

## **HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR RIVERS AND STREAMS**

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### **CURRENT STATUS**

Within Nottinghamshire there are 20 rivers designated as 'main river' by the Environment Agency. Of these only the Trent, Soar and Idle could be classed as lowland rivers, with deep wide profiles and slow flows. The remaining watercourses are generally faster flowing with a mixture of habitat types.

Whilst a water course itself provides important habitat for wildlife, it is important that the marginal and adjoining habitats, extending to the whole floodplain, are also considered. Many species need marsh and pond habitat as well as the watercourse itself in order to survive, and there will therefore be areas of overlap between this action plan and others, for example lowland wet grassland, otter and white clawed crayfish.

Many of Nottinghamshire's rivers have been subject to modification for flood defence or land drainage purposes. In some cases meanders have been removed and the channel straightened, the flood plain has been isolated by constructing flood banks, the channel has been deepened by dredging and trees and other vegetation have been removed. Development in floodplains compounds this problem by further disrupting the natural river system.

There are no river SSSIs in Nottinghamshire, but there are a number of wetland SSSIs which abut some of the watercourses. Very few sections of watercourse have been designated of conservation interest at the county level, the Halloughton Dumble being the most significant in terms of length. The Dumbles are watercourses that have become deeply incised into the underlying Mercia Mudstone creating a unique micro-climate of high conservation value.

### **THREATS**

The main factors currently affecting rivers and streams in Nottinghamshire are:

- Physical modification and management for drainage, flood prevention and navigation.
- Abstraction of water from the river or groundwater, leading to low flows, exacerbating pollution, and damaging habitats which need high water levels.
- Diffuse or point source pollution by domestic sewage, agricultural run-off and industrial pollutants.
- Use of adjoining land for intensive agriculture, urban or industrial use leading to habitat loss, pollution and reduced siltation rates.
- Mineral extraction, leading to the re-alignment of watercourses, reductions in flow, and the loss of floodplain habitat.
- The spread of non-indigenous species.

#### **CURRENT INITIATIVES - EXAMPLES**

- Rivers and streams are a key habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and a habitat action plan will be prepared.
- Internal Drainage Boards and many private landowners manage watercourses and adjacent land and have a vital part to play in the implementation of this plan.
- The Environment Agency has a statutory duty to further conservation in relation to its water management functions, whilst its pollution control functions include a duty to have regard to the desirability of conserving and enhancing features of special interest.
- Where possible, the Agency carries out maintenance work on watercourses in such a way as to enhance the conservation value of the site.
- Regular monitoring of river water quality ensures that it stays within its General Quality Assessment (GQA) class.
- The control of activities which impact on rivers and their floodplains is regulated by the following legislation: The Environment Act 1995, The Water Resources Act 1991, Land Drainage Act 1991. The Agency is also empowered to declare bye-laws where necessary.
- Riparian land owners and county and district planning authorities all have duties and obligations under various acts and local plans to protect watercourses for nature conservation.

- The EA has prepared Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) for the Rivers Erewash, Idle and Torne. LEAPs will also be prepared for other Nottinghamshire rivers.
- The EA has recently contracted out surveys for water vole and otter in Nottinghamshire.

### **Targets**

- Maintain and enhance the existing habitat and species diversity of rivers and streams.
- Enhance, through sensitive management and habitat creation schemes, the habitat and species diversity of at least 100km of main river by 2010.
- Identify opportunities by 2005 for restoring a more natural structure in stretches of main river from which it has been lost. This might involve reinstating meanders and shoals, for example, and should include the reconnection of watercourses to their floodplains. Formulate a target for restoration.
- Restore natural flows, in terms of water level and flow characteristics, to rivers and streams wherever possible.
- Improve the water quality of all main rivers currently below optimum standards by at least 1 General Quality Assessment (GQA) class by 2010.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

#### Policy and legislation

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of rivers and streams habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of rivers and streams habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

Site safeguard and management

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of river and stream habitats and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINCs and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINCs and any other areas of rivers and streams habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing rivers and streams habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat.

ACTION: NGO's.

Advisory

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for rivers and streams habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Future research and monitoring

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

13. Ensure that areas of rivers and streams habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Communications and publicity

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of rivers and streams habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for rivers and streams habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

### **What you can do**

- Use water wisely. A reduction in demand would help prevent the loss of habitats and species to over-abstraction.
- Never pour used engine oil, paint or other chemicals down the drain. They will often end up in watercourses.

### **Species List**

The following are examples of species of conservation concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

Daubenton's bat  
Natterer's bat  
Otter  
Water shrew  
Water vole  
Grey heron  
Kingfisher  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed plover  
Brook lamprey  
Brown trout  
Salmon  
Common hawk dragonfly  
Balsam carpet moth  
Butterbur moth  
Dentated pug moth  
Narrow-leaved water plantain

Sea aster  
Winter cress  
Tufted sedge  
Yellow sedge  
Whorl grass  
Hemlock water-dropwort  
Fen pondweed  
Water crowfoot