

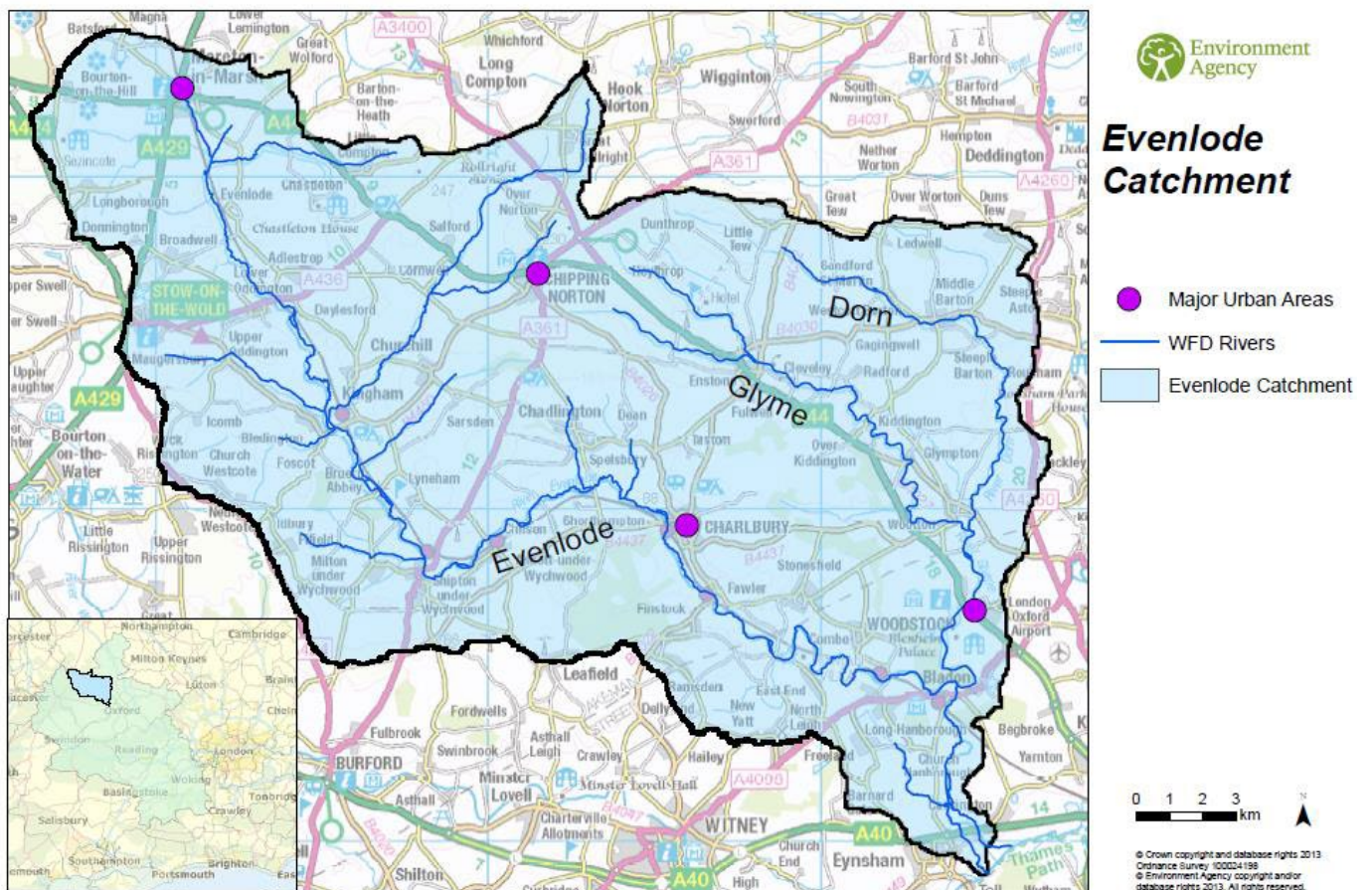


Evenlode Catchment Partnership
Final Annual Report on the Smarter
Water Catchment Initiative 2024-2025



Report title: Final Annual Report on the Smarter Water Catchment Initiative 2024-2025	
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Project	River Evenlode Smarter Water Catchments Project

This document has been created for the purposes of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. This document will be made available to all partners associated with the project, in line with the true partnership ethos. The work detailed in this report is based on the information available at the time. Any findings and/or recommendations will inform future phases of the project.



