

Catchment Matters

The newsletter from the Parrett Catchment Project
Sharing information between organisations and local communities

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Big Sponge: Involving schools & communities



A year in the life of two Catchment Advisors



River Festival Review



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JAF's action-packed exchange programme



SCC & partners celebrate Euro-results

Foreword from the PCP Chairman

I am pleased to be able to report that the PCP has been given a resounding vote of confidence by a leading sustainable development charity.

Forum for the Future, a highly respected organisation chaired by Jonathan Porritt, carried out a "sustainability appraisal" of the project earlier this year. We await the final report, but the initial conclusions are hugely encouraging.

The PCP has had a "considerable impact on catchment-wide sustainability", the report concludes. "River water and soil quality are improving as a result and, although not directly targeted, landscape character is being enhanced."

The project is also praised for bringing together a very wide range of stakeholders in pursuit of an agreed strategy and for building trust with local farmers and giving advice on changing management practices.

The report also acknowledges the significance of the *Joint Approach for Managing Flooding (JAF)* project, which has been crucial in spreading the learning process and maximising the impact, whilst the knowledge acquired in working with European partners has been and will be hugely important (Page 7).

Debate is currently raging, in Government and elsewhere, over how best to achieve the targets for water quality set by the EU Water Framework Directive. Should it be by imposing compulsory controls on farmers – bans on slurry spreading or maize growing, for example? Or should it be, as with the PCP, by working with farmers to change land management practices on a voluntary basis (Page 4).

The Forum for the Future sustainability appraisal demonstrates that the voluntary approach works and, as someone who has been working with farmers for over 30 years in my capacity as NFU Regional Director, I am convinced that it will work infinitely better than compulsion and controls.

The PCP, with invaluable support from JAF, has shown the way forward. Now it is up to all of us to make sure that that lead is followed, not just in Somerset but much more widely.

Anthony Gibson, PCP Management Group Chairman

Photos from the River Festival

Festival review on Page 6



Exhibitions attracted lots of interest



Many opportunities to be creative



Artists, like Nick Crump, attracted crowds



Fun activities and competitions on offer for all the family

The Big Sponge - Involving schools and community groups -

Ponds for education, wildlife, landscape and floods

The Big Sponge—the campaign showing that everyone can get involved in the battle to reduce flood risk—has got off to a flying start, receiving substantial interest from schools and positive support from the public and local media.

After several lengthy articles in the newspapers and a flurry of radio interviews, there was a flood of phone calls and e-mails from teachers requesting information about the grants being offered to build ponds in school grounds. In the first half of June, twenty application forms were sent to schools and more were distributed at the beginning of July.

At the time of printing 35 schools have registered their interest in the grant scheme and two completed application forms have already been received, including an application for a 60m² pond from Robert Blake Science School in Bridgwater. In addition, two site visits have been undertaken to local schools to assist them with planning a new scheme.

Consistent with the aim of the Big Sponge, some teachers at schools that already have ponds have expressed a keen interest to develop their school grounds further by installing new water butts to collect rainwater from classroom roofs or by establishing a wetland or bog garden to complement the existing pond.

Pete Grainger, our Big Sponge Consultant, is keen to commence a number of school projects before the start of the summer holidays.

Once the school term has ended Pete will be approaching community groups to identify opportunities for new pond schemes or simply restoring neglected community ponds.

COMMUNITY GROUPS - Are you involved with a community group that has suitable public amenity grounds for a wildlife pond? If so please contact Pete Grainger for more information about funding opportunities on: ☎ 07906 724047

Nickie Harris, PCP
Communications Officer

LATEST UPDATE

School pond scheme:

- * 35 enquiries received from schools wanting to install a new pond or develop an existing scheme in their grounds.
- * 20 application forms sent out.
- * 2 applications already returned, including one for a new 60m² pond.

Water butt campaign:

- * Over 1,800 water butts have been sold to date - that's 360,000 extra litres of rainwater now being stored!



New PCP education resource under development

The Big Sponge initiative is all about encouraging people to think, and there is no better place to promote knowledge about issues of water management than a formal learning environment. Equally as important, there is no better audience with whom to foster good habits and an appreciation of our local environment than young people.

In recognition of the value of reaching the real stakeholders in the future of the catchment – children – the project team has made substantial progress in developing an online education pack to aid teaching and learning of geography at various key stages.

