**New Forest Catchment Pilot**

The New Forest pilot has been gathering pace since we attended the River Panel at the end of January. Our grant funding from DEFRA was secured later in February/March which allowed us to start recruiting a project officer to assist project delivery. We have just completed recruitment and hope the successful applicant will be starting soon.

In the interim Naomi Ewald from Pond Conservation has been backfilling for the post and working closely in partnership with us. During the period we have:

* Established an interim Steering Group and held a successful first meeting of the group at the end of February. We have been able to make contact with statutory agencies, regulators and representatives of local landowner/managers on the ground.
* Given presentations about the project to the New Forest Consultative Panel (80 local organisation members) and all our Parish quadrant meetings.
* Completed a project plan and draft communications plan.
* Met with our Pilot Facilitator and completed a review of the methods we anticipate using to identify and engage with stakeholders.
* Set up an online huddle group to help manage the project.
* Established a good working relationship with the recently appointed Environment Agency catchment coordinator for the area. This has helped to facilitate a review of the available data for the catchment and enabled a greater understanding of technical issues affecting particular waterbodies to develop technical summaries. Pond Conservation has initiated some visual checks and measurements on the ground to also help inform technical summaries.
* Attended a catchment learning event in London and a two session tele-seminar learning event. We have also completed evaluation surveys and questionnaires and liaised with other catchments.
* Pond Conservation has submitted an expression of interest for the Catchment Restoration Fund to address diffuse pollution issues in a particular area of the catchment.

We are currently:

* Organising workshops and stakeholder meetings in late June
* Finalising technical summaries for use with stakeholders

We have learnt that the technical data can be challenging and is being rapidly enhanced and developed by the Environment Agency. Many decisions relating to the New Forest are based on expert opinion and extrapolation rather than empirical studies. With the Agency we are developing ways to summarise and communicate the data to non-technical audiences at future collaborative working events. We have also found the pubic/NGO partnership with Pond Conservation particularly effective and helpful for delivery.

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