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1 Chair's Report

This annual report covers the final tranche of work by the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) under the Thames Water funded Smarter Water Catchments (SWC) initiative. As in previous years the partners of the ECP have delivered a tremendous range of successful projects and programmes about which you can read more in the following pages and by following the web-links provided.

Some of these projects, such as the river channel improvement works at Cornwell, are significant in their scale and are having an immediate positive effect on our river environment. Others such as the engagement with our communities, local children and minority groups provide a catalyst for change that will deliver positive outcomes over many years to come. An important part of the ECP role is to provide accurate, readily accessible information to a wide audience. In this respect three items stand out: the new and much improved ECP website, the Voices of the River webinar series and the professionally produced films about the Evenlode and local wildlife. Together with the ECP's work with schools these resources will help individuals and other organisations drive change for the better.

Such positive change is desperately needed. The sad fact is work the ECP has done under the SWC initiative has highlighted the very poor water quality of many of our catchment's streams and rivers and the primary causes for this. These pollution pressures are unlikely to reduce in the foreseeable future which makes the role of partnerships such as the ECP and the committed, innovative work of individuals and partner organisations ever more vital going forward.

As the SWC initiative wound down, the ECP took the opportunity to review its governance arrangements to ensure the partnership was fit for the future. This, and success in securing other sources of funding will be a great help in keeping many, though unfortunately not all, of the SWC programmes and personnel in place. This report also marks my last as Chairman of the ECP. After six years in the role, with a new governance framework now in place and a need to evolve the ECP to meet new challenges it seems an appropriate time to step-down to provide an opportunity for others to take this role.

The ECP is and continues to be a successful catchment partnership. This doesn't happen by accident but requires many elements to come together. Particular thanks are due to the team at Wild Oxfordshire who host the ECP and co-ordinate the many overlapping themes, projects and programmes. It is a very difficult task. The need for effective catchment partnerships has never been greater and, in this respect at least, the ECP remains well placed to drive the change needed to bring our rivers back into good ecological condition.

2 Evenlode Catchment Partnership

Catchment Partnerships were set up throughout England in 2014 by the Environment Agency (EA) in a programme to involve communities in tackling the failure of our rivers to meet 'Good Ecological Status' under the Water Framework Directive. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) drew together a wide range of interested people to help tackle the water quality failure throughout all 18 water bodies. These include government agencies, Thames Water (TW), NGOs, consultants, members of fishing clubs, parish councils and catchment residents. Funding from the EA has been very limited in the past so, although an active partnership, we were limited on how much we were able to achieve.

The Evenlode catchment was chosen with The Chess and The Crane catchments to pilot Thames Water's 'Smarter Water Catchment' (SWC) initiative to enable catchments to achieve more. The £3 million funding over five years (2020-2025) from Thames Water enabled us to expand our staff, increase our ambitions and resources, and concentrate on what the Partnership wanted to achieve in the future.

We developed a ten-year plan which identified the four main themes under which we wanted to deliver our projects each year: Water Quality; Biodiversity, Habitats and Landscapes; Natural Flood Management; and Education, Access and Recreation. Each theme is led by a Theme Lead Organisation and the work is planned by working groups which are made up of experts and practitioners, collectively shaping the direction and course of the different projects and milestones. Overall governance is directed by the SWC Steering Group consisting of representatives from all themes and key operators. This is the final year of the Smarter Water Catchment programme.

In October 2023, the ECP made the decision not to accept any more funding from Thames Water beyond March 2025. This was due to the omission in TW's latest Business Plan of improvements to sewage treatment works (STWs) in the Evenlode that had previously been promised. Due to the serious harm from sewage pollution to our rivers and wider catchment, the strong view of the Steering Group was that the focus for future TW investment in the Evenlode should be the upgrading of STWs and the removal of phosphate from our river, and that this should take priority over other areas of work being undertaken under the SWC initiative. The ECP has been actively seeking alternative funding sources for subsequent years.

3 Hosting and the wider Partnership

The charity Wild Oxfordshire is the host for the ECP and has responsibility for bringing the Partnership together, disseminating information and for the co-ordination of the Partnership.

Below is a taste of the range of projects going on in the catchment outside of the SWC-funded themes.

