The network for best practices of river restoration in Greater Europe

ECRR
European Centre for River Restoration

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Contents

Editorial

This ECRR Technical Newsletter brings together three articles that reflect the breadth of current ecological water system restoration practice across Europe: the LIFE Dordogne project, the EU funded OPTAIN Project, and LIFE WADER project. Together, they highlight how restoration is increasingly shaped by integrated catchment thinking, stakeholder and community engagement, nature-based solutions, and the practical exchange of knowledge between projects, practitioners and river basin organisations.

The Dordogne contribution focuses on stakeholder and community involvement, public participation and communication around river restoration, including the preparation of the ECRR network study tour planned for September 2026. It shows how shared learning in the field can support wider understanding of restoration challenges and opportunities.

The OPTAIN Project article adds a complementary perspective by addressing natural water retention measures and their role in building more resilient catchments.

LIFE WADER, meanwhile, brings attention to wetland and wader habitat restoration, demonstrating the close connection between river systems, floodplains, biodiversity and landscape-scale recovery.

By presenting these three initiatives side by side, this newsletter aims to support the exchange of experience within the ECRR network and beyond. The articles offer practical insights, lessons learned and inspiration for those working to restore rivers, reconnect floodplains, strengthen ecological resilience and involve people more effectively in the future of Europe's rivers.

On behalf of the ECRR Members and Board,
Bart Fokkens

LIFE Dordogne River: Restoring Alluvial Habitats and Building a Shared Culture of River Conservation

Author

Baptiste Potet EPIDOR

Led by EPIDOR, the public territorial establishment for the Dordogne basin, the LIFE Dordogne River project is restoring aquatic and alluvial habitats along one of France's major river corridors. Supported by the European LIFE-Nature programme, it combines field restoration, land acquisition, professional guidance, education and European knowledge exchange to address a common challenge: how to give regulated rivers more space, sediment and ecological resilience.

Like many large French and European rivers, the Dordogne has been profoundly altered by past and present development. Large hydroelectric dams have reduced the frequency of river-shaping floods and interrupted sediment transfer from the upper basin. Historical aggregate extraction has deepened the riverbed by more than four metres in some places, while bank protection works have restricted the river's natural mobility. Over the last fifty years, the bed has incised by an average of 60 cm and the active channel has narrowed by about 30 metres, increasing the tendency towards a single, fixed channel.

These changes have degraded natural habitats and weakened biodiversity. Gravel spawning grounds, which are essential for migratory fish such as salmon, shad and sea lamprey, have become scarcer, while emblematic species such as otter, kingfisher and Aquitaine pike depend on increasingly fragile riverine habitats. In response, LIFE Dordogne River is delivering around thirty restoration operations, including gravel injection to restore spawning grounds, sediment transfer near the Mauzac dam, and the ecological rehabilitation of backwaters, banks and former gravel pits through topographic reconfiguration and sediment reinjection.

The project also recognises that river restoration can only succeed if local stakeholders understand, support and help maintain the changes being made. It therefore brings together 15 technical and financial partners and involves managers of other major European rivers. Ten associated beneficiaries contribute to implementation and dissemination: five local authorities acquiring riparian land, a river syndicate carrying out restoration works, the French Office for Biodiversity (OFB), the National Association of Basin Elected Officials (ANEB), the European Centre for River Restoration (ECRR), and the National Union of Quarry and Materials Industries (UNICEM), which supports the sharing of good practice with the quarrying and construction materials sector.

