

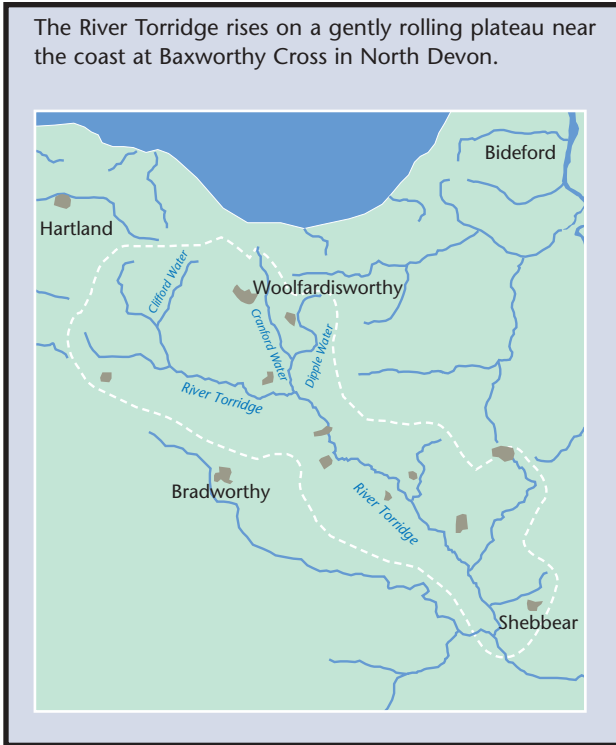
The Upper Torridge Project

Working with local farmers

Improving water quality



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY



The Upper Torridge is sparsely populated with a few small villages and isolated farmsteads. It supports major salmon, sea trout and brown trout fisheries.



▲ Woolfardisworthy viewed from Cranford

However, salmon - which were once recorded in good numbers in the catchment - have shown a serious decline since the 1960's. There has also been a deterioration in water quality above the confluence with the River Waldon in recent years. High ammonia levels and biochemical oxygen demand indicate that the level of organic pollution has increased.

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) and the Environment Agency are working in partnership with farmers in the catchment to arrest this trend.

Land run-off is a major contributor to the decline in river quality. It causes sedimentation in riverbed gravels, affecting salmon spawning grounds. The eggs laid in the gravel rely on 'healthy' aerated gravel to survive. Run-off may also, directly and indirectly, affect the rare freshwater Pearl Mussel population which is dependent upon the salmon for its life cycle.



▲ Putford Bridge near Woolfardisworthy



Sarah Colquhoun of the WRT and Jo Oborn from FWAG are visiting farmers within the catchment and advising them on best environmental farming practices and nutrient management methods. Both are experienced officers who are professionally qualified to provide advice on all aspects of fertiliser and nutrient management having gained the Fertiliser Advisers Certification and Training Scheme (FACTS) qualification.



Identified issues



Soil compaction and soil wash

Issues:

- Land-work carried out on wet soils, causes soil compaction thereby reducing infiltration and increasing run-off.
- Field run-off transports soil particles, slurry, manures and nutrients into the river.
- Sedimentation occurs in the river gravels, affecting salmon egg survival.

Solution:

Improve condition by planning and management



Highways run-off

Issues:

- Run-off follows path of least resistance, usually out of gates and onto roads.
- Run-off from fields deposits soil and crop debris onto roads where it is then transported to the river via road drains.
- Clean up can be costly when sediment has to be removed from both the road and from gulleys and drains.

Solution:

Improve soil stability and risk assess crop type



Poor nutrient management

Issues:

- Spreading of manures and slurry in the winter onto wet land can wash nutrients directly into ditches and feeder streams.
- Clean rainwater unnecessarily adds to manure and slurry storage which can cause tanks and lagoons to overflow.
- Inappropriate matching of nutrients from slurry and manure to crop requirements.
- Sub-surface drainage can transport excess nutrients from the soil into the watercourse.

Solution:

Farm based manure and nutrient management plans based on Defra's Fertiliser Recommendations for Agricultural and Horticultural Crops (RB 209).



Lack of bankside protection

Issues:

- Livestock access impacts directly upon the habitat along river margins and also on water quality.
- Bank-side erosion increases sedimentation in the riverbed.
- Livestock in watercourses can cause acute short-term variations in water quality.

Solution:

Restrict livestock access and provide alternative water supplies



WRT and FWAG in partnership with the Environment Agency are visiting farms in the Upper Torridge catchment to help to improve land management practices.

Together we will reduce diffuse pollution and the effects of sedimentation on the quality of the river and riverine habitats.

If you would like a free visit please contact the Devon FWAG office:
Tel 01392 352012