

WILD Project Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2015

What's in this newsletter?

- WILD Conference September 2015
- Funding for works at North Meadow, Cricklade
- Progress report for Neigh Bridge works
- Farmer Guardians update
- WILD Photographic competition
- Legacy materials for communities
- Year 3 evaluation

WILD Conference a Success!

In September we held a national conference at the Royal Agricultural University to share the WILD approach with professionals from across the country. On the day over 80 attendees came from across the country representing Environment Agency departments, water companies, local non-profit organisations and local authorities. We were welcomed by The Earl Bathurst and the conference was chaired by Professor Janet Dwyer of the CCRI. The morning was spent with speakers from FWAG, GRCC and CCRI WILD Project Officers, the Environment Agency, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, the President of the CLA and the Former Head of Water and Environmental Policy from DCLG.

The afternoon was spent on site visits across the south of the Cotswolds to see examples of good practice by landowners and enhancement works carried out through the WILD project to help to improve water quality.



*Upper Up, South Cerney.
Before works – damage
to river bank by cattle*



*After works, cattle
drink installed and
bank works*

Some of the volunteers at Upper Up, South Cerney



**Petrina Brown - WILD Biodiversity Officer, CWPT
North Meadow Rivers Enhancement Project**

The Cotswold Water Park Trust is delighted to receive a Biffa Award grant of £38,476, as part of the Landfill Communities Fund. This funding will be used to conduct works on the Rivers Churn and Thames on and around North Meadow National Nature Reserve. The aim of the project is to enhance the ecology of the rivers on and around the North Meadow by reducing sediment loading, diversifying the channel and reducing excessive shading.



The Thames and Churn are subjected to significant damage to their banks and bed from livestock and dogs. These areas of mud are exposed all winter so flood water and rain wash this sediment into the rivers which then pollutes the water, smothers aquatic vegetation and gravels that fish need for spawning.



This damage on the river bank will be reduced by repairing the bank, installing temporary electric fencing during grazing periods and pasture pumps to provide fresh water for the cattle.

Dense shade inhibits sunlight reaching the river and therefore inhibits the growth of aquatic and marginal vegetation. In the densely shaded areas scrub will be cut back and/or small sections removed and/or large willow trees will be pollarded or crown raised. This will allow some sunlight to reach the river and we will aim to create around 60-



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70% dappled shade on the river.

In places the rivers have been straightened and have a very straight uniform channel. This reduces the habitat complexity needed in order to support flora and fauna at various stages of their lifecycles. Installing Large Woody Debris deflectors every 50 metres will encourage diversification of river form and flow to enhance micro habitat variation, which in turn should help increase biodiversity.

By reducing the sediment loading and allowing more light to reach the watercourse water quality should be improved along with the ecological value as aquatic and marginal vegetation will be able to grow and exposed gravels will be kept cleaner. In time the channel may also



start to self-narrow as new marginal vegetation stabilizes sediment allowing the river to form a more natural morphology and consequently improve its ecology.

Water Voles present in the area as photographed above by Huw Jones, CWPT WILD Volunteer

River Thames has WILD improvements thanks to GETCo Funding



The River Thames has received a welcome boost to its ecology thanks to a £18,690 grant from Gloucestershire Environmental Trust Company.



The River Thames at Neigh Bridge Country Park was very over-shaded and sections of the bank had been severely damaged by people and dogs. Works conducted this year have repaired the bank damage,

installed deflectors and reduced the shading. This will improve the ecology of the river by reducing sediment loading and allow more light onto the river to encourage marginal and aquatic vegetation to grow. It is hoped that eventually water vole may move into this



section of the Thames if the marginal vegetation establishes well and the deflectors will create more pools for fish and aquatic invertebrates to survive in when the river dries up each summer.

Further works to improve the Country Park for its human visitors include the installation of a viewing platform next to one of the rivers meanders and the installation of boardwalk across low lying ground the often becomes waterlogged to improve ease of access along the Thames Path all year round.

Further works to install a play trail and fencing to protect Kingfisher breeding habitat and the repaired banks are still to come.



Jenny Phelps - FIELD Advisor, FWAG South West
Supporting the Farming Community

Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames

The first quarter of the Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames Facilitation Fund has seen three 'one-to-many' events; the application of 6 Mid-Tier agreements for 2015 and a Higher Tier and Mid-Tier agreement for 2016 and 5 new members signed up to make a total of 14 Farmer Guardians. The Farmer Guardians felt that it was important that their agents were informed of the objectives of the Facilitation Fund and therefore the first event held addressed this. The event was attended by 22 agents and potential sub-contractors, such as RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and local Ecologists.

The second event was a demonstration event to help farmers understand the detail of new Cross Compliance. Farmers attended a practical



session to show them how to manage ditches, reduce bankside erosion by cattle by the installation of cattle drinking areas and how to repair the river bank from cattle damage with the construction of woody berms. They looked at how meadows and ditch management could help reduce water logging of fields, improve soil ecology, reduce flood risk to communities and attenuate water while keeping land healthy and oxygenated by restoring the movement across the flood plain.



