

News- *Catchment Matters* - News

The newsletter of the Parrett Catchment Project



New!

Issue No. 3: Winter 2003/4

New!

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1. Welcome.

Welcome to the new style *Catchment Matters* from the Parrett Catchment Project (PCP) - the newsletter designed to inform you of the latest partnership and catchment news.

The introduction of this electronic newsletter marks a new phase for the PCP in terms of communications with you, our partners. We have a lot to catch up on, so apologies for the length of this bulletin. Rest assured, future issues will be shorter! We would welcome your feedback and suggestions for future articles. If you have any problems viewing the email, would like a hard copy or the document in a specific format, please contact Nickie Harris on 01823 355281 or by return of email.

2. Message from the Chairman, Anthony Gibson.

As someone who has been closely involved with the Somerset Levels for over 20 years and who now lives at Langport, I was delighted to accept the invitation to chair the Parrett Catchment Project Management Committee.

I first became involved when the battle of West Sedgemoor broke out in 1983. Since those turbulent days, we have moved a very long way towards resolving what was then seen as a conflict between the farming and the conservation interest. That conflicting interest has now been replaced by a common interest – reflected in the all-embracing membership of the PCP – in regaining control of the water levels in the catchment in the face of the mounting challenge posed by climate change.



Anthony Gibson, Chairman of the PCP & NFU Regional Director

With control of the water levels, all things are possible, whether for conservation, or recreation, or environmentally conscious farming. Without that control, we face the prospect of continuing and worsening damage to property, land and wildlife. The PCP is already helping to provide that control, both by the range of “farming water” measures aimed at reducing the speed and run-off of upstream rainfall, and by promoting improvements to the downstream flood defences, including the proposed Parrett Sluice. And the fact that it is a partnership of all of the key interests is giving it all the more impact.

The PCP has been criticised in some quarters for producing nothing but paper. That has never been true, and it is an even less valid criticism given the progress which has been made in recent months, and which is described in this newsletter. I can assure you that I would never have agreed to get involved with the PCP in the first place if I didn't believe that it had the potential to make a real difference for the better to the quality of life across the catchment, and that potential is now beginning to be realised.

3. Your opportunity to see PCP in Practice – 2nd March 2003.

To reflect the changes within the PCP the traditional annual Stakeholder Forum has now been re-styled. Set for Tuesday 2nd March 2004 stakeholders and landowners are invited to see 'PCP in Practice', an informative fact-finding day designed to demonstrate the progress of specific projects on the ground and that work of partners that is consistent with PCP's strategy. The itinerary includes a visit to the proposed site of the tidal sluice, a local sustainable drainage system, two Farming Water pilot projects and the soil management monitoring site at Dillington. If you know of anyone who would be interested in attending please pass their contact details our way (see item below).

4. Competition time - Your chance to WIN a hamper of goodies!

We want to make sure everyone who is interest in the Parrett Catchment Project receives a copy of our e-mail newsletters. Help us out and you could win a hamper of local Somerset goodies! To enter, all you need to do is send an email entitled "competition time!" to PCP@somerset.gov.uk with the name and email address of one person who you feel would be interested. You can send more than one email; as for us the more new contacts the better, and for you the greater the chance of you winning. Send your nomination to us by 1st April 2004. Your e-mails will be put into a hat and the winner will be notified in April 2004.

5. Celebrating our rivers.

Last year's Festival, on the River Parrett in Langport, saw 2,500 visitors enjoying the day. The Parrett Catchment Project is on the road again, keeping alive the good work achieved at the 2003 event and working hard to raise awareness about the rivers, their role within the catchment and their management. This year the all-day celebrations are by the River Tone, French Weir Park in Taunton.



Photo: Procession of sound at the River Parrett Festival (Western Gazette, 2003)

The Festival will strike a balance between education and entertainment with activities to really get people thinking about water management and the flooding issues in Somerset. So far we have a host of activities including water inspired entertainment, boat trips, a boat parade, canoeing, model boats, guided walks, exhibitions, interactive computer and video demonstrations from partner organisations, local craft workshops, rural skills, music (The River Tones and Five Furious Fish), live animals from Secret World and much more! We are also honored to have the support of Chris Packham (BBC's The Really Wild Show) who will be around on the day hosting his own events on the programme.