Governance and Structure

As the SWC pilot will end in 2025, the Partnership felt it was timely to examine the structure and governance of the ECP. A Governance and Structure workshop was held on 30th April 2024. Frank Lucas facilitated the meeting which was attended by 25 people. We looked at what is working well, what could work better, possible strategic priorities, and possible future options. It was agreed to set up a smaller working group to examine these findings further and come up with a strategy, deciding the quick wins, interim Terms of Reference (ToR) and the longer term governance and structure. They reported back to the wider ECP in early November 2024 with a first formal draft interim ToR, which was accepted at the December ECP quarterly meeting following amendments. The interim ToR will be reviewed by the new Steering Group in June/July 2025.

Quarterly Meetings

This year most of the quarterly ECP meetings involving the wider Partnership continued to be held online, with a face-to-face meeting at Chadlington Memorial Hall in December.

June's quarterly ECP meeting was a Teams meeting that took place on 20th June 2024 with 20 attendees. The Governance and Structure workshop and progress on the website was discussed. This was followed by a general round the table updates from partners of the very busy Partnership.

September's quarterly ECP meeting was a Teams meeting that took place on 5th September 2024 with 20 attendees. Jennifer Lanham gave a presentation on the very exciting new 'Voices of the River' webinars and podcasts she was planning with Sam Frith (see [ECP Quarterly Meeting Thurs 5th Sept 2024: Voices of the river](#)). There was a quick update on the website and then round table reporting of the partners' achievements and plans.

December's quarterly ECP meeting was an in-person meeting at Chadlington Village Hall on 5th December 2024 with 24 attendees. The Governance and Structure working group explained about the draft interim ToR they had developed, and a robust discussion followed. Hope Steadman, a PhD student from Oxford University, gave a presentation on her study investigating how different groups in Oxfordshire use digital technologies to understand and engage with rivers and river quality. Key themes were river experiences, river data (including citizen science data) and river governance. Tim Field gave a short presentation on the Evenlode Landscape Recovery project on how we envisage the two projects working together. The launch of the ECP website was formally announced. Nick Mottram gave notice of his intention to step down as chair of the wider ECP by the next quarterly meeting.

March's quarterly ECP meeting was a Teams meeting that took place on 20th March 2025 with 23 attendees. Frank Lucas stood in as chair as the post is still to be filled. Updates were provided on the ToR, the new website, the Water Restoration Fund award, and the Big Give Green Match Fund. Then round table reporting of the partners achievements and plans.

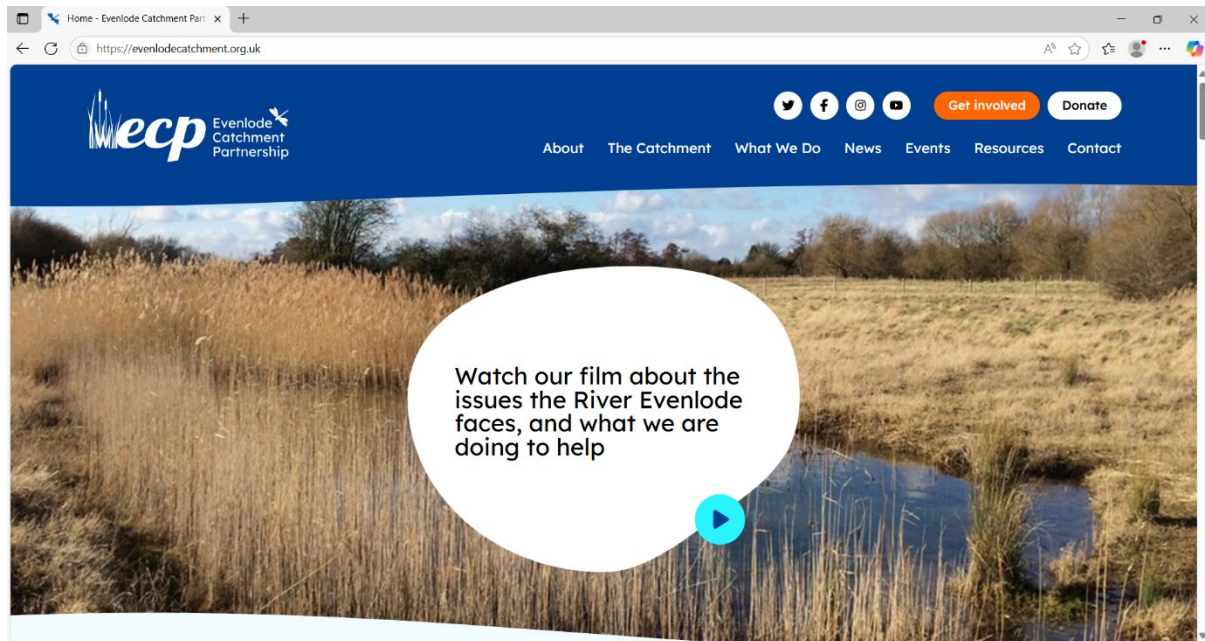
New website

Following extensive interviews with two recommended organisations, 16by9 was selected because their web design is easy to use, has great on-phone display, and they wanted to fully understand the ECP before commencing.

