulations. Administering the craft registration scheme will also have resource implications.
- 6.4.40 Maintaining a staff presence in the field will be a key requirement. It is recommended that rangers or wardens are employed to deal with recreation and navigation matters and that they should work closely with existing county council rangers. In addition to enforcing bylaws, their tasks could include:
- giving advice and information to river users;
 - liaising with user groups, event organisers, landowners and fishery owners;
 - providing feedback on the success of management initiatives;
 - carrying out user surveys;
 - undertaking some physical management tasks.

6.4.41 Other staffing options include:

- adding the enforcement of recreation bylaws to the duties of the current NRA water bailiff force;
- extending the role of NRA water bailiffs to create a multi-functional river warden service;
- employing 'honorary' wardens, who would carry NRA authorisation and be trained by the NRA.

6.4.42 It is vitally important that those responsible for enforcement maintain good relations with river users and are seen to be fair and impartial in their dealings with the public. They will need to be consistent in their approach and it should be clear at all times that they are acting for the NRA, in the best interests of the river, and are not there primarily to protect angling or fishery interests. Clear guidelines will be needed.

6.5 ACCESS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

PUBLIC ACCESS

14. Opportunities should be sought to improve pedestrian access to stretches of riverbank where public access is currently restricted, and where this will not conflict with other legitimate interests.

6.5.1 The existing rights of way network should be managed to secure its maximum recreational benefit, in line with the Countryside Commission's goal to have the whole network available for use by the public by the year 2000 and the Countryside Council for Wales' aim to complete strategic and local networks by 1995. Optimal use should be made of existing riverside rights of way. This should be achieved by ensuring that:

- all routes are kept open and free from obstruction;
- all routes are clearly way marked and, where appropriate, signposted from a public road;
- major routes are adequately publicised and promoted.

6.5.2 It must, however, be recognised that it will not be possible to achieve a desirable level of access to the river using only the existing statutory network. Consideration should be given to other opportunities which would improve access to those stretches of the river bank where it is currently most restricted. These include:

- the establishment of new rights of way;
- the creation of permissive routes in partnership with landowners;
- management agreements with riparian owners to allow the public to use paths and land that are currently private;
- investigating possible rights of access that may be associated with the disused towing path between Hereford and Lydbrook.

6.5.3 Consideration should be given to developing a series of trails and circular walks associated with the river. These could be linked to specific attractions or themes such as its wildlife interest, history or landscape, and could be way marked and promoted through the use of interpretive leaflets and information boards.

VISITOR FACILITIES

15. Opportunities should be examined which would improve the overall standard and provision of recreation sites and visitor facilities associated with the river. Improvements, to promote optimal use of existing sites, should be carried out wherever possible. Additional sites should be developed where there is an established need and a clear opportunity exists. Any new development should be compatible with safeguarding environmental interests.

6.5.4 Surveys show that many visitors to the Wye value the peace and quiet, scenic beauty and wildlife of the river. It is essential to protect these interests, both for their intrinsic value and for the

enjoyment of visitors. However, there is a need to provide ancillary services such as car parking, seating, picnic areas and toilets to enable people to appreciate and enjoy the river with the minimum of disruption to other interests.

