

Neagh-Bann RBD Project supporting water awareness, community engagement and Integrated Catchment Management (Total Fund 15,000)

Summary Report by Bernie O'Flaherty, Environment Section, Monaghan County Council

From Monaghan County Council's perspective we face considerable challenges in terms of protecting and improving water status. While some promising improvements have been noted in recent years, data from the 2010 to 2013 period indicate 57% of river sites monitored in the county have excess phosphorus and approximately 70% of sites have unsatisfactory ecology. Lack of awareness on how we all impact on the water environment is seen as a key barrier to better water management.

In 2014, through the RBD office funding, a sum of €15,000 was earmarked to assist with awareness raising and community engagement. A two phased '**Streamscapes – Ulster Blackwater Project** was undertaken in the Blackwater Catchment. The programme ran from Monday 15th Sept to Friday 19th Sept. 2014.

Streamscapes- Ulster Blackwater: Project Phase 1:

Purpose: To raise awareness of river ecology, water quality issues, river catchments and catchment management in the Ulster Blackwater – a cross border catchment.

Schools Programme – a total of 120 participants from 4 National Schools from both sides of the border took part in the project. Each participant was involved in practical field work and took home the 'Streamscapes -Ulster Backwater' leaflet.

Community Group Programme 3 community Groups – Ballinode Tidy Towns, Emy and District Anglers, and Truagh Development Association hosted Streamscapes Workshops and invited the local community to participate.

Range of Participants (Total number of adult participants approx 50 between 3 workshops)

- Ballinode, Monaghan, Scotstown and Tydavnet Tidy Town Groups.
- NFGWS and local GWS members
- Anglers
- Blackwater Heritage Officer, Dungannon District Council
- Birdwatch Ireland members
- Farmers & members of the executive of Monaghan IFA
- River Blackwater Catchment Trust (RBCT) members
- AWOL (Water based tourism business based border stretch of Blackwater River)
- Tanagh Outdoor Education Centre
- Truagh Development Association
- Landowners and interested individuals

Staff Training Day – staff from a number of sections participated in a Streamscapes Workshop

Significant Water Management issues discussed during workshop discussions

- Water quality in the Blackwater Catchment – many waters are unsatisfactory
- River Channel maintenance – impact of fallen trees on canoeing/tourism development
- Agriculture - need for more Soil Testing for P, progress made in agricultural sector to date
- Invasive weed problem along banks –problem a lot worse than expected
- Environmental regulations are not properly explained - e.g ‘Nitrates’ – negative reception
- Education and awareness needed
- Need for more ‘joined up thinking from Government – agriculture and water quality
- Interest in determining if the FPM is present in the Bragan area (SPA)
- Possible solutions to problem septic tank – query re communal wetlands or similar solutions
- Parts of river stretch no longer attractive to anglers as adult fish trout no longer present – but plenty of small trout
- Lack of deep pools and suitable adult fish habitat (Emyvale & Ballinode areas)
- Damage to rivers from previous drainage schemes
- Barriers and weirs and impact on fish population
- Recent surveys are indicating good populations of Dipper birds
- Concern regarding suitable spawning grounds for wild trout from Emy Lough
- Need for river clean ups - local anglers involved Emyvale

Streamscapes- Ulster Blackwater: Project Phase 2 (ongoing)

Purpose: support community led projects that reinforce learning from streamscapes workshop, that encourage community involvement in water management and support cross border activities including development of the River Blackwater Catchment Trust Action Plan. (Total spend on projects below approx. 9,500)

River Blackwater Catchment Trust - to continue work on invasive weeds near Ballinode Village and support habitat assessment and action plan development. The habitat assessment is co-funded with the Blackwater Regional Partnership (cross border body)

Monaghan IFA – Promotion of Soil Testing in the Blackwater Catchment.

‘Streamscape Cross Border Schools’

Monaghan Co Council’s Environmental Awareness Officer, Nial O’Connor will organise a study tour for the 4 participating schools in Monaghan & Armagh border area.

Tidy Towns Groups Monaghan and Glaslough

Monaghan Co Council’s Environmental Awareness Officer, Nial O’Connor will coordinate projects with Monaghan and Glaslough tidy town groups.

Emy & District Anglers Cross Border Youth Angling Project.

This group will organise a ‘Cross Border Youth Fly Fishing & Water Quality event at the Straid trout fishery, Belfast with expert Campbell Baird.

Monaghan County Council and Inland Fisheries Ireland - proposed joint funded project

Obtain an Engineer's report on the weir at Emyvale, its impact on river flow and fish passage and works needed to improve site.

What worked well (Phase 1) and Future Progress

The Streamscapes Programme provided an excellent start to promotion of community engagement with the local river and increasing interest in the River Trust. The Streamscapes Programme, delivered by Mark Boyden and his team, Stephanie O'Toole and Jessica Mason, was perfectly pitched for all participants and we received excellent feedback. The range of participants, attendance and level of discussion was above expectations. The field trip to the local river at each workshop is considered very worthwhile. Community groups generated additional publicity for the water management workshops through social media, radio and local newspaper. Appendix 1 for links and some photos.

