

WILD Project Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2017-18



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. **For more information see page 4.**



Community Mapping in Cirencester Helen Richards, GRCC.

Funded by Thames Water's Community Investment Scheme the WILD Churn, Cirencester Project extends the WILD approach to not only improve water quality but to identify and install measures to help to control flow and increase water storage capacity along the River Churn through Cirencester. All partners have been busy working with communities and landowners in Cirencester to identify water related issues, carry out habitat restoration and promote volunteering opportunities. We are working with wider partners throughout the project who are all working to improve their local watercourses. Watermoor, Park and Beeches Community Groups have been working with GRCC's WILD Officer to map and walk their water-related issues and with Jo from FWAG to prioritise and organise volunteer work party sessions.



In November 2017 GRCC hosted a visit from colleagues in DEFRA who provide funding to the ACRE network to support work in rural areas. They were taken to view recent work carried out by volunteers at Gloucester Street Sluices and met members of Park and Watermoor

Community Groups to learn more about the project and how community buy in and volunteering, in many forms, are essential to the project's success (*photo, below*).



**For more information contact Helen Richards (GRCC)
T: 01452 528491 or helenr@grcc.org.uk**



Upper Coln Natural Flood Management Isobel Whitwam, FWAG.

The rural hamlet of Andoversford lies near the source of the River Coln on the Cotswold plateau. In periods of heavy rain the water pours off the watershed and can cause flooding to businesses and homes in the village. The Upper Thames Catchment Partnership (hosted by FWAGSW and the Countryside and Community Research Institute) have now been awarded £50,000 (over four years) to look at how natural flood management might help reduce the flooding risk and provide evidence on how successful these interventions are.



We will be working with the local community to put in place physical structures; such as woody debris dams and hedges. This will assess whether we can improve the water holding capacity of the soil by increasing infiltration rates and tackling compaction issues, using deep rooted legume and herb rich swards or by creating wetland areas. Reading University will support the work with computer modelling, monitoring and analysis through the LANDWISE project (<https://www.reading.ac.uk/news-and-events/releases/PR746954.aspx>).

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Support for designation of the first Local Nature Reserve in Cirencester

Richard Mundy, CWPT.

An ecologically important stretch of watercourse within Cirencester, the western channel of the River Churn / Daglingworth Stream where it passes through City Bank, is to be included within a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designation by Cirencester Town Council. This will be the first Local Nature Reserve in the town and only the second in the Cotswold Water Park area (the first being Coke's Pit LNR at Somerford Keynes).

The WILD Project team along with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Friends of City Bank and others, have been working closely with the town council over a number of years to enhance and improve the ecology of the area and to develop it as a key site in the town for environmental education and for the enjoyment of nature for the people of Cirencester. Over the next few months the WILD Biodiversity Officer will be preparing a full Management Plan for the site ahead of the registration of the LNR designation with Natural England. This stretch of the Churn is of considerable ecological importance supporting, amongst other wildlife, otters, bats, Dipper and a strong resident population of water vole. The Management Plan will put in place long term management strategies to ensure that the habitats that are essential to this wildlife are maintained and enhanced.

City Bank is very popular as a recreation area for local people and also with dog walkers and as such a key element in the plan will be the careful management of the area to ensure that the needs of people are balanced with the needs of wildlife. The Management Plan will include, for example, provision for a purpose-built ramp to facilitate dog bathing along with signage asking dog owners to desist from allowing their animals to access the water elsewhere; this will minimise damage to the banks and disturbance to water voles, nesting birds and other wildlife by



dogs. It is also hoped that the plan will include a design for a safe and ecologically appropriate access point for people to get down to the water which will facilitate educational work and field study at the site.

For more information contact Richard Mundy (CWPT)
T: 01793 752413 or Richard.Mundy@waterpark.org



Works on the Ground

Jo Leigh, FWAG.

The focus over the winter has been to visit farms to secure seasonal work for river and water flow management; such as pollarding, hedge laying, coppicing, scrub clearance and collecting NFM material for works that will follow in the spring and summer. Three new farmers have signed up to the Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames bringing the total membership to 47. Other works have included reducing pollution to rivers, bank re-establishment and public engagement for the Thames at Cerney Wick. In Cirencester, reconnecting historic ditches on the Churn has taken place to help with seasonal flooding at the Spitalgate junction. This work has been part funded and led by the Lead Local Flood Authority, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC). Works appear to have had a positive impact with no winter flooding, as of January 2018, for the first time in many years. Flow controls need to be implemented with work due to be completed by spring 2018.



Site visit in Cirencester with EA and Thames Water, Jan 2018

Our fantastic WILD volunteers have been busy in the three months leading up to Christmas with 10 sites visited carrying out multiple tasks such as; hedge laying, ditch management, coppicing, pond restoration and bridge work. Cirencester college students on level 2 and 3 Land Management courses have been given 3 guidance sessions with more planned for the New Year.