The resource will be free and available to download from our website www.parrettcatchment.info in the autumn. Although primarily aimed at schools within the catchment, the online format will ensure the pack is accessible to a national and indeed international audience.

It will contain a general section about rivers – how they work, what they do and the issues surrounding them – and a further section, which will concentrate on the Parrett Catchment itself, detailing the features, perspectives and issues in the area, with a focus on the causes and impacts of, as well as the solutions to, flooding.

As well as information, the pack will provide a number of ideas for exercises and will, aptly, culminate in a debate in which pupils will be

“The PCP’s geography resource for teachers will be topical and relevant, making it all the more fun to teach and all the more engaging for children who will be able to really relate to what is being taught.”

Sam Woodhouse, Associate Consultant for Geography and Citizenship, Somerset LEA

assigned roles of different individuals within the catchment (farmers, homeowners, conservationists, etc.) and try to reconcile various views and interests regarding the management of flood-risk.

The resource will be fully integrated with the national curriculum and contain detailed links with the rest of the elements of the Big Sponge campaign, including a “what you can do to help reduce flooding” section. Its ultimate aim is not only to help schools inform their pupils but also encourage them to begin to think critically and sensitively about the issues surrounding them and their role in the world, thereby fostering life-skills as well as knowledge.

James Baker, PCP Marketing Assistant

Teaching outside the classroom - Can you help?

To make its new education resource as comprehensive and engaging as possible the PCP team is seeking to incorporate ideas for school field-trips, relating to rivers, wildlife and flooding. If you or your organisation can offer opportunities for site visits or tours, would be willing to provide them on an ad hoc basis, or you have a suitable site/s for a non-guided visit, please contact Nickie Harris:

☎ (01823) 355 281

✉ Nharris@somerset.gov.uk



Ashill Community School wildlife pond
- a valuable teaching resource and habitat for wildlife

The Big Sponge
- Involving schools and community groups -



A year in the life of two catchment advisors

Jo Oborn and David Cliffe, Catchment Advisors with the Somerset Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), have been funded by JAF for the past three years to work with farmers to improve agricultural land management in order to reduce runoff and soil loss in the Tone and Parrett catchments.

The past twelve months has seen the arrival of significant changes for agriculture both regionally and nationally, least of all the bewildering array of terminology (SFP, SMR, ESS, GAEC, SMP, WFD, CSF) that has challenged the advisory sector let alone farmers! So Jo and David have had to adapt their approach to their work accordingly.

Growers that Jo and David visited in the early years of the JAF project are now observing improvements not only in a reduction in run-off but also in crop establishment, health and yields. This improvement has been obtained not by investment in expensive machinery but via more sustainable crop rotations, earlier drilling and the ability to make decisions based on the risks of run-off.

For example, this year many cereals established on vulnerable soils in the autumn were not rolled so that runoff and resulting soil loss would be prevented, yet only 2 years ago rolling was common practice on most farms to prevent slug damage and aid crop establishment.

The launch of the new agri-environmental schemes has also highlighted opportunities for farmers in the Parrett Catchment to address resource protection issues. Every farmer applying for the Entry Level Scheme is required to identify fields that are at risk from soil erosion or run-off. He can then choose those management options to implement on his ground that will benefit the environment and landscape.

Jo and David have sought to encourage farmers within the Parrett catchment to adopt the 'management plan' options that will help to identify any risks on the farm and advice on how to minimize the risks of pollution and flooding whilst at the same time maintaining or improving the farm business.

With the introduction of the Water Framework Directive which will require all of our waterways to reach designated standards in 2012 the work in the Parrett catchment is gaining more interest from Government policy makers to assess the methods of delivery. It now seems very likely that the 'Catchment Officer' approach to reduce diffuse pollution and flooding will be adopted country-wide and certainly continue in the Parrett catchment.

Jo Oborn & David Cliffe
(Somerset FWAG) ☎ 01823 355427



Managing soils to remove compaction was the theme of a Soils Workshop held at Dillington Farms, Ilminster.

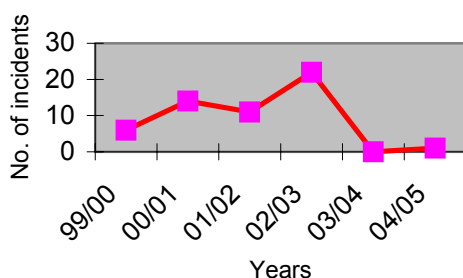


Farmers attending FWAG training workshops on Environmental Stewardship Schemes were able to identify the management options best suited to their own farms.



