

Case Study

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Arun & Western Streams Project Officer

Background

The Arun and Western streams catchment is in the heart of the South Downs National Park. It includes the rivers Rother and Arun, chalk groundwater areas and several seasonal streams.

The Rother is the only river that is entirely within the National Park, and the catchment also has the internationally important Arun Special Area of Conservation/Special Protection Area, which is one of the best wetland sites in the South Downs.

The river systems have been modified over the years to facilitate navigation and there are many structures that act as barriers to fish passage. The rivers also suffer from diffuse pollution and sediment run off. As a result, this catchment was failing on EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) targets to achieve 'good status'. 'Good status' under the WFD is defined by ecology (incorporating biodiversity, physical habitat and fisheries), water resources and water quality (chemistry) and so by definition will incorporate an 'ecosystems approach'.

In order to support the WFD target of 'good status', the Arun and Rother Connections (ARC) landscape-scale project was initiated (2013–2016), which was delivered by a partnership of seven organisations working alongside local communities. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), this project aimed to promote a thriving river system in the Arun and other river catchment across a 77,000 hectare project area. The completion of this successful project identified the need for further capacity to develop project work in the catchment.



Fittleworth Bridge, River Rother

The project

Following the successful ARC project, the Rivers Trust sought support for a Project Officer post for 1 year to identify and develop projects and submit funding bids. The Project Officer started in July 2017, working part-time on the project.

The main role of the Project Officer is to develop a clearer picture of the catchment, problems and solutions. This has involved conceptualising, commissioning and managing projects/investigations across the Arun & Western Streams catchment in order to deliver 'good status' under the EU WFD. The role aims to identify areas for interventions and seek partners and funding for these interventions. The post has been useful in drawing together partners working in the area to work towards common goals. Partners include the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, Southern Water, Portsmouth Water and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA).

Following a model adopted on the Ouse catchment, it's intended that the post would become self-financing at the end of the period through grants and project funding. Currently the post has received some additional funding support as several project bids have been submitted and are pending a decision.

Funding for the year was £29,400, of which SDNPA contributed £5,000. The Arun and Rother Rivers Trust contributed £10,000, Environment Agency £9,400, Portsmouth Water £2,000 and Southern Water £3,000.

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"The role was essential to the delivery success of the Arun & Western Streams Catchment Partnership. Since the new Project Officer has been in post there has been a significant enhancement in project proposal development and increase in funding bids. This initial appointment could not have been made without the support of our co-funders."
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John J Spence, Chairman, Arun & Western Streams Catchment
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The outcome

A summary of work undertaken by the Project Officer this year include:

Investigations:

- Assessment and prioritisation of barriers to fish across the Arun & Western Streams catchment
- Development and expansion of volunteer monitoring using River fly and MORPH surveys (a survey of river morphology, including banks, channel, flow etc.)
- Development of future water quality monitoring in the Arun & Western Streams catchment
- Establishing links with other local groups and organisations including Angling Clubs, NGOs, water companies, local authorities and farmers
- Assessment of funding opportunities for future project work
- Data and baseline gathering using GIS to inform project development

Project development:

- A project to conduct walkover surveys to gather baseline data
- Floodplain meadows project
- Catchment Sensitive Farming Collaboration project around sediment
- A project looking at in-channel habitat improvements for fish
- A project to restore Ambersham loop
- Scoping report for Natural Flood Management options upstream of Liss

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP)

2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 1: *The landscape character of the National Park, its special qualities and local distinctiveness have been conserved and enhanced by effectively managing land and the negative impacts of development and cumulative change.*

Outcome 2: *There is increased capacity within the landscape for its natural resources, habitats and species to adapt to the impacts of climate change and other pressures.*

Outcome 3: *A well-managed and better connected network of habitats and increased population and distribution of priority species now exist in the National Park.*

Outcome 6: *There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.*

Outcome 8: *More responsibility and action is taken by visitors, residents and businesses to conserve and enhance the special qualities and use resources more wisely.*

<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf>

The future

At the end of the one year funding period the Project Officer continues in post, with a number of funding bids awaiting outcomes.

Funding applications submitted include:

- Two Environment Agency, Water Environment Grant (WEG) funding applications submitted. These are at a water body scale to meet WFD objectives – one for the river Rother and one for Upper Arun (includes development of Upper Arun farm cluster)
- Lund fund application for the Upper Arun
- Addition of Arun & Western Streams projects to the Environment Agency Environment Programme

For more information, please contact:

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