

Riverbanks and watercourses to be planted with new woodland

Over 3,000 hectares of new woodlands are set to be planted along England's rivers and watercourses with backing from the country's leading environmental organisations, Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith announced today (Saturday 25 September).

Planting trees on and around riverbanks, or allowing them to grow naturally, can help to improve water quality by blocking the runoff of pollutants into rivers, manage flood risks by slowing the flow of water, boost biodiversity by creating new habitat corridors and make our rivers more climate resilient by providing shade and cooling water temperatures.

There are 242,262km of watercourses in England, and it is hoped that by planting trees in this way they will contribute to a natural network of habitats across the country as part of our plans to expand, improve and connect these places across our towns, cities and countryside.

The Woodlands For Water project aims to create 3,150 hectares of trees in six river catchment areas from Devon to Cumbria by March 2025. To support farmers and landowners to create these woodlands, they will be able to apply for funding through the [England Woodland Creation Offer](#) grant which provides greater financial incentives for landowners and farmers to plant and manage trees, including along rivers and watercourses.

Speaking from a National Trust river tree planting project, Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

This is a hugely exciting and untapped area for woodland creation. The benefits of planting trees by rivers are vast – from helping biodiversity recover by creating more natural riverbanks; to slowing the flow of surface water to reduce the risk of flooding; and improving water quality by buffering rivers from harmful agricultural pollution.

The Government is committed to trebling tree-planting rates by the end of this parliament, and in this vitally important year for tackling climate change with the Glasgow COP summit, this partnership marks an important next step in our plans to build back greener.

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said:

I am delighted to be working with partners to launch the Woodlands For Water project and deliver another major part of the England Trees Action Plan.

By putting the right trees in the right place, helped by our new England Woodland Creation Offer, the Woodlands For Water project can offer numerous benefits, from creating new woodland habitats; protecting existing habitats such as chalk streams; improving environments for fish by reducing water temperature, and helping rivers adapt to climate change.

Supported by Defra, the project will be carried out by the 'Riverscapes' Partnership comprising of experts from the Rivers Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust and Beaver Trust, which will be on hand to provide expert assistance in the selected river catchment areas across England, ensuring there is pipeline of projects for riparian planting in future years.

The Rivers Trust Chief Executive Officer Mark Lloyd said:

The Riverscapes Partnership brings together leading national organisations who want to revive our rivers, restore nature and increase our resilience to droughts and floods.

Woodlands for Water is a very exciting first project for the partnership to work with Defra to meet the government's targets on tree planting and its commitment to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation.

By planting the right trees in the right places, we can tackle multiple problems and provide multiple benefits: more nature, less flooding, more carbon locked up in trees and soils, fewer droughts, less pollution, more wild places for people to enjoy. We hope that this project will be the pathfinder for a route map to the revival of rivers and their catchment areas that can benefit every corner of England, and the rest of the UK.

The Woodland Trust's Head of Landscape Scale Delivery Dr Adrian Southern said:

We are delighted to be part of what is an immensely important project, both from a perspective of combating climate change with more trees but also for showing how it is essential they are planted in the right places.

Tree establishment near rivers and in their catchments can have significant benefits for people and wildlife, from natural flood management to stabilising riverbanks and reducing sediment flow into water courses, to creating great places for people to enjoy.

This commitment from Defra could be catalytic in supporting the Riverscapes partnership to start to really deliver the transformational change needed to meet the threats of climate change and wildlife loss.

The National Trust's Director of Land and Nature Harry Bowell said:

With 90 per cent of UK floodplains not fit for purpose and creating flood issues for communities, we fully recognise the value of trees to our river corridors in helping to slow flood waters, soak up carbon and keep rivers cool in the face of rising temperatures.

This work will enhance the projects we already have underway where our primary focus has been the conservation and health of the river channel itself. This partnership and funding will allow us to look at the wider river corridor to further enhance this work.

James Wallace, Beaver Trust Chief Executive Officer, said:

As members of the Riverscapes partnership with Defra, we are delighted to be a part of this first big first step towards paying farmers to create a nature recovery network of mosaic habitats along our rivers, working together to breathe life back into our land.

We hope in time farmers will be incentivised not only to plant trees but to create wetlands, floodplain meadows and other spaces for natural processes and wildlife to regenerate in riparian buffer zones.

Collaboration between Government, industry, landowners, communities, and the NGO sector is key if we are to help communities build resilience to the climate and the ecological emergency. The Riverscapes partnership looks forward to helping engage the farming community, connecting landowners with each other and much-needed public money, and developing systemic solutions like blended finance, empowering rapid change in how we manage our rivers and land.

Today's announcement is a key action of the recently published [England Trees Action Plan](#) which outlined the Government's strategy to get more trees in the ground that will help to deliver wide ranging benefits for nature, climate and people, and contributes towards the commitment to treble planting rates in England by the end of this Parliament.

Outside of the catchments targeted by this new Riverscapes Partnership, Defra's other Woodland Creation Partnerships are supporting land owners to plant trees to meet a range of objectives, including along watercourses.