

The Stream

Somerset
Rivers Authority

Progress Update - Easter 2016

A 'Slow the Flow' special edition: Somerset Rivers Authority pledges £550,000 for natural flood management projects

Grants are being offered to farmers and landowners for projects that will slow the flow of water and reduce the risks of flooding across Somerset. Somerset Rivers Authority has earmarked £550,000 for natural flood management activities that will benefit roads, villages and towns - and improve the environment for people and wildlife. It's part of an approach that looks at whole catchments.

"There isn't one solution to flooding. We need a range of solutions," says Cllr John Osman, chair of the SRA. This issue of *The Stream* includes two case studies, plus a round-up of news on p.4.



John Osman and Lord Cameron plant trees at Dillington



A pond being restored above Montacute, near Yeovil

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) exists to provide higher standards of flood protection than ordinary national funding allows for. This edition of The Stream details some of the work the SRA has recently been involved with at sites across the county.

For more information about the SRA - or if you'd like to receive future copies of The Stream - call 01823 357824, email sra@somerset.gov.uk or visit www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk The next issue will focus on how the SRA plans to spend its budget from council tax in 2016/17.

6,000 trees planted to slow the flow



Case Study 1: Somerset Rivers Authority is part-funding the creation of 10 acres of new woodland in the catchment of the River Isle, which feeds into the Parrett.

A fairly steep section of land on Ewen Cameron's estate at Dillington near Ilminster will no longer be used for grazing. Instead, it's been planted with a mix of 6,000 native broadleaf trees, set about 6ft apart, so as to provide denser cover than usual and slow the flow of water from slope to valley stream.

The land features on a map of 'flow pathways': that is, places where water is known to run during times of heavy rainfall. Trees can intercept or interrupt flow pathways.

Lord Cameron said: "This is part of the catchment of the River Isle, it's a small little bowl that runs into the River Isle, and clearly if you get a lot of rain, trees are far better at stopping the flow of water rushing down into the stream, rushing into the River Isle and into the Parrett, causing the flooding we've had recently, so if we can plant the trees, it slows the water down, and that's what we are trying to achieve."

The scheme is mostly being funded by the Forestry Commission, under a new Countryside Stewardship scheme, but the SRA has contributed nine per cent of the cost so as to maximise the flood reduction benefits.

SRA 'Slow the Flow' uses Growth Deal money from Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership.



Cllr John Osman, chairman of Somerset Rivers Authority, said: "During the flooding crisis a lot of people criticised work which *wasn't* done 20 years ago, such as dredging, so planning for the future *now* is important. This is something which is fairly low-cost, it's good for the environment and it will play a critical part if we can replicate this kind of scheme around the county.

"I look forward to more people coming forward. We've got the money available for natural flood defence schemes like this and we look forward to having a conversation with anyone who thinks they can assist.

"We need more schemes like this, on the Mendips, on the Quantocks, on Exmoor. If we can slow the flow of water then hopefully we can prevent so many problems happening in the future."

Ben Thorne, senior farm conservation officer with FWAG SW, and leader of the SRA's land management work, said that schemes did not have to be large-scale: "We're looking for planting in strategic locations, that can make a difference: like steep slopes, like corners, next to roads, next to rivers. It has to be the right type of planting, in the right place."

Trees planted at Dillington include oaks, evergreens for winter cover, thorns and cherries for blossom in the spring and, smiles Lord Cameron, Scots pines: "I'm a Scotsman and I like having Scots pines in my plantations."

More info: contact FWAG SW - 01823-660684; www.fwagsw.org.uk / email info@fwagsw.org.uk



Historic ponds restored to help reduce floods

Case Study 2: Somerset Rivers Authority is funding work on three ponds and a series of dams in the Meeds Valley on Abbey Farm in Montacute near Yeovil. One pond is an ancient stewpond from Montacute Priory (founded c.1100), that was almost completely silted-up. The other two may once have been 18th-century ponds for washing flax. These too were almost defunct. They are being dug out again primarily to hold water, but also for wildlife.