- 6.5.5 The Wye can best be regarded as a string of sites and attractions linked by the river. With the exception of anglers, canoeists and walkers, it is inevitable that visitors will want to congregate at these locations. If properly planned and located, these can help to relieve the pressure on the remainder of the river. As a general principle, optimal use should be made of existing sites. These should be promoted or improved if necessary. Where there is a clear need, a limited number of additional small scale sites should be developed.
- 6.5.6 When considering the overall distribution of recreation facilities, a two tier approach may be necessary:
1. There will inevitably be a small number of 'honeypot' sites, capable of accommodating a large number of people and possessing a full range of facilities. These tend to provide for car borne visitors and require good road access and parking, but any opportunities for public transport or non car access should be explored. Examples of such sites include most of the main settlements and Symonds Yat. The existing provision of such sites appears to be adequate for the current level of use, though the management and standard of facilities at most sites could be improved. Specific areas such as Symonds Yat and Tintern where intensive use is causing problems will require specific management.
 2. Beyond these larger sites, visitors should be encouraged to disperse to more informal sites, and onto the right of way network. There is a need to improve the provision of small, low key sites and to ensure that existing sites are used efficiently and are of an acceptable standard. Whilst reasonable road access will usually be necessary, there may be opportunities to develop sites for use primarily by canoeists, walkers and cyclists, for which usual standards of road access may not be essential.
- 6.5.7 Any new sites should, wherever possible:
- fulfil a well established need or an unrealised potential need;
 - take account of the existing distribution of sites and provide either additional capacity where needed or an alternative to sites experiencing excessive pressure;
 - be of a scale appropriate to the surrounding area;
 - have good access by road, foot, water or public transport;;
 - take advantage of attractive locations and other features of interest;
 - have a level of car parking which balances anticipated demand with the potential for intrusion in the local environment;
 - be associated with public rights of way, roads or settlements;
 - promote the conservation and enhancement of the river corridor;
 - be designed so as to minimise intrusion and retain the natural and informal character of the river;
 - promote the quiet enjoyment of the river as opposed to noisy or disruptive activities;
 - have regard to the physical constraints of the river, including the height and gradient of the bank.
- 6.5.8 They should not:
- have an unacceptable impact on the landscape or wildlife interest of the river, historical or cultural interests or local communities;
 - have an unacceptable impact on established recreational uses;
 - lead to excessive congestion or recreational pressure on a particular stretch of river;
 - place an undue strain on the capacity of the local road network;
 - create a risk of river pollution.

Opportunities

- 6.5.9 It is not appropriate to suggest specific locations for new sites in this report, and to an extent the development of new facilities will remain largely opportunistic. Although several possible areas have been identified, a more detailed assessment of need and opportunities is required, and in some cases discussion with private landowners will be necessary. Opportunities for improving access include:
- unused or under used land, or surplus areas of land owned by public bodies;
 - areas of common land, especially those where there is no registered owner. Local authorities should seek the cooperation of landowners and commoners to secure the low key use of common land, where this is compatible with other interests;
 - privately owned land where a suitable agreement can be reached with the land owner. Owners and local communities should be encouraged to suggest possible sites. A fund could be established to encourage owners to improve public access. There may be scope for enhancing access through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and other agricultural diversification initiatives;
 - the direct purchase of land;
 - partnership schemes with the owners of existing riverside attractions such as public houses and camp sites. This would have advantages in terms of on-site supervision and control, and may have commercial benefits to the owners. A separate study of this matter may be necessary bearing in mind possible planning constraints.

People with special needs

- 6.5.10 Consideration should be given to the needs of all sections of the community when creating new recreation facilities. Attention should be paid to the special needs of the disabled, the frail and elderly, and those people with young children. Some existing sites and footpath routes may need to be upgraded to make them more useable, though this may not be appropriate for the more remote, infrequently used parts of the river.

CANOE ACCESS

16. The standard and provision of canoe landing sites should be improved to allow safe access to all navigable parts of the river, where this is consistent with the need to safeguard environmental interests.

- 6.5.11 There is a need to improve both the standard and overall provision of canoe launching and landing facilities. From a canoeing point of view there should be a sufficient number of sites to provide adequate access to all navigable parts of the river. Access points should be suitably spaced to allow journeys of a safe maximum length between sites. The ability of novice and young canoeists should be considered. The theoretical target should be to have formal access points at approximately 8 km intervals. This is a reasonable distance for a single trip without a break. Where there is legitimate concern about the possible environmental impact, or proven evidence of environmental damage, it may be desirable to restrict the availability of access to discourage the use of particular stretches of river.

