



south east water ARUP

Press release

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Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) SouthWest's 'Hills to Levels' project wins prestigious 2018 UK River Prize

This year's winning entry for the prestigious 2018 UK River Prize, which recognises and celebrates the achievements of individuals and organisations committed to improving our rivers and catchments, is 'Hills to Levels' – a partnership project led by Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) SouthWest. The announcement was made at the annual UK River Prize Awards Dinner on 24th April at the De Vere East Midlands Conference Centre, in Nottingham.

The UK River Prize is administered by the River Restoration Centre, partnered by Arup, South East Water, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Natural Resources Wales.

This year's impressive level of entries were judged by a panel of esteemed industry experts, including Martin Janes (River Restoration Centre), Oliver Lowe (Natural Resources Wales), Pam Nolan (Environment Agency), Ann Skinner (Independent) and Christopher Spray (University of Dundee).

After much deliberation, the overall winner was the 'Hills to Levels' project in Somerset for their "excellent demonstration of integrated catchment-wide approaches to raising awareness and tackling river quality problems". Fiona Bowles (River Restoration Centre Chairman) presented the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SW (FWAG) and project partners with the Nigel Holmes Trophy – named after a hugely influential and passionate river restoration and conservation advocate.

Commenting on the winners' achievement, Martin Janes, Managing Director of the River Restoration Centre said: "After Somerset became the focus for so much bad news and hardship as a result of the 2013/14 winter flooding, it is excellent to see such a well-coordinated approach has emerged to managing both the sources of flooding and poor river ecology. Such catchment-scale approaches need the level of commitment and enthusiasm that 'Hills to Levels' displays, to involve the huge number of landowners and to partner with them to make significant change happen. 'Hills to Levels' builds on previous catchment projects on the Tone

and Parrett with a clear message that ‘every field, every farm and every stream has a part to play’.”

About the ‘Hills to Levels’ winning entry



An estimated 25,000m³ of floodwater can be stored in the project’s many ‘leaky ponds’.

Following the devastating floods in Somerset in 2014, the ‘Hills to Levels’ project was set up as a collaboration between the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) SouthWest, Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT), RSPB and the Royal Bath & West Society. The work is over five main catchments – River Parrett, River Tone, West Somerset Streams, River Brue and River Axe. Since then, Hills to Levels has come a long way: water quality, erosion reduction and improving habitats have been added to the original project remit and the funders and project partners have changed. Currently, Hills to Levels is supported by and works in partnership with the Somerset Rivers Authority, the Environment Agency, Interreg 2 Seas for the Triple C project and Natural England Catchment Sensitive Farming.

Many streams in the area are failing current standards for inputs of sediment and phosphate and poor fish habitat; and their ecology suffers from being heavily modified through centuries of use. The project uses a holistic catchment approach, providing advice on soil and land use management in order to reduce sediment runoff to the rivers, and improve infiltration and hydrological processes to reduce flooding and improve drought resilience.

400 farms were visited and 453 natural flood management structures have been put in place, including 232 woody structures and ponds helping to store 25,000m³ of flood water, and

planting 11ha of woodland. Flow paths were assessed to target problem areas. Success is being measured using data loggers, time lapse cameras, fixed point photography, invertebrate surveys and infiltration tests to quantify the benefits.

The long-term vision is for NFM to become an everyday part of land management, and for these farmers to become ambassadors of NFM, encouraging others to carry out similar work, and to strive towards the land acting 'like a sponge, not a sloping roof', reducing flooding and sediment runoff, resulting in healthier rivers.

'Hills to Levels' current principle project partners



Quotes from the 2018 UK River Prize sponsorship partners:

"Arup is once again delighted to partner The UK River Prize in 2018. We champion best practice, innovation and pragmatic thinking, and we fully support the recognition that this prestigious award provides. Following on from last year's inspiring finalists, it is superb to see another great set of deserving projects shortlisted this year." **Mark Fletcher, Global Water Leader, Arup**

"We're delighted to be associated with this high profile national award. The impressive level of entries submitted for the 2018 UK River Prize reflect our ambition of restoring, maintaining and improving our rivers, catchments and the natural environment. South East Water is fully committed to supporting excellence and best practice in water management, which has clearly been demonstrated through the projects submitted by this year's innovative and creative finalists." **Simon Lohrey, NEP Surface Water Catchment Management Lead, South East Water**

"Protecting our water environment through catchment management is essential to help build resilience and sustainability for wildlife and water resources in the future. The projects submitted for the 2018 UK River Prize demonstrate a vast variety of innovative techniques being used to achieve this. It is our vision at Severn Trent to be environmental leaders, we are very happy to be partnering the UK River Prize and it's great to see successful entries coming from within our region." **Zara Turtle, Catchment Partnership Coordinator, Severn Trent Water**

Notes to editors

This year's UK River Prize category winners – making up the four finalists:

Finalist	Category winner	Lead applicant
Love Your River Telford <i>Shropshire</i>	Innovation project <i>Demonstrating an innovative approach to protecting and improving the river environment</i>	Environment Agency
Overall Winner Hills to Levels <i>Somerset</i>	Catchment-scale project <i>Demonstrating an integrated catchment-wide approach to raising awareness and tackling river quality problems</i>	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group South West
Connswater Community Greenway <i>Belfast</i>	Urban rivers project <i>Working on highly constrained and modified urban watercourses to improve biodiversity, flood protection, access and recreation</i>	Connswater Community Greenway Trust
Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership <i>Warwickshire & Staffordshire</i>	Multiple benefit partnership project <i>Demonstrating a long-term partnership approach to restoring the ecology and natural functioning of rivers and wetlands</i>	Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

The River Restoration Centre is the UK's independent expert centre for information and advice on best practice restoration and management of rivers and their catchments. We are committed to ensuring our watercourses are restored and managed for the benefit of all, with long lasting results for future generations to enjoy. Healthy rivers and catchments provide enjoyment and well-being for people, rich and diverse wildlife and strong economic benefits for modern society.

Short videos have been submitted by the winner and finalists. These are available to view on the River Restoration Centre's website. Further information on the finalists is available at www.therrc.co.uk/uk-river-prize

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