

Visit by JC to Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust - 29th June

1 History

Formed in '97, became a charity in '99. There are 9 Trustees all with fishing interests. There has been no turnover of Trustees, and there is no defined nominating structure. In the early days all work was done by the Trustees, mainly just by 3 of them.

First employee, Stephen Hatton, taken on in April '05, followed by Rachel Perryman in Oct 05 - so everything was done on a voluntary basis for 8 years. (Eden took 4 years to first employee, then expanded rapidly)

They did not seek to develop any relationships with Angling Clubs for many years. They now set up meetings and invite the clubs to brief them on what they are doing.

For the first 8 years 18km of fencing was completed. Then accelerated rapidly with 30km completed 1 year later. Very little on the main river, most on tribs, some very small.

Their activities have been restricted to about one third of the catchment so far (mainly Clitheroe upstream, and the Hodder). Various River Associations and clubs are active elsewhere on the catchment.

2 Funding

Have had quite a lot from DEFRA/RES, about £100k in the last 3 years. The RES scheme is ending, and the likely successor is NW Development Agency, their emphasis will be on workspace and jobs, so does not look so promising.

The DEFRA scheme to encourage catchment sensitive farming looks very encouraging - but the money has to be spent on farmer education - not engineering work!

Also BAP should be very useful if you can hook into it.

There are typically 2 to 4 panels per year by funding agencies, applications need to be in 3 months in advance, and you may not hear for a month afterwards

Wording is important "Pollution reduction project" may sound better to some people than "habitat improvement project".

The overall process is

1. Identify potential project
2. Get outline consent from landowner
3. Seek EA advice (and others if appropriate)
4. Send application for consent to EA (must reply in 2 months, but can be quicker. If they have to ask any questions or request changes the 2 months starts again)
5. Seek finding. Speak to the manager concerned, get a site visit as early as possible. Give them as much info as possible.
6. Get the money and do the work
7. Monitor the results.

They commit to repairing any flood damage for a period of 10 years - this is a big selling point for farmers. Other Trusts just do 5. So far luckily no major costs incurred. There are no funding streams for maintenance!

"in kind" contributions are costed, and identified as such, e.g. volunteer effort, free rocks from the Castle Cement quarry, free logs from the Forestry commission. If all goes well the trust can end up banking some money at the end of the project - this is then used for operational expenses. However some funders are starting to remove "in kind" contributions.

Get as many supporting letters as possible - if they are from the right organisations they count for a lot.

3 Habitat projects

Ribble are following Eden and currently working on a large HLF bid. They have got some money to cover the planning part of the application process - This is funding Rachel's salary. Most of this will be on education and access, as per Eden, but also hoping to fund electro fishing juvenile surveys. Funders are increasingly asking for evidence that results have been achieved - this is one of the few ways of collecting hard evidence.

Getting EA consent can be difficult and standards are changing. Previously rocks could be used to reinforce eroded banks, but they will not consent this now (elsewhere they still do)

The DEFRA ELS (Entry Level Scheme) will now allow farmers to claim £30 per hectare for land they loose in fenced buffer strips - not a lot, but it helps.

They do some in river work, adding boulders and bends to trap gravel and improve spawning and juvenile habitat. Progressing 3 projects to open up unused channels for spawning. In stream cover is very important in order to get a high fry-parr-smolt conversion rate.

Normally 12 months planning is required between initial consent by landowner and commencement of the work. Important to get the EA involved asap.

UU do a free connection to the mains for them so that a cattle drink can be put in away from the water coarse. An in-river drinking access point can cost as much as £1700 (2 flood gates), so a trough can be a much better and cheaper option.

They have done a lot of bank stabilisation with logs and spruce tree tops hanging over to diffuse the current and stabilise the banking.

The best flood defense for fencing is to drive 2 to 3" live willow stakes in, in a line upstream - these have a high strike rate (i.e. they root and grow) then take the force of the current and catch debris that would otherwise catch on the fence and potentially take it out. The willows are coppiced every 2 years to provide new stakes - nice solution.

UU funding a major project in the upper catchment to improve habitat and water quality - Grip blocking, i.e. blocking up the drainage channels that were dug in the past to improve drainage and land quality. However this resulted in increased erosion, and higher and shorter spates - now trying to reverse this!

Runs appear to be increasing on the Ribble, and they would like to think that this is the result of the work that has been done over the years - but difficult to produce hard evidence. Juvenile surveys before and after a project is as good as you can do.

4 Surveys

They have not done any formal surveys. Ideas for habitat projects just come from people keeping their eyes open as they are out and about, talking to fishermen or the EA, and taking a casual stroll up the becks now and again. If there are signs of livestock poaching, or erosion the farmer is approached.

However before and after work is carried out they now do:

- Photographic bank side vegetation survey - a sq. mtr. is staked and photographed before the work, than at intervals after to monitor changes.
- In river "kick surveys" for invertebrates.