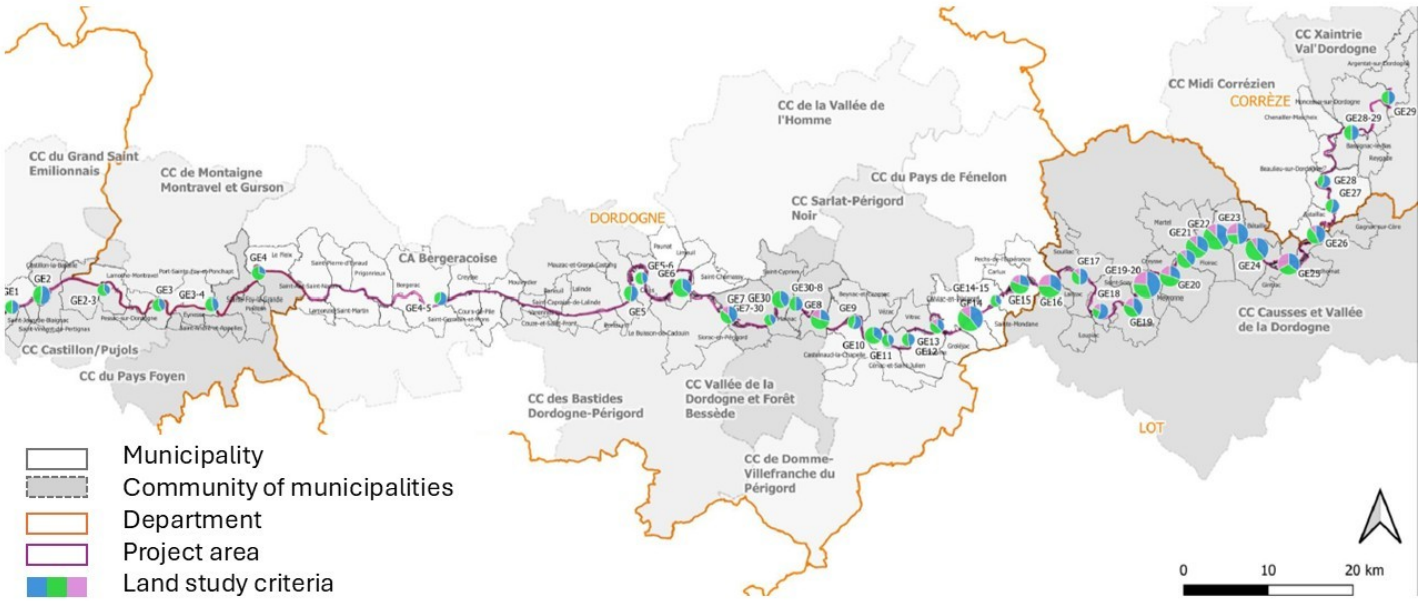

FIGURE 1 *The land strategy at the scale of the 280 km river corridor. Credits: EPIDOR.*

Mobilising local authorities to secure long-term habitat protection

The long-term success of conservation and restoration on the Dordogne depends on sustained commitments from local authorities, supported by land acquisition targets and a shared strategy along 280 km of river corridor.

Land control is a decisive condition for restoring habitats and ensuring their long-term conservation. Many target habitats, especially alluvial woodlands, extend across both the Public Fluvial Domain managed by EPIDOR and privately owned land. The project therefore includes the acquisition of 181 hectares to guide land use and secure practices that are compatible with natural habitat protection.

The Pays de Fénelon community of communes and the municipalities of Prudhomat, Carennac, Floirac and Carsac-Aillac receive LIFE funding to acquire 121 hectares of riparian land. These acquisitions make restoration work possible and help preserve areas of high ecological value. Public management of riverfront land is therefore not only an administrative tool, but also a strategic lever for improving ecological continuity.

At the scale of the 280 km river corridor, the land strategy draws on the land study and the feedback from the beneficiary communities and brings together 13 intermunicipal authorities. Its purpose is to translate conservation objectives into urban planning documents and pre-emption tools. A working group led by EPIDOR, with the participation of other land stakeholders, helps embed this approach beyond the lifetime of the LIFE project.

Local authorities also play a central role in explaining the project to residents and river users. Elected representatives help anchor restoration projects locally, bring the issues into municipal discussions and relay clear messages to communities along the valley.

Improving practice in the quarrying and public works sectors

Through UNICEM Nouvelle-Aquitaine, companies in the quarrying and construction materials sectors are being encouraged to better integrate the morpho-ecological functioning of the alluvial plain into their activities.

