CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

RHAGNENTYDD GWY UCHAF/
UPPER WYE TRIBUTARIES

Date of Notification: 2003

National Grid Reference:
SO 887 810 Afon Bidno
SO 907 747 Nant y Dernol
SO 960 661 Afon Elan
SO 975 636 Dulas
SO 005 567 Hirnant

O.S. Maps:
1:50,000 Sheet Number: 136,147
1:10,000 Sheet Number: SO 05 NW
SN 87 NE
SN 88 SE
SN 95 NE
SN 96 NE, SE & NW
SN 97 NW & SW

Site Area: 19.7 ha

Description:

River Wye

The Wye system, comprising the River Wye and several of its tributaries represents a large, linear ecosystem, which acts as an important wildlife corridor, an essential migration route and a key breeding area for many nationally and internationally important species. The Wye is of special interest for its associated plant and animal communities. Its character spans a range of types from an upland base-poor stream to an estuarine, silty lowland river. The river's overall diversity is a product of its underlying geology soil types, adjacent land use and hydrology.

The River Wye forms one of the longest rivers in England and Wales. From its source to its confluence the main channel is 250kms long, drains a catchment of 4136km sq. and has the fourth largest flow of any river in England and Wales. Rising at an altitude of 680m on Pumlumon Fawr in Powys, the Wye meanders down through Wales, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, finally entering the Severn Estuary at Chepstow.

Upper Wye Tributaries

The site is of interest for its internationally important populations of otter *Lutra lutra* and Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*, as well as bullhead *Cottus gobio*.

The tributaries support both oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) and more mesotrophic (relatively nutrient-poor) aquatic communities and extensive areas of semi-natural riparian habitats can still

be found along their banks. These include semi-natural woodland, dry and marshy grassland, stands of tall fen and marsh vegetation and gravel banks. The site also includes back channels and oxbows that support otters and waterfowl and provide valuable refuges for small fish and invertebrates in times of flood.

The Upper Wye Tributaries comprise the lower sections of the Afon Bidno, Nant y Dernol, Afon Elan, Llanwrthwl Dulas and Hirnant which flow into the River Wye at various points upstream of the River Ithon confluence.

The Bidno rises at an altitude of 450m at Waun Goch near the Hafren Forest. As it flows south-east it is joined by smaller tributaries and meets the Wye after crossing the A44 1.5km west of Llangurig. The Nant y Dernol rises at an altitude of 450m above Trafelgwyn to the south west of Llangurig. It flows east-south-east to join the Wye 5km south of Llangurig. The Afon Elan rises at an altitude of around 510m at Esgair Elan to the east of Cwmystwyth. It is joined by a number of smaller tributaries as it flows south-east and through the reservoirs of Craig Goch, Penygarreg, Carreg-ddu and Caban-coch, before meandering eastwards and joining the Wye just below Rhayader. The Dulas rises at an altitude of 480m on the slopes of Y Gamrhiw to the south-east of Caban-coch resevoir. It flows east and is joined by four smaller tributaries before entering the Wye at Llanwrthwl. The Hirnant rises at an altitude of 585m near Drum Ddu to the north of Llanafan-fawr and flows south-east and then east to join the Wye just upstream of Brynwern Bridge below Newbridge-on-Wye.

Most of the tributary catchments have developed on sedimentary rocks of Silurian age but the Llanwrthwl Dulas and Hirnant run across Ordovician rocks. Their orientation indicates that the course of these tributaries is generally controlled by features in the solid geology and rock sections are frequent in the stream beds. However, the lower Elan runs through a flood plain composed of glacial till, outwash gravels and more recent river alluvium. The soils in the catchment are generally acidic but vary considerable in drainage, clay and organic content.

The upper Wye and its tributaries support one of the strongest populations of otters in England and Wales. This species is threatened by habitat destruction, disturbance and pollution throughout its European range. Otters rely on woodland, scrub and tall bankside vegetation for cover. Their holts can be located on the riverbank or in other suitable dense vegetation at some distance from the edge of the river channel.

The tributaries provide important spawning and nursery areas for Atlantic salmon. Bullheads are frequent and juvenile lampreys, likely to be brook *Lampetra planeri* or river lamprey *L. fluviatile*, have been recorded recently.

Although not of special interest in their own right, the site supports several characteristic breeding birds such as grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and goosander *Mergus merganser*.

Remarks:

The site supports the following habitats and species covered by the EC Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora):

Common otter - Annex II and IV
Atlantic salmon - Annex II and V

Bullhead - Annex II

Otter is also listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).