

Press release: Over £14,000 pollution penalty for Staffordshire farm

In a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency, B&M Elkin & Son Ltd (the Company) of Hall Farm, Hilderstone, Staffordshire pleaded guilty to three charges of breaching environmental regulations following two pollution incidents and failing to provide adequate effluent storage.

The first incident occurred in Sept 2015 following a report of farm effluent discharging to the Gayton Brook, Milwich for several days. Investigators discovered that farm slurry had escaped from a gap in the storage pit. The incident caused effluent to run across the farm and into the brook, which was found to be green/brown in colour with a white foam, with a foul odour present. Approximately 3000 fish were killed in this incident.

A second incident occurred on 30 June 2016, when effluent entered Wheatlow Brook, which was found to be brown and frothy in appearance.

Hall Farm is within a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone which means the farm must comply with strict slurry storage capacity. Environment Agency officers advised the company that there was insufficient storage capacity and that they were in breach of the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2010.

The company was fined £7,000, and ordered to pay £7,100 costs and a victim surcharge of £120.

In mitigation, consideration had been given that the business has been operating for 30 years without incident. The company had also cooperated with the Environment Agency and pleaded guilty at the first available opportunity. In addition, B&M Elkin & Sons Ltd had voluntarily paid £1,000 to the local wildlife trust and had spent over £20,000 in improvements and remediation at their site.

The Environment Agency Officer leading the investigation said:

These were entirely preventable serious incidents, which led to pollution of farmland and watercourses in the area, resulting in the death of thousands of fish. The fact that the first incident was subsequently repeated gave us little choice but to pursue a prosecution.

" I hope this case sends a strong message to the farming industry that their activities have the potential for serious environmental impacts, and we take action when necessary.

If farmers need help understanding the regulations that apply to them, the Environment Agency are available to help and can give advice on how to prevent farm pollution, just give us a call on 03708 506 506.

Press release: Royal approval for Kielder Salmon centre

Kielder Salmon Centre rears and releases around 360,000 juvenile salmon into the River Tyne catchment each year.

It was built in 1978 to compensate for the building of Kielder Reservoir – the biggest man-made lake in Northern Europe – which cut off around 7% of the River Tyne catchment including some of the best spawning streams for salmon.

On Wednesday 12 September the Prince of Wales was given a tour of the facility, including the new £100,000 visitor centre which is due to open to the public later this month.

The three-month refurbishment has created a more interactive experience for visitors and allows them to get up close with the salmon and other species the centre aims to protect – including the critically endangered freshwater pearl mussel.

The new visitor centre includes:

- a natural North East river environment aquarium showcasing salmon and other local river species
- videos revealing the behind the scenes work at the centre to protect iconic species
- a prehistoric salmon fossil dig
- a quiz and brass rubbings to unveil interesting information about the salmon
- new and improved outside spaces and pearl mussel breeding beds
- a circular salmon walk around the local area



The Prince of Wales unveils a plaque to commemorate his visit

The Environment Agency's Richard Bond, who has been Manager of Kielder Salmon Centre since 1995, said:

We were absolutely delighted to be able to show the Prince of Wales around our conservation centre which aims to protect this incredible, iconic fish.

We also explained the innovative work we are doing to hand rear one of the UK's most endangered species, the freshwater pearl mussel, which is absolutely vital to our river systems and in great decline.

He was interested to hear about the improvements to the River Tyne, which has gone from a heavily polluted industrial river to one of the best salmon rivers in the country thanks to improvements to water quality and conservation efforts from ourselves and our partners.

The new visitor centre has a wealth of information about the aquatic life of Northumbria and is a great way for people to understand the fascinating world that lies below the surface of the

river.



The Prince of Wales is shown the adult pearl mussels housed at the salmon centre.

[Press release: Significant progress and a setback for flood reduction work in a Lancashire town](#)

A £1million flood alleviation project which will provide vital protection to 91 homes and 17 businesses in Earby is now likely to be delayed.

The project has been set back due to a major obstruction being discovered whilst drilling the new culvert beneath the disused railway embankment just under halfway along the route.

The Environment Agency's contractors, JBA Bentley, are on site working hard to find a solution so that the culvert repair can be completed as quickly as possible. The work started on Monday 23 July and was expected to take 13 weeks.