Fresh Water Watch monitoring has been taking place this winter with recordings being made on the Coln, Chelt and Churn rivers. The group has 13 members, so far, covering locations throughout the Upper Thames. This work is funded by Earthwatch and has another year of funding with 25 kits available to pass on to willing volunteers from



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farms, parishes, schools and colleges. Look out for events through the year to support maintaining river banks, shade reduction and natural pest management.

<https://www.facebook.com/gloucestershirefwag/>

For more information contact Jo-anne Leigh (FWAG)

T: 01666 503668 or joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk



PEGASUS Project Update

Chris Short, CCRI.

WILD has been part of a European project called PEGASUS for the past 3 years. The project is designed to explore key questions about how best to improve the social and ecological resilience of farming and forestry systems in the EU through enhancing the sustained provision of environmental and social benefits. Examples include water quality and supply, vibrant rural communities, healthy soils and landscape character. Crucially, it has involved 34 case studies across ten European countries and WILD has been a very prominent one.

The outcomes from WILD have been reported in a policy meeting in The Hague with the Dutch Minister in attendance and Jenny Phelps taking part in a panel discussion. The project has developed a toolkit to help local initiatives build stronger relationships and will inform UK and European policy through a series of meetings in February. Thank you for your help in contributing to the project. You can follow the project on

Twitter:

@PEGASUS_eu or via the website: <http://pegasus.ieep.eu>



Positive Results from trials to improve water quality in the Upper Thames

Sarah Wells, FWAG.

The Thames Water Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) trials in the Upper Thames Catchment are now complete for the 2017/2018 winter season with positive results across the four waterbodies.

The trials are based on the concept of Payments for Ecosystem Services where the ecosystem service is the provision of 'clean' water and the payments are for the farmers that influence the provision of this service. The project enables us to help farmers reduce the loss of inputs

from the farm and aims to reduce the level of the pesticide Metaldehyde, a commonly used ingredient in slug pellets, found in our rivers and extracted drinking water. The drinking water standard for metaldehyde is extremely low – only 0.1µg/l, equivalent to 1 grain of wheat in 390 tonnes! This is not a health based standard but is legally binding. Unfortunately, the chemical is near impossible to remove from drinking water and consequently there is increasing pressure on the agricultural industry to ensure responsible use whilst moving to a reduction in its usage. The project provides advice for each farm on reducing the risk of diffuse water pollution and offers farmers a payment for reducing metaldehyde use in the catchment during the October-December period. One of the options available within the project is to switch from using metaldehyde based slug pellets to ferric phosphate based pellets.



Ferric phosphate is non-soluble in water, meaning less applications are needed should it rain, and it is a naturally occurring compound which causes no issues in rivers or drinking waters. Farmers in the catchments of the River Cole, River Ray and Marston Meysey Brook have been involved in PES trials this year. Water samples are tested for metaldehyde weekly between October and December with payments to farmers based on the results. FWAG has been focusing on increasing participation this year and have had some positive results. Both the Wiltshire Ray (including the Lydiard Brook) and the Marston Meysey Brook have remained within the drinking water standard throughout the high risk season, despite some very heavy rainfall. In the larger catchment of the River Cole levels remained within the drinking water standard for all but one week, which coincided with some very wet weather at the end of October. This year's River Cole results were an improvement on the previous year.

We are keen to demonstrate that by working constructively with farmers, environmental issues can be solved and explore whether the model of Payment for Ecosystem Services can be used to work towards solutions for a range of environmental objectives.



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Left: Farm machinery and equipment discussions with local farmers

What is the WILD Project?

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In addition to the schemes that FWAG are facilitating Thames Water are continuing to conduct their research on the efficacy of grassed swales to reduce metaldehyde concentrations in water flow. A three year study is being carried out in conjunction with the Royal Agricultural University at Harnhill which sits within the Ampney Brook catchment. This winter is the third year of results, and the findings of the trial will be made available in the near future. Due to the trial requiring the use of metaldehyde on certain fields within the catchment, the payment on offer to farmers in the Ampney Brook is not based on the results of water testing but on the use of Ferric phosphate, applied as an alternative to metaldehyde. FWAG will continue to facilitate metaldehyde reduction schemes on behalf of Thames Water within the Upper Thames catchment so please encourage your farming neighbours to take part!

For more information & to get involved:

Jenny Phelps (FWAG): supporting landowners/farmers. 01666 503668 or 07876 687272
jenny.phelps@fwagsw.org.uk

Helen Richards (GRCC): supporting communities. 01452 528491 helenr@grcc.org.uk

Richard Mundy (CWPT): Biodiversity Officer 01793 752730 richard.mundy@waterpark.org

To join our WILD volunteers, contact; Jo Leigh,
joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk or 01666 503668



Above: Kingfisher spotted along the Barton Mill stretch of the Churn in Cirencester, Jan '18.

