

# Agencies join forces to investigate environmental damage to the River Lugg

Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission mount joint investigation into damage reported on SSSI area of the River Lugg in Herefordshire. Legal notices were served and officers have attended the site to gather evidence.

Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission have joined forces to investigate a series of unconsented works on the river Lugg at Kingsland in Herefordshire. The area has SSSI status due to its environmental importance.

With the support of West Mercia police, officers from Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission came together on the scene last week with officers from Herefordshire Council, to investigate and seek formal evidence for the alleged offences.

A legal notice requiring the works to stop immediately was served on the landowner by Natural England last week, while the Forestry Commission issued a stop letter requiring an end to any further felling work. The Environment Agency also requested no further works to be carried out on the river last week.

Emma Johnson, Natural England area manager, said:

I'm shocked by the destruction I've seen to this very special river.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest represent our finest places for wildlife and geology and Natural England is responsible for ensuring their protection, working with landowners and managers to achieve this. We have regulatory powers to prevent damage taking place to SSSIs but when this does occur we can take appropriate enforcement action, including prosecuting offenders.

The river Lugg is a very special place due to the ecology of the river and surrounding area. Natural England and our partners are working together to take strong action to ensure a wide-ranging and thorough investigation is carried out.

The three agencies came together to jointly investigate last week following reports of activities including dredging, illegal felling of trees and profiling of the river banks. The works have the potential to cause

significant, long term ecological harm to nearly 1.5km of the river.

Keith Jones, area director for the Forestry Commission said:

I'm appalled at what has happened. Trees are a precious natural resource, which is why anyone wishing to fell them must ensure they comply with the Forestry Commission's felling licence requirements.

Dave Throup, area environment manager for the Environment Agency, added:

This is a beautiful part of the world. To see the changes from last week to this is terrible. We're working closely with our partners to ensure this is thoroughly investigated.

### **Further information:**

- Natural England is responsible for ensuring the protection of SSSI areas, the Forestry Commission is responsible for issuing and regulating tree felling permits and the Environment Agency is responsible for flood risk management, fish and spawning and the way rivers function.
- Natural England has regulatory powers to prevent damage taking place to SSSIs and to take appropriate enforcement action, including prosecuting offenders where damage occurs.
- Felling trees without the authority of a felling licence issued by the Forestry Commission, where one is required, currently carries a penalty upon conviction in a magistrates' court of £2,500 or twice the value of the timber felled.
- In certain circumstances, the Forestry Commission is empowered to serve a Restocking Notice upon anyone committing an illegal felling offence, either with or without having secured a conviction, which compels the individual served to restock the land with trees. Failure to comply with the notice may result in a separate offence being committed, which already carries a penalty of an unlimited fine.