Official sites

- 6.5.12 The current arrangements for public canoe access need to be improved and formalised. The target should be to provide a comprehensive range of agreed, 'official' access points along the river. Once formally designated, these sites should be properly promoted and publicised and the use of 'unofficial' sites discouraged. The use of privately owned sites would continue as at present. Such regularisation would do much to reduce the current confusion over access, would enhance the enjoyment of canoeists and would help to reduce problems of unauthorised access. It may also help to divert pressure away from stretches which are currently over-used or congested.
- 6.5.13 The establishment of 'official' sites should be achieved in three ways:
- improving and formalising the use of existing sites;

- providing or encouraging the development of new sites in appropriate locations;
- discouraging or prohibiting the use of sites where there is no legal right of access or where use is having an unacceptable impact on the environment or other interests.

6.5.14 To date, there has been an assumption that the provision of canoe access is primarily the responsibility of public bodies. However, there is no reason why private riparian landowners should not also provide new facilities or open up existing facilities to wider public use. An accreditation scheme could be introduced whereby sites conforming to a required standard could be formally recognised and promoted as official sites.

Improving existing sites

6.5.15 It should be a general aim of policy to minimise the need for new facilities by making optimal use of existing sites wherever possible. Many existing, commonly used sites are inadequate - they are either unsafe, poorly located or lack adequate facilities. The legal status of some is in doubt. This creates difficulties for public bodies promoting their use. Any site being promoted as 'official' should conform to an acceptable standard. This may involve:

- developing facilities such as proper access steps, car parking, picnic areas, changing areas and on-site information, and ensuring that there is adequate road access;
- discouraging the use of those sites where the supporting infrastructure is inadequate and incapable of being improved

Developing new sites

6.5.16 Where the existing provision is inadequate, additional or alternative sites should be created. Factors influencing the location of new sites include:

- the distance from other sites;
- the likely environmental impact (including visual impact, physical damage and disturbance to wildlife);
- the likely impact on neighbouring activities. Where possible fishery owners should be consulted so as to avoid damage to valuable fishing swims;
- physical constraints imposed by the river, including the height of the river banks and the tidal range;
- infrastructure requirements, especially road access and car parking;
- the location of other managed facilities such as footpaths, picnic sites, toilets and car parks;
- the availability of road access.

6.5.17 When developing new canoe launch sites, there are advantages in locating close to existing settlements where services and refreshments are close by and where people already converge. However, opportunities for land acquisition or management can arise outside settlements and may be equally acceptable when all relevant factors have been considered. Consideration should be given in the first instance to extending the use of existing public access areas or taking advantage of opportunities provided by bridges or other locations where the road network converges on the river.

'Stop-over' sites

6.5.18 In addition to launching and landing sites, consideration should be given to developing low key 'stop-over' sites at intermediate locations or where the development of formal sites is not possible. These could serve as resting places or emergency exit points only and would not necessarily require road access or other facilities. Locations should be identified and agreed in conjunction with landowners and fishery owners. Ideally, they should be linked to rights of way or other visitor facilities such as picnic sites or informal camp sites. Such sites would enhance the enjoyment for canoeists and could help reduce some of the conflicts that can arise from canoeists mooring and coming ashore onto private land without permission.

The upper Wye

- 6.5.19 Launching facilities for canoeists upstream of Glasbury are very poor, but improvements cannot usefully be considered while there remains a dispute about navigation rights. Consideration should be given to formalising launching and landing arrangements upstream of Hay-on-Wye once this dispute has been satisfactorily resolved.

Design and safety

- 6.5.20 New canoe access facilities should be designed and constructed to a high standard, and existing sites improved where necessary, in order to:-
- minimise environmental impact;
 - enhance the recreational experience of users;
 - be safe and convenient to use.
- 6.5.21 Safety is of the utmost importance, especially in the design of access to the water. Official sites provided, managed or promoted by public bodies should be as safe as possible, with properly constructed steps or other means of access. Public bodies need to be aware of their responsibilities and should consider the consequences of continuing to promote sub-standard sites, including their possible liability in the event of an accident.