The Festival coincides with Taunton's 1100th Charter celebrations in May and we will be benefiting from a lot of media coverage from that relationship, however Caroline Dunn, Festival Coordinator, will ensure the River Festival retains its identity as a PCP partnership effort.

To do *your* bit, the official Festival posters and leaflets will be available for distribution and display by the end of March, and Caroline is awaiting your order. For further information or to get involved on the day contact Caroline on 01823 356156 or cldunn@somerset.gov.uk

6. PCP PROGRESS.

Introduction

Progress towards achieving the 12 components of the PCP strategy has been helped by 3 key events in 2002:

- In spring 2002 the Environment Agency published the Parrett Catchment Water Management Strategy Action Plan (updated Sept 03), which incorporates many of PCPs components (albeit not all delivered by the EA).
- In November 2002 PCP working groups were established to implement some components. Further working groups were established in February 2003.
- In December 2002 PCP secured EU funding of £650k (50% match funded by PCP and EA) under the EU Joint Approach for Managing Flooding (JAF) project to assist with delivering some of PCP's components.



Work has continued since then and in summary:

- 1 component is being delivered by Local Planning Authorities through PPG 25.
- The PCP Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) group is delivering 1 component.
- Delivery of 7 components are being led by the EA.
- PCP is helping to deliver 3 components with funding from JAF. Further progress with these requires change to DEFRA's Agri-Environment Scheme.
- Progress with 2 of the components has been slow due to lack of funding.
- For progress in all components there is a continued need for funding mechanisms to change.

The following is a round up, by PCP strategy component, of activities that have taken place over the last year or so, either by others that are consistent with the PCP vision, or by the PCP itself.

Component 1: Changes to Agricultural Land Management

This component seeks to retain more rainfall in the upper catchment and delay the time it takes for water to reach the floodplain, through a variety of practical measures, pilot projects, monitoring projects and lobbying of the Government's Agri-Environment Review, to provide the necessary financial incentives.



Photo: FWAG workshop to highlight problems and solutions to soil runoff and solutions (FWAG 2002)

In 2003 PCP put forward to DEFRA a soil management trial scheme proposing the Parrett catchment as a study area for a land management incentive scheme, funded through the government Agri-environment scheme, focused upon soil management. PCP and partner organisations have continued to lobby DEFRA through the Agri-Environment Review. Over the last 2 years European funding through the JAF project, has enabled FWAG to double their work in this area, resulting in: 107 farm visits completed involving 80 farmers re. arable conversion; 9000 acres converted from arable land to grassland; 344 farm visits involving 208 farmers re. soil management practice; 50 soil management plans completed; 8 Farmer workshops held involving 90 farmers; 2000 acres have changed soil management practice. JAF has also enabled monitoring projects to be set up, researching the effects of changes in soil management and cropping regimes on soil runoff.

Component 2: Creating temporary flood storage areas

This component looks at storing water temporarily on farmland in the upper and mid catchment and controlling its release when the peak flow of water has passed, through the development of water storage pilot projects, and lobbying the government to incorporate Farming Water within the new Agri-Environment Scheme.

Funding through JAF has enabled the:

- Development of 6 pilot flood storage schemes to demonstrate the approach, learn what is required to implement such a scheme and increase effective storage capacity by 392k cu.m.;
- Development of a conceptual model for operation of multiple temporary storage releases;
- Gain information about remote control mechanisms.

Meanwhile the PCP Lobby Group and Stakeholder organisations have continued to lobby for changes to Agri-Environment Schemes to ensure that future schemes provide incentives to farmers and landowners to take up these Farming Water initiatives.

Component 3: Controlling runoff from development

This component aims to slow the flow of runoff from development and onto the floodplain by seeking to incorporate sustainable drainage and flood storage systems into new and existing developments through the local planning systems and raising awareness of developers. The PCP SUDS group have responded to the National SUDS Guidance Policy, reviewed guidance currently available to developers, identified issues hindering the uptake of SUDS, and produced a SUDS Protocol and Developer Guidance Notes with a view to having these incorporated into Local Plans. The Group has also established a database of SUDS schemes to monitor the level of SUDS implementation locally.

