

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

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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 Monitoring Specification. Monitoring Specifications are based on UK [Common Standards Monitoring guidance](#) published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. To request a copy of the monitoring specification please e-mail west.midlands.enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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

The River Wye and Lugg designated site has a relatively complex set of interest features (those features for which the river is designated) and as such undertaking a full condition assessment is a significant undertaking. Natural England is seeking to undertake a full assessment in 2023/4 In the interim, the Area Team has reviewed a number of specific components of the interest features using Common Standard Monitoring Guidance (CSMG) to review the current condition stat. us. For full details of the features assessed please see Appendix 1.

Natural England's assessment is that the River Wye SSSI and the River Lugg SSSI are in unfavourable declining condition. Our interim assessment focused on Macrophytes, , Salmon and White-Clawed Crayfish.

SSSIs are divided into monitoring units (as per Table 1). 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.

The recent assessment demonstrated that in every unit at least one of the assessed components of the interest features (Macrophytes, Salmon and White-Clawed Crayfish) was in unfavourable condition and was declining. Therefore the current condition is detailed below. This does not impact on the water quality target, and therefore makes no change to the "Nutrient Neutrality" status of both rivers, as this is based solely on water quality. The Lugg is failing its water quality targets, the Wye is not failing its water quality targets.

Table 1. Revised condition of River Wye and Lugg SSSI/SAC

Unit	River	Reach	Designation	Suggested Condition on CMSi
1	River Wye	Tidal river - Estuary to Brockweir Bridge	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
2	River Wye	Brockweir Bridge to Monmouth	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
3	River Wye	Monmouth to Ross	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
4a	River Wye	Ross to Lugg Confluence	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
4b	River Wye	Lugg Confluence to Hereford	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
5	River Wye	Hereford to Bredwardine Bridge	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
6	River Wye	Bredwardine Bridge to Whitney Toll	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
7	River Wye	Whitney Toll to Hay	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
1	River Lugg	Bodenham Weir to Confluence with Wye	SSSI/SAC	Unfavourable - Declining
2	River Lugg	Bodenham Weir to Leominster	SSSI	Unfavourable - Declining
3	River Lugg	Leominster to Mortimers Cross	SSSI	Unfavourable - Declining
4	River Lugg	Mortimers Cross to Presteigne	SSSI	Unfavourable - Declining

Table 2: The following table explains the condition categories.

SSSI Condition categories	
Condition status	Explanation
Favourable condition	The designated feature is being adequately conserved and the results from monitoring demonstrate that the feature is meeting all the mandatory site-specific monitoring targets set out in the Favourable Condition Tables (FCT). The FCT sets the minimum standard for favourable condition for the designated feature and there may be scope for the further (voluntary) enhancement of the feature.
Unfavourable recovering condition	Often known simply as 'recovering'. The Feature is not yet fully conserved, but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the feature will reach favourable condition in time. At least one of the designated features mandatory attributes is not meeting their targets (as set out in the site specific FCT).

Unfavourable no-change condition	The feature is not being conserved, and will not reach favourable condition, unless there are changes to the management or external pressures and this is reflected in the results of monitoring over time; with at least one of the mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site specific FCT) with the results not moving towards the desired state. The longer the feature remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.
Unfavourable declining condition	The feature is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to management or external pressures. The feature condition is becoming progressively worse, and this is reflected in the results of monitoring over time, with at least one of the designated features mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site specific FCT) with the results moving further away from the desired state. The longer the feature remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.
Part destroyed condition	Lasting damage has occurred to part of a designated feature, such that it has been irretrievably lost and will never recover (no amount of management will allow the feature to ever reach favourable condition).
Destroyed condition	Lasting damage has occurred to an entire designated feature such that the feature has been irretrievably lost (no amount of management will bring this feature back). This feature will never recover e.g., a finite mineralogical feature has been totally removed from its surroundings without consent and is therefore lost forever.

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

Where a feature/unit 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. Changes in site management and/or changes to external pressures are required to achieve favourable condition.

There is a significant amount of effort on both the Wye and Lugg to improve this situation, including a Nutrient Management Plan which outlines the actions required with regard to phosphates. Some of the reasons for decline may be outside the catchment, and further work is required to fully understand the reasons.

For details of pressures affecting the condition of the Wye and Lugg SSSIs (River Wye) please visit the [Designated Site Viewer](#). search for the site.