

16/09/2009

Dear Mrs Hawkins,

I am writing to you with regard to the proposed free access that canoes and other watercraft are hoping to obtain on our Welsh rivers. I am a game angler who has fished the South Wales rivers for 30 years. I am also a mountain bike guide and at 36 years old I appreciate the full spectrum of outdoor pursuits whatever the activity (I am not the stereotypical tweed wearing landed gentry).

I would like to draw your attention to the following facts:

As a game angler I MUST pay an annual license fee of £75 to the environment agency along with club and syndicate fees for sections of water which amount to over £500 per season.

The rod licence and annual fees impose restrictions on when, where and how I may fish.

As a club member and game angling casting instructor/guide I make substantial voluntary contributions (in kind and cash) to maintain our precious lakes, rivers and waterways both in and out of season. In doing so I improve the habitat for fish and wildlife and pay towards hatcheries to support fish stocks.

If I continue to carry out the above, it gives me permission from the EA, clubs and riparian owners to cross land, use the banks and fish the waters.

Whilst Scottish rivers are large enough with enough flow to accommodate canoes (just like the lower Wye), Welsh rivers are spate rivers which increase and decrease in flow and water volume rapidly with rainfall. Flotillas of canoes grinding across gravel beds and riffles in the typical summer low water levels do irreparable harm to the underwater eco system.

It would seem that the canoeists and others who want to have completely FREE access to our waterways (which we as game anglers have cared for for centuries) would like us to continue to keep the waters of Wales clean, tidy and in good order for them to do as they like 24/7, 365 days of the year. We have fishing seasons for a reason! Canoeists don't pose disruption to our waters in the off season, when the rivers are also more suited to their activity which is why they are allowed to use specific waters outside of the game fishing season. Having said this, how a canoe performing rolls and grinding its hull over salmon redds isn't at best interfering with salmon (illegal) and at worst destroying fertilized eggs in the winter months is beyond me.

I compare the canoeists demands as like somebody turning up in your garden, altering your plants, letting their dog chase your cat and ruining you day whilst also expecting you to pay for the privilege! It has to be bared in mind that this scenario would be repeated through the day as each group (flotilla) enters and leaves your garden.

Game anglers are law abiding folk who are regulated and licensed up to the hilt. If canoes are to be given free unfettered access to the land and water of Wales, I for one will not be buying EA rod licences and large riparian owners fees to enjoy my hobby. Why should I when canoeists don't?

Yours faithfully



Lee Watts

AAPGAI casting instructor