UNICEM represents more than 2,700 companies in the quarrying and construction materials industries and provides a documentary resource centre for its members. Within the LIFE project, UNICEM Nouvelle-Aquitaine is developing a practical guide to help operators better understand the ecological and geomorphological dynamics of alluvial systems and adapt their practices accordingly.

Seminars and technical days provide opportunities to share know-how and practices that respond to sustainable development challenges. Feedback from LIFE Dordogne River is already helping operators integrate ecological issues into extraction and rehabilitation projects and reduce environmental impacts. For example, the management of invasive alien species is now anticipated from the drafting of technical specifications, with close to 10% of some project budgets allocated to this issue.

FIGURE 2 *The former gravel pit of Reingues after restoration works. Credits: EPIDOR.*

The forthcoming guide will consolidate this feedback and support skills development among socio-professional actors. Technical recommendations can then be incorporated into site specifications, while public-private partnerships may open the way to more ambitious morpho-ecological restoration projects across the alluvial plain.

The UNICEM website has a summary article of the workshop “Water-Filled Alluvial Quarries: Creation Rehabilitation and Diversification of Environments”, jointly organised with EPIDOR in Carsac-Ailac.

FIGURE 3 *A session of the Carsac-Ailac workshop. Credits: EPIDOR.*

FIGURE 4 *Visit to the former gravel pit of Gaule as part of the Carsac-Ailac workshop. Credits: EPIDOR.*

Sharing river restoration knowledge with managers in France and Europe

By combining demonstration sites, pilot actions and structured feedback, LIFE Dordogne River contributes to the knowledge base available to managers of large rivers.

French and European partners see the project as an opportunity to broaden technical and strategic reflection on river management. Coordinated by the OFB and its watercourse resource centre, and supported by exchange sessions led by ANEB, this work will result in a practical guide in French and English for managers facing similar challenges in river restoration. At European level, ECRR will help promote exchanges through a study tour in the Dordogne basin in September 2026 and the final project conference in May 2027.

In partnership with SMDMCA, which manages part of the LIFE project area in the Lot and Corrèze departments, seven restoration operations are planned. SMDMCA works alongside EPIDOR on integrated water and aquatic environment management. This collaboration enables the syndicate to lead innovative and ambitious works while strengthening its expertise in morpho-sedimentary management and ecological river restoration.

FIGURE 5 *The ECRR international restoration and management workshop in the Dordogne basin. Credits: EPIDOR.*

The ANEB website has a summary article of the workshop "Monitoring and Evaluation" jointly organised with OFB, EPTB Dordogne and EP Loire at the Nausac Dam.

FIGURE 6 *An extracurricular workshop activity. Credits: EPIDOR.*

Using LIFE sites as places for environmental education

Opening LIFE sites as learning spaces helps users, riparian owners and young people understand why river habitats matter and how daily practices can support their protection.

Many LIFE sites are public spaces used for activities such as fishing, swimming, hiking and boating. Their preservation depends on users and riparian owners understanding the ecological issues at stake. This understanding encourages good practices, supports behaviour change and helps residents engage more confidently with conservation and restoration policies.

For young people, Educational Terrestrial Areas have been created and others are being planned on LIFE sites. This OFB initiative enables pupils from primary schools, middle schools and high schools to take part in the participatory management of a natural area. Supported by environ-

mental education organisations, they observe the effects of their decisions and actions through a management plan. This places them in the role of manager-observers and helps them understand from an early age that ecosystems depend on interconnected biological, physical and chemical processes.

For valley stakeholders, information and awareness-raising activities help make the project visible, understandable and relevant to everyday river use. Café-debates, public meetings, walks, water sports and nature activities all provide opportunities to explain the actions undertaken to protect the Dordogne's natural environments and to invite local people into the conversation.

The presentation of the ATE tool is available on the OFB website.

FIGURES 7 & 8 *The Maison-Neuve ATE during a field activity. Credits: EPIDOR.*

Conclusion

The Dordogne's natural environments are valued by residents, visitors and socio-professional actors, but their long-term preservation requires more than technical restoration works. It depends on shared understanding, good practice and a network of partners able to connect ecological objectives with land management, professional activity, education and local decision-making.

