

## Catchment Restoration Fund Project Briefing Note



### The Axe and Exe River Improvement Project (AERIP)

The Axe and Exe River Improvement Project (AERIP) is a partnership project using Catchment Restoration Funds to undertake river catchment restoration on the Axe and Exe. The partnership, led by the Westcountry Rivers Trust, has been carrying out river restoration and undertaking works to address the causes of Water Framework Directive issues for many years.

#### The Axe and Exe River Improvement Project (AERIP) partnership includes:

- River Exe and Tributaries Association
- Axe Vale Rivers Association
- Environment Agency
- South West Water
- Exe Mitigation Group
- River Exe Foundation
- Exmoor National Park
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England
- East Devon AONB
- Dorset AONB
- South West Rivers Association

#### Through restoration work the project will address issues including:

- Barriers to fish migration, preventing fish from reaching their natural spawning grounds
- Diffuse pollution, the run-off of soil and nutrients which cause damage to spawning grounds and a negative impact on the wider river ecology
- Interrupted conveyance of river gravels reducing the spawning habitat for trout and salmon
- Degraded river corridor habitat, including the impacts from abandoned tree coppice and excessively eroded and poached riverbanks damaged by stock access.

Key facts	
<b>River Basin District</b>	South West
<b>Catchments</b>	Axe and Exe
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p><b>Water quality management</b> – More consistent supply of better water quality</p> <p><b>Improved biodiversity</b> - increased habitat biodiversity and re-naturalisation</p> <p><b>Social</b> - Improved leisure environment for angling and recreation</p> <p><b>Economic</b> - Improved fisheries and spawning for commercial stocks</p> <p><b>Flood attenuation and management</b> - Improved soil management</p> <p><b>Counteract climate change</b> - Carbon sequestration through wetland sinks</p>
<b>Start Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> May 2012
<b>End Date</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015
<b>Budget</b>	£670,870, (£617,320 from CRF & £53,550 from match funding)

## Description of Works

To tackle the issues in the Axe and Exe catchments the Axe and Exe River Improvement Project (AERIP) will undertake the following activities:

- **Weir Removal/Easement** – Direct physical action to remove an obstacle, or to increase its pass ability to fish and/or eels, will remove the factor that is causing a water body to fail for fish.
- **Gravel Augmentation** – Restoration of spawning habitat by means of gravel works, using graded gravels from both local quarries and by grading and recycling gravel removed from the river for flood defence purposes. These works will directly help to increase spawning rates and survival of the early stages of salmon, trout and other fish such as bullheads.
- **Restoration of Riverine Habitat** – Selective coppicing to promote a diversity of bankside vegetation and prevent excessive riverbank erosion. This will be linked with coarse woody debris introduction to provide improved instream fish habitat.
- **Fencing** – Where agricultural input is a causative issue of failure under WFD (phosphate), targeted riparian fencing along with associated drinking points will be constructed or alternative supply provided by drinking troughs.
- **Track creation/improvement** – As well as creating new tracks, sediment traps/diverters/culverts will be installed on forestry and farm tracks to remove pathways of diffuse pollution run-off.
- **Nutrient Management** – Soil testing will be made available to farmers in the catchment, particularly on the Bathern and Blackwater, to enable better targeting of expensive inputs and help to reduce losses of nutrients to watercourses.
- **Improved soil management** – Soil investigations for compaction will be undertaken to help target work for soil structural improvement. Farmland work like sub-soiling will aim to improve crop growth, as well as reduce soil erosion and run-off which can lead to flooding and damage to the river ecology.

Wider education work will also take place, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders including, landowners, schools, colleges and fishing club volunteers. With a range of activities including Salmon ova reared in the school classroom to farm and river management events.

## What will success look like?

Success in the Axe and Exe catchments will include the direct delivery of the above actions but will also include the development of a strong partnership that brings together the organisations and stakeholders that have a role to play in managing both catchments and helping to meet the standards required for the Water Framework Directive.

<b>About the team – Westcountry Rivers Trust</b>
<b>Project Manager</b> – John Hickey Senior Land and Fisheries Officer
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