A Website Workshop was held on 15th May 2024 in Moreton in Marsh. Representatives attended from the key communicator and delivery partners: Wild Oxfordshire, Cotswolds National Landscape and Earthwatch. 16by9 facilitated a thorough exploration into the ECP, bottomed out who the audience was and fixed on personas (these are composite character profiles of different website users and what they are looking for when they come to our website).

Several meetings followed the workshop to agree the format and design. 16by9 created the wireframes while ECP staff compiled content for the site. The website was soft launched in November 2024, with a wider roll-out in December.

New website: www.evenlodecatchment.org.uk



New website homepage: www.evenlodecatchment.org.uk

Case studies

15 case studies covering all four themes were produced to highlight some of the work achieved through the SWC initiative. These were displayed at our celebration and exhibition event on 15th March 2025, and the information is also available on the website (scroll down to the map on [What We Do - Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#))

Other events

A cross-catchment visit to the Bruern Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Cornwell River Restoration and Wetland Creation projects was held on 11th September 2024. Wild Oxfordshire led 16 attendees on a comprehensive guided tour, followed by lunch at Bruern Farm Café to give everyone a chance to network.

Ann Berkeley (ECP Project Manager) gave a talk on the ECP as part of the Local Environment Groups Conference in Burford on 9th November 2024.

On 15th March 2025, we held a TW SWC celebration and exhibition event at FarmED with 120 attendees. This was a chance to thank all our volunteers and celebrate the work we have delivered over the four years of the project.



Enstone school children presenting at the exhibition event. @Rowan Wynne-Jones

Staff changes

Stephanie Kendrick joined Wild Oxfordshire as the ECP Admin Officer in August 2024.

Eoghan Concannon, ECP Project Officer, left Wild Oxfordshire at the end of March 2025.

Tom Hall, Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, joined the North East Cotswold Farmer Cluster in October 2024. His post is jointly funded through ECP, Cherwell Farmers Cluster and Natural England.

Nick Mottram stepped down as chair in the December quarterly meeting. Many thanks for his commitment and guidance over the years.

Funding

This is the final year of TW's funding, concluding at the end of March 2025. The ECP will need to secure new funding streams.

Other sources of funding received this year:

The EA continues to provide £7,500 towards the costs of hosting the partnership.

The ECP, through Wild Oxfordshire, was awarded £25,000 per year for the next three years (2024 -2027) from West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) to fund the hosting role.

In the middle of March, the ECP was awarded £780,000 over the next 2 years from the Water Restoration Fund (WRF), a DEFRA-backed project administered by the RPA using fines paid by TW.

The ECP would like to thank all our funders and those who have donated to the Partnership for their generosity.

Following this brief review of another busy year for the wider catchment, we will now look in more detail at some of the SWC projects and initiatives completed over the year within the catchment plan.

4 Water Quality

None of the 18 water bodies in the catchment currently achieve good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and local residents report that water clarity, aquatic macrophytes and fish stocks of the River Evenlode have degraded over recent years. The catchment has high nitrate concentrations and is also impacted by phosphates, 65%-83% of which has been estimated to come from sewage treatment works (STWs). Please refer to the [Evenlode Annual Water Quality Report 2024](#) for more information.

Currently only the STWs on the Dorn and Glyme tributaries are equipped with phosphorus stripping capabilities. Thames Water had previously committed to invest in phosphate stripping upgrades at 13 STWs in the Evenlode catchment, however they subsequently reneged on this commitment. As such the ECP ended its funded relationship with them in March 2025.

Housing developments and population growth in the catchment will increase the volumes of waste through the STWs which will lead to an increased flow of treated discharge into waterways and more frequent storm overflows (where untreated sewage is discharged into rivers during periods of heavy rain to avoid sewage infrastructure backing up and flooding properties). However, the number of hours of storm overflows recorded shows that these events are likely occurring at other times too. Five STWs spent over 2000 hours discharging raw sewage into rivers in 2024. Current and historic discharge events can be viewed at www.sewagemap.co.uk.

