

We all Live

Downstream

of Somebody

Exploring the River Itchen's
natural history, biodiversity
and heritage using the arts
to understand its
challenges, deepen
connection, share stories
and cultivate an
environment of radical hope



A proposal by ArtfulScribe and an invitation to engage with local people, communities, and organisations sharing an interest in the river and its environment with a view towards collaborating, co-creating and working together as an act of mutual care and consideration.





The River Itchen is a chalk stream and one of the rarest habitats on the planet.

It's a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

It's a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

The Itchen springs from a bedrock aquifer that overflows when saturation point is reached.

It is highly filtered and rich in minerals and supports the chalk stream salmon, a relative of the endangered Atlantic salmon. It is home to the southern damselfly and the bullhead, a freshwater fish known for its flattened head and love of fast-flowing, well-oxygenated water.

The river also supports the brook lamprey, white-clawed crayfish, water vole, otter and a range of other creatures.





From a human perspective...

The brain and heart are composed of 73% water

Lungs are 83% water

Muscles and kidneys are 79% water

If you live on the west side of Southampton

100% of your drinking water comes
from the River Itchen

If you live on the east side of Southampton

52% of your drinking water comes
from the River Itchen

Unless you drink bottled water or work elsewhere
the majority of your vital organs ARE
the River Itchen