LIFE Dordogne River shows that restoring a large alluvial river is both a physical and a social process. Its effects extend beyond the project sites themselves, with potential benefits for ecosystem services linked to agriculture, drinking water production, tourism and biodiversity. By combining habitat restoration, land strategy, professional guidance and public engagement, the project offers transferable lessons for other European rivers seeking to recover space, sediment dynamics and ecological resilience.

OPTAIN

OPTAIN Project: Advancing Water and Nutrient Retention through Integrated Modelling, Stakeholder Co-Creation, and Practice

Author

Ivana Korn Varga — GWP CEE / Project Consortium

The OPTAIN project addresses a central challenge in agriculture today: how to retain water and nutrients more effectively within agricultural landscapes under changing climatic conditions.

Increasing variability in rainfall, pressure on water resources, and ongoing nutrient losses are making this challenge more visible across Europe. By combining modelling, stakeholder engagement, and practical experience from 14 different case studies, OPTAIN develops approaches that support environmental sustainability, farm resilience, and long-term resource efficiency.

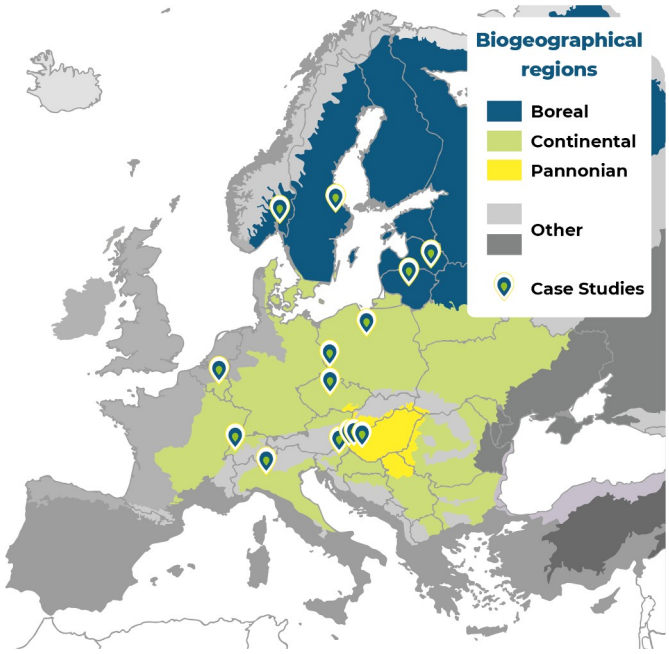

FIGURE 1 *OPTAIN case studies across biogeographical regions of Europe.*

Water and nutrient cycles are closely interconnected. When water leaves agricultural land through runoff, drainage, or leaching, it often carries nutrients with it. In practice, this results in a double loss: reduced soil fertility and lower input efficiency for farmers, alongside wider environmental impacts such as nutrient pollution in rivers, lakes, and groundwater. OPTAIN therefore approaches the issue as a connected system, focusing on how landscapes can retain both water and nutrients together, keeping them available where they are needed most.

To address this, the project evaluates a wide range of Natural/Small Water Retention Measures (NSWRM). These include improving soil structure, increasing organic matter content,

maintaining vegetation cover, including drought resistant crops, converting from cropland to grazing, implementing riparian buffer strips, restoring wetlands, and adapting drainage and irrigation systems. Each of these and other included measures influences how water moves through the agricultural landscape. Slower movement allows more infiltration and reduces nutrient losses, and when measures are combined, their effects tend to reinforce each other rather than act in isolation.

FIGURE 2 *Slovenian Pesnica River watershed. Credits: Gregor Kramberger.*

A key part of OPTAIN was understanding how these processes interact across different conditions and locations. For this, the project relied on process-based modelling, with the SWAT+ (Soil and Water Assessment Tool) model forming the core of the modelling framework. SWAT+ makes it possible to simulate how water, sediments, and nutrients move through soils, fields, and catchments, taking into account weather, soil properties, land use, and management practices.

