

Hammer Stream Project

Over the last 40 years or so, farming and indeed the rural way of life have changed dramatically. So has the environment in which these changes have played out. More intensive methods of farming have resulted in significant increases in fine sediment entering the river system, supplemented by rising runoff from ever-increasing road traffic volumes and other sources such as forestry. During the winter months and after heavy rainfall events large amounts of soil-water runoff discharge into the rivers, such that it clogs its natural flow and damages fish spawning grounds. The soil-water mix also contains a range of chemicals, from heavy metals arising from car tyres to high nutrient levels, such as nitrogen and phosphates, from agricultural fertilisers and pesticides.

ARRT believe that a collaborative approach at a local level is needed to help resolve these issues, embracing advice, incentives and voluntary action. With this in mind the ARRT are pleased to be working with the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) officer for the Arun and Rother, to see it's possible to engage the farming and landowning communities surrounding the Hammer Stream with the aim of reducing runoff. There are important links between agricultural runoff and farm profitability; improving farmers' knowledge and information on soil nutrients and pesticide loss due to runoff will aid both farm profitability and reduce impacts to the water environment. Controlling such agricultural diffuse pollution will protect soil quality, which is a key determinant of long term farming profitability. This is affecting farmers now and is relevant for the future, with the need to be able to hand on viable businesses to the next generation of farmers.

Letters of invitation were sent out to farmers and landowners for a '**Self-Assessment of Land Drainage Workshop**' at Milland Valley Memorial Hall, 6-9pm, on Wednesday 7th November 2012'. Around fifteen farmers/landowners attended the evening workshop, initially helped by a lovely hot buffet supplied by the local pub. The Chairman of the ARRT, Sir Sebastian Anstruther, opened the Workshop, explaining the main ideas behind the event, followed by an illustrated short talk by Andy Thomas (of the Wild Trout Trust) on some of the impacts of rural runoff on the river environment. The CSF officer, Greg Howarth, then introduced the self-assessment element of the workshop, explaining the simple test kits to be supplied to farmers/landowners, so that they can begin to see for themselves the quality of water that drains from individual fields. Albeit that the monitoring is for a short trial period of 4-6 weeks, the results should still demonstrate the differences arising from individual fields and the effects that varying cropping/land cover and soil management plans have on water quality on their land. Good feedback from the farmers/landowners was obtained during the workshop, with agreement to monitor 3-4 land drains or isolated ditches once or twice weekly during November and December, recording the results in a simple log book.

The water quality on the Hammer Stream has high levels of fine sediment. Species such as salmon and trout are particularly sensitive to this, and fish survey results show below expected populations. This project will enable us to work better with farmers and land managers to find solutions to water quality problems that suit individual circumstances. All data arising from the workshop will be kept confidential and anonymous; it is not about gathering information which could potentially incriminate individuals or the farming sector. The self-test kits provide quick and easy measurements that indicate a 'ball-park' estimate of water runoff quality.

A results workshop is already planned for the 30th January 2013, to be held at The Rising Sun pub, Milland, from 6-9pm. If there are any landowners/managers/farmers in the local Hammer Stream

area that missed the initial workshop but would still like to get involved in self-monitoring there is still time, but you need to be quick! Please call Ses Wright on 07854 721902 before the end of November or contact ARRT via email at info@arrt.org.uk .

Lastly, if anyone would like to get involved and give their views on all of or any of the rivers and streams in the Arun and Rother Catchment please come along to the Trust's next major public event on Thursday 6th December at Pulborough Village Hall, where we are gathering information to be used in the development of the forthcoming Catchment Management Plan. Please see our website for details (www.arrt.org.uk/events or call Sara Denton on 07557 190705). We look forward to meeting you!

Photo: Land Drainage Workshop, Milland Village Hall



Ses Wright

15/11/12