

# Irwell Catchment Natural Flood Risk Management Group

Groundwork  
MSSTT



## Date carried out

From April 2017 for 3 years

## Location

Upper catchment of the River Irwell in Greater Manchester & Lancashire

## Background

During 2016 Natural England applied for an additional round of funds, through the DEFRA Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund, to promote natural flood management among groups of farmers in areas hit by floods in late 2015. A bespoke, flood focused, scheme was subsequently launched in December 2016. In North West England funds were awarded to four projects, including an application in the upper River Irwell catchment led by Groundwork MSSTT in its role as host for the Irwell Catchment Partnership.

## Project

The Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund resources have enabled Groundwork to establish a network of 21 landowners and managers whose holdings cover over 5320 Hectares of land in the upper Irwell catchment. The network facilitators enable members of the group to access and interpret the expanding evidence base, partly developed through Natural Course, for the Irwell catchment. The network also enables knowledge, experience and opportunities to take forward Natural Flood Management (NFM) approaches to be shared and developed. The facilitators advise on land management techniques and funding

## Partners

Environment Agency, United Utilities, Natural England, GMCA, National Flood Forum, Lancashire Peat Partnership, NFU and The Rivers Trust

## Themes



Rural



Water Quality



Water Quantity



Urban

*“We’re delighted to have been successful in receiving the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund on behalf of the Irwell Catchment Partnership. We will be using the grant to bring together landholders to explore Natural Flood Management and hope to identify a suite of solutions which will have a measurable effect in reducing the rate of water run-off into the Irwell during high rainfall. We hope this will strengthen the development of sustainable mechanisms and support for land managers in delivering this vital service to communities who are at risk of flooding.”*

**Paula Pearson, River Irwell Catchment Partnership Host**

opportunities available through the Countryside Stewardship programme and more widely and support the group to seek capital and revenue funding for delivery and maintenance of NFM projects.



### Outcomes

The project aims to achieve a step change in downstream flood risk management by maintaining and restoring priority habitats such as blanket bog at the head of the catchment and traditional Pennine clough woodland. Members of the network will be encouraged to adopt new soil management practices to increase infiltration rates whilst habitats such as wetlands will be restored and expanded to contribute to a downstream reduction in flood risk. Measures such as leaky dams, hedgerows and boundary walls, ponds and gully blocking will also be explored. Additional benefits will include improved habitat for bird populations which are a priority within the newly notified West Pennine Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the north west of the Irwell catchment. Outputs of the project will include farm level analyses which make the business case for delivery of NFM measures.

### Learning

The project will contribute to increased knowledge in a number of areas including: how to achieve multiple reductions in peak flow rates to watercourses at strategic locations across the catchment, promoting understanding of how land can be managed to address run-off issues and to

increase infiltration rates and greater awareness of land management techniques that can contribute to a range of ecosystem services such as improved condition of the SSSI, improved water quality and capacity of habitats to sequester carbon and improved landscape amenity value and countryside recreation.

### Next Steps

The facilitation network has now been launched and the facilitators have visited the majority of the holdings involved in the scheme. Meanwhile, data and information has been recorded in an ArcGIS project template. This resource will be developed into an opportunity analysis tool during the next quarter. The first meeting of the network took place in July 2017, with another meeting planned for January 2018. A first training and knowledge exchange session is planned for November 2017, at which soil structure and chemistry will be explored. Further actions include developing links with a neighbouring facilitation network and contributing to a catchment-wide natural flood risk management strategy for the River Irwell.

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