



# Save the Spring June 2025 Update



The River Dee



■ This month we take a deep-dive into native riverside woodland regeneration along the River Muick - a Save the Spring priority area.

Save the Spring is a partnership between the River Dee and Atlantic Salmon Trust, supported by the University of Stirling and UHI Inverness.

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[riverdee.org.uk](http://riverdee.org.uk)  
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# The Forest Returns

After a busy period during this year's smolt migration, the team has been finalising habitat restoration plans for this year which we look forward to sharing at a later date. In the meantime, this month's Save the Spring update gives us a chance to deep-dive into the native riverside woodland regeneration now happening along the River Muick - one of the project's key priority areas.

Back in spring 2022, the River Dee Trust and Dee District Salmon Fishery Board, with support from the Balmoral and Glenmuick estates, set to work laying the groundwork to enable the re-establishment of riverside woodland along a 1600 metre stretch of the River Muick comprising over 38 hectares across both banks of the river.

The aim was to establish tree cover to create shade over parts of the river and help mitigate rising water temperatures predicted by climate change modelling, stabilise banks and encourage input of leaf litter, invertebrates and woody debris to benefit aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity. Woodland expansion would also create enhanced connectivity of currently fragmented scattered pockets of woodland through the glen.

The site was sensitively planted with native broadleaved trees in spring 2022, with areas of deep peat and sensitive wetland habitat left unplanted. Trees were protected with over 2.5km of perimeter deer fencing, with added rabbit netting and wooden markers to mitigate bird strikes. Vole guards were also used with individual planted trees to protect young saplings from browsing.

Three years on from this work, a spectacular transformation is underway, not just in terms of the growth of planted trees, but also natural regeneration spreading from nearby Scots pine woodland in response to protection from herbivore grazing.

A mix of trees was planted, suited to the local ground conditions. This mix included:

- Downy birch - *Betula pubescens* 25%
- Grey willow - *Salix cinerea* 10%
- Alder - *Alnus glutinosa* 20%
- Rowan - *Sorbus aucuparia* 15%
- Sessile oak - *Quercus petraea* 10%
- Goat willow - *Salix caprea* 5%
- Eared willow - *Salix aurita* 5%
- Aspen - *Populus tremula* 5%
- Holly - *Ilex aquifolium* & Juniper - *Juniperus communis* 5%



**Natural Scots pine regeneration happening in tandem with the planting of native broadleaved trees, contributing to a diverse mix of species.**

The project was funded through the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme administered by Scottish Forestry. Additional support was provided by Cairngorms National Park Authority via the Woodland Challenge Fund which helped with the costs of financing peat depth and other biological surveys.



## Creating a Woodland Patchwork

This area of native woodland expansion is part of a wider programme of works through Glen Muick, aiming to restore a patchwork of diverse riverside woodland cover from above the headwaters at Loch Muick and along the River Muick itself, to its confluence with the mainstream of the River Dee. This will link with established mature mixed native woodland immediately downstream.

While a woodland habitat alongside the river is crucial, care has also been taken to ensure a mosaic of habitats can occupy this area in the future, including areas of open ground and wetland ponds to benefit ground nesting and wading birds.

This work is a great example of how collaborative working can enable a successful habitat restoration project designed to benefit a range of species and support biodiversity as a whole.



## Do you represent a business in Deeside or beyond?

### Here's how you can help Save the Spring

Save the Spring is a 20-year programme of work to restore and futureproof the upper River Dee catchment, heartland of its famous spring-run wild Atlantic salmon - a population of fish which has declined by 80% in recent decades and is now at risk of extinction.

Its goal is to rebuild and secure a long-term future for this iconic population of wild salmon, working across the landscape to boost biodiversity and build resilience to climate change by restoring native woodland, wetland, peatland and working in the river channel itself.

Not only will this help the Dee's precious wild salmon recover, but it will also bring far-reaching benefits for other at-risk native species, the wider environment and local communities.

Wild Atlantic salmon are essential for our ecosystems, for local communities and for Deeside's shared natural and cultural heritage. Save the Spring is taking action to restore their habitat and their numbers for the future. If you're aiming to enhance your sustainability and environmental strategy, Save the Spring is the ideal partner to help you meet your goals while engaging your employees in meaningful environmental stewardship.

Get in touch with us via the contact details below and join us on this journey.

## Want to help spread the word?

Contact us at [info@riverdee.org](mailto:info@riverdee.org) to arrange a delivery of our new Save the Spring information leaflets - perfect for fishing huts, hotels and businesses.



## SUPPORT US

### Individuals

To support Save the Spring as an individual, contact the River Dee team at [info@riverdee.org](mailto:info@riverdee.org)

### Corporate support

Find out how your business can play a positive role in shaping the future of the catchment, aligning with your own environmental and sustainability strategy.

Contact the Atlantic Salmon Trust's Corporate Ambassador, Mark Cockburn, at [mark.cockburn@atlanticsalmontrust.org](mailto:mark.cockburn@atlanticsalmontrust.org)

### Spread the word

Follow and share our [#SaveTheSpring](https://twitter.com/SaveTheSpring) social media posts to help us reach an even wider audience.