The Meeds Valley is a lovely horseshoe of hills, with springs running into a central ditch. Water flows down to Montacute, on to Martock and into the River Parrett at Gawbridge Mill. The ditch (*above*) has been cleared out for the first time in 40 years and new dams are being created, some with I-beams, sleepers and boards, to allow water levels to be controlled, whilst other natural leaky dams use local logs.

SRA supports natural flood management

Other SRA 'Slow the Flow' natural flood management schemes have been approved at Brompton Ralph and Hestercombe (leaky ponds); Wiveliscombe (leaky pond, track & flow spreaders); Hurcott (silt barriers); Croford (soil bunds, scrapes, cross drains along track, pond de-silting); Stoke St Gregory and Pitminster (rainwater harvesting); Shepton Beauchamp (filter sox); Nynhead (rainwater harvesting & filter sox); South Petherton (attenuation ponds, bunds); Bower Hinton (hedge planting); Donyatt (water meadow restoration); Hinton St George (flow spreader debris dams).

Alisdair McFarlane, of Abbey Farm, said: "We looked at how we could make it work as a whole, to hold water back, because what's driving the money is - how can we relieve the pressure on the Levels? Though this also relieves the pressure on Montacute's flood alleviation scheme..."

Alisdair said the SRA grants were "very handy": "It was something I couldn't afford to do otherwise."

The photo below shows Alisdair (*left*) with Roy Hayes (of FWAG SW & Catchment Sensitive Farming). The two men worked on plans together (with Alisdair's wife Elizabeth); Alisdair built the dam himself. He said: "It's been a fun project, a lot of hard work, but it's been fun."



Getting water off Wick Lane

A new culvert beneath Wick Lane near Brent Knoll, north of Highbridge, is protecting the road and nearby properties from flooding.

The scheme was funded by Somerset Rivers Authority and carried out by the Axe Brue Drainage Board with local contractor JD Pope & Sons. *(Pictured below: work in progress).*

The area between Wick Lane and the main Taunton-Bristol railway line used to suffer very high water levels during times of heavy rainfall and saturated ground.

As soon as the culvert was installed, IDB staff noted that water levels dropped significantly, as land can now drain effectively into a network of maintained rhynes (ditches) to the west.



Upgrade for pumping station

Large gate valves have been renewed and the inlet channel structure cleaned out at Wirral Park balance pond and pumping station *(below)*, built in 1989 to protect homes and businesses in Glastonbury against flooding. More work on this SRA-funded Mendip District Council scheme is planned for 2016/17.



Site sought for Parrett Barrier

Seven possibilities for a tidal surge barrier in Bridgwater have been proposed, with estimated costs varying from £31m to £82m.

A well-attended public drop-in session heard the aim is to protect 10,000 properties and 600 businesses from tidal flooding for the next 100 years or more. Consultants will recommend one location for a barrier on the Parrett this summer.

The Environment Agency and Sedgemoor District Council are working together on the project, supported by the SRA and HotSWLEP. Further public consultation is planned. A barrier is due to be in place by 2024. For more info - and to comment: www.bit.ly/BridgwaterBarrier

Work approved on Sowy/KSD

The SRA's Board has voted for a major scheme to widen the River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain. Work this Spring includes removing constrictions at Dunball, improving Chedzoy Flap and aligning the Sowy and Langacre to the four new culverts under Beer Wall on the A372.

Progress in west of Somerset

Drainage and investigation works start soon in Combe Florey, after the successful completion of Minehead, Bicknoller, Washford, Sampford Brett, Wootton Courtenay and Holford schemes.



New dredging after Easter

New dredging is due to begin in April of 750m of the Parrett downstream of Northmoor Pumping Station. The work follows smoothly on from 2.2km of maintenance dredging of the Parrett, done for the SRA by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board. A contractor's video with aerial footage *(above)* is on www.bit.ly/WMPHvideos