

RESTORING OUR AMAZING RIVER (ROAR) PROJECT

Purpose

To inform members of the commencement of the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project with the Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Rural Hub.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcomes the collaboration with the Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Rural Hub through the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project

Key Issues

- The Wye & Usk Foundation, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Herefordshire Rural Hub and the Wye Valley AONB Unit, submitted an application for the Water Environment Grant (WEG) entitled Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR).
- The WEG scheme is competitive and a bid for £1.2million covering the English part of the Wye Catchment was submitted in May 2018.
- The ROAR project was finally approved in June 2019 with a grant of £672,000 until March 2021.
- The ROAR project includes additional farm Catchment Advisors across the English part of the Wye Catchment
- Two advisors, covering the English part of the Wye Valley AONB and the adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment, will be employed by the Wye & Usk Foundation and hosted by the AONB Unit.

Reasons

WEG, as a competitive scheme, is aimed at a wide range of river restoration projects, including advice for landowners, control of invasive species and work which improves water quality. It supports information sharing and delivery of catchment scale improvements which demonstrate they meet Water Framework Directive objectives as set out in river basin management plans, including those for water dependant protected sites. These may include restoration of habitats, landscapes and other features (including river and water), addressing diffuse and other water pollution, and recovery of species populations including the threat from non-native species.

The Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) project has four main objectives:-

- Supporting Restoration of water dependent habitats and ecosystems
- Removing or reducing threats from non-native species

- Support for activities that will help improve land management practices in relation to water dependent habitats
- Hosting demonstration or knowledge events and advisory visits which promote improved land management

It is also intended that the project will widen the capacity of the partnership to deliver.

Implications

The project lead is the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) and the collaborative delivery will be secured through partnership agreements.

The Catchment Advisors will operate within the wider farm advisory team run by the WUF and will be based with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Wye Valley AONB Unit. WUF will provide additional support and farm advice as the project progresses. The Herefordshire Rural Hub and Farm Herefordshire will run networking events for farmers.

The Catchment Advisors role entails working with farmers and a broad range of project partners to identify and implement changes in land use practices that will have benefits to the river systems. The advisers will visit and offer advice to farmers to identify sources of diffuse pollution arising from land management, deliver appropriate advice and make recommendations where appropriate for improvements, including for capital works or adoption of new management practices. They will utilise and signpost a variety of funding streams including the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, to allow implementation of recommendations and deliver the dual purpose of protecting watercourses whilst also realising cost savings or efficiencies on the farm.

It is also anticipated that the two Catchment Advisors based with the AONB Unit will help identify initiatives for inclusion into a bid to the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

Background

The Water Environment Grant (WEG) scheme is led by DEFRA, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency as part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2014-2020.

The objective of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) scheme is to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid's existing electricity infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes.