

# How your FreshWater Watch water quality monitoring data helps the Evenlode Catchment Partnership



Every month, the Evenlode catchment champions, a group of dedicated volunteers, monitor the River Evenlode and its tributaries using the FreshWater Watch toolkit. This toolkit includes a survey alongside nutrient (nitrate and phosphate) and turbidity measurements, the results of which are uploaded to the FreshWater Watch platform ([FreshWater Watch](#)), where data can be visualised and compared to the results from other catchment champions, providing important information for the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP). They can also be compared to other community groups worldwide who are using the exact same methodology.

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## Before data can be used it is quality control checked to ensure it is robust

All data is quality control checked by the FreshWater Watch team, once it is uploaded onto the platform. If the team notice any issues with the surveys, such as incorrect sampling locations or erroneous turbidity and nutrient results, they will follow up with the volunteer to investigate further and correct the survey accordingly. The surveys are designed to ensure consistent and robust measurements are being taken.

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## FreshWater Watch data is used by the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) for a wide variety of their work. Including but not limited to:

### Reporting and Research



The ECP Water Quality subgroup use the Evenlode catchment champion collected data within the Annual Water Quality Reports (available on the FreshWater Watch platform publications page). This is shared with partners and the public, and uses water quality data to investigate where and what are the most notable threats to water quality in the Evenlode. In 2023, the water quality subgroup will produce monthly water quality reports to understand where and how water quality is changing over time and to increase the engagement of this important citizen science dataset.

### Inform Partnership Activity



Citizen science water quality monitoring in the Evenlode has helped guide ECP activity, such as directing further investigation of pollution, and informing action projects such as wetland restoration. For example, an Outfall Safari where volunteers locate and assess misconnected pipes is being planned in Chipping Norton, as there has been evidence of non-connected sewer discharges here. The ECP have also been working with local landowners to advise and monitor water quality following catchment sensitive farming restoration projects.

### Increase Public Awareness



Environmental issues such as climate change, nature loss and sewage pollution continue to make headlines. Sadly, the Evenlode catchment is no different, with local citizens noting losses of freshwater plants and wildlife, such as water voles. The Evenlode catchment champions are a unique group, as they are found throughout this large catchment and have been monitoring regularly for many years, covering more sites and providing more data than the Environment Agency. This community expertise has led to features on television, radio and magazine articles, and as such, has inspired more UK community groups to sign up to use FreshWater Watch monitoring and take action. Water quality monitoring is a great tool to increase education and awareness. By taking part and discussing their work, Evenlode citizen scientists have helped to create an informed local community, which has continued to gain support from local councillors. Public awareness is needed to put pressure on polluters and governments to make river health a top priority.

## Evidence-led campaigns



The Partnership have used citizen science water quality data as evidence supporting their campaign for greater investment from Thames Water into improving the performance of their Wastewater Treatment Works. This data was used as supporting evidence in the most recent Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP), which the Partnership were able to comment on as part of several online workshops. Whilst the outcomes of the WINEP are being finalised, the Partnership continually raised concerns regarding where and when investment was occurring, and the accuracy of the data used in catchment population and asset planning. The involvement of the Partnership in this process has increased the demands and pressure on both the water industry and regulators to improve this process. The Partnership has also been featured on BBC Radio 4 Farming Today, discussing why the Environment Agency needs further investment, as citizen science now forms the bulk of catchment water quality monitoring in the Evenlode, as it is their role as regulators to prosecute and monitor compliance. The Partnership is hoping to increase its campaigns and work more closely with campaign groups such as Windrush Against Sewage Pollution and River Action UK this year.



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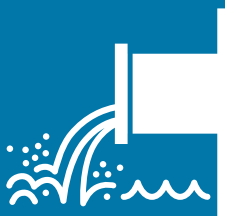
### 3

There are limitations in how regulators can apply citizen science data but there are steps to improve this.

The Environment Agency must follow strict legislative protocols and reporting of their water quality monitoring. This means that the data collected by the Evenlode catchment champions cannot currently be incorporated in any legal or legislative reporting they undertake. Whilst citizen science water quality monitoring data could be a useful tool for the Environment Agency to focus their monitoring and investigations in the Thames Area, they are not fully resourced to explore and implement it.

The Environment Agency are aware that there is plenty of scope and benefits of better incorporating citizen science data into their work, and have employed new Catchment Citizen Science Officers to help address this. By 2025, they plan to have guidance for internal and external partners on how and where citizen science data will inform their evidence base.

## Citizen scientists are making a splash in the Evenlode



FreshWater Watch data collected by the Evenlode catchment champions indicates that there is a significant difference and lower water quality downstream, compared to upstream, of Wastewater Treatment Works. This data is important evidence used to support and validate campaigns encouraging Thames Water to clean up their act.

The Evenlode Catchment Partnership aims to restore the Evenlode catchment to "good ecological status", and it cannot do that without local community knowledge and the water quality monitoring they are providing. Both are needed to best advise where restoration measures occur. But long-term monitoring is a critical resource; needed to understand the complexity of rivers, the many and ever-changing threats to river health, and whether or not restoration has been successful.



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