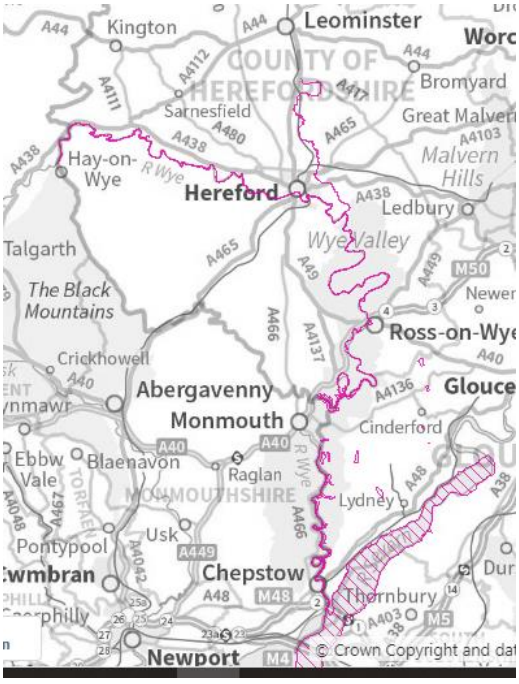
Appendix 2: Understanding the terminology of the condition of a SAC river- using the example of the River Wye and Lugg SAC

Natural England February 2022

The terminology and meaning of describing and understanding the condition of a river and what certain phrases mean can be very confusing, especially when discussing alongside Nutrient Neutrality, which is itself complex. This note is a simple guide to understanding the current condition of a river using the Wye and Lugg as an example.

The different designations involved

The River Wye and the River Lugg are designated as two separate Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). They are the two component SSSIs that underpin the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in England. Although only the stretch of the River Lugg SSSI between Leominster and its confluence with the Wye is part of the River Wye SAC. The biological features that make the River Wye SAC important, also form part of the underpinning SSSI designations. The River Wye SAC, also known as the Afon Gwy SAC, extends into Wales. Natural Resources Wales provide advice for the Welsh stretch.



SSSI monitoring specifications

When assessing the condition of a SAC, it is the biological features of the underpinning SSSIs that Natural England assess and record. Condition is 'judged' against each SSSI's monitoring specification, known as the site's Favourable Condition Table (FCT). FCTs are based on UK Common Standards Monitoring guidance published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

SAC Conservation Objectives

Every SAC has Conservation Objectives identifying the site's designated features. This is supported by detailed Supplementary Advice on conserving and restoring site's features. Together these documents, and any case specific advice given by Natural England, should be used when developing, proposing, or assessing an activity, plan or project that may affect the site.

The SAC documents capture what is necessary to ensure the integrity of the site is maintained or restored so that it contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its designated (qualifying) features. Specific targets or characteristics to achieve this, such as targets for phosphate levels for the River Wye SAC, are described in the underpinning SSSI's FCT as well as the SAC's Conservation Objective. This cross referencing provides a link between assessing the condition of SSSI features and the favourable conservation status of the SAC features.

Phosphate targets and levels in the Lugg and Wye

The River Lugg section of the SAC is currently exceeding the phosphate target for the river habitat feature identified in both the Wye SAC's Conservation Objectives and the underpinning River Lugg SSSI's FCT. This means the river habitat feature in this stretch is in unfavourable condition and failing its Conservation Objectives. This also means that this stretch is not contributing to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for this river habitat, and that other designated (qualifying) features in the SAC dependent on the river habitat are also unlikely to contribute to their Favourable Conservation Status.

The River Wye (between Hay -on -Wye and the River Lugg confluence) is currently just meeting its phosphate target in some monitoring locations and is, therefore, at risk of also failing the SAC's Conservation Objectives if phosphate levels increase.

The Phosphate target is just one element of the River Wye SAC's Conservation Objectives, but a very important one in terms of health of the river. In relation to Nutrient Neutrality the fact the Lugg stretch is exceeding the water quality targets has specific implications with regards how the Habitat Regulations are applied due to the Dutch Judgement.

River Lugg and River Wye SSSI Condition

Natural England's assessment is that that most of the River Wye SSSI and the River Lugg SSSI are in unfavourable condition. Only the tidal stretch of the River Wye is currently considered to be Favourable: Natural England are currently reviewing the latest evidence regarding condition of the river.

Unit	Unit name	Status	Condition	Condition Threat Risk	Habita
001	TIDAL RIVER - ESTUARY TO BROCKWEIR BRIDGE	Live	Favourable	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
002	BROCKWEIR BRIDGE TO MONMOUTH	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
003	MONMOUTH TO ROSS	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
004	ROSS TO HEREFORD	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
005	HEREFORD TO BREDWARDINE BRIDGE	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
006	BREDWARDINE BRIDGE TO WHITNEY TOLL	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
007	WHITNEY TOLL TO HAY	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
100	WHOLE SAC	Archived	Unfavourable - No change	No assessment of Condition Threat undertaken	RIVERS AND STREAMS

River Lugg SSSI

Unit	Unit name	Status	Condition	Condition Threat Risk	Habitat
001	RIVER LUGG (WYE SAC)	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
002	BODENHAM WEIR TO LEOMINSTER	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
003	LEOMINSTER TO MORTIMERS CROSS	Live	Unfavourable - Declining	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS
004	MORTIMERS CROSS TO PRESTEIGNE	Live	Unfavourable - Recovering	High	RIVERS AND STREAMS

SSSIs are divided into monitoring units (see table above). A unit's condition reflects the lowest condition category of any designated feature present in that unit. If a unit is in unfavourable condition, then at least one feature present in that unit is assessed as unfavourable.

What does Unfavourable-recovering condition mean on the Wye & Lugg?

Where a feature/unit is recorded as unfavourable-recovering, this reflects Natural England's judgement that sufficient measures are in place to allow that feature to meet its monitoring targets in the future, and to achieve favourable condition. Where condition is recorded as unfavourable-declining, it is Natural England's judgement that there is evidence of continued decline against the feature's monitoring targets, and the management measures in place are insufficient to allow the feature to attain its monitoring targets in the future.

The River Lugg stretch included in the River Wye SAC is in unfavourable condition because currently some of the features are failing some of their monitoring targets, including the phosphate target. However, because it is Natural England's judgement that sufficient measures are in place to allow all the features to recover to favourable condition, this stretch is considered unfavourable-recovering.

On the non-tidal stretch of the River Wye, some of the features are failing some of their monitoring attributes, but not the phosphate target (although it is at risk of failing). Currently it is Natural England's judgement that sufficient measures are in place to allow all the features to recover to favourable condition, so the units on this stretch are also considered unfavourable-recovering.

The aim is for the river to reach favourable condition and to fully fulfil its Conservation Objectives. The Nutrient Management Plan Action Plan details the actions (measures) required to achieve this in relation to phosphate.

Appendix 1- definitions of condition

Favourable	SSSI is being adequately conserved and is meeting its 'conservation objectives', however there is scope for enhancement of these sites.
Unfavourable recovering	SSSI unites are not yet fully conserved, but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the SSSI will reach favourable condition in time.
Unfavourable no change	SSSI unit is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the site management or external pressures. The longer the SSSI unit remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.
Unfavourable declining	SSSI unit is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the site management or external pressures. The site condition is becoming progressively worse.
Part destroyed	Part destroyed means that lasting damage has occurred to part of the special conservation interest of a SSSI unit such that it has been irretrievably lost and will never recover. Conservation work may be needed on the residual interest of the land
Destroyed	Lasting damage has occurred to all the special conservation interest of the SSSI unit such that it has been irretrievably lost. This land will never recover.