

Dartmoor Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Implementing the Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive and the UK Regulations that implement it have been introduced to protect Europe's most endangered plants, animals and habitats.

In the UK we are one of the competent authorities under the Habitats Regulations. Our role is to review the possible direct or indirect environmental effects on Natura 2000 which include SACs and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) by assessing all new and existing licences and permissions. The review of existing consents is a huge task for us, with thousands of permissions under our control.

Five Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Dartmoor National Park have been designated as the Dartmoor SAC, covering a total area of 23,165 hectares.

The SAC has been designated for:

- wet and dry heaths, blanket bog and sessile oak woods;
- Atlantic salmon, otter and southern damselfly.

These are the site interest features.

Because salmon are a mobile species we also have to protect their migration routes between the SAC and the sea on the following rivers: Taw, Teign, Dart, Erme, Yealm and Tavy.



The Review of Consents:

We have developed a four-stage risk assessment process in collaboration with Natural England and Countryside Council for Wales:

- Stage 1:** Identify relevant permissions and licences.
Is the permission likely to affect the Natura 2000 site?
- Stage 2:** Assess likely significance.
Is there a mechanism through which the Natura 2000 site may be significantly affected by a permission?
- Stage 3:** If significant effect predicted then undertake appropriate assessment.
Carry out an 'appropriate assessment' of the significant permission to ensure that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites. This is done in consultation with Natural England and based on information that we hold on the permission, additional investigations if needed and the site's 'Conservation Objectives (set by Natural England).
- Stage 4:** 2007 – March 2009 Review options for removing adverse effects and determine the permission.
Our decisions are based on best available scientific information and our professional judgement.

The Dartmoor SAC Review of Consents – Progress so far

We are now at the start of Stage 4. Working with Natural England we have completed a condition assessment of salmon and their habitat in the Dartmoor SAC. The assessment was completed by Hull International Fisheries Institute (HIFI), and concluded that the Dartmoor SAC is in unfavourable, declining condition for salmon. However, this is not necessarily a result of intervention in the Dartmoor SAC or elsewhere in the associated rivers. There was no evidence that habitat conditions in any of the Dartmoor rivers are deteriorating or impacting on the salmon stocks. In some cases it was thought that poor recruitment rates may be linked to problems of adults accessing the upper reaches (perhaps because of barriers or abstraction or both).

Following this assessment we are moving forward on the precautionary principle to restrict abstraction to current levels to prevent any further impact of abstraction. Further investigations will continue to monitor the salmon stocks and recruitment.

Natural England are currently working on setting the Conservation Objectives for the Dartmoor SAC.

We have already visited the majority of licence holders to discuss the effect on each permission in more detail. We will be working with licence holders to develop options for improving the salmon migration routes. If we have not yet contacted you we will be in contact within the next 4 weeks.

If you would like to find out more then we shall be speaking at the Dartmoor Society Debate Talk 'What Future for Dartmoor's Water Resources?' The event is taking place on 27 September 2008 at Meldon Village Hall. Details from www.dartmoorsociety.com, Events tab and click on the link for a timetable of the day, a list of speakers and details of how to book tickets.

Timetable:

September - October 2008 – We will have visited all licence holders

October 2008 - Identified flow targets for Dartmoor SAC

September 2008 to Feb 2009 - Review options for removing adverse effects on the Dartmoor SAC

March 2009 - Complete Site Action Plans for all licences

Further work

We will complete Site Action Plans for each licence by March 2009. We will continue to liaise with other stakeholders who have an interest in the Dartmoor SAC.

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For general information on the Dartmoor SAC or other Natura 2000 sites and their features of interest please contact your local Natural England office

www.naturalengland.org.uk Tel: 0845 600 3078

Further information can be found at:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk under Conservation > Habitats Directive.