To reduce the impact on local residents the current temporary traffic lights on the A56 will be removed on Friday (14 September). They will be reinstalled for a shorter period of time when a solution has been agreed.

Next week new temporary traffic lights will be installed for around two weeks at the junction of the A56 and Victoria Road, near the Co-op food store, so that further sections of Victoria Clough culvert can be repaired.

Other elements of the project are progressing well with the completion of 43m of structural re-lining of Victoria Clough culvert from the junction of Valley Road and Victoria Road. The road is expected to be re-instated and re-opened by Friday 21 September.

Paul Swales, flood risk advisor for the Environment Agency, said:

We would like to thank residents and businesses for their patience and understanding while we carry out this essential work to reduce flood risk and protect their properties.

Whilst the work is carried out there will be some disruption to motorists using the A56 and Victoria Road. There will also be some parking restrictions on Victoria Road.

The flood alleviation project involves making Victoria culvert structurally sound. Culverts are structures which carry water underground. They were often built to allow development to take place around them such as roads, homes and businesses. Many people live and work near culverts and may not even know they are there.

A new culvert will be installed beneath the disused railway embankment to replace the existing one which has collapsed. The team will also re-line or replace a number of sections along the length of the culvert at locations under Victoria Road and the A56 Skipton Road.

A new and improved trash screen will also be fixed at the inlet of the culvert, to help reduce the risk of it becoming blocked with debris and making it easier and safer to clear when water levels are high.

The Environment Agency continues to explore other options to reduce flood risk from all sources in and around Earby. Over the next 12 months, the team will investigate the options in more detail, which include flood storage areas on Earby Beck, the New Cut and Victoria Clough and installing a flood defence wall at Boot Street.

The Environment Agency is looking for volunteer flood wardens to play a key part in keeping Earby prepared and informed before, during and after a flood. Anyone interested in becoming a flood warden can email heather.cottrill@environment-agency.gov.uk to find out more.

By signing up to the Environment Agency's free Flood Warning service residents and businesses can receive flood alerts and flood warnings for

Earby Beck and/or Earby New Cut directly to their phone and emails, 24/7. To find out if you're at risk and register for Flood Warnings please visit: www.gov.uk/flood

Press release: Landmark Agriculture Bill to deliver a Green Brexit

Legislation to deliver a cleaner and healthier environment for future generations after nearly half a century under EU rules is being introduced into Parliament today (12 September).

The Agriculture Bill sets out how farmers and land managers will in future be paid for "public goods", such as better air and water quality, improved soil health, higher animal welfare standards, public access to the countryside and measures to reduce flooding.

This will replace the current subsidy system of Direct Payments, which is ineffective and pays farmers based on the total amount of land farmed. These payments are skewed towards the largest landowners and are not linked to any specific public benefits. The top 10% of recipients currently receive almost 50% of total payments, while the bottom 20% receive just 2%.

In its place, a new Environmental Land Management system will start from next year. The government will work together with farmers to design, develop and trial the new approach. Under the new system, farmers and land managers who provide the greatest environmental benefits will secure the largest rewards, laying the foundations for a Green Brexit.

The Bill will also be underpinned by measures to increase productivity and invest in (R&D).

For example, there will be funding available for farmers to come together to develop and get the research projects that they want and need, whether that be on soil health or sustainable livestock farming. This will lead to practical gains for farmers that help them become more profitable and reduce their environmental footprint.

The government will also be able to make payments during the seven year transition period for farmers to invest in new technologies and methods that boost productivity.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The introduction of the Agriculture Bill is an historic moment as we leave the EU and move towards a brighter future for farming.

After nearly 50 years of being tied to burdensome and outdated EU rules, we have an opportunity to deliver a Green Brexit.

This Bill will allow us to reward farmers who protect our environment, leaving the countryside in a cleaner, greener and healthier state for future generations.

Critically, we will also provide the smooth and gradual transition that farmers and land managers need to plan ahead.

Farmers will be supported over a seven year transition period as we leave the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

For 2019, Direct Payments will be made on the same basis as now, subject to simplifications where possible. Direct Payments for 2020 will also be made in much the same way as now. Simplifications will be made as soon as possible, subject to the terms of the overall Brexit implementation period. There will then be an agricultural transition period in England between 2021 and 2027 as payments are gradually phased out.