To roll or not to roll? Farm practices in the Parrett catchment have seen a considerable turn-about, especially those on vulnerable soils.

Number of reported soil erosion incidents within Taunton Deane



As shown by the graph, this year has seen a reduction in reported run-off and soil erosion incidents, possibly a result of a combination of the dry winter and improved land management on vulnerable sites. As a result Jo and David have had significantly fewer incident call-outs and instead that gap has been filled by proactive advisory farm visits.

Soil management issues have been highlighted by the requirement for all farmers claiming the single farm payment to draw up a soil management plan by the end of 2006. Now a common theme in the farming press the 'soil as a resource', in the past neglected, has now come under the spotlight. The increase in numbers of farmers attending FWAG's resource protection workshops in the catchment and advisory visit requests reflect this trend.

PCP launches new user-friendly website



In any partnership, let alone one with as many stakeholders as the PCP, sharing information is essential. It is with this in mind that the PCP website has been overhauled to allow us to communicate effectively with the widest possible audience.

To be useful, all communication devices must be accessible, readily understandable and practical for a whole range of different people. As such, the new PCP website now features a much simplified structure that enables users to go straight

to the most relevant information. It, therefore, has been redesigned with multiple audiences in mind.

To complement this new structure is a new professional appearance, created by Somerset County Council Web Developer, James Turner. All in all, the PCP's new website will allow us to present the project's achievements in a simple and clear format.

The new website can be viewed at the old address: www.parrettcatchment.info

Gauging river turbidity & soil erosion



The Environment Agency turbidity probe (circled white) at Bishops Hull gauging station

As part of the programme to monitor the effectiveness of PCP's soil management work, the Environment Agency, through support from JAF, are carrying out important measurements in the catchment.

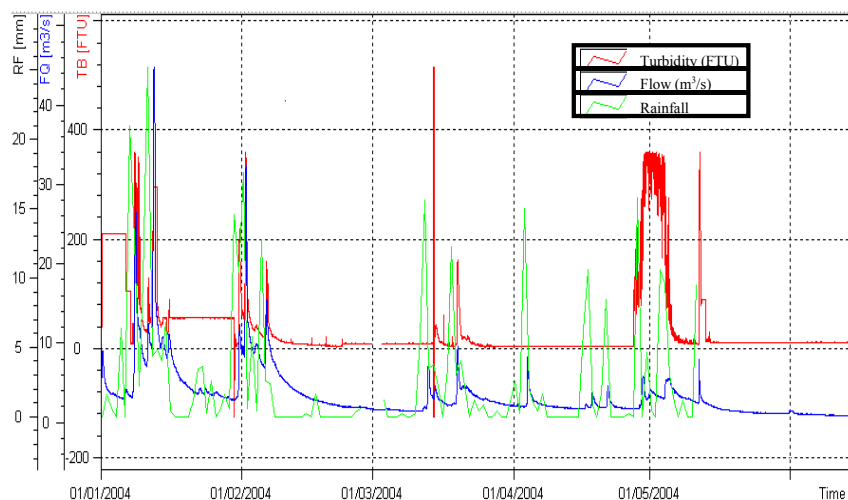
The River Tone suffers from large peaks in suspended solids as a result of soil erosion within the catchment. This erosion generally occurs during heavy rainfall events, and the resulting increase in suspended solids within the river can be measured using turbidity.

The solids and associated nutrients are a form of diffuse pollution which can have a damaging effect on the river ecology. The input of these solids into the river system

can also have an effect on flood defence issues as heavy deposition can clog up the river channel.

To investigate the quantity and nature of the suspended solids and associated nutrients a turbidity probe has been placed on the River Tone at Bishops Hull. It measures the river turbidity continuously. The probe was installed in autumn 2003 and the results will be reported on in spring 2006. This is funded by the EU *Joint Approach for Managing Flooding* project, which is match funded by the Environment Agency and Somerset County Council.

Frances Attwood (EA) ☎01278 484604



A graph showing the turbidity (red line) measured by the probe at Bishops Hull and its relationship to the river flow (blue line) and rainfall (green line).

Looking back over three years of celebrations...and forward

The River Festival this May was PCP's third festival funded through the *Joint Approach for managing Flooding*. Fitting with the watery theme, torrential downpours meant Environment Agency staff were on Flood Alert, yet still 5,500 people turned out to celebrate in Bridgwater.

