

news release

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Project aiming to reintroduce salmon to River Aire upstream of Leeds gets £800,000 boost

A project to restore Atlantic salmon, improve coarse fish populations and engage people with the River Aire has secured £800,000 from the National Lottery.

The Environment Agency and the Aire Rivers Trust have worked together to get Stage 1 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to progress their £1.6m Developing the Natural Aire (DNAire) project.

This will build fish passes on four weirs - the last major barriers to fish movement between the North Sea and Gargrave in the Yorkshire Dales to spawn.

Historically the River Aire was rich in salmon but industrial pollution and weirs rendered much of the River Aire lifeless.

In more recent years the Aire has been cleaned up by a range of different organisations and landowners allowing wildlife to return.

This includes the Upper Aire Project which has worked with farmers and landowners to improve water quality and spawning grounds where salmon can breed.

Downstream of Leeds fish passes have been built on other major weirs which means that adult salmon can now reach the city centre from the Humber Estuary.

With this support, made possible by National Lottery players, DNAire will fill the missing gap between Leeds and Gargrave, enabling the return of the iconic fish, as well as allowing coarse fish, such as dace, chub and barbel to move freely up and down the river to find the best places to feed, spawn and shelter.

Mark Scott, Environment Agency Yorkshire area director, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has chosen to support the DNAire project.

"With our partners we have worked for many years to improve and restore the River Aire and with this Lottery support it's now within our grasp to finally return salmon to their historic habitat.

"This is wonderful news for the people and communities along the River Aire and for the reputation of Leeds and Bradford as a great cities."

A trail of 'Focus Points' will be created where people can access their river and learn about and enjoy its natural heritage. People will be able to follow the journey of salmon along the River Aire from Leeds to Gargrave.

Building the fish passes on the weirs will link modern and historic engineering and provide opportunities to promote Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM) subjects within schools, local colleges and universities. Undergraduate students in engineering and natural sciences will have the opportunity to engage with the project and gain training. Apprenticeships in construction will be offered. Local people will also be invited to get involved, and able to gain skills in river ecology and stewardship.

Kevin Sunderland, Aire Rivers Trust trustee, said: "Support for DNAire by the Heritage Lottery Fund recognises the value of the heritage of the River Aire and what a wonderful space it is for people and wildlife.

"It's been our long held ambition to allow the passage of coarse fish and enable the return of migratory fish to one of Yorkshire's great rivers.

"Salmon back in the Aire will benefit people and communities along the river and help them to see the river as something worth caring for.

"My thanks go to the Lottery players for supporting this exciting venture."

David Renwick, Head of HLF Yorkshire & the Humber, said: "Yorkshire's rivers are the arteries of our landscapes, providing connections for wildlife to move along their banks and in their waters. The industrialisation of many areas saw water quality decline and barriers put in place, reducing their value for wildlife and to society.

"However, in recent years otters have returned, plants are flourishing and kingfishers can be seen catching fish in even the most urban areas. Thanks to National Lottery players the DNAire Project will allow fish to traverse the four remaining barriers on the River Aire allowing salmon to return."

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Picture shows a Native Atlantic salmon, the type that the project is hoping to reintroduce to the Aire in Leeds and upstream to Gargrave

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #NationalLottery and #HLFsupported.

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