During consultation, there was a widespread support for applying reductions to Direct Payments more widely. All farmers will therefore see some reduction to their payments from the start of the transition, although those who receive the highest payments will see bigger reductions initially. This will free up funds to invest in public goods.

To help new entrants get into the sector and give farmers flexibility to plan for the future, Direct Payments during the agricultural transition period up until 2027 will be "delinked" from the requirement to farm the land.

These payments, which may be calculated according to money received in previous years, can be used by farmers to invest in their business, diversify their activities or else retire from farming and give way for new people to enter.

The Bill also sets out how the government will strengthen transparency in the supply chain to help farmers get a better deal in the marketplace.

By collecting data from across the supply chain, the government will help food producers strengthen their negotiating position at the farm gate and seek a fairer return.

The introduction of the Agriculture Bill now means that all the necessary measures will be in place for the start of the agricultural transition in 2021, delivering a smooth transition to the new domestic policy.

[Press release: Peatland work kick-starts multi-million pound project](#)

Weardale residents are reaping the benefits of a project which has kick-started a £2.1million natural flood management (NFM) project.

A programme of peatland restoration over last winter on a Weardale hillside will help reduce flooding further down the dale, as well as encouraging carbon capture and improving the land for nature.

And a film of the work has launched a new series of Environment Agency Youtube videos which will capture the pioneering Weardale project throughout.

There is also an introductory video about the whole project and what it aims to achieve.

[Introduction to Weardale Natural Flood Management project](#)

Extensive areas restored

The North Pennines AONB Partnership worked with East Allenheads Estate to restore extensive areas of bare peat on Wolfcleugh Common, above Rookhope.

It's the first step for the Weardale Natural Flood Management pilot project which will see the Environment Agency and its partners investigate the potential for a much bigger initiative.

The ambition is to deliver natural features across 100km² area to reduce the risk of flooding to 141 properties and create a haven for wildlife to thrive.

The project team is currently carrying out an assessment of NFM techniques that might help reduce flood risk in Weardale and takes in towns and villages including Stanhope, Westgate, Eastgate and Wolsingham.

The Environment Agency is working on the project with Natural England, Forestry Commission, Durham County Council, the North Pennines AONB Partnership and the Wear Catchment Partnership, established under Defra's Catchment Based Approach.

The project team, supported by Wear Rivers Trust, is now working with local farmers and landowners to discuss voluntary involvement in the scheme for future features to be delivered on site at the end of this year.

The peatland restoration work at Rookhope includes installing coir rolls and stone dams to slow down the flow of surface water over bare peat. Steep sided erosion gullies have been reshaped to encourage revegetation, and heather and mosses have been harvested and spread over the bare peat. This helps protect it from further damage from wind, rain, frost and ice and also creates an ideal environment for seeds to germinate.

A series of videos of the Weardale work will be uploaded to Youtube so the community can understand the project and stay updated with progress.

[Peatland restoration](#)

Fantastic to see work completed

Alistair Lockett, Field Officer at the North Pennines AONB Partnership, said:

We have been working with Natural England and East Allenheads Estate for the past three years and it is fantastic to see the work completed. It will make a big difference to the valley, by improving carbon storage and mitigating flooding downstream. We're also pleased that we have been able to support local contractors within the North Pennines.

Kirsty Hardy, the Environment Agency's Project Manager for Weardale NFM scheme, added:

The AONB Partnership's peatland restoration work kick starts what is a pioneering project to explore and deliver natural flood management features to reduce flood risk in Weardale, as well as enrich the landscape and habitat of what is a beautiful area of countryside.

Together with our partners we hosted a series of events in the Spring for the community to come along and find out more about the project. We're now speaking with local farmers and landowners to identify any suitable locations for potential delivery of natural flood management features early next year.

This is a really exciting opportunity to increase our understanding of the impact natural flood management can have on reducing the risk of flooding. A series of videos about the project from start to finish will help people understand the process and stay up to date with progress.

In March 2017 the Environment Agency announced £15million of funding had been made available for NFM schemes nationally. Initial work to engage with farmers and communities and model the flood risk benefits that can be achieved will be complete by the end of the year. If this is successful then the project will deliver a programme of work from early 2019 for a two-year period.