



Progress

Report

September
1999 - 2001

THE NORTH EAST RIVERS PROJECT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 1999 - SEPTEMBER 2001

BACKGROUND

Since September 1999 extensive consultations have been carried out across Aberdeenshire. Meetings and discussions have been held with a range of relevant agencies and interested groups. (Listed at the end of the document). The purpose of these consultations was to gauge opinions on the management of freshwater ecosystems across Aberdeenshire. It also provided a good networking opportunity for the project.

In parallel with these meetings, the Project Officer attended numerous river-related seminars, conferences and workshops. These provided a broad overview of the subject, giving insight to national as well as local management problems and solutions. The Project has also commented on a number of consultation documents. Examples of which are Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's Dee Catchment Management Plan, the Cairngorms Rivers Report, Aberdeenshire's Local and Structure Plans and the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Urie Floodplain Development. The project also had close involvement in the consultation on the Cairngorms and North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan's for Riparian, Wet Woodland and Water Vole.

An issues report was compiled for the management group in early summer 2001. This provided an overview of the main problems and gaps associated with river management in Aberdeenshire. The report aimed to provide direction for the project by identifying the areas/issues not already being tackled on the rivers of Aberdeenshire. These 'gaps/issues' are areas the project could focus on in its second phase and have already governed the choice of workshop themes and demonstration projects.

A substantial part of the project has been general awareness raising and promotion of best practice. This has been carried out via a range of mechanisms:-

- demonstration projects
- production of guidance notes
- workshops
- one to one meetings
- on-site visits

The project was extended to September 2001. This allowed for continuation of its awareness raising and informative dissemination work within Aberdeenshire. Further funding bids however were held back until the project's role, in relation with the other many river initiatives in the area, was clearer. This was to minimise conflict and competition with funding bids from within the area and to ensure a more co-ordinated bid for Heritage Lottery funding which is hoped to form the basis for Phase II.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

1 Database Information

A contacts database (Microsoft Access) has been established. It holds over 100 names, addresses, e-mails, etc. of relevant agencies, groups and individuals the project has encountered in the last few years. The database is divided into names on a catchment by catchment basis and also at a general and national level. General/national includes people who are involved with rivers across Aberdeenshire and Scotland e.g. academics, research bodies and environmental agencies.

On a smaller scale but similar format, a projects database has been compiled. This listed all relevant projects and associated interest groups happening in Aberdeenshire.

A database of river related dissertations both for the University of Aberdeen and the Robert Gordon University has also been established.

2 Demonstration Projects

Part of the projects first year remit was to identify and fund projects that demonstrate environmentally sustainable river management. In order to ensure the fair selection of projects, an advisory panel was set up.

The North East Rivers Advisory Panel and their respective interests are:

Community - Rod Lovie, Outreach Officer, Rural Environmental Action Project

Academic - Mark Young, Freshwater Ecology Lecturer, Aberdeen University

Fisheries - Mike Donaughey, Scientific Officer, Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory

Farming - John Miskelly, Area Representative, Scottish National Farmers Union

Landowners - Mark Andrew, Area Representative, Scottish Landowners Federation

Education - Vacancy, Aberdeenshire Education Service

Conservation - Vacancy

Economic - Vacancy

A number of panel members have changed employment and their replacements have yet to be identified.

Guidance notes and a selection criteria were devised in order to ease the demonstration project selection process. All application forms had a copy of the criteria and guidance attached ([see Appendix 2](#)).

However the Project Officer also worked as closely as possible with potential applicants to ensure the selection criteria was fully understood before applications were submitted.

In the first round, the project funded 5 separate initiatives:

The first funding round for demonstration projects was in June 2000 details of which are listed below.

■ Birse Community Trust Rivers and Burns Project:

focussing on production of guidance notes for fish passage and water mills (spawning in lades, impassable weirs); maintenance of forest tracks to minimise run-off which results in higher sediment loads in local burns.

■ LBAP Riparian Tree Nursery:

the production of local, native riparian trees to stock sites in Aberdeenshire; there are about 2,500-3,000 trees with tree guards to supply to suitable sites.

■ Tarland Catchment Initiative:

catchment-wide 5 year project for enhancing and monitoring the Tarland Burn and its tributaries, Deeside; the project is funding £5,000 out of the overall estimated £55,000 cost.