Publicity and promotion

- 6.5.22 Once 'official' sites are agreed, they should be actively promoted and canoeists should be encouraged to use only these sites. They can be publicised in written material and on bankside information boards. Direction signs should be erected both in the river and on the bank to encourage canoeists to use them. Notices in the river should inform canoeists about the distance to the next exit point or rest area.

ACCOMMODATION

17. The provision of additional campsites and other low key overnight accommodation close to the river should be encouraged in those areas where current provision is inadequate, and where this will not conflict with other legitimate interests.
- 6.5.23 There is a need for additional low cost accommodation, such as camp sites and camping barns. These should be spaced at regular distances along the length of the river, in locations convenient for canoeists, back-packers and cyclists. Although there will be a continuing need for sites with a full range of facilities and good road access, informal sites with minimal facilities and limited road access may be acceptable in some locations where use is likely to be light or infrequent.
- 6.5.24 Although the provision of accommodation will in most cases remain the responsibility of the private sector, local authorities and other public bodies can help to facilitate new sites. They may be able to identify suitable areas of land which could be used for camping, or buildings which could be converted for group accommodation. As a start, search areas should be established where there is greatest need. If suitable opportunities are identified, discussions should be initiated with landowners. The suitability of areas of land owned by public bodies for camping should be examined.

CYCLING

18. Consideration should be given to improving access to parts of the river for cyclists through the development of predominantly off-road cycleways in the Wye Valley.
- 6.5.25 The growth in the popularity of recreational cycling, especially off road cycling, needs to be recognised. The Wye Valley is well used by cyclists and the demand is likely to increase. Cycling should generally be encouraged - it is quiet, pollution free, healthy and can be enjoyed by all ages. Provision for cyclists should be improved. There is a need for safe, interesting and attractive traffic free routes to enable cyclists to enjoy the Wye Valley and gain access to the river.
- 6.5.26 The status of existing rights of way should be clarified in order to identify those routes which

can be used legally by cyclists. Those which are suitable in terms of their physical characteristics, location and likely demand should be promoted and signposted as cycleways. These should be appropriately surfaced and maintained. It may be necessary to separate cyclists from pedestrians or to restrict cycling to paths of sufficient width.

- 6.5.27 Further consideration should be given to developing cycle tracks along the floor of the Wye Valley. A feasibility study commissioned by the Wye Valley AONB JAC in 1983 identified options for possible routes, using mainly sections of disused railway line, forest tracks, bridleways and minor roads. Such routes would have substantial recreational benefits and would be a major visitor attraction. Depending on which route is selected, the scheme could involve a substantial capital investment by local authorities and others. This may involve the creation of new river crossings, land acquisition and management agreements with landowners. Maintenance costs may also be high.

6.6 MONITORING AND RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

MAINTAINING A DATABASE

19. The current database of information about the Wye should be maintained and improved.

- 6.6.1 Access to a central database of information about the Wye is essential for informed decision making. This should contain information about sites of environmental and historical importance, recreation facilities, public access, and ownership. The information described in this report provides a sound foundation for the establishment of such a database, but it will need to be improved and expanded in places.
- 6.6.2 Once established, the database should be kept up to date. Responsibility for maintaining should rest with a single organisation, preferably the NRA, though the information it contains should be made widely available, subject to the need to protect sensitive or confidential information. In the longer term, consideration should be given to establishing a computerised geographical information system to replace the existing computer and map based database.
- 6.6.3 A comprehensive inventory of the river's environmental interests, and particularly its nature conservation interests, should form a key component of the database. Although a great deal of information about the river's flora and fauna is available, it is of variable quality and needs to be evaluated by English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales. The objective should be to have access to information of a consistently high standard for the entire river corridor. Further surveys of both aquatic and riparian habitats and individual species may be necessary where the existing information is inadequate or out of date.
- 6.6.4 Better information about nature conservation interests will assist when making decisions about the future management of recreational use, especially the provision of any new facilities, and will make it easier to assess the likelihood of damage or disturbance. The should be to identify:
- sites which are important for the rare species they support;
 - stretches of river which are particularly important in terms of their physical characteristics or habitats;
 - stretches which are particularly sensitive and vulnerable to certain recreational pressures;
 - stretches which are of lesser importance for nature conservation and which may be better able to withstand recreational use.
- 6.6.5 The archaeological and historical interest of the Wye and its banks has not been thoroughly researched and comparable information is not available for the whole river. Existing sources of information should be thoroughly evaluated and, if necessary, county councils and other interested bodies should be encouraged to undertake further surveys. Information about archaeological sites is necessary to secure the effective protection of any important remains.
- 6.6.6 The remains of structures such as weirs, wharves and mills, and other features associated with the river's past use for industry and commercial navigation are of particular interest. There is some documentary information about these features and it is known that the remains of many can still be traced on the ground. However, no authoritative attempt has been made to collate details of