Citizen Scientists

The ECP, led by Earthwatch Europe, set up a group of volunteers in 2016 to take monthly readings of nitrates, phosphates and turbidity across the catchment using FreshWater Watch (FWW) kits. 820 FWW surveys were collected at 160 sites during 2024 (up from 32 sites in 2023). This greatly exceeds the 173 surveys at 18 sites carried out by the EA in 2024. A total of 225 participants took part in monthly and WaterBlitz FWW testing, with more than 60 regularly

engaging in testing. Citizen scientists' FWW results are in good agreement with those from the EA.

Only 26 of the 820 surveys (3%) undertaken recorded good water quality. Moderate and high nitrate concentrations were found widely throughout the catchment. Moderate and high phosphate concentrations were generally found downstream of STWs in particular, with a mitigating effect of dilution seen during the wetter months (October to March).

Additionally, the ECP have been supporting volunteers to undertake riverfly monitoring. These surveys are very helpful in showing water quality status in terms of river improvement or decline, and the monitoring scheme is run in partnership with The Riverfly Partnership. It is also filling in the gaps in regulatory EA monitoring, of which there is now far less compared to past decades.

A riverfly training day was held on 13th April 2024 at Enstone with 17 attendees. The training covered how to take riverfly samples and how to identify eight key groups of river invertebrate larvae. An extended riverfly training day was delivered on 3rd February 2025 at Enstone to 11 of our experienced riverfly surveyors. The extended riverfly method involves the identification of a wider range of invertebrates (33 species) to provide greater insights.



Volunteers at the riverfly training day in April. @Wild Oxfordshire

69 Riverfly surveys were taken at 28 sites (up from 12 in 2023-24) by 21 citizen scientists, (up from 11 in 2023-24). Following a public workshop in April, the ECP Project Officer has been out to help several trained Evenlode catchment community groups and volunteers on average twice a month. This ensures that they have confidence in their count and identification abilities.

Riverfly sampling resulted in two trigger-level breaches which were investigated by the EA, although they took no reported further action.

Sondes

Four sondes continued to monitor and report real-time, near-continuous data. This provided detailed daily and seasonal information upstream and downstream of two STWs (Chipping Norton and Milton-under-Wychwood). The data shows a significant decrease in water quality downstream of the STWs, with a diurnal pattern reflecting domestic water use.

In August, one of the sondes at Chipping Norton was moved to a site downstream of Moreton-in-Marsh STW for a case study investigation. A case study report on this site is due to be published in 2025.

Wetland

A newly created wetland downstream of Chipping Norton STW on the Cornwell Estate has shown a notable beneficial effect on phosphate concentrations. This is very promising, and further investigation should be carried out into the phosphate-stripping potential of wetlands and their wider implementation.

Road runoff

Non-exhaust particulate emissions from brake, tyre and road wear are attracting increasing attention. There is no legislation in place to regulate this pollution which is a concern for air and water quality. In summer 2024, a group of citizen scientists collected runoff samples in the Evenlode and Windrush catchments for chemical analysis. Antioxidants, stabilizers and rubber compounds indicative of tyre pollution were found in all samples, showing that pollution from non-exhaust emissions is present in these river environments. Read more here: [Tyre pollution in the Evenlode and Windrush river catchments](#)

Further research carried out by Earthwatch and citizen scientists in January 2025 unequivocally demonstrated that chemicals from tyres are entering our river system. Every site tested showed varying mixes of chemicals known to be toxic to aquatic life. Read more here: [Tyre Pollution in the UK's Rivers: Evenlode Case Study](#)

What's next?

Over 2025 and 2026, we will continue monitoring water quality, both through citizen science and the use of specialist probes. The focus will be on the worst performing STWs across the catchment, collecting the data needed to drive local campaigns to fight for change where it is needed most. If you would like to get involved, please contact Sam, Laura and Caroline at Earthwatch by emailing water@earthwatch.org.uk.

The full report on water quality in the Evenlode catchment 2024 can be found below:



Water-Quality-in-the-
Evenlode-2024.pdf

5 Biodiversity, Habitat and Landscape

As well as water quality issues, changes in land management and river engineering all impact our biodiversity. Much of the catchment lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape (the new name for the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)) and includes the remains of Wychwood Forest and the World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace. It is a beautiful landscape that has become degraded.