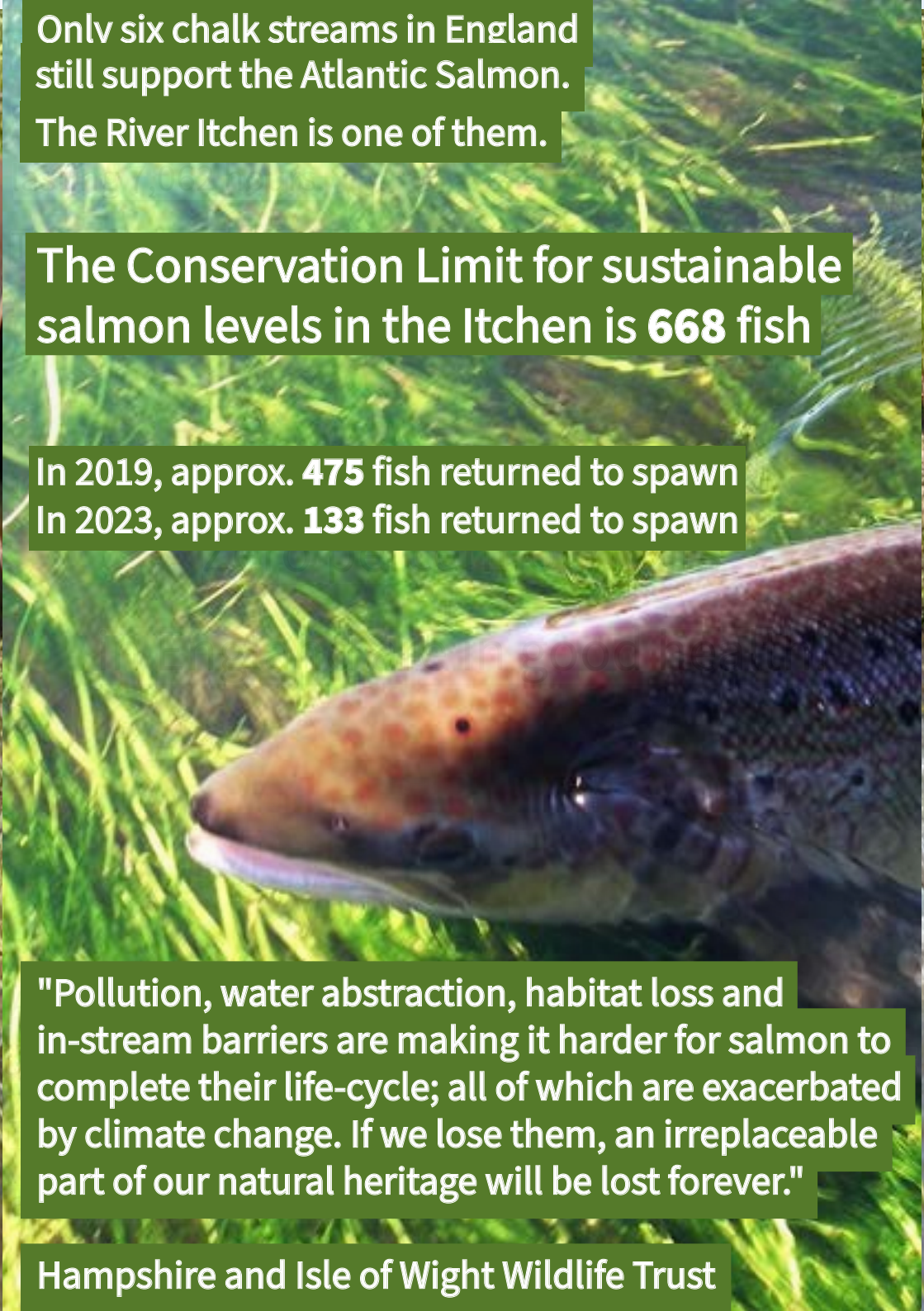


In 2024 the River Itchen
was polluted by sewage 439 times
lasting 7,062 hours.

There are 8760 hours in a year.

Zero percent of rivers
in England are in good health.

ALL water bodies fail due to
Ubiquitous Persistent Bio-accumulative Toxic Substances
These are also known as forever chemicals
and can take centuries or longer to clear



Only six chalk streams in England still support the Atlantic Salmon. The River Itchen is one of them.

The Conservation Limit for sustainable salmon levels in the Itchen is **668** fish

In 2019, approx. **475** fish returned to spawn
In 2023, approx. **133** fish returned to spawn

"Pollution, water abstraction, habitat loss and in-stream barriers are making it harder for salmon to complete their life-cycle; all of which are exacerbated by climate change. If we lose them, an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage will be lost forever."

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

A scenic view of a riverbank. In the foreground, there is a grassy area with some dry patches. The river flows in the middle ground, reflecting the sky and the buildings. On the right bank, there is a large, multi-story brick building with a dark roof. The sky is filled with white and grey clouds, with some blue visible. The overall atmosphere is calm and historical.

A Tale of two rivers: where natural history meets local history

From Roman settlements and historic shipyards to flying boats, spitfires and iconic aviators, the Itchen offers a rich bed of stories populated by people who've worked here, played here or called this stretch of water home.

