

Case Study

Keeping their cool

May 2015



WOODLAND
TRUST

Keeping their cool

Wessex rivers improved by planting trees

Thanks to a partnership project with the Woodland Trust, the Environment Agency is helping to improve water quality in rivers and streams in the Wessex area by planting trees.

The partnership

The Trust first began working with the Environment Agency in Wessex while supporting the delivery of the Keeping Rivers Cool project in the Hampshire Avon catchment. Keeping Rivers Cool seeks to reduce the impact of climate change on fish by planting trees on banks in order to provide shade, and thereby cool rivers and streams.

Since this initial activity, the partnership has continued to develop and is now supporting landowners with tree planting in several catchments, including the Hampshire Avon, the Frome and the Piddle (now known collectively as the Poole Harbour catchment). The aim is for these catchments to see benefits, including improved water quality, through reduced agricultural diffuse pollution and reduced surface water run-off from agricultural land.



“Trees help our natural landscape in so many ways. The trees planted in partnership with the Environment Agency will demonstrate how, in the long-term, trees can help to reduce flood risk and improve water quality.”

Hamish Thomson, Woodland Creation Adviser

The secrets of our success

The schemes that this partnership has so far delivered are mostly small-scale plantings alongside rivers, with fencing provided where necessary to keep livestock at bay and provide additional benefits in terms of water quality. For example, two woods, each covering approximately one hectare, have been planted at The Came Estate and Lower Burton Mill. Both sites lie within the Poole Harbour catchment and are considered priority locations by the Environment Agency.

However, a larger scheme - The Lower Woodsford Project - has been delivered within the Woodsford Farm Estate beside the River Frome. Here, more than 11 hectares of wet woodland was created as part of a river restoration project which involved reconnecting the river with the floodplain. Combined funding from the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and the



The Cheselbourne scheme

Trees can provide tangible benefits to communities as shown by a Wessex Tree Planting Project scheme in Dorset. The site in Cheselbourne is adjacent to a small stream in a shallow valley, which feeds into the River Piddle. Historically, the stream was straightened and deepened, and sheep were able to graze close by, causing bank erosion. In addition, the landowners had to regularly remove watercress that would grow in the stream during the summer, since heavy rainfall would wash it downstream, blocking culverts and increasing flood risk.

Dorset Wildlife Trust recently completed a miniature river restoration project on the site with help from Dorset AONB. Work included lowering the banks, creating constrictions and introducing woody debris into the stream to slow the flow of water. As part of this work, the Wessex Tree Planting Project provided fencing and trees which, by excluding the sheep, will allow natural bankside vegetation to establish, reducing the potential for cress to dominate. The trees will also cool the water temperature, reduce run-off and agricultural diffuse pollution and provide natural woody debris in the future.

Dorset Wildlife Trust volunteers, including local schools, have planted around 2,000 trees on the site. “This is a great example of partnership working and it demonstrates that small planting projects can be beautiful and highly effective when it comes to river restoration and natural flood management,” says Hamish Thomson.

Environment Agency ensured that opportunities for woodland creation were maximised on the site, which comprised mainly arable land that was prone to flooding.

Working with other partners, such as the Wild Trout Trust and the Wildlife Trusts of Wiltshire and Dorset, has also been invaluable to the project's success, since these organisations

often undertake wider river restoration work in which trees can play a part. Support from the Woodland Trust and Environment Agency has meant these projects have gained the additional benefits that trees can provide, such as bank stabilisation, shade, woody debris and reduced pollution and surface water run-off.



(L-R) Hamish Thomson (Woodland Trust), Kim Goonesekera (Environment Agency), Rags MacGregor (Came Estate) and Mike Millington-Stephenson (Came Estate)

Getting the word out

Landowners and partners have been made aware of the benefits trees can provide, as well as the support available from the Woodland Trust and the Environment Agency, in a variety of ways. A targeted MOREwoods for Water leaflet was produced and distributed in the Avon, Frome and Piddle areas of Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire, while farm walks and an advisor event have also helped directly engage those interested.

Support for landowners in the form of trees and guards has been paid for by the Trust's MOREwoods scheme, which covers up to 60 per cent of a landowner's costs if planting more than half a hectare. Given the project's role in helping to deliver the Water Framework Directive in these catchments, further funding was also made available from the Environment Agency to 'top-up' support for landowners. "It has been a really successful partnership that is delivering real improvements on the ground and gaining momentum," says Hamish Thomson.

The Environment Agency agrees that the project is having a positive impact. "We are very pleased to have worked with the Woodland Trust and local landowners on this exciting project, and look forward to seeing these areas of woodland grow and play a vital role in improving and supporting the surrounding river system and countryside," says Kim Goonesekera, Project Manager at the Environment Agency.

The Wessex Tree Planting Project has shown how trees can help partners achieve their water objectives and, in particular, how they can help the Environment Agency meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.



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How the Trust can help

The Woodland Trust is working with partners across the UK on projects that will benefit water quality, reduce flood risk and improve the ecology of the water environment. Our projects are cooling rivers, slowing surface water run-off, stabilising banks and preventing pollution while also delivering numerous other benefits to farmers, landowners and communities.

We would be happy to hear from organisations and individuals who are looking to achieve these water management objectives in order to explain further how trees might help. We can point you in the right direction for evidence and tools to help you develop a project, as well as put you in touch with others who have taken a similar approach.

In some circumstances the Trust may be able to help fund the delivery of tree planting for water projects. In addition, we can provide advice and support to enable you to identify other funding sources.

We have a range of materials available that can be used to engage with landowners and encourage them to integrate trees into their farms. We also have a team of advisors who can speak directly with interested landowners, visiting sites and drawing up planting schemes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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