Component 4: Creating and enhancing wetland habitats

Wetlands benefit society as much as wildlife by intercepting floodwater, retaining nutrients, recharging groundwater, purifying water and creating jobs through amenity use. The PCP has continued to lobby DEFRA through the Agri-Environment Review, and the Environment Agency and Flood Defence Committee have bid for £1M for habitat creation funds to assist with a land purchase or land swap.

Component 5: Dredging and maintaining river channels

The Environment Agency's dredging programme, to improve the efficiency of the lower river system, particularly in the tidal reaches, has resulted in the following de-silting, dredging and bank reinforcement work to date:

- River Yeo: Ilchester town bridge to Yeovil approx. 3 km of silt removed.
- River Isle: At Hambridge approx. 2km silt removed & 0.5km of Hambridge Mill stream silt removed.
- River Tone: New Bridge to Knapp Bridge approx. 2km silt removed, bank widening and reinforcement.
- Long Sutton Catchwater : de-silting work completed from abattoir to Huish Episcopi Pumping Station.
- Tidal River Parrett: The tidal stretch of the river for 5 km downstream from Burrowbridge was dredged last winter, 2002 / 2003. This year 2004, dredging of another 5km stretch down to the M5 motorway crossing is just starting. Monitoring work,



Photo: Dredging the tidal River Parrett (Environment Agency 2003)

including underwater sonar scanning, is accompanying this three year dredging trial and will provide data that should enable a decision on the sustainable continuation of such dredging and the production of a sustainable dredging programme. Steel Piling Bank reinforcement work has been completed in 2002 /2003 at Rose Cottage and Saltmoor Pumping Station. Piling at Linden Farm was completed in 2003/2004. Piling work from Northmoor to Winslade farm and at Winslade Farm is due summer 2004. Appraisal work for piling at Gillards Transport, Warmoor and Coates Rhyne will start in April 2004. Further Parrett Bank work is programmed to commence in the next 3 years at Stathe House, Stathe Bridge and The Croft.

Component 6: Raising riverbanks

To accommodate rising sea levels riverbanks need to be raised. The Environment Agency has undertaken the following works to date:

- The consultancy contracted by the Environment Agency is currently evaluating the possibility of raising the banks of the tidal Parrett.
- An existing flood alleviation scheme on the River Tone near Bradford on Tone has been reinstated back to design level – completed October 2003.
- Low points in the left hand (southern bank) of the River Parrett upstream of Westover Pumping station at Langport have been raised, using natural material - completed September 2003.
- Existing flood defences in Ham Village, Ham Lane, Ruishton and Creech St Michael are subject to improvement. A road ramp has been constructed in Ham Lane and work to raise the road ramp and improve the flood bank in Ham Village together with a road ramp in Ruishton is planned for the financial year 2004/2005.

Component 7: Upgrading or replacing pumping stations

PCP seeks to ensure that pumping stations are a reliable, efficient and cost-effective element in the operation of the flood management system. Environment Agency work is progressing a Programme for Pumping Station modernisation, which is due for completion by April 2004. This programme looks at three aspects: 1) the importance of the pumping station - in terms of what it protects 2) the present condition and 3) the work required to improve the existing plant to maintain its function. It will not address the underlying need for the pumping stations or ways in which they may be upgraded.

Component 8: Spreading floodwater across the moors

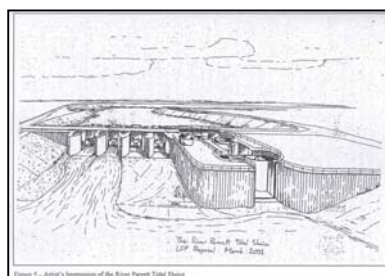
By spreading floodwater across the moors the average depth and period of flooding is reduced. PCP is lobbying through the Agri-Environment Review to have landowners involved in this scheme supported through washland incentive payments.