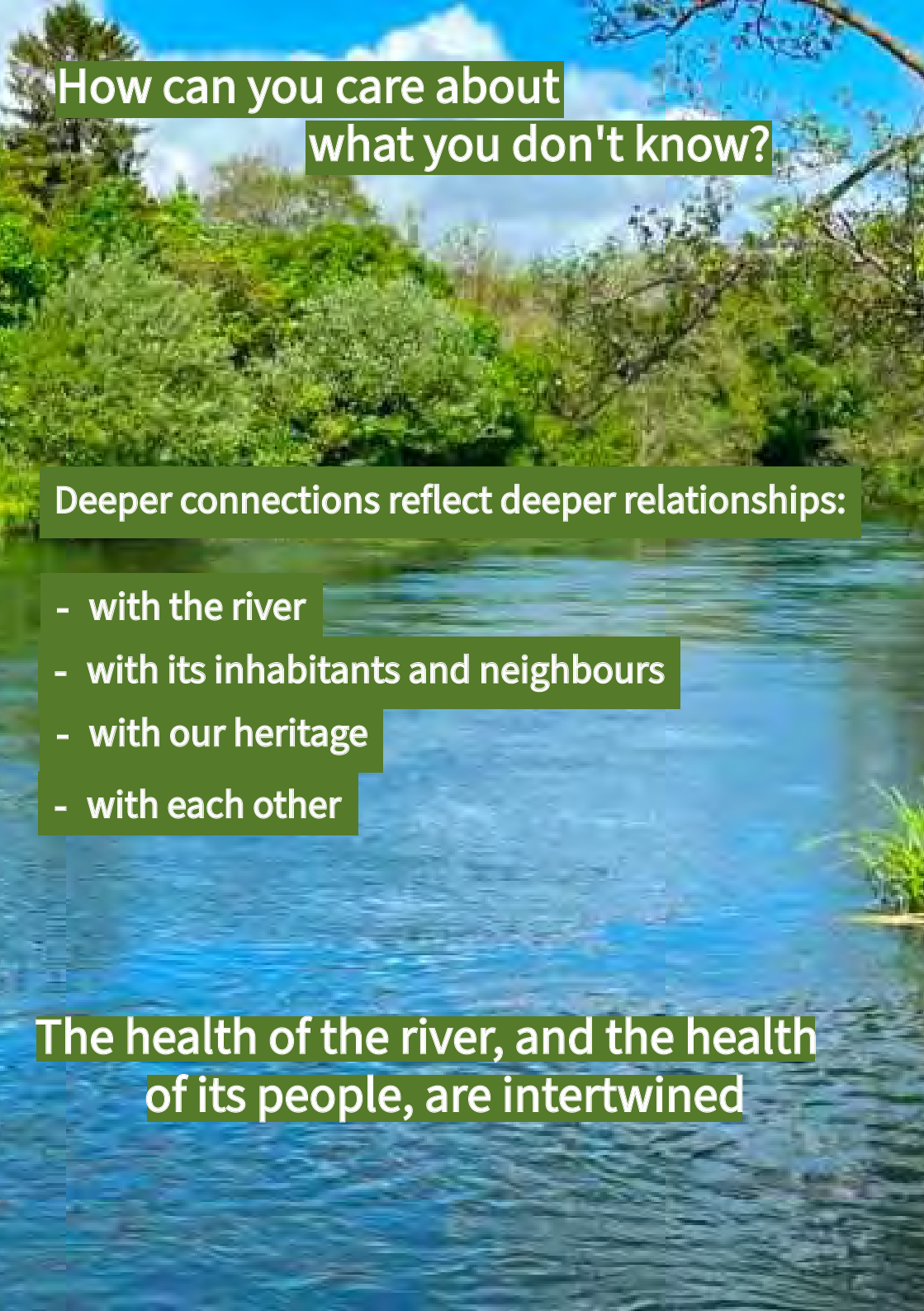


The inner environment is a microcosm
of the outer environment

"When rivers thrive, so does nature, so do we."
The Rivers Trust

"Communities that better understand the health
of their rivers are empowered to stand up for them
and be part of the action to restore them."

The State of Our Rivers (2024)



How can you care about
what you don't know?

Deeper connections reflect deeper relationships:

- with the river
- with its inhabitants and neighbours
- with our heritage
- with each other

The health of the river, and the health
of its people, are intertwined

The background of the slide is a vibrant, abstract painting. It depicts a landscape with a river or stream flowing through the center, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. The sky is filled with soft, blended colors of blue, purple, and pink, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is impressionistic and colorful.

10 ways Art can help address social and environmental challenges

1. Raising awareness
2. Promoting dialogue and critical thinking
3. Inspiring action
4. Amplifying existing and marginalised voices
5. Fostering environmental justice
6. Utilising eco-friendly art practices
7. Art-Science collaborations
8. Visualising solutions
9. Using social media for dissemination
10. Creating a legacy for future generations



10 ways Art can help support physical and mental wellbeing

1. Reduces isolation through social connection
2. Lowers stress hormones and raises endorphin and dopamine levels
3. Boosts self-esteem
4. Raises confidence
5. Enables self-expression
6. Fosters self-awareness and growth
7. Improves cognitive function through learning new skills
8. Broadens perspectives
9. Improves attention span and focus
10. Generates curiosity, awe and wonder



