

## The Taw, Torridge and North Devon Streams Strategic Partnership Winter 2015/16 Newsletter

This is the winter edition of the newsletter from the Taw, Torridge and North Devon Streams Strategic Partnership. This edition will cover the new Countryside Stewardship, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Project work in North Devon and technical advice on Maize.

### **Countryside Stewardship**

This year Agricultural Stewardship schemes saw some big changes; here is a quick summary of the main ones:

- Countryside Stewardship can only be applied for at one point in the year, between July 1<sup>st</sup> – September 30<sup>th</sup>. Next year application forms will be available from March.
- Schemes run from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December for a 5 year period.
- Payments are now based on specific options in place on the farm rather than hectares of farm in the scheme.
- Higher Tier is delivered by Natural England or Forestry Commission.
- Uplifts can be gained from Catchment Sensitive Farming endorsement, being part of a Facilitation Fund or by completing the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package as part of your application.
- Countryside Stewardship is not a whole farm scheme; the idea is that you put in the parts of your land that are a priority rather than the entire farm. There is nothing to stop you from entering the entire farm if you wish.
- All manuals, options and other information are now found online; there are no printed manuals.

### **Capital Grants**

- Same application window as Countryside Stewardship Schemes
- Works must be completed between 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December of the following year.
- Fixed payments rates
- All options and scheme information is found online with the Countryside Stewardship information

Two types of grant available:

- ❖ Water Quality Grants – Available in priority catchments, some items require CSFO support, £10K cap.
- ❖ Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant – Will be available from early 2016, £5K cap.

### **More information:**

Countryside Stewardship Manual

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-manual>

Countryside Stewardship Options

- <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants>

Statements of priorities

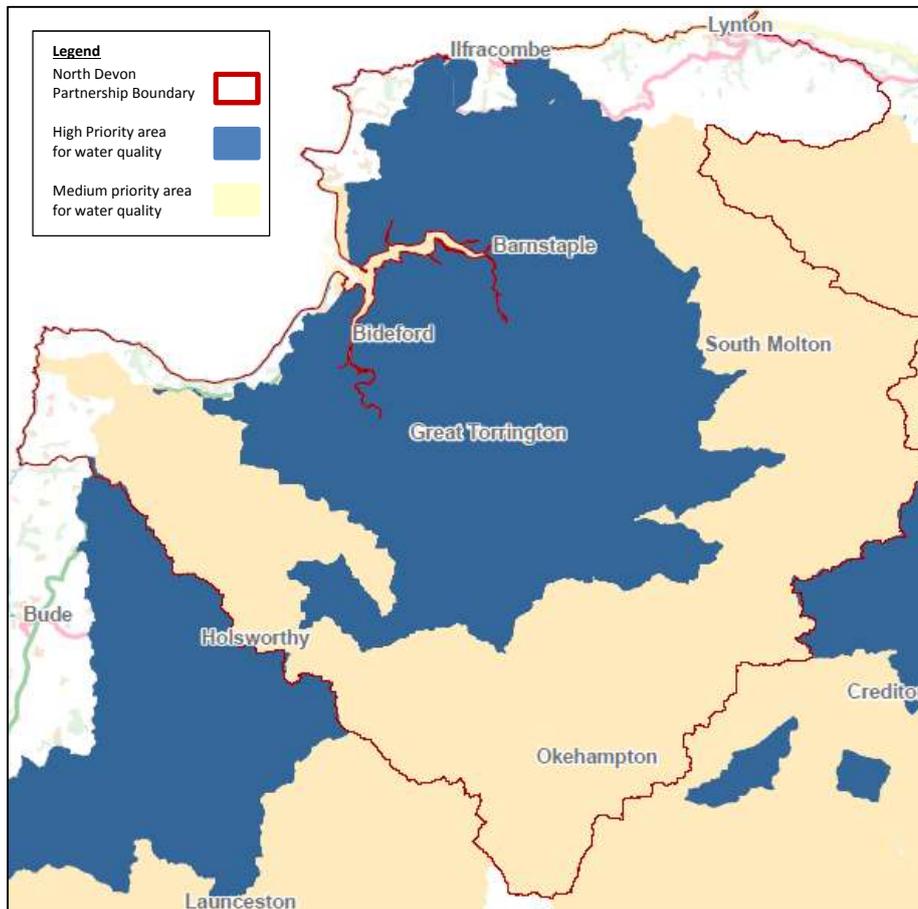
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-statements-of-priorities>



## Catchment Sensitive Farming

CSF is now incorporated into Countryside Stewardship; this enables all farms access to capital items that can help tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture but also gives CSF access to land management options.

