

Press release: Light aircraft used to target illegal abstraction investigations

The Environment Agency in the East Midlands is the first area in the country to use digital imaging collected by light aircraft to put a stop to illegal abstractions from rivers and streams.

The information obtained from the operation is now helping the Environment Agency to effectively target high invasion areas and carry out targeted abstraction patrols to catch illegal abstractors and put a stop to illegal abstraction that can cause harm to the environment and wildlife.

The Environment Agency manages abstraction to balance the needs of the environment with the rights of existing lawful water users during periods of dry weather.

93 abstraction licences in the East Midlands have had restrictions placed on them in the last few weeks to reduce abstractions and 16 licence holders have been told to cease abstracting completely.

To ensure abstractors are complying with the new restrictions, Environment Officers will be carrying out high visibility patrols throughout the East Midlands to check that abstractors keep within the conditions of their licence and do not cause harm to the environment.

Steve Lawrie, Area Environment Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

Our patrols across the East Midlands aim to deter illegal abstraction and identify compliance issues where restrictions are in force, or where we are aware of environmental issues.

We are working to be flexible where possible and allow abstraction where it will not cause harm to the environment or impact other river users. We must balance the needs of farmers and other businesses with those of wildlife and other water users.

As the hot, dry weather continues we are urging everyone to use water wisely to help protect the environment and prevent the need for further water restrictions.

Anyone suspected of abstracting illegally should be reported to the Environment Agency hotline on 0800 80 70 60.