What makes this approach useful is its ability to represent how different parts of the landscape are connected. Fields, slopes, and downstream areas are linked through hydrological pathways, and the effectiveness of retention measures often depends on their placement within this landscape. A measure that works well in one location may have a very different impact elsewhere. By capturing these relationships, SWAT+ helps identify where and which interventions can have the greatest effect.

The model also works across scales. It can represent processes at the level of individual fields while also showing their cumulative impact at the catchment level. This is important because improvements at field scale do not always translate directly into broader landscape benefits. Understanding these interactions allows for more targeted and effective solutions.

Within OPTAIN, modelling is not used on its own but is integrated with economic assessment and optimisation. This reflects how decisions are made in practice. Farmers and land managers need to consider costs, labour, and long-term viability alongside environmental outcomes. By linking environmental performance with economic considerations, the project provides a more realistic basis for decision-making.

One of the more innovative aspects of the project is the use of multi-objective optimisation. Instead of testing only a limited number of predefined scenarios, OPTAIN included and explored a wide range of possible combinations of measures. This approach identifies options that balance several objectives at the same time, improving water retention, reducing nutrient losses, maintaining crop production, and ensuring economic feasibility.

This process also makes trade-offs more visible. In many cases, improving one aspect of the system may affect another, and understanding these relationships is essential for making informed choices. By identifying solutions that perform well across multiple objectives, the project supports more balanced and practical outcomes.

Another important insight is the role of spatial targeting. The results showed that location matters as much as the type of measure. Interventions placed in areas where water flow is concentrated, such as slopes, drainage pathways, or areas close to water bodies, can have a much larger impact than the same measures applied elsewhere. This

makes it possible to use resources more efficiently and achieve better overall results.

The modelling framework is supported by data from 14 case studies across Europe. Where detailed data were available, model outputs were compared with observations to ensure that results reflect real conditions. This helped build confidence in the findings while also highlighting uncertainties that needed to be considered. Being transparent about these uncertainties was important for supporting informed decision-making with stakeholders.

Alongside modelling, stakeholder engagement is a central part of OPTAIN. The project followed a multi-actor approach, involving farmers, advisors, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders throughout the process. Each case study included a Multi-Actor Reference Group (MARG), which contributed to identifying challenges, selecting measures, designing scenarios, and discussing results.

This involvement ensured that the work remained closely connected to real-world conditions. Farmers and local stakeholders brought practical knowledge that cannot be captured through data alone, such as how fields respond to different weather conditions or what constraints exist in daily operations. Their input helped ensure that the scenarios being tested were realistic and that the results are relevant.

FIGURE 3 *MARG workshop in Belgium. Credits: Ivana Korn Varga.*

The interaction between stakeholders and modelling was continuous with four workshops held in each case study. Stakeholders helped shape the assumptions and scenarios used in the models, while modelling results provided a basis for discussion and reflection. This back-and-forth process built a shared understanding and increased confidence in the outcomes. It also made it more likely that the proposed measures will be applied in practice.

MARG workshops, field visits, and regional dialogues on biogeographic levels (Boreal, Pannonian and Continental) supported this process. They provided opportunities for exchange between different perspectives and allowed participants to learn from experiences in other countries. This kind of interaction helped strengthen collaboration and support the wider use of project results.

FIGURE 4 *Pannonian regional dialogue in Hungary. Credits: Ivana Korn Varga.*

To make the findings more accessible, OPTAIN developed a Learning Environment that brings together modelling outputs, case study insights, and practical guidance. This knowledge exchange platform allows users to explore scenarios, compare measures, and understand how different options perform under varying conditions.

This makes it easier to connect results with real decisions. Farmers and advisors can relate findings to their own situations, while policymakers can better understand potential impacts and trade-offs. By making complex information easier to use, the Learning Environment supports a more informed and confident decision-making process.

Another important aspect of the project was the effort to ensure consistency across case studies. By applying a harmonised modelling approach using SWAT+, OPTAIN allows results from different regions to be compared and combined. This helped identify broader patterns while still recognising that local adaptation is essential.

