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# TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

## Teifi summer

Idyllic trout fishing in the  
Vale of Flowers

LOCH  
STYLE FOR  
BEGINNERS

## Lake District bolthole

A gorgeous stillwater  
hidden from the crowds

**“More than three  
colours in a salmon fly  
is a waste of time”**

The Ally Gowans interview



# THINK BIG

Fundamental change is needed to solve our rivers' ills, writes Simon Cooper



**R**ECENTLY, I CAME ACROSS AN abandoned copy of *Trout* magazine in, of all places, an airport lounge — clearly the demographic of air travellers is improving. *Trout*, published four times a year, is the house magazine of Trout Unlimited (TU) whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

What I've always liked about TU is they don't apologise for the fact they love fishing and rivers equally; what's good for one is good for the other, so goes their calculation that allows fishing and conservation to unite around common cause. Heavens, even the address for TU shouts fishing: PO Box 7400, Woolly Bugger, West Virginia. This holistic approach is something our conservation groups should heed. TU have a prodigious fund-raising operation (\$62 million in 2019/20) and powerful lobbying connections.

The leader in the Winter 2022 edition that I snaffled (yes, the date confuses me) offered editor Chris Wood's take on Joe Biden's \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure and Jobs Act, which prioritised projects that offer natural solutions, clean water and climate resiliency. TU lobbied hard for a share of US Federal government funds. Wood lists some of the funding secured. \$14 billion for mine clean-up via the Forestry Service. A billion for dam removal. \$600 million to alleviate the effects of abstraction. The list goes on — tens of billions of dollars in total.

Now, it is easy to dismiss these sums as being super-sized American, but the US only has a population five times bigger than the UK. Divide that abstraction number by five and convert it into pounds — that's £100 million. Imagine what we could do to restore depleted headwaters with that sort of money. Or for Forestry Service read Environment Agency. £2.5 billion would go a long way to solve our immediate sewage problems.

In the US, despite it being an avowedly capitalistic nation, it seems to be accepted that public funds are required to clean up private sector mess. The reasoning seems to be that, say, in the case of mines, the damage was done long ago by companies who no longer exist in any meaningful sense. You either throw up your hands in despair, play regulatory pass-the-parcel (a UK speciality) or, as with the Infrastructure Act, roll up your financial sleeves to solve a legacy issue.

In Britain, we don't seem to be there yet. The 2021 Environment Act and various other recent initiatives to resolve our dreadful sewage problems are long on plans but short on actions and hard cash. In many respects, you cannot argue with the fine principles of the Environment Act that sets out statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas, including water, to reverse the decline in species abundance by 2030. But we've been here before. The 1975 Water Act tried to do something similar.

It is easy to rail against the privatisation of the water and sewage industry of 1989 as the root of all our rivers' ills, but the privateers were sold a hospital pass. The 1975 Act failed to improve infrastructure and privatisation simply moved the cost from the public to the private sector. It didn't happen post-1975; it was not (and is not) going to happen post-1989.

We have to accept that for generations we've made an almighty mess of dealing with our waste. No amount of blame will change that. It is time to spend big, US style, before it is too late. ■

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