

## The Project

The project is co-ordinated by Hampshire County Council and will cost £2.9 million, with the European Union contributing 40 percent from its LIFE Nature programme. The remaining funding will be provided by the New Forest LIFE3 Partners who are:

English Nature

Environment Agency

Forestry Commission

Hampshire County Council

The National Trust

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

## Natura 2000

The European Union (EU) has recognized the importance of sites that support the most seriously threatened habitats, plants and animals in Europe by creating a network called NATURA 2000. The New Forest is part of this network. To help pay for the conservation of the NATURA 2000 network, the EU has set up a fund called LIFE. It is this fund that has co-financed this project.

## Contacts

If you would like more information about the project please visit the website [www.newforestlife.org.uk](http://www.newforestlife.org.uk)

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New Forest Life  
PARTNERSHIP

## Sustainable Wetland Restoration in the New Forest



The New Forest includes some of the most important and rare wetlands in Europe, but they and their threatened wildlife urgently need looking after.

The New Forest LIFE3 project, is a new four year initiative that aims to restore this vulnerable habitat for the benefit of wildlife and people, now and in the future.



## Why do we need the Project?

Over a period of 200 years or more the wetlands have declined and deteriorated largely as a result of human activity. Mires have been drained in order to plant trees and to improve grazing for stock; water-courses have been straightened and deepened to speed up the waterflow and to reduce seasonal flooding; native wet woodland has been invaded by introduced "exotics" such as rhododendron and Norway spruce. To prevent further losses of those areas that survive, the remaining wetlands will need careful restoration and management.



## Aims and Benefits

Over four years (2002-2006) the New Forest LIFE3 Project aims to restore more than 600 hectares of this rare and vulnerable wetland habitat and create appropriate conditions for their natural re-establishment and future sustainability.

In addition the restored habitats will help reduce flooding to properties downstream by holding water back on the natural floodplains at times of high rainfall and will eventually provide additional grazing for commoners' animals.



## Location

The project will target three out of the six main water basins in the New Forest: Lyminster River; Avon Water and Hampshire Avon.

## Partners

Each of the New Forest LIFE3 project partners has an important role to play in delivering the project. Each partner has a detailed work programme and a consultative group, the Water Basin Management Forum (WBMF), has been set up. The WBMF consists of representatives from a wide range of landowners and managers, technical experts and local interest groups. Its role is to advise and guide the production of integrated project work plans.



ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY



Forestry Commission



Hampshire  
County  
Council



THE NATIONAL TRUST





## Riverine and Bog Woodland

The New Forest has some of the best examples of riverine woodland and bog woodland left in Britain. The **riverine woodlands** grow on the wet, relatively fertile floodplain soils found along Forest streams, which flood seasonally as water levels rise. Their mixture of alder, willow, field maple, ash and oak trees support a rich and diverse ground flora.

**Bog woodland** is an increasingly rare habitat and occurs on peat in which bog species make up a significant part of the ground flora. The woodlands invariably comprise of willow and alder, with occasional birch. The ground flora is often dominated by mosses, sedges and rushes.

Historical land uses have caused the loss, fragmentation and continued degeneration of much of these valuable habitats. Actions being carried out under the LIFE3 project will help restore 261 hectares of riverine woodland and 18 hectares of bog woodland. Actions will include:

- Restoration of sections of the river channel to enable water to use the floodplain
- Pollarding and coppicing of holly



## Valley Mires

The New Forest contains approximately 75% of N.W. Europe's lowland valley mires, which form where peat accumulates under waterlogged conditions.

Mires are rich in plant species, including sphagnum mosses, sundews, cotton grass and orchids. Many have been damaged by drainage and subsequent headward erosion. Under the LIFE3 project 184 hectares of mires linked to the Lymington, Avon Water and Hampshire Avon water basins will be restored. Infilling of drains with heather bales and bank spoil will stop headward erosion and support water levels.

## River Restoration

Past management actions of straightening and deepening rivers and creating drainage ditches has resulted in faster flowing rivers, increased erosion and drying out of adjacent wetland habitats. Through the LIFE3 project the Environment Agency aims to reverse these impacts along the Black Water and Highland Water. Extensive surveys have already been carried out including studies to identify the old river course before it was artificially modified.



A series of actions are proposed. These include raising river bed levels, reinstating old meanders, and installing debris dams. This will lead to a more natural, slower flowing river system with the ability to overflow onto its floodplain, which acts as a natural water storage area. These actions will result in improved conditions for the rivers' associated wetlands such as riverine and bog woodlands, helping to secure their future, as well as reducing flood risk to properties downstream.





- Pollarding of some oak, ash and beech
- Removal of non-native species, e.g. *rhododendron*, *gaultheria* and *western hemlock*
- Removal of scrub

## Inclosure Woodland



Large areas of riverine and bog woodland have been lost or fragmented in the past when areas were drained and then planted with non-native conifer trees. The LIFE3 project aims to link up those fragmented habitats with existing areas outside the inclosures and restore the riverine woodland corridor within the inclosures. This will be achieved by removing conifers and other exotic species, filling in drainage ditches and realigning fences to re-introduce grazing.



## Wet Grasslands



The New Forest wet grasslands are found on poorly drained clays which seasonally flood. The two main types of wet grassland are tightly grazed rush pasture and fen meadows. They are an important part of the Forest landscape providing rich grazing for commoning stock and supporting unique and rare species of plants.

Drainage and straightening of the natural river courses has stopped seasonal flooding of these areas. This has resulted in them becoming drier and deprived of essential nutrients previously deposited by the river during this flooding. Scrubby plants have invaded these now drier areas and the habitat is being lost. Fast flowing water has resulted in severe erosion in some areas and large quantities of gravel being transported downstream. The LIFE3 project aims to restore 141 hectares of wet grasslands through the direct actions of clearance of encroaching scrub and indirectly through the river channel restoration work.

## Surveys and Monitoring



The wetlands of the New Forest are scarce and vulnerable habitats. Specialist survey work will be carried out before, during and after the project is implemented. These will monitor how species, which occur in these habitats are responding to work undertaken. The Environment Agency will carry out surveys of river invertebrates and fish, which are expected to respond positively to river restoration. Forestry Commission ecologists will survey and map the wetland habitats, and breeding wading birds e.g. lapwing, redshank, curlew, and snipe will be surveyed by the RSPB.