Past dredging activities for drainage purposes have caused the river channels to be disconnected from the natural flood plain. As a result, natural flood meadow habitats are rare and much of the valley floor has been converted to arable land where nutrient and sediment losses are greatest during flooding. Weirs and other barriers block the passage of fish and reduce their access to spawning grounds.

Intensive farming practises are highly dependent on high fertiliser and pesticide applications and impact heavily on water quality and biodiversity. Sustainable farming is being actively encouraged in the catchment in order to protect soil health, water quality and wildlife.

Wild Oxfordshire delivered a series of river restoration, wetland creation, natural flood management (NFM) and weir removal projects at Rynehill Farm. The river restoration permanently re-set the course of a small brook to follow the original valley bottom.



This photo shows the brook at Rynehill in flood after storm Bert Nov 2024. @Wild Oxfordshire

A culvert that had created a step in the brook bed was removed, and leaky woody dams were constructed to slow the flow on the Sars Brook.



Brook bed restored to continuous gradient. @Wild Oxfordshire

Wild Oxfordshire constructed a fish spawning bed on the Cornwell Estate where the Chipping Norton Brook joins back into the Swail. This was to provide sheltered spots behind boulders and logs for fish to rest between fast flowing sections, and gravel where hopefully one day fish might spawn. Trout have been seen upstream of this bed now that the water is better quality.



Fish spawning bed. @Wild Oxfordshire

This year the Wetland Creation Grant Scheme delivered 5 new ponds, a brook restored out of a culvert and across a field, and a floodplain re-connection.

Funded by the ECP, CNL restored 10 ha of species rich grassland through their Glorious Grasslands project. Two training sessions for dry stone walling and hedge laying were run by the Wychwood Forest Trust.

This year Wild Oxfordshire supported Charlbury Town Council by providing the funding for a detailed design for a rock ramp at Charlbury weir, to support the failing weir and deliver fish passage.

Three walks that take in many ECP projects en route have been created by Wild Oxfordshire and are available on the website: [Maps Archives - Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#).

6 Natural Flood Management

Natural Flood Management (NFM) is a method of ‘soft’ or ‘nature based’ engineering. It aims to restore natural features of river catchments to slow water flows to protect communities from peak floods. Such features include riparian areas, instream woody material, the use of floodplains, and wetlands. This helps local communities to prepare and protects them from flood risk, while also improving the health of the river ecosystem.

NFM measures aim to reduce the maximum peak flood flow by reducing and delaying the arrival of the high water levels downstream in towns and villages. During high rainfall events, rain falling on the steep slopes in the upper catchments quickly rushes downstream along deepened and straightened ditches. NFM interrupts this flow, storing water to be released slowly when the peak flow downstream has passed. Storing more water upstream in wetlands also protects against drought, making the catchment more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events.

The ECP attended the Moreton-in-Marsh community day on NFM on 23rd October 2024. The EmRiver model was deployed to demonstrate how rivers work.

A design was produced for Old Farm, Moreton in Marsh, and Bould Farm, Bledington, with delivery planned for next year.

Ascott-under-Wychwood projects are dependent on landowner buy in. We delivered a scheme at Fairspear Hill Farm, above Ascott-under-Wychwood, creating areas where surface water flows can be stored to reduce flood risk and to settle out sediments.

Wild Oxfordshire supported Moreton-in-Marsh Town Council in delivering a community project in the town-owned park, Blenheim Meadows. The small brook was re-wiggled including a two-stage channel with leaky woody dams to store water in heavy rain events. The aquatic plants along the old channel were replanted in the new channel and are flourishing.



Two stage channel and leaky woody dam at Blenheim Meadow, Moreton in Marsh. @Wild Oxfordshire

The ECP engaged Nicola Schafer to create a film about NFM and our work to reduce flood risks in the catchment. 'A River Sings' explores the devastating effects of flooding, the co-operation of landowners and farmers and the amazing benefits for habitats and wildlife. It is available to watch on our YouTube channel [here](#).

7 Education, Access and Recreation

Based at Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL), our three Education and Outreach Officers have continued their fantastic work with a busy fourth year of delivery.

Over the course of the project, the team has engaged with primary, secondary, higher education and special educational needs (SEN) schools and colleges to take children into the outdoors in river-based locations throughout the Evenlode catchment. Many of the pupils experienced wading in rivers for the first time, a profound sensory connection to the aquatic environment which they were highly unlikely to experience outside our project.

