

# The Spey Catchment Initiative

## Introducing the Spey Catchment Initiative

The Spey Catchment Initiative is a new project which aims to help deliver the objectives of the **River Spey Catchment Management Plan (CMP)**. Published in 2003 the Spey CMP sets out a framework for the wise and sustainable use of the water resource, and for the protection and enhancement of water quality and natural heritage within the River Spey catchment.

The Spey Catchment Initiative will concentrate on a few key priorities in the plan and deliver considerable benefits for the water resource, its wildlife and the people who live and work in the area.



### The objectives of the initiative are:

- To demonstrate integrated catchment scale management by protecting and restoring natural features and characteristics of the Spey catchment
- To raise awareness and understanding of the whole river system and engage with stakeholders and communities within the catchment
- To further development of the Spey Catchment partnership

### What does this mean in practice?

- improving riparian habitats, for example by planting riparian woodlands and enhancing wetlands.
- showing how natural flood management techniques can help reduce flood risk
- Improving knowledge of natural catchment processes and how the whole river system works - leading to a more holistic approach to sustainable use of the catchment
- helping to control the spread of invasive non native plants and animals in the catchment
- helping people to enjoy , learn about and get involved in protecting the catchment
- working in partnership with agencies, organisations, community groups, landowners and individuals to protect and enhance the catchment

## Who is involved?

### Spey Catchment Steering Group

The Spey Catchment Steering Group led the development of the Spey CMP and now guides the Spey Catchment Initiative. The steering group has members from Scottish Natural Heritage, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Spey Fishery Board, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, the Highland Council, and Moray Council.

### Spey Catchment Initiative Working Groups

Three working groups have been set up to help deliver the priorities for the initiative. These cover 'woodlands and wetlands', 'natural flood management' and 'natural catchment processes'. The remit of these groups is to provide support and advice for the development and implementation of projects on the ground.

### Spey Catchment Stakeholders

Many agencies, organisations, land managers, community groups and individuals were involved in the development of the Spey Catchment Management Plan and it is hoped that all these stakeholders – and many more - will be involved in the Spey Catchment Initiative over the next two years. A **Stakeholders Forum** will be held, bringing together people living and working in the Spey Catchment to discuss opportunities and issues within the area, to learn more about the catchment and to hear about the Spey Initiative projects

### Spey Catchment Project Officer

To help implementation of the Spey Initiative projects a two year project officer post has been created.

## Spey Initiative Projects

### Creating Riparian (riverside) Woodlands



Native trees by rivers, burns and lochs play an important role in maintaining the health of our water systems, in supporting wildlife and enhancing our landscapes.

Riparian trees and woods have many benefits:

- tree roots bind river banks together and help reduce erosion
- trees provide shade, shelter and food for freshwater life, including fish
- they provide breeding and resting sites for wildlife such as otters

- trees intercept run off from agricultural fields and reduce pollution
- they enhance the landscape
- riparian woods can help reduce flood risk

Native riparian woods have been lost from many areas of the Spey catchment through factors such as changes in agriculture and commercial forestry planting. Woods are often small and isolated with little natural regeneration. The Spey Catchment Initiative hopes to reverse this trend by working with landowners to enhance and extend existing woodlands, create new areas of trees and link up riparian woods into useful habitat networks.

### Enhancing Wetlands



Wetlands in the Catchment include everything from extensive marshes and large upland bogs, right down to the small wet corner of a field. All of these are valuable for wildlife and can have an important role to play in flood management. Enhancing a wet area can be as simple as blocking a drain or changing the grazing management. The Spey Catchment Initiative is keen to work with land managers to improve wetlands.

### Natural Flood Management

Natural Flood Management (NFM) is a set of techniques for helping to manage flood risk by restoring natural features and through land management. The aim is to create more space for water- store it in areas where it is less likely to cause damage, e.g. in floodplains, wetlands and woodlands, and help reduce the flow of flood waters downstream. NFM techniques will not replace other approaches to managing flood risk, but will have an important role to play alongside them.