The 38 boats, canoes and other craft in the Docks were complemented by the 50 exhibitors and 18 artists and performers in the marquees of adjacent Brewery Field. These all served to create a package quite unique for the Somerset calendar of events.

The first two festivals were blessed with sunshine, so this year it was disappointing for organisers to see the heavens open. Yet in one respect the rain proved a blessing because those who flocked into the marquees to gain shelter also read the partnership's exhibitions and displays and took part in all the fun activities and competitions on offer in the dry.

On the dockside spectators under umbrellas watched the demonstrations on the water and went on guided walks along the Parrett and through the town. The Environment Agency, the National Federation of Anglers and Bridgwater Angling Association offered an opportunity for people to experience the joy of fishing and over 140 visitors gave it a try.

Anthony Gibson, PCP Chairman, officially opened the event and many other dignitaries were present. Over the day they saw the Docks transformed into a riot of colour and learnt about the work of those organisations and groups involved in the management of the Parrett catchment.

Three years of European Regional Development Fund support has established the Festival in Somerset's event calendar. Nationally, Somerset continues to be one of only 4 counties to host a river or water festival and it is the only one that brings the diversity of organisations together on one day.

In just 21 hours, over 3 days over 3 years, 14,500 people joined the PCP partnership in celebrating our most important resource; water.

The media coverage was huge, and the 100 articles in the press and magazines, 20 plus radio interviews, TV appearances and website listings served to reach millions and not just in the UK!

We saw 69 craft cruise Somerset's rivers and canal, trailered by road before being lowered into the water. By 2005 we were encouraging new anglers to take the bait and in one day 140 new fishermen were born!

There were 41 displays from partners of the PCP and 83 separate exhibitions from external groups, not including the many artists and performers who have contributed to make each event special.

Our JAF partners in Germany and the Netherlands visited two events and were impressed with our achievements. In fact the Festival has surpassed all local expectations too. Never did the PCP team anticipate that the Festival would become so popular and so effective at raising awareness.

"The PCP itself should be congratulated on giving local people in Somerset this event - an event that I hope will continue to grow, yet vitally retain its unique character and its local focus."

Caroline Dunn, PCP Festival Co-ordinator

The JAF project finishes spring 2006. However buoyed by the success of the past events the PCP insists that the Festival continue. So, once again Caroline is setting the wheels in motion for the next *Water Festival 2006*, and possibly beyond.

If you are interested in being involved please contact Caroline Dunn on:

☎ 01458 251694

✉ cdunn@tiscali.co.uk

The unique PCP Festivals have proved to be hugely effective tools for raising awareness of local issues in our flood-prone county and communicating the work of the partnership and that of individual organisations in Somerset. In just three days 14,500 people were engaged and the publicity reached millions!

Nickie Harris, PCP Communications Officer



Canoeing in the Docks created a colourful spectacle



Fascinating bugs & mini-beasts at the Environment Agency stand

JAF's action-packed exchange programme

One of the most important programmes within the JAF project is the transnational exchange programme (called 'Input-Output') where experience and skills are transferred between different European organisations. The aim here is to increase expertise within those organisations who are responsible for land and water management in flood-prone river catchments.

This May and June were busy months for exchange visits between the five EU partners in England, Netherlands and Germany:

- * To exchange expertise in awareness-raising methods Dutch colleagues attended our River Festival in May, alert to any fresh ideas that could be incorporated into their Water Theatres that are touring along the R. Vecht this Summer. The Somerset organisers then visited the Water Theatre at Hardenburg courtesy of the Velt en Vecht Waterboard on 23rd June. Lots of new ideas were gleaned from the trip and might very well be seen incorporated into the next Somerset festival.

- * In June Environment Agency engineer, Kevin Woodley took part in an exchange to gain better understanding of computer modelling techniques used to assist water management of surface and ground waters.

- * Another visit to The Netherlands in June saw two EA engineers, Phil Plant and Nick Stevens, visit the Regge en Dinkel Waterboard to discuss different methods for river maintenance contract work. There they saw new purpose designed machinery used to maintain small watercourses that so impressed them they are now making arrangements to purchase one of the new

machines for use along our small Somerset waterways.