Envisioning a brighter future

Harnessing the energy of existing organisations and initiatives

Building upon a rich heritage of past and present projects

Working in partnership with Arts, Culture, Environmental and Community groups

Engaging the 45+ educational settings along the Itchen's length

Acting as witnesses for where we are now

Co-creating a new narrative reflective of these times, concerns, and priorities

Re-imagining the river as vibrant and sacred

Bringing into being a more beautiful world our hearts know is possible

Creative Outputs

Workshops (poetry, visual art, music, story-telling)

River visits for Children and Young People and Community groups

A touring show based on the resurrection of a river goddess

Procession of goddess and other revered symbols/puppets along the river's length

A walking assembly with wisdom talks from local enthusiasts and experts

Learning from a native American indigenous shaman from the Bruncjka people of Boruca in Costa Rica about rites and rituals for an Itchen-specific vision of the sacred



Project Legacy

Audio-trail along the river with QR codes

Visual exhibition for display in

Documentary film detailing the project's journey

Dedicated website drawing together new and existing material that tell the river's story

For Schools

Suitable: KS2, KS3, and KS4 - Years 6+

ENGLISH: purpose and audience; writing styles; listening and presentation skills

SCIENCE: observation, measuring; data gathering; communication; core concepts

GEOGRAPHY: processes; environmental understanding; fieldwork; interdependence; presentation; place knowledge; environmental issues

MUSIC: compose; listen; perform

ART: creative process; develop skills; visual literacy; technical proficiency

CITIZENSHIP: real world issues; active participation; taking informed action

HISTORY: understanding connections between local and international history

Further reading

<https://theriverstrust.org/key-issues/state-of-our-rivers>

<https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/news/urgent-action-launched-save-endangered-atlantic-salmon>

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/media/ke1fyg52/river-itchen-inquiry-final-report.pdf>

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB107042022580>

<https://wildfish.org/project/the-bakkavor-story/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jul/30/council-recognises-river-test-rights-chalk-stream-hampshire#:~:text=The%20right%20of%20a%20famous>

Further reading ctd

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/14/attempt-to-protect-englands-rare-chalk-streams-in-planning-bill-rejected-by-labour-mps>

<https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/spufnei1/ti.pdf>

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uW-Qch3x_QMp0evlGKzUXb4elbCHgRt1vTa-2KRz_FA/edit?tab=t.0

<https://wildfish.org/latest-news/southern-waters-plans-to-renege-over-abstraction-commitment/#:~:text=Salmon%20populations%20hit%20critical%20levels,relevance%20to%20Atlantic%20salmon%20conservation%29.>

<https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/watercress-and-winterbournes>

Further reading ctd

<https://www.solentforum.org/publications/Environment%20Agency%20SSD%20Fish%20Monitoring%20Report%202023.pdf>

<https://talesbytheriverbank.wordpress.com/tag/itchen/>

<https://www.southernwater.co.uk/latest-news/uncovering-the-worst-illegal-connection-ever/>

https://bitternepark.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12930:group-s-latest-river-testing-reveals-high-e-coli-again&catid=166&Itemid=92

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5cb16b6df96949fd943c299b3e171f53>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjd22ek0ynxo>

ArtfulScribe is a writer development agency and arts organisation based in Southampton with a wide range of experience in fundraising, producing and delivering multi-dimensional projects with multiple stakeholders.

From place-based identity projects like 'Stories from Our Streets' in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, through to environmentally-centered initiatives such as 'Creative Writers against Coastal Waste' with University of Southampton, 'Climate Sirens' with Cape Farewell, and Rivers of Hope with Activate in Hampshire and Dorset, ArtfulScribe's work is centered upon empowering voices from the margins and the under-represented, to speak out.