The issue of equitable water dispersal and temporary storage of floodwater across moors has been investigated to an extent by the Environment Agency by the work done in the preparation of the Lower Parrett and Tone Flood Management Strategy (LPTFMS) and through implementation of the Water Level Management Plans. LPTFMS is due for publication early this Summer 2004. Further decisions on this issue are dependant upon the results of DEFRA's Agri – Environment review.

Component 9: Building a tidal sluice downstream of Bridgwater

A sluice would bring greater control to the management of the lower river system by reducing silt deposits and moderating the effects of tidal surges.

A skilled team of environmental consultants has been appointed by the Environment Agency to investigate the complex environmental issues surrounding the provision of a tidal sluice on the River Parrett. This team has begun this work and aims to provide initial findings by March 2005. A detailed review of options will be available by March 2006.



Sketch: Artist's impression of the tidal sluice

Component 10: Upgrading channels to enhance gravity drainage

This component seeks to increase the volume of water that can be evacuated by gravity without adversely affecting property and roads. The engineering measures identified under this component have been addressed in the Environment Agency Lower Parrett and Tone Flood Management Strategy, which is due for public circulation early summer 2004.

Component 11: Restricting new development on the floodplain

This component seeks to restrict new development on the floodplain. Already 10,000 homes are at risk from flooding in the catchment area. Local plans and Structure plans show that Local Planning Authorities have adopted, and are implementing, PPG 25, at a local level.

Component 12: Woodland development on a catchment scale



Photo: Woodland planting to assist in alleviating flooding and associated problems. (FWAG 2001)

Woodland establishment in the catchment has been progressed through EU JAF project funding. Progress to date includes:

- A report and suitability map was commissioned and produced (TR Nisbett & S. Broadmeadow 2003) which identifies suitable areas where woodland planting would assist in alleviating run-off and related flood problems.
- This research is now being translated into practical action through a series of woodland pilot schemes. Five blocks of 5ha will be planted and monitored to measure how effective woodland is at reducing runoff. The first three are being planted this winter 2003-4 and the remaining two sites will be planted in 2004-5.

7. Water butt initiative.

The PCP has partnered up with the Somerset Waste Partnership and Wessex Water to bring the Water Butts Initiative to Somerset. To be launched on the 1st March 2004 and running for 12 months, the initiative aims to widely promote the use of water butts in conserving water and slowing the rate of rainwater runoff from residential areas.

Facts & Figures:

- In a year approx. 90,000 litres of water falls on the average roof in the Parrett catchment.
- If all homes in the Parrett catchment had one water butt filled to capacity this would result in approximately 28 million litres of water stored at any one point in time.
- In a year one home could potentially collect 450 water butts full of water.



Water butts on offer!
(Blackwall Ltd.)

The initiative aims not purely to promote the high quality and value for money product (!) but to change the way people regard the raindrops hitting their roofs and the way they use their water butt. Water butts should be regarded not only as a mechanism for conserving water but also as a means to hold potential floodwater, slowing the rate of runoff down our drains and onto the floodplain. For those on a water meter, with the ability to store 450 water butts full of water a year, a water butt equates to serious savings.

Every home in Somerset will receive a leaflet promoting the purchase of water butts and also composter bins. This leaflet together with regular media releases, articles and a water butt stand at the River Festival in May, will encourage homeowners to do their bit for others who have had to live with the flood.

For further information about the initiative please contact Nickie Harris on 01823 355281.

8. Dates for your diary.

- 1st March Water butts initiative launch
- 2nd March PCP in Practice
- 23rd May River Festival, French Weir Park, Taunton

Dates of interest

- 21 Jan 04 PCP-JAF Input-Output exchange visit, the Netherlands: river restoration
- 25-27 Feb JAF Transnational Coordination Group meeting.
- 1-3 March PCP-JAF Input-Output training course: Multi-functional land use.
- 10th March JAF Regional Steering Group meeting
- 12th March PCP Management Group meeting
- 29-31 Mar PCP-JAF Input-Output exchange: New technologies.

This document is available on request in Braille, large print, audiotape or disc and can be translated into different languages. Contact: Nickie Harris, Communications Officer on tel: 01823 355281 or email PCP@somerset.gov.uk