

WATER COLLABORATION SET TO IMPROVE HABITATS THROUGH CITIZEN SCIENCE

South East Water has been revealed as one of the winners of a national £2 million Innovation in Water Challenge (IWC) for an initiative that aims to improve water habitats for native species.

CatchmentLIFE, is a bespoke software package which aims to make scientific recording of habitats and wildlife easy for everyone to take part in, including volunteers.

The computer programme will allow communities to get involved in reporting on the wildlife in their area which will support scientific experts by providing much more data and information about the water habitats than can be collected alone.

The design was submitted to Ofwat's Innovation Fund - where £2 million was available for ideas that tackle shared problems faced by the water sector – and was voted as one of just 11 winners from a packed field.

Debbie Wilkinson, Groundwater Manager at South East Water said: "I have had the idea for this software for quite some time and this innovation fund is allowing it to become reality.

"Seeing is often believing so I wanted to make something that could show the damage caused to habitats in the hope we can protect our water species. The software is based on a series of ecological models and will be user-friendly as we aim to design it by working with users from a broad spectrum of organisations."

CatchmentLIFE has been developed by South East Water with partners Bristol Water plc, Earthwatch Europe, Environment Agency, Loughborough University, Natural Resources Wales, SES Water, The River Restoration Centre (RRC), University of Huddersfield, and Wessex Water Services Ltd. It will receive £197,000 in total to take the project forward.

Emma Goddard, Head of Environment at South East Water, went on to describe how CatchmentLIFE has the potential to improve water habitats.

She said: “This Innovation in Water Challenge funding is providing an incredible opportunity to trial a new approach that will identify the impact water catchment pressures can have on our native species.

“It has the potential to have a profound impact on the ecological status and improve water habitats nationally and identify collaborative options to resolve issues at the root-cause.”

Recommended by an independent panel of judges, CatchmentLIFE is one of 11 collaborative initiatives led by water companies and involving a number of partner organisations, that will receive up to £250,000 each to tackle the biggest issues facing the water sector in England and Wales.

John Russell, Senior Director at Ofwat, said: “Innovation has the potential to drive a sea-change in the water sector and tackle some of the biggest challenges we are facing in society. Solutions such as this will make a real impact in the coming months and mark the beginning of a new wave of innovation in the sector.”

Run by Ofwat and Nesta Challenges, and supported by Arup and Isle Utilities, the IWC was the first competition this year within Ofwat’s £200 million Innovation Fund. It is part of the regulator’s goal to create an innovative and collaborative water sector that meets the evolving needs of customers, society and the environment in the years to come.

To find out more about the IWC and the full list of winning entries visit waterinnovation.challenges.org.

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Notes to Editor:

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About Ofwat’s Innovation Fund

Ofwat is the economic regulator of the water and wastewater sector in England and Wales. The regulator has established a £200 million Innovation Fund to grow the water sector’s

capacity to innovate, enabling it to better meet the evolving needs of customers, society, and the environment.

From 2021 Ofwat will run at least two types of competitions that water companies, in partnership with others, can enter with their innovations.

- A £2 million Innovation in Water Challenge (IWC) with the opportunity to win funding up to £250,000. The initiatives selected to receive funding are announced today.
- The £40 million Water Breakthrough Challenge. The first round will open for entries on 6 May 2021.

We expect different rounds of the competitions to run until 2025, but our goal is that the Innovation Fund's impact will continue well beyond this.

To learn more, please visit <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/about-us/our-duties/>. To contact Ofwat's press office, please call 07458 126271

About Nesta and Nesta Challenges

Nesta is an innovation foundation. For us, innovation means turning bold ideas into reality and changing lives for the better. We use our expertise, skills and funding in areas where there are big challenges facing society. We've spent over 20 years working out the best ways to make change happen through research and experimenting, and we've applied that to our work in innovation policy, health, education, government innovation and the creative economy and arts.

Within Nesta, [Nesta Challenges](#) exists to design and run challenge prizes that help solve pressing problems that lack solutions. We shine a spotlight where it matters and incentivise people to solve these issues. We are independent supporters of change to help communities thrive and inspire the best placed, most diverse groups of people around the world to take action.

We support the boldest and bravest ideas to become real, and seed long term change to advance society and build a better future for everyone. We are part of the innovation foundation, Nesta. We are challengers. We are innovators. We are game changers.