

Northumberland

Crayfish Conservation Strategy

2019-2023

**DRAFT**

Version 8  **:** OCT. 2018

**Rationale**

Northumberland is one of the most significant remaining UK locations for native freshwater crayfish (*A. pallipes*) but populations face threats from disease, competition and habitat changes.

Despite statutory protection and recent conservation initiatives, unless positive actions are taken these populations will suffer further decline and/or be eradicated within the next decade.

This Strategy and associated Delivery Plan seeks to provide a basis for positive action to reduce this risk.

Note.

*WCC* = “White-clawed Crayfish” *Austropotamobius pallipes.*

*SC* = “Signal Crayfish” *Pacifastacus leniusculus*

**Strategic Aims**

**Strategic Aim 1**

**Improve our knowledge and better understand the current distribution and status of freshwater crayfish in Northumberland**

**We will:** Collate existing data and commission surveys to fill gaps in current knowledge and to monitor changes in distribution/ status of native and alien species.

This will include:

* Resolving issues with data collection, accuracy, storage & sharing.
* Supporting a single database of records, which is regularly updated,

*Why? If we can better understand the distribution and viability / ‘strength’ of crayfish populations this will help us to focus our efforts on the most effective actions.*

**Strategic Aim 2**

**Identify and encourage actions to protect and enhance populations of *WCC***

**We will:** Improve our understanding of threats to remaining populations of WCC, agree priorities and take appropriate actions.

This will include:

* Investigating and implementing actions to reduce risks from alien species
* Establishing and monitoring Ark sites for WCC as ‘reserve’ populations of *WCC*.
* Seeking to ensure relevant development proposals give positive consideration to WCC
* Consolidating, enhancing & increasing existing WCC populations through habitat and land management improvements.
* Investigating the feasibility/setting up a captive breeding programme for WCC

*Why? Being well informed about the threats to populations of WCC means we can target our conservation efforts to best effect. At the same time establishing ‘reserve’ populations of WCC will enable the re-stocking of waters following removal of risks.*

**Strategic Aim 3**

**Identify and implement actions to reduce the impact of existing *SC* populations in Northumberland.**

**We will**: Identify and confirm locations where *SC* populations may be significantly impacting on habitat, biodiversity and/or water quality. Based on evidence, we will implement measures to restrict, reduce or remove *SC* from relevant locations.

This will include:

* Investigating the wider environmental impact of SC.
* Trialling the removal and restriction of SC - using trapping, physical barriers, predators or other relevant techniques.

*Why? Where there are currently strong SC populations they are perceived to cause risks to populations of WCC and also significant changes to river habitat through burrowing, feeding and potential predation on fish (eggs) and invertebrates.*

**Strategic Aim 4**

**Inform and engage the public, stakeholders on crayfish conservation issues.**

**We will**: Proactively highlight the threats to *WCC* populations and promote key conservation measures such as biosecurity and habitat protection.

This will include:

* Informing & engaging others.
* Promoting biosecurity on all waters.
* Working with riparian landowners to implement practical actions to improve habitat for WCC
* Promoting the national importance of WCC

*Why? Involving river users, river managers and the wider public will be essential if we are to reduce risks to WCC populations and will encourage support for positive crayfish conservation actions.*