The priorities in the Taw and Torridge are faecal contamination and pollution from surface nitrates, surface phosphates and sediments; certain areas also have pesticides as a priority. Below is a map of the priority area where CSF help is available.



### What's available?

Anyone in the high priority area can attend workshops or ask for a specialist visit; on offer this round are:

- Farm Infrastructure Audits (Creedy)
- Water Management Plans (ADAS)
- Soil husbandry (ADAS)
- Rural Suds visits (ADAS)
- Soil Workshops (ADAS)

CSF offer free farm visits to farms in the high priority area for water. Due to the amount of farms in the catchment Environment Agency data has been used to determine Priority farms for these visits.

For more information or to find out if you are a core farm call Abi Killen on 01409 221823 or 07973 691175

## Other projects in the catchment

### Estuary Project

Constructed Wetlands to treat dirty water around the estuary.

For more information call Tom Hynes on 01271 388534

### Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project

Tackling water quality on the River Torridge between Torrington and Hatherleigh to restore the species.

For more information call Izzy Moser on 01409 221823 or 07968 850803

### Facilitation Fund in the Torridge Headwaters

A group of landowners utilising a landscape-scale approach to deliver environmental benefits in Torridge Headwaters.

For more information call Deborah Deveney on 01409 221823 or 07909 252527

### Upstream Thinking in the Barnstaple Yeo

Improving drinking water quality by focusing on pollution from pesticides and sediment.

For more information call Working Wetlands on 01409 221823

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## **Managing Maize**

The recent wet weather has once again lifted to the top of agenda soil wash (flooding) and erosion from fields the soil within which has become compacted as a consequence of harvest machinery travelling on wet soils not able to fully support their weight. Compacted soils associated with late harvest can result from many crops especially maize. Creedy Associates advisor John Morgan who works extensively with the Maize Growers Association (MGA) takes this opportunity to identify the maize specific opportunities to reduce the risk of harvest related soil compaction occurring in future.

### **Avoiding the issue in the first place - Site and variety choice**

Choosing an appropriate field and maize variety can dramatically reduce the risk of problems. Factors such as location, soil type, slope, proximity to environmental features/property, altitude, and rainfall should all be taken into account when choosing where and what to grow. All these factors are listed in the recently updated MGA Site/Variety selector which is free to use for all growers, via the MGA web site, be they MGA members or not.

### **Drilling Date**

Maize requires a certain number of heat units to mature from a dry seed to a fully mature crop. The earlier, subject to minimum soil temperatures and soil conditions, the seed is drilled in the spring the earlier the crop will be ready to harvest. Drilling should start when soil temperatures consistently reach 8-10 degrees in mid to late April.

### **Tyres**

The pressure within a tyre is very similar to the pressure that tyre places on the ground for a set load. Choosing flotation tyres and lowering their pressures to the lowest within the manufactures recommendations will therefore significantly reduce the pressure they exert on the ground and reduce the risk of compaction.

### **Degradable film**

It has been independently established that the use of biodegradable film will warm the soil in the spring and as a consequence reduce the days required for a set variety to reach maturity compared to the same variety grown without film. Crops grown under film consistently reach maturity and are therefore ready for harvest, three weeks earlier than those grown without film.

### **Dealing with the issues**

The aim when dealing with compacted soil is to increase the fields short term ability to “soak up” rain water. This stored water can then, assuming field drainage is adequate and in good order, soak away into the ground water or field ditches over time when the waterways can better deal with the volume.