remains or to carry out further surveys. Such information would be valuable for its own sake, but could also be of interest to river users. There is considerable scope for interpreting archeological information in a form that can enhance the enjoyment of visitors and improve their appreciation of the river's history.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

20. There is a need to assess the impact of various recreational activities on wildlife conservation, including the maintenance of salmon populations.

6.6.7 The NRA, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales should determine what information is required in order to evaluate the environmental impact of sport and recreation more reliably. Priorities for further research should be established and a long term programme drawn up. The most effective means of undertaking this research should be examined. Once available, the results of any new research should be made available to all interested parties.

6.6.8 Subjects which warrant further research include:

- the impact of canoeists on spawning salmon and on fish behaviour generally;
- the effects of boating, angling and other forms of recreational activity on breeding wildfowl.
- the sensitivity of otters to recreational disturbance;
- the physical damage to riparian habitats and vegetation caused by bankside activities

6.6.9 The most urgent need is for further research into the various forms of disturbance. The key objectives of any such research should be to:

- identify activities which can lead to disturbance, and the mechanisms involved;
- quantify the significance of disturbance in terms of the breeding success and population levels of affected species;
- identify other factors which may have a detrimental impact besides recreation;
- assess the significance of any impact on the overall ecological interest of the river.

MONITORING

21. A regular programme of surveys is needed to measure changes in the level and distribution of recreational use and changes in the wildlife resource.

6.6.10 Although this report contains a considerable amount of information about recreational use, this is only a start. Further research is needed to measure future trends, including changes in:

- the level of use by different activities;
- their geographical distribution;
- the periods over which activities take place;
- the characteristics of users.

6.6.11 The steering committee should coordinate the implementation of a regular monitoring programme. This should build on the work already undertaken and should comprise surveys of actual river usage and questionnaire interviews with users. The introduction of craft registration will assist with monitoring boating activity. Up to date information about recreational use is necessary in order to:

- help identify possible conflicts with environmental interests;
- plan the provision of recreation facilities and public access
- assess the effectiveness of attempts to influence recreational use and accommodate current demands.

6.6.12 The wildlife resource itself will also need to be regularly monitored. This is necessary to detect changes in the river's ecological interest, and is particularly relevant when considering the potential impact from sport and recreation. The populations of sensitive species will need to be

monitored, as will habitats along vulnerable stretches of river. Some impacts will only become noticeable over a long period, and where a link is suspected between recreational use and environmental change it is desirable that any management response is supported by evidence of damage or population change.

LEGAL INVESTIGATIONS

22. Further legal studies should be undertaken in an attempt to resolve the uncertainties surrounding the extent of rights of navigation and access.

6.6.13 It is clear that the issue of navigation rights and public access to the river is extremely complex. As a result, considerable confusion exists about the legal status of some activities and the respective legal rights of land owners, fishery owners and recreational users. Further historical and legal research is necessary to clarify these issues. The results of this research could have an important bearing on the future management of the river. The key areas of uncertainty relate to:

- the legal definition of navigation;
- the status of navigation above Hay-on-Wye;
- rights of access associated with the old towing path.