■ National Trust for Scotland Coy Burn Walkway Improvements:

part-funding works to improve a walkway near the Coy Burn and help relieve the access pressure from the eroding bank sides.

■ Ythan Angling Workshops:

two workshops part-funded by the project but run by the Ythan Fishery Board; the workshops aimed to provide advice to proprietors and anglers who may wish to carry out work in river.

In the 2nd Funding Round the following projects were approved:

The second funding round was on the 8th September 2000.

■ Native Floodplain Forestry -

enhancement of a stretch of riparian woodland via the removal of non-native/invasive tree and plant species. Project lead, North East Native Woodlands.

■ Fordyce Community Initiative -

enhancement of a disused quarry on the outskirts of Fordyce. This has the Burn of Fordyce running through it. Project lead, Fordyce Community Association.

■ Knock Farm Wetland -

establishing a wetland environment along a small farm burn. This will take place within a field volunteered by the farmer himself, with easy access to the roadside and existing access routes. Project lead, Roger Polson (farmer) and Grampian Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

As part of the conditions for funding these projects were required to complete a report on the initiative/event by April 2001. Some of the projects like the Birse Community Trust will also be producing guidance notes. Any demonstration project publicity also acknowledged the North East Rivers Project. The publicity the project has received to date and the newsletters the project targeted for publicity are available from Aberdeenshire Council.

3 Guidance Notes

Separate from the demonstration projects, the North East Rivers Project has funded Grampian Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to produce two sets of guidance notes, one on pond creation/maintenance and the other on watercourse buffer strips. Both of these are aimed at the farming community but the notes on ponds have a trout fishery development emphasis, aiming to make it a useful document for Development Control Planners to improve the habitat/conservation aspects of future trout fishery/agricultural/recreational pond developments. The project was involved in the update and reprint of Aberdeenshire Council's notes on Watercourse Management and Maintenance and the addition of a Flooding section. The project is assisting the Fishery Boards and Grampian FWAG in the production of a Ditches and Drainage leaflet.

4 Workshops and Seminars

The project has successfully run a number of workshops/meetings. Details of these are listed below:

■ **Preliminary meeting of the Flood Prevention Team and Development Control Planning** - this meeting brought the two departments together to discuss the issues where the North East Rivers Project and an integrated approach to river management could help. From this stemmed the next workshop.

■ **Aberdeenshire Council Staff Awareness Workshop** -

This was an in-house workshop aimed at increasing awareness of flood prevention, flood plain development and general river issues within Aberdeenshire Council. In attendance were representatives from each Development Control Team in Aberdeenshire, the Flood Prevention Team (Transportation & Infrastructure), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage and representatives from Aberdeen City. The workshop was a half-day event with presentations from Flood Prevention, Development Control, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Planning and the Council's Environment Officer. After general discussions, a short practical exercise took place. This involved a hypothetical planning application on a floodplain, with numerous associated issues. The audience was split into mixed groups. The exercise was designed to get the various departments working together and considering the range of issues presented to them.

One of the main issues highlighted during the workshop discussions was the lack of a Flood Appraisal Group for Aberdeenshire. This is a group advised by National Planning Policy Guidelines 7. Since the workshop, numerous meetings have taken place to get this group up and running. It is now established as the North East Scotland Flood Appraisal Group.

A report of the Workshop proceedings was compiled and distributed to all those who attended. To ensure this also filtered down to all other Development Control Planners a summary report was produced and copies sent out to all Development Control Teams in Aberdeenshire.

■ **Project Funding Workshop** -

From the beginning, the lack of co-ordination of rivers projects across Aberdeenshire has been an issue that has influenced the North East Rivers Project's decision making. Towards the middle of the year (2000) and with the ever-closer funding application deadlines, it became obvious to the project a meeting/

workshop was required. The North East Rivers Project organised a Funding Workshop, inviting all the relevant river based projects/initiatives in the area - Ugie Wetland Project, Tarland Catchment Initiative, Ythan Project, Don District Salmon Fishery Board, Dee District Salmon Fishery Board and Grampian Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. Representatives from Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, North East Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Scottish National Farmers Union were also present.

The meeting was designed to bring together all river related projects/initiatives that would potentially be submitting funding applications to the likes of LIFE Environment and LIFE Nature, Heritage Lottery Funding and other larger funding bodies. It was hoped a meeting might minimise the level of overlap and competition for funding between projects.

