



Press Release

River revolution in Europe as France launches largest dam removal project on the continent

Paris, 21 November – With thousands of proposed dams threatening Europe’s few remaining free flowing rivers, France’s decision to remove two large dams could signal the start of a new era on the continent – with countries focussing on reviving their rivers and on large scale dam destruction rather than construction.

Eight years after the idea was initially discussed, the French government agreed last week to remove the 35 metre-high Vezins and 15 metre-high ‘La Roche qui boit’ dams from the Selune river in Normandy in 2018.

With France leading the way, countries from Spain to Finland have taken down many small and obsolete dams in recent years, but freeing up the Selune represents the largest dam removal project so far in Europe – and a major step towards bringing life back to the river, including wild salmon and eel whose migrations have been blocked by the dams for decades.

“The dismantling of these ancient dams after almost 100 years of hydropower generation is a landmark in Europe’s attitudes to its rivers and energy production,” said Roberto Epple, Founder President of the European Rivers Network (ERN). “Removing these obstacles will help rewild the entire 90 kms of the Sélune, allowing fish to migrate and sediment to flow and rapidly boosting the river’s biodiversity.”

Fragmenting rivers with dams, barrages and other infrastructure has played a major role in the catastrophic loss of fish and other freshwater species across the continent. Removing these concrete obstacles will help to reverse this trend and provide other benefits to communities along Europe’s riverbanks, including income from the anglers who will follow the fish back to the rivers.

Indeed, fishing associations have long worked with French environmentalists to bring down the two Selune dams as part of the ‘Friends of the Selune’ coalition (see the attachment for a list of members).

“Choosing to remove these dams will help to revolutionise Europe’s approach to rivers: instead of erecting new dams, it is time to start dismantling dams and bringing life back to our rivers,” said Bart Geenen, Head of Freshwater, WWF-Netherlands. “Studies clearly show that dam removal is by far the most cost-effective way to restore rivers. Living rivers will boost biodiversity and provide new and exciting opportunities for local people.”

The project is aligned with France’s commitment to the conservation of its remaining wild salmon and eel populations and with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive.

“Signalling the end of the road for these dams is cause for celebration, but we still need a clear and binding timetable from the government,” said Epple, who is also one of the driving forces behind Dam Removal Europe. “The authorities must also involve local communities in plans to develop sustainable tourism in the valley.”

Note to editors:

Photos of the Selune river and dams are available here, low resolution,

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/v150uyw4ykthmos/AABLuubf1uxkeoU8v_dmRpUsa?dl=0

Please ask us for high definition

For more information, please contact:

Roberto Epple, Founder President European Rivers Network: Tel +33 6 08 62 12 67 ; email

roberto.epple@ern.org

Bart Geenen, Head of Freshwater, WWF-Netherlands, Tel: +31 30 6937357; Email BGeenen@wwf.nl

Please visit

www.ern.org

www.ern.org/en/dam-watch/

The members of the coalition "Les amis de la Sélune"



ANPER TOS - Association Bretonne pour la Pêche à la Mouche - Association Internationale de Défense du Saumon Atlantique – Club des Saumoniers - Comité National de la Pêche Professionnelle en Eau Douce - Eau et Rivières de Bretagne - European Rivers Network - Fédération de la Manche pour la Pêche et 24 AAPPMA - Federation of Irish Salmon and Sea Trout Anglers - Fédération Française des Moniteurs Guides de Pêche - Fédération Nationale pour la Pêche en France - Fondation GoodPlanet - Fonds Humus pour la biodiversité - L'Hydroscope - Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux - Manche Nature - Mayenne Nature Environnement - North Atlantic Salmon Fund - SOS Loire Vivante - Sustainable Eel Group – AAPPMA de l'Elorn (Finistère) - AAPPMA de Pont-Croix (Finistère) - AAPPMA de Pontrieux - la Roche Derrien (Côtes-d'Armor) - Association Régionale des Fédérations de Normandie pour la Pêche et la Protection du milieu aquatique – Association Régionale des Fédérations de Bretagne pour la Pêche et la Protection du milieu aquatique - Vét'Eau Pêche...