

Issued by **RSPB, WWF UK, the Angling Trust and the Salmon and Trout Association**

Search for the nation's best loved and most neglected river

With only 5 per cent of rivers in England and Wales described as being in a pristine condition a new survey has been launched by a coalition of conservationists to celebrate and bring attention to some of Britain's best loved and long forgotten rivers.

The Our Rivers Campaign which includes the RSPB, WWF-UK, the Angling Trust and the Salmon and Trout Association is calling on people to take part in the first ever Our Rivers Awards by going online and voting for the 'best' or 'worst' river in England and Wales.

This could be any river from a picturesque chalk stream to a waterway teeming with native wildlife, or a river plagued by pollution and ruined by water abstraction.

The first person to cast their vote for the Our Rivers Awards was television presenter and producer and keen conservationist Phillipa Forrester who is currently appearing in Halcyon River Diaries, on BBC1'. Other river enthusiasts, chef Tom Aiken and wildlife writer, Steve Backshall have also named their favourite rivers.

Phillipa Forrester said: "Living close to a river I get to see an amazing array of life from the emergence of mayflies in Spring to the darting flash of a hunting kingfisher and the secretive habits of the water vole. It may be small but my vote has to go to the river which runs close to my home, the real star of the Halcyon River Diaries, because it is a very special place for me.

"We have to do all we can to protect these vital wildlife habitats and I hope the Our Rivers awards will highlight the pressures these waterways, and the life they support, are facing."

Tom Aiken has cast his vote for the River Yare in Cringleford near Norwich and Steve Blackshall nominated the Upper Dart in Dartmoor.

The Our Rivers campaign was launched last year to campaign for clean, healthy rivers across England and Wales. Soon after, a Government report on the state of the country's rivers found that 74 per cent are failing to meet European environmental targets.

The report found that just five per cent of rivers in England and Wales remain in pristine condition. The rest face a variety of pressures including; run off pollution from fertilisers and poorly designed urban drainage, invasive riverbank species like signal crayfish and American mink and low water levels caused by over abstraction.

Ralph Underhill, Our Rivers campaigner, said: "This is the first time the public has had a chance to vote for the river which is closest to the nation's heart. This award will be a great celebration of one of our richest wildlife habitats – and one that everyone can enjoy because no-one is more than a few minutes from a river, stream or brook. We want to celebrate the amazing rivers we have in England and Wales, whilst raising awareness of the threats they face. By casting your vote, you are speaking up for Our Rivers."

To cast your vote visit the Our River campaign website at www.ourrivers.org.uk. Voting remains open until the end of British Summer Time on the 31st October 2010.

-Ends-

Editor's notes:

A recent Environment Agency assessment listed 26 per cent of rivers as 'Good' status. This means 74% of rivers are failing – including 117 rivers (2%) which are classified as 'Bad' making them among the worst in Europe. The EU Water Framework Directive requires the UK to bring all of its rivers up to 'Good' status or above by 2015. Current draft plans mean the UK will fail to reach this target.

Our Rivers is supported as part of the HSBC Climate Partnership (HCP). The HCP is a US\$100 million, five-year partnership funded by HSBC, working with the Climate Group, the Earthwatch Institute, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and WWF. Launched in May 2007, the HCP will:

Help to protect four of the world's major rivers – the Amazon, Ganges, Thames, and Yangtze from the impacts of climate change, benefitting the 450 million people who rely on them.

Make some of the world's great cities – Hong Kong, London, Mumbai, New York and Shanghai cleaner and greener, which the partners will promote as models for the world;

- Create 'climate champions' worldwide who will undertake field research and bring back valuable knowledge and experience to their communities;
- Conduct the largest ever field experiment on the world's forests to measure carbon and the effects of climate change.

For more information, please visit www.hsbc.com/committochange

Halcyon River Diaries, written by award-winning wildlife writers and photographers Philippa Forrester and Charlie Hamilton James is the story of one family's year living by a West Country river. *Get Out! – and Explore your Local River*, also written by Philippa, is an activity book which engages children on everything to do with wildlife in streams and rivers . Both books are available now.

If your river is voted 'Best' overall, the award will be widely publicised. We'll design an online badge for your local council and tourist board, to remind everyone you've got the best river in 2010, plus a commemorative panel or sculpture donated to the winning town - to be placed on the riverbank or elsewhere in town.

As for the Worst River - it's not just about naming and shaming. The Our Rivers team of experts will conduct a one-day workshop with the local council and/or local groups to help develop an action plan to help improve the condition of the river and bring back the wildlife.

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