

Celebrating 10 years of Green Engineering in Cumbria

The Environment Agency is celebrating ten years of successful soft engineering along Cumbria rivers that has improved habitats and water quality, protected fish and got more people fishing throughout Cumbria and the Scottish borders.

The programme of work, funded through fishing licence sales, has been led by Environment Agency's Mike Farrell, who is a keen angler himself. The series of work has included many different soft engineering techniques at different locations throughout Cumbria including river restoration, tree planting and habitat creation.

Environment Agencies Mike Farrell said

"This has been a great programme to work on over the last 10 years, it's good to see that all our hard work has paid off. Having successfully completed 130 projects, working with 219 different partner organisations, the programme has led to significant environmental improvements across Cumbria.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in this project over the years, from our partners to local school children, local angling groups to the passing public and schools further afield. It really is amazing what can be done when we all come together. Looking back and seeing work we implemented 10 years ago thriving and working to its best potential is certainly rewarding and makes all the hard work from everyone involved totally worth it!"

Over the last ten years, the Environment Agency, as part of the works, have coordinated the planting of 31,995 trees across the county. This provides river bank stabilisation, creates shaded areas to help boost fish populations and slow the flow of the rivers. All completed with the help of hundreds of school pupils, local angling clubs, associations and environmentalists adding up to thousands of volunteer hours.

The programme has introduced of over 2072 meters of willow to protect banks from erosion as well as 44,141 meters of fencing along water courses. This helps to create riparian strips (area where land meets water) and wildlife corridors. It also allows natural rejuvenation of the river banks, contributes to natural flood management due to re-profiling of the river banks and also decreases the amount of sediment that goes into the river. Along with this the introduction of 58 sections of woody material debris and management of gravel beds provide shelter for young fish and creates channel diversity, enhancing fish to naturally breed leading to a higher number of fish in our rivers.

Dale Renac, Chairman of the River Ellen Angling Association (REAA) said

'We send our thanks from the REAA to the Environment Agency for their funding and help when carrying out projects on the river Ellen. Six years ago the Bullgill project was started and has now created an excellent riparian strip with over 500 trees planted, the biggest part of it being willow which helped reduce erosion of the river banks.

To this present day we are seeing a big increase in damselfly's and dragonfly in the improved and replanted river banks. Juvenile fish can be seen amongst the new vegetation that has grown near the river banks and otters and kingfisher are regularly sighted in the area. It is so good to see what can be achieved from these projects when we all come together to help the environment'

The Environment Agency has also worked with hundreds of school children from 15 different schools, across Cumbria, Nottingham and Sunderland. Students from Sunderland attend with Derwent Hill outdoor education centre in Cumbria.

Matthew Ellis, director for the centre said:

"The Environment Agency, through our relationship with Mike Farrell, have been instrumental in these courses providing expert guidance, advice on sensitive and vulnerable locations and up to date information about the current ecological challenges.

In the last three years we are very proud to have planted over two thousand trees and engaged in real projects such as shoring up river banks after devastating floods thanks to this ongoing support."

A spokesperson for the Oak Field Special Needs school said:

"Oak Field School is a school for children with severe learning difficulties aged 3 to 19 years. For over 10 years, sixth form students and old students have had the great opportunity to work with Mike Farrell and the Environment Agency team.

The students have planted trees and cleared Himalayan Balsam, it has been an amazing and successful project to be involved in over the years, giving the young people the confidence and the experience of working together to put something back into the environment.

The students learnt a lot about the need to care for the countryside and the impact that conservation has on the local environment. Many of the students return every year and look forward to meeting Mike and the friendly and helpful Environment Agency team.

The school and students appreciate the fantastic opportunity to partake in conservation of rivers and nature, we hope to return next year to spend some more quality time caring for our environment in the beautiful location of the Lake District."

The project has been rewarding for all involved and it is clear that by working together great things can be achieved.