



Updated Jul 13

Introducing the Spey Catchment Initiative

The Spey Catchment Initiative was set up in late 2010 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 concentrates on a few key priorities in the plan and aims to deliver actions which benefit 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 through the planting of riparian woodlands & enhancing wetlands
- showing how natural flood management techniques can contribute to reducing flood risk
- Improving knowledge of natural catchment processes, ie how the whole river system works, leading to a more holistic and strategic 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 understand and connect with the river, and encouraging them to get involved in enhancing 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 activities of 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 Stakeholders

Many agencies, organisations, land managers, community groups and individuals were involved in the development of the Spey Catchment Management Plan. A Stakeholder Forum was held in Sep 12, 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 progress of the Spey Initiative projects

Spey Catchment Project Officer

A project officer is employed to deliver the objectives outlined above. The initial 3 year post has been funded by the Steering Group partner organisations with additional LEADER support. Given the success of the Initiative as a ground works delivery mechanism, a further 3 year funding package is currently being secured to ensure the continuation of the Project Officer post until Dec 16.

Spey Initiative Priorities

Creating Riparian (riverside) Woodlands



Native trees by rivers, burns and lochs play an important role in maintaining the health of water systems, in supporting wildlife and enhancing the 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 is contributing to reversing 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. Looking to the future, the planting of riparian

woodlands now will help provide water shading in the future. This should help to mitigate against predicted future water temperature increases due to climate change.

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 working with land managers to improve wetlands.

Natural Flood Management

Natural Flood Management (NFM) is a mechanism for helping to manage flood risk by restoring natural features to river systems and through certain land management techniques. Aims include creating more space for temporary water storage and helping to reduce the flow rates and volumes of flood waters heading downstream in times of spate. NFM techniques will not replace other approaches to managing flood risk, but have an important role to play alongside them.

In the upper/upper middle catchment NFM techniques 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
- reconnecting rivers with their floodplains
- restoring gully woodlands
- reducing grazing impacts
- forest management
- introduction of woody debris dams to rivers

In the middle/lower catchment NFM techniques 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 is working with landowners in the catchment to trial some of these NFM techniques. By creating demonstration sites we aim 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 and prioritise restoration actions.

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 it is hoped 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 issues such as water abstraction.

Invasive Non Native Species

The Spey Catchment Initiative is contributing to efforts to deal with 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 it's presence along river bank paths and where people fish is a serious concern. It is a very vigorous plant, out competing native plants which results 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. By law it must be removed before construction can go ahead and because it is not easy to eradicate, this can end up being very expensive to do.



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 been updated and revised. New resources have been being added to the box which has been adapted for use with the Curriculum for Excellence.

Schools can borrow the resource from SNH: Contact Sue Scoggins, SNH, Achantoul, Aviemore Tel 01479 810477



Catchment Classrooms

Schools in the catchment can share their experiences of the Spey and it's catchment through a special layer on the Spey Interactive Map called 'Catchment Classrooms'. This is 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.

Demonstration site visits

As project sites are developed, the Initiative hosts a range of site visits to raise awareness of the activities being undertaken. The aim is to inform on techniques and possibilities, publicize the benefits to be gained and encourage further sites to be developed. We want to reach as wide an audience as possible from Land owners, managers and users to organisational representatives, Government Ministers to schoolchildren.

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.

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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