In the upper/upper middle catchment NFM techniques will aim to:

- improve soil water storage
- capture runoff
- manage stream flows

They can do this through

- blocking field drains and moorland grip blocking
- restoring the water holding capacity of peatlands
- restoring native riparian woodlands
- restoring gully woodlands
- reducing grazing impacts
- forest management
- introduction of woody debris dams to rivers

In the middle/lower catchment NFM techniques will aim to:

- improve soil water storage
- slow run off

They can do this through:

- land and soil management activities to retain and delay surface water run flows
- restoring native woodlands and floodplain forests
- installing buffer strips along watercourses
- re-meandering rivers
- re-connecting rivers with floodplains
- maximising natural floodplain storage eg through wetland restoration



The Spey Catchment Initiative would like to work with landowners in the catchment to trial some of these NFM techniques. By creating demonstration sites we hope to show that NFM techniques can be effective and encourage natural ways of managing flooding to be adopted more widely within the catchment.

### **Natural Catchment Processes**

Understanding how the whole river catchment functions is the key to protecting the water resource. Only by looking at the river system in a holistic way can we hope to make good decisions about how the catchment should be managed and cared for.

The Spey Catchment Initiative is currently working on a 'catchment assessment' study which will greatly improve our understanding of river processes such as hydrology and geomorphology and the impacts of land use. From this study we hope to be able to target key areas where river restoration is required; identify areas where natural flood management techniques could be used; and use the study to inform future decisions about things like water abstraction.

### **Invasive Non Native Species**

The Spey Catchment Initiative is focussing on invasive non native plants – particularly giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. These three plants are a problem particularly in the lower catchment

The sap of giant hogweed is dangerous to people as it can cause severe skin blisters and therefore its presence along river bank paths and where people fish is a serious concern. It is a very vigorous plant, out competing native plants resulting in dense stands of hogweed. Himalayan balsam is another plant which out competes the native plants, it grows very rapidly and spreads fast. Japanese knotweed is a particular problem in towns and villages where property development is likely, as by law it must be removed before construction can go ahead and this can be very expensive as it is not easy to eradicate.



The Spey Initiative aims to survey these plants to find out their distribution in the catchment. It is important to determine the upper limit of their distribution as the seeds are often dispersed downstream by the water, so the survey work will begin in the upper catchment within the Cairngorms National Park and gradually extend downstream. Having found out where the plants are we then hope to develop a major eradication programme.

## **Education and Awareness Raising**

### **River Bank Resource Box**

This hands on resource is designed to help young people learn about the river Spey and its catchment . It was created in 2004 but has recently been updated and revised . This project, led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), sees new resources being added to the box and it has been adapted to fit with the Curriculum for Excellence.

Schools can borrow the resource from SNH:

Contact Sue Scoggins, SNH, Achantoul, Aviemore Tel 01479 810477



## **Abernethy NNR Educational Resource**

This educational resource is to be produced shortly and part of its focus is the River Nethy and its tributaries. Activity cards will help children learn about and experience the river in many ways – from studying freshwater minibeasts to understanding geomorphology.

### **Catchment Classrooms**

Schools in the catchment will soon be invited to share their experiences of the Spey and its catchment through a special layer on the Spey Interactive Map called 'Catchment Classrooms'. This will be an opportunity for schools to tell each other about river related projects, special places and wildlife in their part of the catchment, any river issues and problems and generally link together through living in the catchment.

### **How can you get involved?**

#### ***If you manage land in the Spey Catchment***

We are keen to work with landowners, land managers and community groups to create riverside woodlands, improve wetlands, trial natural flood management techniques and restore natural river features. For further information download our leaflet ([link to leaflet](#)).

#### ***If your school is in the catchment***

Teachers can get help with river projects by using the river bank resource or contacting the project officer and getting their classes involved in 'Catchment Classrooms'.

Children can explore the interactive map to find out more about the Spey Catchment, ask the Project Officer questions, or get involved with Catchment Classrooms through their school.

#### ***If you live in the catchment***

The Spey Catchment Initiative can help communities to develop projects in the catchment, ranging from planting trees to improving public access along the riverbank.

### **Find out more**

For further information please contact:

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