

North Devon's World Biosphere



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Coordinated 'landscape scale' conservation projects drive improvements in Biosphere water quality.

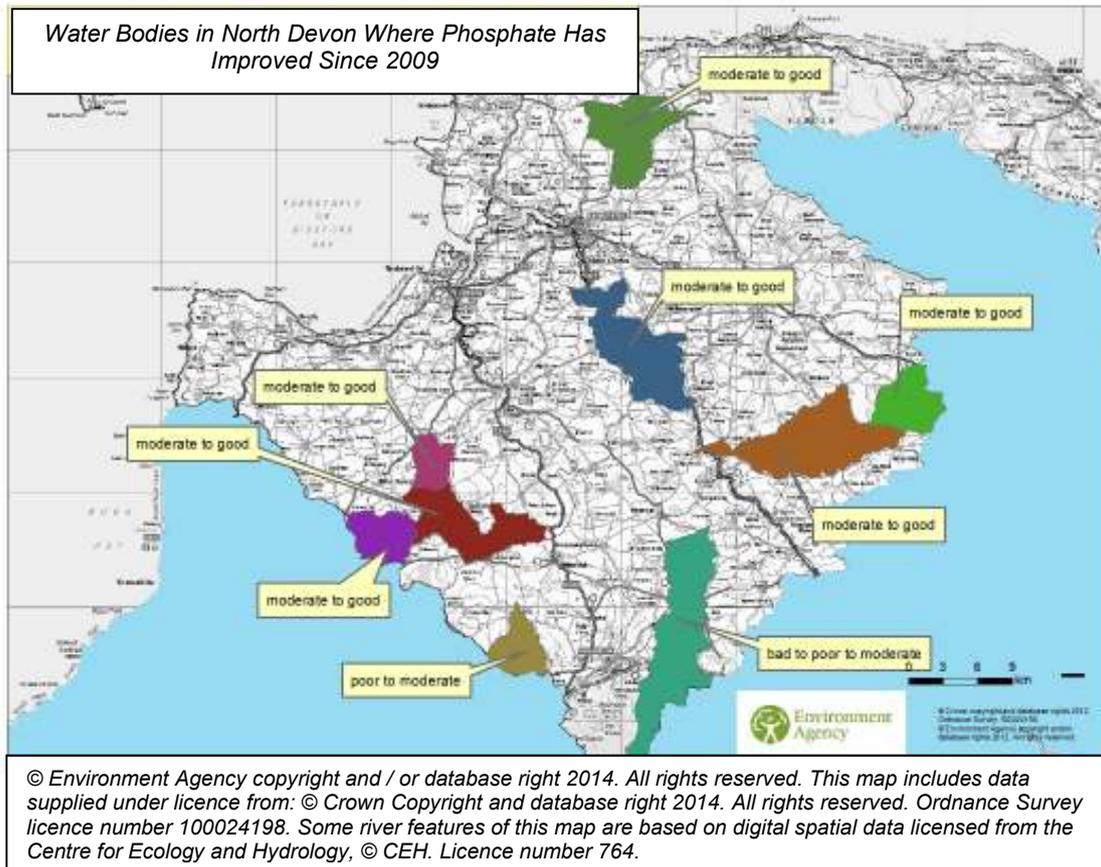
Since 2009 the North Devon's Biosphere has been at the forefront of projects to improve water quality at a river catchment scale. We are therefore pleased to announce Environment Agency monitoring shows that this investment, primarily to support land management changes in farms, has improved the phosphate pollution status of 9 sub catchments targeted by a variety of projects. These are listed in the notes to editors.

The projects have been designed to provide advice and support to land owners so that they understand more about the problems associated with diffuse pollution and can take measures to address them. The measures have often been as simple as fencing to prevent stock entering water courses, improving farmyard drainage and slurry management, addressing soil compaction through the provision of free specialist kit, help managing wet culm grasslands and tree planting to take up water and pollution before it reaches the water courses.

