Delivering River Restoration: Recipes for Success

13th Annual Network Conference

Restoring Europe’s Rivers

[Logos of various organizations]
WETLAND RESTORATION IN THE NEW FOREST: Keeping Most Of The People Happy?

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BACKGROUND
Land ownership context (political)
River catchment context (physical)
Mosaic of habitats

- Ancient woodlands
- Lowland heaths
- Valley mires
- Grasslands (lawns)
- Scrub
Commoners Stock – The ‘Natural Managers’

4,500 Ponies  2,500 Cattle  200 Donkeys  100 Pigs

700 Commoners
Wetland Resource

> 70km watercourses

> 2000 ha valley mires

And…

> 1000 ha streamside lawns
  (wet grassland)
History of habitat restoration

1997-2001 – LIFE 2 Project - rhododendron, path erosion, mire and heathland restoration, education & awareness

2002-2006 – LIFE 3 Project - functional catchments of mires, wet grasslands and rivers

2005-2008 – PROGRESS Project
2006-2008 – Pathfinder Project
2008-2010 – Final 4,000 Project
2010-2020 – Higher Level Stewardship Scheme
THE PROCESS
Consultation Protocol

**Natural England**

- Identifies SSSI units that need restoring
- Key issues that need to be addressed

**Forestry Commission** works with the HLS partners (the Verderers and the National Park Authority) and the Commoners to

- Prioritise SSSI restoration sites work programme over the course of the 10-year scheme
Research

- Historic maps
- Aerial photos
- Fieldwork
Cross-sectional depths:
1=Artificial drain
2=Meander route
Restoration plan proposal

1. Restore meanders and infill drain. Position gravel ford across restored channel.
2. Restore meanders and infill drain. Clear some scrub and secondary woodland.
3. Upgrade bridge and approaches to take flow of restored meanders. Scrub clearance on approaches.
4. Restore meanders, level spoil banks and infill drain. Localised scrub clearance.
5. Redirect water away from Queen Bower and infill drain.

Legend:
- Fenceline
- Existing watercourse
- Proposed watercourse route
- Forest roads

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On-Site Consultation

- FC – Ecologist, Keeper, Recreation Ranger
- NPA – Ecologist, Archaeologist, Access Officer
- Commoners Defence Association
- New Forest Association
- Natural England
- Verderers
- Agister
**Felling Licence**
- Application to Forestry Commission
- Comments invited from Natural England, National Park Authority, Parish Councils

**Flood Defence Consent**
- Application to Environment Agency
- Detailed restoration plan with mitigation for sensitivities

**Inform and Engage**
- Restoration plans available on FC/HLS website
- Raise awareness with local communities
ISSUES
Where’s your evidence?

Eroding drain...
Where’s your evidence now?

... or much-loved landscape?
Grazing
Boggy ground
Debris dams
Reinstatement
Local concerns

Why is it in ‘unfavourable condition’?
Why have we picked these areas for habitat restoration?

“I can’t see anything wrong with it”
“It’s always been like this and I’ve lived here all my life”
“You will do more harm by interfering”
“It will recover naturally”
“Cutting down trees and scrub is destroying important habitat, especially for birds”
“Why interfere with nature?”
Visual impact of sites in the landscape

Open habitats vs Woodland setting
Fear of the unknown...
SUCCESSES & SOLUTIONS
Compromises and agreements

Lawn restoration
Access – fords, passageways
Stock safety
Unstable areas
Proven track record

Stakeholders ...
• Now giving approval to tackle sites previously rejected at the consultation stage
• Uniting to support FC proposals on contentious sites

Other audiences...
• Recognition by statutory agencies and NGOs
• The trust of Parish Councils
• Local people standing up in support of the work
Ongoing communications

• Level of engagement
• Methods of engagement
• Presence on the ground
• Monitoring and feedback
Local Champions

- New Forest Keepers
- Recreation Rangers
- Local experts
Quality of contractors

- Over 30 years of experience in habitat restoration and creation
- All the staff understand the objectives of the project - from managers to machine operators
- Innovative ideas for ecologically sensitive locations
THANK YOU
Letter to a Forester...

This letter was received by way of explanation of the remarkable cartoon drawing left on a harvesting machine.

'I must admit that I shed a few tears when I first caught the monster in the act. A brontosaurus of a thing munching its way rapidly through enormous trees - unbelievable power... and the speed of it. How long it takes for a tree to grow, how quickly it can fall!

Last Friday, I dared to go back and see what had happened. Face my demons, keep up with the changes. Found the monster gorged and asleep under some trees and dared to touch its head. Then I had the bright idea of leaving it a pleading message - I snuck back and stuck it to the cab of the machine. A couple of days ago I bumped into Little John (the contractor), dared to own up and he had thoroughly enjoyed it. He told me about your woodland strategy, how he goes about choosing which trees to fell, how the monster calculates, computes (amazing) and it felt like a nice completion to have chatted with him.

I'm sure that when the autumn comes and the light is not so harsh, the wood will start to soften. With all the debris and tyre tracks, it looks a bit like the woodland equivalent of the Blitz at the moment, but it's still beautiful and those trees that are left will benefit from the increase in light and space. I think that once the timber stacks and debris have disappeared, I'll quickly grow used to the new shape! And I realise that some of the debris will stay behind to rot down and renew the soil. So well done - I can see how meticulous the planning and execution has been (and continues to be). Be nice to meet you some day.'
Outline content:

Background to the New Forest and the wetland restoration programme
Processes to engage with consultees and stakeholders
Identify issues
Share successes and solutions

Surrounded by major conurbations.
It is the extent of the habitats as well as their uniqueness that makes this area internationally important for conservation.