Over 500 copies of the Blackwater leaflet produced by Coomhola Salmon Trust were distributed.

It is hoped the experience will encourage community groups to consider further projects around water management.

Monaghan County Council propose some follow up meetings and will endeavour to keep interested parties informed.

Appendix 1

Community Group Social Media links, Photos and Newspaper Article

(See also Report by Coomhola Salmon Trust for more details and photos)

Emy & District Anglers

Some links from recent water quality workshops <http://www.emyvale.net/streamscapes.html>

And cross border youth project link

<http://www.emyvale.net/cross%20border%20fishing.html>

We also have emy youth angling facebook page see link

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/118841434944780/>

And there is friends of emy lough page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/105975756106486/>



Group by the Mountain Water Emyvale Village Sept 2014

Ballinode Tidy Towns

<http://ballinodetidytowns.weebly.com/latest-news/september-16th-2014>



Attendance at Ballinode Community Centre following riverside workshop.



Streamscapes workshop at stream above and Blackwater Learning Centre below



Article by Enda Fields of Emy &
District Anglers in Northern
Standard 16/10/2014

Sustainable Water Management Workshop Streamscapes/River Blackwater Catchment



Some of the participants on the recent Sustainable Water Management Workshop.

Mark Boydan from the StreamScapes Project (Coomhole Salmon Trust Ltd located in Bantry Co. Cork) visited Emyvale river on Wednesday September 17th. With him, were two very knowledgeable aquatic bug and wildlife ladies in Stephanie and Jessica. We all gathered on a small stretch of the mountain river (close to Emyvale Enterprise Centre). Using various sampling methods and small nets/trays/containers etc a brief insight into 'what lies beneath' the surface water film was seen by all.

Monaghan County Council Environmental officers Bernie and Aileen were on hand to explain water quality and other important issues in relation to increasing awareness on the river ecology and best practice on maintaining our river catchments.

During our sampling on the river we came across cray fish, caddis flies, mayfly, stone fly, sticklebacks and small brown trout were observed under the main bridge (in deeper water) feeding but could not be caught on this occasion. I must remember to bring my fly rod the next time!

We all headed back to Emyvale Leisure Centre for some lovely tea, biscuits and scones (courtesy of Monica, Karen and Caoimhe). A further discussion took place looking at our river workshop finds. It appears that there is plenty of food in this part of the river and that the river water quality at this location at this point in time sampled (i.e. 7.30pm on 17/9/14) was in very good condition scoring an impressive Q4 (highest is Q5).

Maps shown by Bernie indicates that the water quality at sampling stations coming from the Bagan source direction is very good but further downstream from around the parishfield onwards is not so good and this area requires further investigation and monitoring. We can all play our part and some household best practice ideas were suggested (see image). It was also noted by some of the workshop participants that in recent weeks/months along the mountain river / mill race / Emy Lough a kingfisher, some dippers, minks and otters (see image) as well as other wildlife were seen.

Hopefully, sampling water quality survey maps showing biological and phosphorus data will be conducted as soon as possible on the Mill race as this beautiful small stream is a nursery for wild brown trout and other wildlife etc and this also flows in to Emy Lough (caters for Glaslough/Tyolland Group water public scheme - A very important water source. Algae blooms have been observed over the years on Emy suggesting that all is not well and the resource is under stress and pressures. Emy Lough then flows out via a sluice gate to rejoin the Ulster Blackwater catchment indicating that the Mill race/Emy Lough is as an equally important source that needs constant monitoring.

The workshop and discussion was a real learning curve and eye opener. Hopefully more workshops/local river community type projects may come to fruition in the near future on the mountain river/mill race/Emy Lough catchment and that the water quality will improve further to aid a return to a lot higher wild brown trout numbers and other wildlife habitat species. Many thanks to everyone who organised and took part in what was a great workshop.

Recent reports by both the WWF and the UN have highlighted how countries like Ireland are failing miserably in our obligation to protect Biodiversity. Intensive farming and forestry practices are driving species like Hen Harrier and Fresh Water Pearl Mussel (FWPM) towards national extinction. Ireland has 46% of the EU FWPM individuals yet due to deteriorating water quality very few of these populations are able to breed. The fact that we need a €5m project to stabilise the FWPM population on the Caragh and Blackwater catchments highlights just how unsustainable Ireland's agri/forestry sectors are.

See links
<http://www.antisce.org/articles/ireland%E2%80%99s-global-environmental-impact-exposed-%E2%80%93-93-taisce>
<http://www.thejournal.ie/global-report-environment-1701766-Oct2014/>
<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/pearl-mussel-plan-will-be-worth-37m-to-south-kerry-290022.html>