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The third event was held to discuss 'next steps' in learning wanted by the group and it was agreed that a full foundation in Cross Compliance was needed to underpin future learning. The event highlighted farmers' requests for agents and agronomists to follow the learning and to keep offering events out to the wider group. The output of this event, which was followed by a local produce supper, was the agreement to tackle NVZs at the next event.

Farmcare Ltd was one of the farms supported by the WILD Project to apply for over 900Ha of Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship which included the full Farm Wildlife and Wild Pollinator Package; covering off all the priorities for species, historic environment and applying for 12 metre buffers against all main rivers and 4 metres against all ditches for water quality. In field options were also chosen that would help build organic matter to help percolation; water quality and integrated pest management.

If you would like to become a Farmer Guardian of the Upper Thames please contact Jenny Phelps:

07876 687272 jenny.phelps@fwagsw.org.uk

WILD Young People Photographic Competition



By Ethan Bucher – winner of 12-15 age group & overall winner

The WILD Photographic Competition saw entries from all age groups around Gloucestershire, the theme for the competition was 'How Water Affects the Landscape' and there were some fantastic photographs received. Gloucestershire FWAG would like to say a huge thank you to everyone that entered. The winning entries will be put in our 2016 Calendar.

The photographs will be displayed in an exhibition at the Corinium Museum from January 8th to February 8th 2016 please go and have a look and support this important work with our youth.



By Tara Andrews - winner of 9 – 11 age group

This has been an exciting start to what is hoped will be a long relationship with the local schools and colleges in and the county. Gloucestershire FWAG hope that it is a starting point from which schools can gain greater access to the countryside, learning the importance of farming as well as the important work farmers do as stewards of the land.



By Ellesha Stafford – winner of 16-18 age group

The photographs will be displayed in our 2016 calendar which can be purchased through the website FWAGSW.org.uk for £6.99 or by calling the office on 01285 700830, all proceeds will go into future funding of educational projects with schools in the county.

The competition was run working with partners from the Water with Integrated Local Delivery, WILD, project and supported by the Ernest Cook Trust, Summerfield Trust and Environment Agency



Helen Richards - WILD Officer, GRCC
Working with communities

Out of the 19 parishes and towns within the WILD Project area, 18 have now actively engaged through parish/town councils or community members to discuss the issues facing their community with regards to the water environment. Giving their time to provide an insight into water-related issues in their community.



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The WILD Project can enable communities to;

- further develop relationships with their riparian landowners and relevant statutory and non-statutory partners
- be empowered to continue to care for their local water environment by providing skills and knowledge

A big 'Thank You' to all that have engaged with the project so far and we continue to look forward to working with even more communities in the future.

Legacy materials for communities

We are continuing to develop our package of resources for communities once the WILD Project finishes. As stated in the last newsletter this will include;

- a **Map** of points of interest/issues identified during mapping with landowners and communities
- a **Status table** of each point on the map
- a **River Management Guide** outlining the key features of rivers in your parish/town
- a **Ditch management guide** outlining best practice and
- The **Community Water Guide** produced by FWAG and ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England – the umbrella body of GRCC).

We will be sending out maps and status tables to parish and town councils throughout the winter so please keep an eye out in your inboxes!



Project Evaluators, CCRI Year 3 Evaluation Next steps

During December and early 2016 the final phase of evaluation will take place, with input requested from farmers and land owners, community groups, parishes/town councils and local authorities (in addition to project partners). The questionnaires will be sent out by email, as previously but some will be carried out by telephone or face-to-face. The surveys aim to understand how each group has been involved with the project along with capturing their perspectives on the impact of the project. This is really important so that the lessons can be learnt and taken forward more widely. Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

What is the WILD Project?

The WILD project (Water with Integrated Local Delivery) is a partnership of primarily four organisations working together to bring about environmental improvements to the rivers and other watercourses of the Cotswold Water Park. The partnership is led by Gloucestershire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and includes Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC), Cotswold Water Park Trust (CWPT) and the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire. The project is mainly funded by the Environment Agency with additional top-up funding sourced through in-kind contributions and grant funders. Project Officers are engaging with local communities and landowners to encourage them to get directly involved in understanding local water courses and their management. With local community input we are also devising and beginning to deliver plans of enhancements over the three year period of the project.

Our aim continues to be to extend this approach, working with farmers and communities across the catchment, through work with the Upper Thames Catchment Steering Group.

Why get involved?

Between parishes, wildlife populations can vary hugely. The WILD project aims to give you an insight of what you have on your doorstep and how you can be involved in managing and enhancing the wildlife that inhabits nearby water courses.

For more information and to get involved contact:

Jenny Phelps (FWAG) – working with landowners/farmers 01285 700832 or 07876 687272
jenny.phelps@fwagsw.org.uk

Helen Richards (GRCC) – working with communities
01452 528491 helenr@grcc.org.uk

Petrina Brown (CWPT) – Biodiversity Officer
01793 752730 petrina.brown@waterpark.org