Crown lands managed by the FC total 29,000 ha
Owned by the State, managed by the FC

6 river catchments in the forest:

- Cadnam River
- Bartley River
- Beaulieu River
- Hampshire Avon
- Lymington River
- Avon Water

All need restoration work to some extent.

Their extent, unique management and relative lack of disturbance - means that they are home to many rare species unable to survive elsewhere.

These fragile habitats are easily damaged by man.

Unique management systems in New Forest

- Verderers
- Agisters
- Commoners

No solid geology - underlain with gravels, sands and clays
Streamside lawns very valuable for Commoners stock
Very fragile habitats!
LIFE Projects - European funding

PROGRESS Project - Partnership with Fontainbleau
Peoples interaction with wildlife; conservation in an area with high visitor pressure. How people use the forest, **encouraging more responsible use**

F4K Project - NPA, NE and FC, with EA joining later

Govt’s **PSA target** - 95% fav/recov cond by 2010

HLS - Verderers, NPA and FC, with NE administrating money on behalf of DEFRA

SSSI units are usually in unfavourable condition
due to:

- Artificial drainage
- Tree and scrub encroachment
- Non-native species

**For each site where restoration works are proposed:**

FC undertakes fieldwork and research to prepare a restoration proposal for consultation.

At this stage, initial assessment of sensitivities – site specific constraints, and options for mitigation strategies.

(eg archaeology, rare species, ordnance, community feeling, access routes)

**Dartford warbler** - gorse 34% GB breeding population 538 prs

**Lapwing** – ground nesting birds, disturbance, corvid/predator perches

**Odonata** - Southern damselfly and SBT

**Fish** - 20spp recorded, incl sea trout, stone loach, bullhead and brook lamprey

**Ordnance** – Ashley Walk bombing range

**Archaeology** - Lots of WWII stuff; also much older, eg calcined flints of boiling mounds, medieval bee gardens

Restoration proposal circulated to consultees 2 weeks before the site visit.
Consultation site visit with representatives of the organisations listed above.

**Talk about issues these groups have**

FC writes up and circulates the record of discussions and decisions from the site visit, with an accompanying revised restoration proposal for consideration and approval. Consultees to respond to FC with any comments or conditions within 4 weeks.

Review of feedback:

I Restoration proposal approved  
ii Restoration proposal approved with conditions – acceptable to all  
iii Restoration proposal approved with conditions – not acceptable to all  
iv Restoration proposal not approved in its current form

Circulate final proposal to all consultees.

**FC to obtain licences and consents as required.**  
FC to review level of community engagement required and implement (eg signage, parish councils, local newsletters, information events)

**FC’s changing role as an organisation**

Public perception...recognition as not just forestry but conservation, habitat management and restoration

**STAKEHOLDERS: Verderers, CDA – need clear evidence**  
At some sites, erosive damage is very clear...  
Straight, deep drains  
Continued erosion of stream bed  
No interaction with floodplain  
Any attempt at meandering is several feet below floodplain – will never make it out of channel.  
Often dug to side of original meanders, where drier and easier – so not at lowest point in floodplain.  
IF overbank flooding occurs, can’t get back into drain channel – up hill, plus spoil banks to get over!

Sometimes harder to see...  
Aerial photos can help  
Or other ‘proof’ found during research – historic maps, wartime photos
Grazing – quantity, quality & condition
Perceived issue of stock being disturbed
Need to monitor – vegetation surveys: biomass, species composition, resilience of floodplain to drought
Commoners HATE water ‘out of channel’ – they strongly oppose debris dams!
Water needs to be under control!

Springwatch Brigade – look at the lovely wildlife
Power of the people! Let’s demonstrate!
Reference to Latchmore;
Compare Latchmore and Blackwater here?

Flooding impacts
Effect on grazing
Out of control...
Fear of change and disturbance
Adjusting to access restrictions during high flows

Felling colonising secondary woodland and scrub – extra grazing.
Suppression of scrub and bracken due to raised water table
Associated access works – removal of concrete culverts and less need for structures with a shallower watercourse to cross
Stock getting stuck in deep drains
Gravel deposition on lawn – due to upstream erosion. Remove erosive force and system becomes stable.
ENGAGEMENT:
Inform or consult? Be clear about what you are doing!
If inform, how? Newsletters, websites, one-off mtgs, guided walks, attendance at PC meetings
If consult, who with? Locally – Parish Council
Eg Latchmore talk ‘info mtg’ showed most people were afraid of the unknown; knowledge = reassured
Presence on the ground – changing situations.
Informal one-to-one engagement and reassurance
Be a human! Recognise locals care, and that they need to see that YOU do too.
MONITORING AND FEEDBACK:
What if it goes wrong? Funding to fix it?
Keep in touch!
Fixed point photos to Parish Council mtgs
FC to oversee delivery of restoration work on the ground. Presence on the ground
FC to monitor works and undertake snagging as required.

New Forest Keepers:
Presence on the ground
Link to local communities

Recreation Rangers:
Support public enjoyment and understanding

Local experts/allies:
Especially in response to community issues! ie Latchmore
All need to be kept informed – updates, progress reports, information provision and training events

A great example of genuine public interest.
Both contractor and FC staff took the time to listen to concerns and the opportunity to explain about forest management.