

**Malvern Hills AONB Landowners and Managers Group Event**  
**Water and Land Management – 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at Colwall Village Hall**

This event provided an opportunity for farmers and land managers to hear from advisers specialising in land and water management, providing advice about the protection of river/stream health, the local environment and water quality. It was well attended with 24 farmers and landowners taking advantage of this opportunity.

The five speakers were from Severn Trent Water, Natural England, Worcestershire and Herefordshire Councils and the Severn Rivers Trust, with each giving an overview of what the organisations they represent can offer farmers and landowners to help improve their water and land management.

Each of the speakers gave a brief presentation followed by Q and A and the opportunity to ask questions in detail over a buffet lunch. The presentations can be found using the following links:

- [Natural Flood Management](#)
- [Citizen Science and Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative](#)
- [Farming for Water: Severn Trent](#)
- [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#)

**Notes:**

1. **Natural Flood Management** – Wendy Bufton, NFM Project Manager, Worcestershire County Council and Steve Wharton, NFM Project Manager, Herefordshire Council.

Wendy and Steve advise on Natural Flood Management – this involves slowing the rate at which water runs off the land into water courses using a variety of techniques, ranging from leaky woody dams through to contour tree planting and re-instating river and stream meanders to slow flow. The most important concepts are that work carried out high up in the catchment area is particularly important, that every single intervention counts and that only natural processes are involved.

Both officers are keen to find partners to work with in their respective catchment areas, having received significant funds from DEFRA after some promising pilot projects, and they encouraged participants to get in touch to find out whether their land could be included.

The AONB is a priority area for this work and cross-county work may be possible where land holdings cover both Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

2. **Citizen Science and the Catchment Systems Thinking Co-operative (CaSTCo) Project**  
- Alice Moore

Alice works for the Severn Rivers Trust, which operates throughout the whole of the Severn Catchment to protect and enhance the river Severn, its tributaries and streams. The CaSTCo project aims to use citizen science to provide data about the river environment and its

wildlife, filling the current 'gap' in data which can lead to the waste of resources and poor quality environmental outcomes for projects.

In addition to training citizen scientists the CoSTCo project also aims to standardise monitoring techniques so that data is robust enough to be trusted and used. The long-term aim is a framework where citizen science and community monitoring are integrated into a local evidence base and people are empowered to gather, share and interpret evidence.

Alice is keen to hear from landowners and potential monitors from the Teme catchment who would like to be involved with this project.

### **3. Farming for water at Severn Trent – Robin Bickley Catchment Partnership Agriculture Advisor (based at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust)**

Robins' role involves working with landowners to identify risks to the water system upstream of sensitive receptors, such as wildlife habitats or drinking water abstraction.

Because of the costs of water treatment it's of benefit to spend money on good catchment management. For every £1 spent for catchment management Severn Trent gains £4 in wider environmental benefits and much more is saved on treatments, particularly if this involves pesticide removal.

There are a number of opportunities for farmers and landowners to benefit, including STEPS. This scheme offers advice and grants to farms to address any water quality issue but mainly focussing on infrastructure. STEPS grants are also available for biodiversity options which offer water quality benefits, such as wildlife buffer strips.

Robin is keen for any landowners within the priority catchment areas to get in touch and find out what is on offer in Worcestershire and Herefordshire. He also emphasised that help was available with filling in grant applications.

### **4. Catchment Sensitive Farming - Denise Latham, Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisor, Lower Teme Catchment, Natural England.**

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is led by Natural England in partnership with Defra and the Environment Agency. It offers a free and confidential service which is non-regulatory, offering support which aims to improve water quality.

CSF's main aim is to improve water and air quality and sustainable water management in England by providing farmers and landowners with free advice, training, and grant support in the following areas:

- Soil management
- Nutrient, slurry, and manure management
- Ammonia reduction
- Farm infrastructure and machinery set-up
- Pesticide handling
- Water resources and natural flood management

- Local environmental priorities
- Land management

Denise was keen to stress that there were a wide range of options to help farmers improve their infrastructure and also to increase the wildlife diversity on their land. Different catchments in the area are covered by other NE Officers. Anyone interested in advice or grants was urged to get in touch.

## 5. Questions and Answers

**Q** What happens in the event that enhanced water quality monitoring pinpoints pollution sources to those who can't afford to repair them?

**A** It was recognised that this may be difficult and it may be that there is no immediate solution. However, it was also recognised that there is now significant support available to help resolve pollution problems and that having better, up-to-date data was important in helping to improve the water environment.

**Q** Where can I find data about the water courses on my land?

**A** Data on the current condition of certain water courses/catchments can be found at [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

**Q** Has the situation improved re. form filling/bureaucracy? This can take up valuable time for farmers.

**A** Yes, the context for helping to support landowners and managers in taking positive action has improved over time. This doesn't mean that it is always easy but there is more support and advice around from a greater range of sources and funding bodies are often able to help with compiling funding applications and paying for things like planning applications.

**Q** The way planning applications involving water seems to vary across the AONB.

**A** On planning specifically it was recognised that there can be variation in how different Local Planning Authorities interpret planning regulations and a need to provide a clearer and hopefully simpler national steer about how to get on with this work. The MHAONB Team Planning Officer (Josh Bailey) provided the following wording to circulate after the event: *The creation of a pond by machinery is considered an engineering operation under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Even if your proposed scheme only includes a small and shallow pond, it may be defined as an engineering operation which could require planning permission – it will depend on your planning authority. Note that engineering operations considered as "agricultural work" are exempt from planning permission although one can make an application to the Local Planning Authority through 'Prior Approval' using agricultural permitted development rights.*

**Note** It was suggested that livestock farmers should register their land with Severn Trent in order to claim possible future drought payments.

Events organised for the Malvern Hills AONB landowner group are free to all. They are organised by the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership, which aims

to conserve and enhance the landscape and habitats of the Malvern Hills AONB.  
[www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk](http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk)

Karen Humphries 01905 845056 Paul Esrich 01905 845057