FIGURE 5 *Petit Glane River and surrounding riparian forest, Switzerland. Credits: Nives Ramisberger.*

Economic considerations were integrated throughout the project. Measures were evaluated not only in terms of environmental performance but also in terms of costs, benefits, and impacts on farm income. This includes both short-term effects and longer-term benefits, such as improved soil health, reduced input requirements, and increased resilience to drought.

Across the case studies, one message is clear: combinations of measures, carefully selected and well placed, tend to perform better than individual interventions. At the same time, there is no single solution that works everywhere. The most effective strategies depend on local conditions, priorities, and constraints, which makes flexibility essential.

Looking ahead, the approaches developed in OPTAIN provide a strong foundation for further work. The combination of modelling, optimisation, and stakeholder engagement offers a framework that can be applied in other regions and contexts. It supports better understanding of complex systems, more targeted actions, and closer collaboration between different actors.

The project also contributes to policy development by providing evidence on the effectiveness and feasibility of different measures. This can further support the design of policies and incentives that encourage improved water and nutrient management, particularly in the context of climate adaptation and environmental protection.

At the farm level, the results point towards gradual and adaptive implementation. Measures can be introduced step by step, adjusted over time, and combined in ways that fit specific conditions. This reduces risk and makes adoption more manageable.

Overall, OPTAIN showed that retaining water and nutrients in agricultural landscapes is achievable through coordinated and well-informed approaches. By bringing together modelling, practical knowledge, and stakeholder engagement, the project provided a foundation for more resilient and sustainable farming systems in Europe.

In the end, the objective is straightforward: to keep water and nutrients where they matter most, in the soil, within the landscape, and available for both crops and ecosystems.

FIGURE 6 *OPTAIN project team in Lithuania. Credits: Natalja Čerkasova.*

Co-funded by the European Union

The LIFE WADER project

Author

Liz Humphreys Natural England

LIFE WADER is a five-year, €6.8m project running from 2021 to 2026, aimed at improving the condition of the river, intertidal and marine habitats of the Northumberland coast and Tweed catchment for the species that depend on them. The project is led by Natural England in collaboration with the Environment Agency, Tweed Forum and Newcastle University, and is co-funded by the European Union through the EU LIFE Programme.

Project overview

LIFE WADER is a large and ambitious project with a diverse range of work programmes and aims. The project focuses on four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and two Special Protection Areas (SPAs), spanning 70,242 ha from south-east Scotland along the Northumbrian coast and including the Tweed catchment in the Scottish Borders and Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve to the east. By tackling issues affecting site condition, targeting 10 Annex I habitats, three Annex II species and associated SPA bird interests, LIFE WADER aims to help these sites become more resilient to climate change.

The project has taken a catchment-to-coast approach to nature recovery, looking at the bigger picture through a landscape-scale lens. It set out to tackle four major issues prevalent in the area: declining water quality affecting freshwater, coastal and marine habitats; excessive algal growth in the intertidal zone; the increasing spread of invasive species in riparian, coastal and marine habitats; and growing recreational and visitor pressure on wildlife habitats, particularly at the coast. Practical nature recovery interventions have been aimed at addressing these challenges through the trial of innovative solutions, as well as demonstration of established practice. In tackling these issues, the project also set out to raise levels of awareness about the importance of, and interconnectivity between, the river, coastal and marine habitats of this special area.