In 2024-25, 39 school sessions were delivered to a total of 925 children and a further 45 young people. Of the school sessions, 32 were delivered to secondary aged children and 7 sessions to primary school aged children. Since the start of the project in November 2021, over 3000 schoolchildren have been reached.



GCSE students surveying a river for their field studies. @Rowan Wynne-Jones

The decision was made that Combe Mill is no longer safe for session delivery due to ever-increasing pollution levels. Sessions from April 2025 will take place in new locations within and outside the catchment.

Our first Citizen Science Water Quality Schools – three primary schools and one secondary school – have been established. Earthwatch and CNL staff members provided initial training to small groups of passionate pupils and teachers, along with inspirational whole-school assemblies. The schools regularly test the water quality of their local rivers and send the data to Earthwatch.

The CNL team conducted a PGCE training event for Oxford University on 13th January 2025, focused on facilitating river-based field trips, river surveying best practices, and outdoor teaching strategies.

The team continued to offer Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) volunteering opportunities in a wide range of rural and conservation skills. This has included hedge laying, tree grafting, bird box building, pond clearing, leaky dam building and willow weaving, as well as assisting at some community outreach events. Over the course of this project (March 2022 to December 2024), over 35 young people have been involved, providing more than 700 hours of volunteering. 26 young people will have achieved their DoE awards.



DoE volunteers laying a wood chip path. @CNL

9 community events, fairs and shows were attended, including:

- Freeland Parish Council annual meeting on 10th May 2024. Wild Oxfordshire and CNL held a stall to engage attendees on the work of ECP to show how locals can get involved to protect the river, followed by a brief presentation communicating the work of the ECP and why it’s important.
- Shipton-under-Wychwood Fair on 23rd May 2024. Wild Oxfordshire and CNL held a stall at the annual Wychwood’s Parish Council meeting communicating what the ECP is and what we are trying to achieve. CNL gave a brief presentation on how people can take action for cleaner water from home, and Wild Oxfordshire spoke about the NFM work done by ECP to reduce flood risk locally and exploring further opportunities in the future.
- Moreton-in-Marsh Show on 7th September 2024. Displays and gazebo with a demonstration river table where we showed how rivers form naturally and what happens if we interfere. This was very popular with great engagement.

The Voices of the River webinar series invites water experts and activists to present on river-related issues to help the public better understand the depth of the challenges our polluted rivers face and extend a ‘call to action’ for people to support river restoration in their catchment communities. Collaborators included Curlew Action, River Action, the Angling Trust, Water21, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, and Surfers Against Sewage. Topics include PFAS/PFOS, micro plastics, tick and flea treatments, and road runoff contaminants. Ann Berkeley (ECP Project Manager) also gave a talk about the ECP [Episode 11: The Watery World of the ECP](#). Eighteen episodes are now available on [our YouTube channel](#).

A set of online learning resources for short sessions on bats, bugs and pond dipping have been produced and published. The guides provide practical information on how to plan an event. They have been created because we run sessions on these subjects that are incredibly popular with schools, community groups and members of the public. The guides will give other groups the confidence and knowledge to run events themselves. [Education & Outreach Archives - Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#)

The 'Message in a Bottle' campaign encouraged people to write to the government about our rivers. After two years of postcard creation, the team paraded through the streets with children from Rushmore Primary School Eco Committee to deliver hundreds of postcards to Minister Emma Hardy - Under Secretary for Water Flooding at the DEFRA offices in London. The children carried wicker fish and plastic bottles containing postcard messages. At the meeting the children all raised their concerns with Minister Hardy demanding that she use her power to push for river restoration.



Taking the 'Message in a bottle' campaign to the DEFRA offices. @CNL

The team has endeavoured to be more inclusive by creating bespoke events for less represented groups. Working alongside groups like Black2Nature, the Friendship Café, and Refugee Resource has resulted in amazing outreach, enriched the programme, and enhanced the wellbeing of the wider community.

Collaborating with partners like Blenheim Palace has allowed the team to bring children aged 8-12 years old from the charity Black2Nature into the Cotswolds from inner city Bristol for a fun-filled nature day. The children learned about water quality issues, the 3Ps (Poo, Pee, Paper),

willow weaving, pond dipping, campfire cooking, wild bees and ancient trees. It is hoped that experiences like this may inspire the next generation of conservation professionals.