The North East Rivers Project produced a number of handouts for the day giving details of relevant funding bodies. The information was split into large and small grant awarding bodies, with details of sums of money available, deadlines, contact numbers, etc.

The meeting proved a successful awareness raising exercise and has hopefully resulted in a number of projects taking a partnership approach for further funding bids.

■ River Restoration Workshop -

was aimed at a broader audience than any of the previous events organised by the project. The audience included District Fishery Boards, Angling Associations, environmental project staff and agencies, research bodies and academics. The guest speakers were experts in their fields, which ranged from academic to on the ground enhancement works. The workshop was held in October 2000 and consisted of a half-day of presentations/discussions and half-day on site.

■ Rivers and the Natural Heritage Seminar -

at the Castle Hotel, Huntly in June 2001. This was to a broad audience of fishery, angling, academic, research, conservation and local authority interests. The seminar looked at the requirements, management and legislation of riverine species and habitats, with talks on freshwater pearl mussel, salmon, bank side mammals, riparian woodland and general riverine conservation.

■ Fishery Boards Workshop -

was chaired by the chairman of the Scottish Association of Salmon Fishery Boards, Andrew Wallace. The agenda was set out by the Boards themselves, covering issues/problems they consider relevant. The project felt a separate meeting for the Fishery interests would encourage them to speak freely of their concerns for river management and this was successful as there was considerable discussion and debate at the workshop.

The workshop themes selected by the project have all been issues raised during the initial consultation period. It is hoped the workshops will increase awareness of these issues and provide an opportunity for information circulation/dissemination across the catchments of Aberdeenshire.

5 Training

A River Habitat Survey (RHS) Training Course was run by SEPA and supported by the North East Rivers Project. This trained and accredited 8 people who are involved in rivers and river issues in Aberdeenshire e.g. Project Officers, Fishery Board representatives, Flood Prevention Officers.

River Habitat Survey is the survey method employed by Scottish Environmental Protection Agency to assess the habitat quality of Scottish rivers and burns. By training people in Aberdeenshire the project hoped to broaden their awareness of the range of habitat features and issues to consider when managing the river or habitats there in.

6 Record Keeping/Photographic Data

Throughout the year the project officer has compiled a photographic record of the rivers within Aberdeenshire. This includes photographs of specific events such as floods and the progress of river engineering works. The majority of these are on disc and will be used for publicity and presentation purposes.

7 Consultation

A short questionnaire was sent to all Scottish Local Authorities, questioning their involvement and policies regarding riverine issues. Response has been excellent and a number of other river projects have come to light because of this. This will provide a useful contact base for Phase II and dissemination of information across Scotland.

8 HLF Area Partnership Scheme

NERP Phase II is now working on pulling together projects from across Aberdeenshire to submit to the Heritage Lottery Fund. At this stage we are helping direct and advise local initiatives of the criteria they must meet for HLF and aiming to get to the stage one application level by December 2001.

Consultation List

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeen and District Angling Association
Aberdeenshire Council
Aberdeenshire Environmental Forum
Aberdeen University
Association of District Fishery Boards
Atlantic Salmon Trust
Ballater Environmental Education Centre
Birse Community Trust
Cairngorms Biodiversity Action Plan
Cairngorms Partnership
Dave Latham Outdoor Activities
Dee DSFB
Dee Salmon Improvement Association
Deveron DSFB
Dess and Aboyne Water Project
Don Brown Trout Improvement Association
Don DSFB
Drum Tree Nursery
Esk DSFB
Forestry Commission
Forest Enterprise
Forvie Tree Nursery (Bob Davies)
Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory
Grampian Enterprise Limited
Grampian Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Habitat Enhancement Initiative
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (now CEH)
Inverurie Angling Association
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
Mid Dee Project
Monymusk Estate
North East Local Biodiversity Action Plan
North East Native Woodlands
North of Scotland Water Authority
Northern Periphery Project
National Trust for Scotland (Crathes)
River Restoration Centre
Robert Gordons University
RSPB
Rural Environmental Action Programme
Scottish Canoe Association
Scottish Landowners Federation
Scottish Native Woodlands
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Scottish National Farmers Union
SEPA Aberdeen
SERAD
SNH Aberdeen and Edinburgh
Turriff Angling Association
Tweed Forum
Tweed Foundation
Ugie Angling Association
Ugie Wetland Project
World Wildlife Fund for Nature - Wild Rivers
Project
Ythan DSFB
Ythan Project