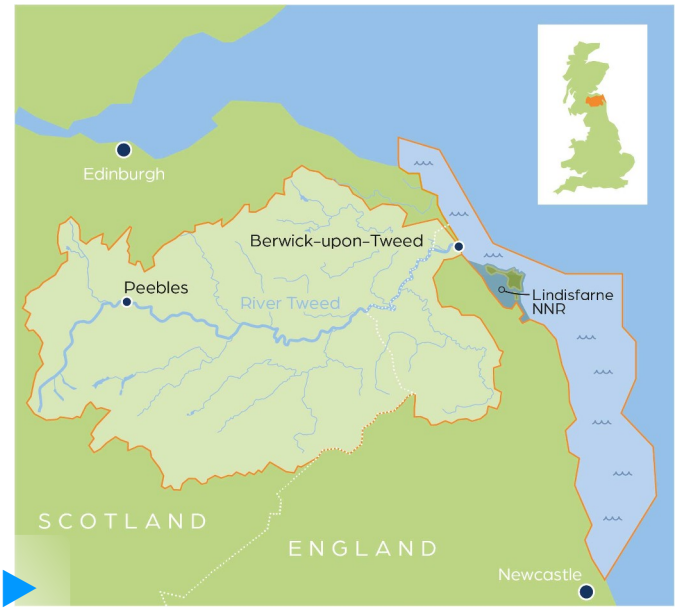

FIGURE 1

LIFE WADER project area, Northumberland coast and Tweed catchment.

Restoration measures

Delivering river restoration on the River Till/Breamish — completed a re-meander of the river involving 600 m of new river channel excavated, removal of approximately 150 m of flood bank, construction of approximately 390 m of new swale, two large woody dams and six new floodplain scrapes, installation of approximately 3,400 m of new fencing, resulting in approximately 5 ha assumed wetted area at the downstream end of the site, and planting of 800 willow plants and stakes.

FIGURE 2 *River Breamish before restoration. Credits: Tommy Wilkinson.*

FIGURE 3 *River Breamish after restoration. Credits: Tommy Wilkinson.*

Creating new wetlands — constructed 15 reed beds and sediment ponds.

FIGURE 4 *Construction works at the sediment ponds at Warren Mill. Credits: LIFE WADER.*

FIGURE 5 *A newly constructed sediment pond at Warren Mill. Credits: LIFE WADER.*

FIGURE 6 *Newly constructed sediment ponds at Kiln Point. Credits: LIFE WADER.*

Riparian planting — planted 95,000 trees, creating 64 ha of native riparian woodland and buffering up to 8 km of watercourse. Carried out demonstrations of different biodegradable tree guard materials and solar water troughs for livestock.

FIGURE 7 *Riparian woodland planting at East Deloraine. Credits: Tweed Forum.*

Farm advice and demonstration projects — provided soil health advice to 17 farms and carried out on-farm demonstration projects on cover crops over three years and farmyard manure over two years. Demonstrated fenceless grazing and ran workshops on dung beetles for soil and nutrient management. Delivered training in effective water quality monitoring for citizen scientists.

FIGURE 8 *Water quality monitoring with citizen scientists. Credits: Environment Agency.*

Modelling — a reconstructed catchment-scale model is being developed to understand the nutrient and sediment dynamics of the riparian system and identify where and when they are a problem. Modelled scenarios will allow assessment of the effect of the project interventions, including woodland creation, wetlands and improved management of farmland. To assess across spatial scales, sub-models appropriate to the scale of the project interventions are being used. Once validated with data collected across the project, models will be used to simulate scenarios across the catchments, such as land-use or policy changes, to understand what scale of interventions might be needed to mitigate nutrient loading, including nitrates and phosphates, in problem areas.

Opportunistic macroalgae — carried out research and modelling to understand macroalgae growth and function, and created a model of Budle Bay to estimate the relative contribution of different nitrogenous sources to algal growth. The model will be validated with monitoring data and can then be used to assess interventions and simulate different nutrient-level scenarios. Successfully removed 2.5 tonnes of algae using a specially adapted boat to remove it sensitively, and explored ways in which the removed material can be used. Carried out a demonstration of ROV technology to take nutrient measurements across the bay.

FIGURE 9 *Aerial view of macroalgae in Budle Bay. Credits: Matt Carr.*

FIGURE 10 *Removal of opportunistic macroalgae in Budle Bay. Credits: LIFE WADER.*

Improved non-chemical control of invasive species — carried out successful mechanical removal of priority invasive dune species across large areas and demonstrated the value of fencing to protect foreshore dune habitat. Established rust fungus biocontrol for Himalayan balsam and successfully removed giant hogweed, American skunk cabbage and Japanese knotweed from large stretches of the River Tweed. Carried out a demonstration of new *RootWave Pro* technology, which uses electricity to target and destroy plants at the root. Developed a toolkit for detection of marine invasive species using eDNA. Ran a demonstration workshop on the use of online apps to collect management and identification information.