"We have been looking for something just like this new innovative Dutch machine for a while now and the purpose built, easily transported, weed cutting machine that can safely access small watercourses like ours should more than match our requirements. It certainly made our exchange trip worthwhile" said EA Engineer, Phil Plant.

- * By all accounts the recent visit by a multi-agency group to the area of the River Vecht in Holland and Germany to discuss multi-functional land use was a highly valuable experience. The group saw new pilot projects where land has multi-use i.e. water storage, agricultural and ecological benefits (photo 2), an organic experimental farm and the largest inflatable dam in the world. Valuable information on tree planting alongside restored rivers and soil management, both key PCP interests, was exchanged.

Each exchange has served to highlight the similarities and differences in the way each country approaches the different aspects of land and water management, such as awareness raising tools, on the ground river maintenance or land use policy and practice. These differences will be explored further to provide valuable subjects for further information exchange and real gains on the ground locally.

Paul King, EA Strategic Planning Engineer & JAF Exchange Programme Manager.

For details of the exchange visits and the lessons learnt by officers and managers in Somerset through this programme please contact Paul King on: ☎01278 484716

The JAF project is an excellent example of international cooperation, which is essential to achieve results in our battle to manage water. We can learn so much from each other, and we need each other. It is vital that we, as water managers, invest our time and effort in projects such as this one. We will reap the benefits in the future!

Mrs Annelies Verstand-Bogaert,
Director of Regge en Dinkel
Waterboard (Dec 04)



Photo 1. Multifunctional land use exchange team (L-R): Andrew Palmer (local farmer from the Parrett catchment), Ben Thorne (FWAG), Jenny Bashford (EA), James Phillips (DEFRA-RDS), David Cliffe (FWAG), Stephen Parker (English Nature), Paul King (EA).



Photo 2. Site visited by the exchange team — the JAF-funded Oesterbroeks water storage scheme with multifunctional land use benefits, including new habitat and biodiversity gains.

Somerset County Council & partners celebrate excellent European results

Somerset County Council and partners are celebrating this month as they have learnt that they have met virtually all their targets in their EU co-funded project nine months ahead of schedule.



The innovative *Joint Approach for Managing Flooding* (JAF) project is Somerset's European Regional Development Fund project that has brought £650,000 into the County from 2002-2006. Managed by Somerset County Council on behalf of the Parrett Catchment Project, with the Environment Agency as their principal partner, the Interreg IIIB money has funded water and land management pilot schemes in the flood prone Parrett catchment.

Paula Hewitt, Head of Regulation and Rural Services at the County Council says, "We recognise that flood management for local communities and livelihoods is crucial and that no one organisation is able to resolve flooding in the County by itself. While we know that we still have a way to travel to reduce flood risk JAF has shown that by working in partnership we can make clear improvements. This news from Europe clearly demonstrates the County Council's commitment towards this aim."

The official EU figures show that through investment by JAF and local action by partner organisations JAF has influenced positive change over 635 hectares (6,356,080m²) in the Parrett catchment. To reduce runoff and soil loss 189 hectares (1,893,080m²) have been converted from intensive arable land to extensive grassland and woodland. By constructing four pilot flood retention schemes on farmland JAF has

served to increase the water holding capacity of land in the catchment by 50,000m³.

Ten awareness-raising events have been held including three River Festivals, farmer demonstration days and practical stakeholder events. These events have involved nearly 15,000 people and generated a vast amount of publicity. Three public initiatives have been organised including The Big Sponge campaign and the pending Woodland Campaign. Newsletters and a new website (www.parrettcatchment.info) also serve to increase awareness.

Richard Symonds, the Environment Agency's Area Flood Defence Manager and Chairman of the JAF Regional Steering Group believes "The JAF Project has been a highly positive and instructive experience for all involved. The EA is currently considering how to continue to strengthen the solid foundations built up over the last four years with our European partners. There is still a great deal we can learn about each country's response to flooding and the measures employed to reduce flood risk."

The JAF Operations Manager Sarah Diacono believes, "This project is groundbreaking in terms of pioneering new approaches to flood management. The County Council, EA and partners can congratulate themselves for the constructive work accomplished through JAF."

The JAF project has also been boosted by lobbying, monitoring and modelling projects led by the Parrett Catchment Project, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and the Environment Agency. For example, as a result of lobbying important changes have been made to the Government's new Environmental Stewardship scheme, which will reduce water runoff from farmland.

Nickie Harris, PCP Comms Officer



Joint Approach for Managing Flooding



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