### **Cultivations**

Cultivating the whole field, ideally across the slope and immediately post-harvest, has been proven to have the best effect. However excellent infiltration has also been achieved by cultivating strips across the field in order to stop water building up speed and becoming disruptive. Post-harvest cultivation can be done via a chisel plough, subsoiler or even conventional plough if a follow on crop is to be established.

### **Cover crops and their ability to soak up Nitrogen**

A follow on, or cover, crop will not only hold soil in the field but will also take up nitrogen that might otherwise be lost to the ground water or rivers. This nitrogen will be available in the spring for a subsequent crop or to partially fertilise the cover crop if it is to be left in the field for a whole season. DEFRA funded research during the winter of 2012/2013 showed that up to 40 kg of Nitrogen leaching could be prevented by growing a cover crop following maize.

### **For more information:**

It is the MGA's view that all maize fields should be actively managed to reduce the risk of soil and nutrient over the winter months. John and the MGA would be delighted to talk through the issues with growers keen to reduce the risks associated with late harvest of crops on their land. [www.creedyassociates.com](http://www.creedyassociates.com); [www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk](http://www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk)

Catchment Sensitive Farming is currently offering free soils husbandry reports to farmers in the Taw, Torridge and North Devon Streams catchments. The aim of this advice is to reduce the risk of sediment (and the pollution it carries) impacting on water quality by advising farmers/land managers in the identification of soil erosion and soil structure issues, good soil husbandry and the implementation of management practices to reduce soil erosion and run-off. For further details contact Tom Hynes on 01271 388534.



*Under sown maize has been proven to hold soil and reduce nitrogen leaching.*



*The use of degradable film can speed up harvest by three weeks.*



*Cultivating or ploughing maize stubbles post-harvest will reduce the risk of water and soil runoff considerably.*



*Establishing a cover crop post maize harvest will reduce the potential for nutrient and soil loss from the field.*

## Bathing waters

The Environment Agency has recently published Bathing Water Quality Data for this year. Of the 13 North Devon beaches 7 are now classified as Excellent, 4 Good and 2 Poor.

Most notably this year Ilfracombe Hele has improved from a sufficient BW quality to good and Combe Martin has gone from a poor BW quality to good. No bathing waters in the catchment have seen a decline in water quality from the previous year.

All information is available on <http://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>

## Freshwater Pearl Mussel Update



North Devon contains the largest remaining population of freshwater pearl mussels south of Yorkshire. These represent a fragment of historic populations and are in danger of extinction due to water quality and availability of suitable habitat in rivers. A Devon Wildlife Trust project has been launched to safeguard this species through captive breeding, river restoration techniques, water quality monitoring and engagement with local communities.

### **What have we been doing?**

The Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project in the Torridge catchment has been active over the last 8 months, working to improve breeding in freshwater pearl mussels and promote "Water Friendly Farming". This involves looking at a range of options including fencing, watering points, crossings, tracks, cross drains and more.

### **Lower Torridge Grant Scheme**

A series of farm grants are available in the Lower Torridge catchment for improvements to farm infrastructure and watercourses. The target area includes the River Torridge upstream of Torrington to Dolton (Newbridge) and Hele Bridge (Hatherleigh) and adjoining tributaries, such as the River Mere and Woolleigh Brook.



For more information, please contact Izzy Moser (Project Officer) on **01409 221823** or email [imoser@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:imoser@devonwildlifetrust.org).

## Upcoming Events

Hedge Laying Course - Little Comfort Farm near Braunton

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016

*£15 - To book call North Devon Biosphere on 01271 388647*

Soil workshop - TBC, Torrington.

Late January 2016

*For further details call ADAS on 08453 713399*

## Upcoming Dates

Cross compliance rules and BPS start date

1<sup>st</sup> January 2016

New Countryside Stewardship agreements start

1<sup>st</sup> January 2016

End of closed period for manufactured N fertiliser\*

15<sup>th</sup> January 2016

End of closed period for manure\* – quantity restrictions apply

1<sup>st</sup> February 2016

End of quantity restrictions for manure applications

29<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Next Countryside Stewardship application window<sup>◊</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016

No Hedge trimming

1<sup>st</sup> March – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016

\* If conditions are suitable

◊ Application forms available from March



# Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