Andy Bell from the North Devon World Biosphere says that;

"The Biosphere Reserve area is based on water catchments and what happens on the farmland in those catchments can have a huge impact on river water quality from the uppermost reaches down-stream to the estuaries and the sea. It is only by working with farmers and landowners and helping

them to make land management changes that these improvements to water quality have been made. All of those farmers and the Biosphere's partners in these projects should be congratulated for demonstrating the benefit of working together at these big scales”.



The European Water Framework Directive sets a target for all UK waterbodies to be in good ecological condition by 2015. This imperative has driven much of the action, led at a national level by the Environment Agency, to address diffuse pollution issues. Phosphate levels are one of the factors that influence a water body's overall ecological status and one which, in the Biosphere, is often one of the key reasons for a water bodies failing to meet good ecological status.

Since 2011, the Biosphere Partnership has been the coordinating body for these landscape scale projects. Together, they have helped secure over £4m in grants for landowners that have addressed diffuse pollution issues and

delivered a range of other benefits. The main source of funding has been Defra's Stewardship Schemes and Environment Agency programme funds.

Brett Grosvenor from the Environment Agency explains; *“Coordinated partnership working like this not only helps address water pollution issues but delivers other benefits, such as, flood risk reduction and habitat creation. Partnership projects in North Devon Biosphere have been very successful in achieving these objectives; however, meeting Water Framework Directive targets remains a significant challenge for all and there is a long way to go. We can achieve it together and we have set out a plan. The River Basin Management Plan is currently out for consultation and we want the public and all our partners to guide its development to deliver a better environment for people and wildlife”.*

The groups represented on the Biosphere Partnership and that have been involved in the planning and delivery of these schemes include (alphabetical order):

The Devon Wildlife Trust

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West

The Silvanus Trust

West Country Rivers Trust

, and most importantly farmers and land managers from land managers up and down the Biosphere from Brayford to Bridgerule and South Tawton to St. Giles in the Wood.

Professor Michael Winter, Chair of the North Devon Biosphere partnership and Co-Director of the University of Exeter Centre for Rural Policy Research concludes that *“The progress being made here isn't the result of hi-tec wizardry. We have clearly shown that the key is landscape scale partnership and coordination, coupled to grants and advice to deliver common sense and practical measures. What we must do now is to continue to invest in this sort of project and in the necessary network of advisors and specialists to support that process”.*

~ Ends ~

Notes for Editors

Site visits and contact with farmers that have participated in these schemes can be arranged. Photographs can also be provided.

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1. Catchment Partnership Projects in the Biosphere
 - Catchment Restoration Project – [Taw River Improvement Project \(TRiP\)](#) since 2012.
 - [Agricultural Diffuse Pollution Project](#) – Targeted sub catchments draining into the River Torridge in 2014
 - [Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area \(NIA\)](#) - Land management projects targeted to the River Torridge catchment since 2012
 - North Devon Strategic Partnership – Delivering [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#) programmes for the Taw and Torridge Rivers since 2009.

2. **North Devon's Biosphere Service** is a partnership organisation based in Barnstaple and hosted by Devon County Council. It is core funded by Devon County Council, North Devon Council and Torridge District Council. The Service co-ordinates and delivers activities set out in the North Devon's Biosphere Reserve Strategy and works with a wide range of local, regional, national and international partners. It also helps maintain and develop the South West Coast Path and Tarka Trail. More information about the work of the service can be found at www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/

3. **North Devon's Biosphere Reserve** is the first new-style UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the UK with core functions of conservation, learning and sustainable development and three different management

zones. The Biosphere Reserve is centred on Braunton Burrows and includes the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Taw and Torridge Estuary, Lundy Island and the land and communities from the coast to the edge of Exmoor and the foot of Dartmoor. www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/

4. The Environment Agency is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Within England, we are responsible for:
 - regulating major industry and waste
 - treatment of contaminated land
 - water quality and resources
 - fisheries
 - inland river, estuary and harbour navigations
 - conservation and ecology
 - We are also responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea.

We work to create better places for people and wildlife, and support sustainable development.