

LIFE Environment Project title:

The Ythan Project – sustainable land management in the Ythan catchment

Project partners:

Lead partner: Aberdeenshire Council

Other partners: Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Ythan District Fishery Board
Forest Enterprise
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
River Restoration Centre
Formartine Partnership

Description of the work as given in the project summary section of the LIFE application form:

Objectives

The project aims to assess the success of taking a community based approach to developing sustainable land management practices in the catchment of the river Ythan. The catchment is the first large scale Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) in Scotland and suffers from several river degradation issues. The project will involve local people (farmers, anglers, residents, walkers etc) in decisions and actions designed to limit the environmental deterioration of the area and aims to achieve more wide ranging results than may be achieved by either the NVZ legislation or agri-environment schemes alone. The project will evaluate the hypothesis that by bringing local people together to find a common solution to specific issues, more effective results can be achieved through better targeting and integrating of actions. The project therefore aims to enhance the river's ecological status and to provide a model for best practice in the future involvement of local communities in these issues.

Description of work

The key aspect of this proposal is the innovative way in which it will focus on ensuring that many sectors of the local community share ownership and development of the project. This will include farmers, anglers, walking groups, school groups and residents. Representatives of all these groups have been uniquely drawn together to develop the ideas for this proposal and will continue to be involved in the project. The usefulness of this style of approach will be evaluated and the findings will be used to produce a 'conceptual model' for the way in which local communities and national agencies can work together on land management issues in river catchments. This model could then be adapted for other situations, enabling the project's findings to be applied widely throughout Europe. By involving many sectors of the local community in the project we hope to demonstrate that such an approach is successful because people are drawn together by a common goal, enabling them to articulate their views and jointly deliver tangible results. This should reduce their individual direct impacts on the river as well as increasing the incentives for farmers to implement best practice.

Practical work will include:

- Establishment of a farm demonstration site to disseminate best practice, particularly to the local farming community

- Working with local farmers to increase applications to agri-environment schemes; to develop nutrient budgeting work and to produce water management plans for individual farms
- Bringing together anglers, walkers, local residents and national agencies to select and manage restoration work on key sections of the river which are currently degraded
- Working with local residents and others with an interest in the river to monitor changes in water quality and other indicators

Throughout these tasks the project will aim to push forward the development of best practice by encouraging the application of innovative techniques to these land management issues.

To oversee the project, a steering group, representing all interests, will be established. This will meet on a regular basis throughout the project and will provide a mechanism through which all community groups can have their views included.

Expected results

A conceptual model for involving local people in catchment issues

Effective partnerships between previously opposed groups (e.g. farmers and environmentalists)

Enhancement of the ecological status of the river and its habitats

Development of local peoples' understanding of catchment land management issues resulting in increased social incentives for landmangers to utilise best practice

Delivery of combined ecological and business benefits for local landmangers in an integrated manner