Children test the 3Ps experiment at the Black2Nature day out at Blenheim Palace. @Jennifer Lanham

Another great example was hosting the women-only Muslim walking group from the Friendship Cafe in Gloucester at Bruern Farm. The day involved foraging, a talk on regenerative farming and natural flood management, discussions on sewage, the 3Ps, and how to be advocates for our rivers. The women loved their visit and plan on returning to the Cotswolds for future walks. The hope is to encourage sustainable change by supporting these women in training as community walk leaders so they can confidently lead more walks for their own communities.

Over the summer we organised two visits to Blenheim Palace for guests from Refugee Resource. The first event was embraced with great enthusiasm with lots of photos being taken through the nature tour and a shared meal. It inspired a second family-friendly day in July, with the children enjoying splashing in the water park while another group did a guided walk with the Cotswold Wardens. Events like this really are extraordinary and great examples of how everyone benefits from being in nature.



Guests from Refugee Resource at Blenheim Palace. @Jennifer Lanham

The Waters of the Cotswolds photography competition encouraged people out into their local environments to photograph river-related scenes. Winners were selected from the many entries by special guest judges. The winning photographs can be [viewed on the website](#).

The team has also been working alongside people with different abilities to make their visit to the countryside more enjoyable. An Access for All event was held at the National Star College with guest speakers covering topics including autism-friendly outdoor activities, how to support visually impaired walkers, and promoting access to areas with challenging trails for people with different abilities. There were also heavy-duty wheelchairs called mountain trikes for people to try. It was with great delight that the ECP's purchase of a mountain trike was announced. This will be available for people to use on loan to access the countryside! A 'touch trail' for visually impaired people was also created in collaboration with Blenheim Palace.

The team co-led 5 guided walks with CNL Wardens, taking in the River Evenlode and informing walkers about the issues around water quality and flooding in the catchment

The CNL Team will be carrying on with their work for the TW SWC programme until the end of July 2025 when the school term concludes.

8 Conclusion

It has been a busy and successful final year of the SWC initiative, with a last-minute flurry of activity to spend the remaining funding and complete all the projects by the end of March. Much of the work completed has been groundbreaking, in particular the educational work with schools, and we hope that some of our successes can be replicated in other catchments. This year, we have been especially successful in communicating information to a wider audience, including through the Voices of the River webinar series and our new film, which form part of an online legacy of the SWC initiative. In addition, the new ECP website serves as a channel to communicate the past and current activities of the ECP.

While the SWC initiative has come to a close, the partnership will continue in its commitment towards improving the water quality and ecological state of the River Evenlode and its tributaries. Next year will be a new challenge with a different funder and different reporting rules, but we have built a strong partnership that we are sure will continue to flourish and deliver outstanding projects for the catchment. We will also continue to fundraise so we can expand our projects and paid staff.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the SWC initiative, including our dedicated partners, and especially those who gave their time voluntarily to attend Steering Group and other meetings, to carry out citizen science, and to support educational and outreach events. We also thank the landowners who have provided continuous support and who allow us to bring groups to see the work on site. We hope our supporters will continue to champion our efforts as we move forward.

9 List of Partners

- AtkinsRéalis
- Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
- Blenheim Palace
- Bruern Farms
- Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH)
- Coldstone Angling Club
- Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL)
- Cotswolds Rivers Trust
- Cotswold Seeds
- Charlbury Town Council
- Daylesford/Bamford Organic Farm
- Earthwatch Europe
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Forestry Commission
- Milton under Wychwood Parish Council
- Natural England
- North East Cotswold Farmer Cluster
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Smiths Bletchingdon
- Thames Water
- West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)
- Windrush AEC
- Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP)
- Wychwood Flora Group
- Wychwood Forest Trust

10 Abbreviations

3Ps	Pee, Poo, Paper
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (renamed as National Landscape)
CNL	Cotswolds National Landscape
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DoE	Duke of Edinburgh
EA	Environment Agency
ECP	Evenlode Catchment Partnership
FWW	FreshWater Watch
NFM	Natural Flood Management
PFAS	Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
PFOS	Perfluorooctane sulfonate
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
RPA	Rural Payments Agency
SEN	Special Educational Needs
STWs	Sewage Treatment Works
SWC	Smarter Water Catchments
ToR	Terms of Reference
TW	Thames Water
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WODC	West Oxfordshire District Council
WRF	Water Restoration Fund



Evenlode Catchment Partnership