FIGURE 11 *Works at the dunes by River Tweed to manage invasive plant species. Credits: LIFE WADER.*

Reducing wildlife disturbance — created approximately 100 ha of seasonal wildlife refuges for breeding shorebirds and seals. Delivered a protection and engagement programme to identify pressure points and enhance visitor management through an increased presence of wildlife rangers and improved signage and information materials, including a new wildlife ID guide and mobile exhibition trailer.

Longer-term impacts

With such a large-scale project, it is hoped there will be many positive impacts. These would include improved water quality; a reduction in the amount of algae growing at the coast over the summer; more riparian woodland along the banks of the River Tweed and its tributaries; more small-scale sediment ponds and reed beds on farms throughout the catchment; and fewer invasive species in the water and on land. Across priority sites, we would like to see dogs on leads on beaches with nesting birds, less disturbance from human activities such as low-flying drones, and increased populations of visiting winter and summer bird species.

Reversing the decline of freshwater, coastal, and marine habitats and species

Interventions delivered by the LIFE WADER project have begun to reverse some of the negative trends, allowing nature to recover and become more resilient.

Through modelling, the project has shown that small-scale improvements achieved at local level, when scaled up to catchment scale, can bring enormous benefits to habitats, wildlife and people, delivering financial gains, improving and protecting ecosystems, and enhancing visitor experiences.

To truly achieve change at the catchment scale, to deliver the ambition of the project and to achieve long-term change at scale, the project interventions need to be replicated many times over throughout the catchment.

Demonstrating best practice to businesses, policy makers and land managers

A key impact of the project has been demonstrating how relatively easily these interventions can be implemented. To date, the project has delivered 12 training and demonstration workshops and site visits, and 30 webinars and presentations at meetings, conferences, industry and public events.

Approaches to the delivery of the LIFE WADER project have also been captured in two short films describing the river restoration project (Harehope Restoration Project – Tweed Forum) and the macroalgae removal work (Film Captures Restoration Work in Budle Bay – Life Wader).

Outputs from the project will include the production of best practice guides for established approaches and peer reviewed papers for the more novel elements. Publications to date include the Tweed Catchment Biosecurity Plan 2026–2031, a protocol for molecular monitoring of biofouling communities using settlement panels and diagnostic assays, and an Education Pack for outdoor learning.

Increased awareness of the importance and vulnerability of the SAC/SPA sites

Together these have, and will continue to, encourage replication of the various interventions either as one-off interventions or ideally built into business-as-usual delivery for partners. A second adjoining upstream stretch of the river Breamish will be restored later this year with two further downstream sections under consideration for the future. Landowners will be further encouraged through existing funding schemes to undertake riparian planting, pond construction and other soil management initiatives. Project staff have also facilitated replication of the wildlife refuge approach at three additional sites outside the project delivery area.

Lessons learned

The LIFE WADER project will formally complete in December 2026 but there is more that can be done to maintain momentum and maximise impact at the catchment scale. Delivering at scale is difficult and the LIFE WADER project delivery partners are keen to do more in this space, bringing together a wider partnership.

Interventions don't need to be large or commercially designed to have an impact.

Landowner engagement early on is crucial to a smooth and timely delivery.

Data availability can be problematic as long-term standardised monitoring datasets, needed for modelling, are often lacking. Collation of historic data that has been collected for smaller, short-term projects takes time to locate, share and collate. An advantage of partnership working is the availability of data from multiple sources, although this is often not standardised. We'd advocate for Open repositories of for environmental data across all partners.

A good working partnership is crucial. While individual components of the project were led by individual partners, most were delivered in partnership. Through demonstrating how well the LIFE WADER partnership has worked and the benefits this has brought, it is hoped this encourages more engagement from a wider group to become involved and to contribute to activities moving forward.

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