

Using natural flood management to achieve multiple environmental benefits in Wharfedale



The Wharfedale Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF) network was set up to provide multiple environmental benefits through increased biodiversity, protection of historic landscapes, wetland management and improvements in water quality. The network was brought together by, and is now coordinated through the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust which allows greater connectivity with, and knowledge of, similar activity taking place across the region

Summary

Natural flood management (NFM) was one of the reasons for establishment of the Wharfedale CSFF network in 2017; it brought together 16 farmers to tackle issues across the catchment using NFM and other measures. Flooding happens several times a year in the catchment and there are long-term problems with soil loss and pollution; Storm Desmond in 2015 provided a North of England focus for action to address flooding. A key aspect of this network was to bring together a group of neighbouring farmers and identify their priorities. The group has focused on key issues they want to tackle; some related to flood risk mitigation, but many others on topics including improving the value chain for their products, public goods such as habitat restoration and understanding and reducing their carbon footprints.

Objectives

- Improvements in water quality, in particular reductions in sediment and phosphate throughout the catchment, from Natural Flood Management measures
- Increased biodiversity in blanket bog, upland heath and hay meadows
- Improvements in habitats for species, in particular wading birds
- Training to provide greater knowledge and understanding of flood risk reduction and to build a holistic view of the catchment



Problem description

The Wharfedale NFM CSFF network was funded through the CSFF Northern Flood round in 2017 as a response to the flooding in the North of England caused by Storm Desmond in December 2015.

Flood events happen in this area several times a year and there are longstanding issues such as sedimentation, soil loss and pollution levels in the Wharfe catchment. While the flooding itself is further downstream from where network members are based, there was a desire amongst farmers to use NFM measures to tackle these problems and work together collectively.

COLLECTIVE



PUBLIC GOODS



Water quality



(Farmland) biodiversity



Resilience to natural hazards



Water quantity



Rural viability and vitality



Cultural heritage



Landscape and scenery

CONTRACT

Public-Private contract

Contract conclusion:

Written agreement



Payment mechanism:

Incentive payments



Financing party:

Government with EU-funding

Funding/Payments:

Government funding, up to £500 per year, per farmer in the CSFF group to cover costs of training and attending meetings.

Length of participation in scheme:

The length of the contract is 3 years



Start of the program:

2017

End: 2020

LOCATION

United Kingdom



North Yorkshire UKE2

Data and Facts - Contract

Participation: The membership is 16 farmers with a total land of adjacent holding of 6456 hectares, with the participation and oversight of Natural England (government agency).

Involved parties: Three major types of partners are involved in the CSFF group; farmers, network facilitator and funding body. The facilitator of the group is employed to bring the group together, organise meetings and invite key stakeholders and experts to provide training as well as bring new members into the scheme. They also oversee the expenses of participants and will apply for funding renewal as appropriate. Natural England provides funding, oversees the functioning of the group and provides crucial information on pressing environmental needs in the region and the actions of other CSFF groups in the area.

Management requirements for farmers: The maximum salary that the CSFF facilitator can get is £50k. While there is no set requirement for numbers of meeting between the members, progress reports are required every quarter along with expenses claims.

Controls/monitoring: Results are not monitored yet, but monitoring and evaluation is conducted through the claim expenses of the CSFF facilitators. Natural England determines whether farmers and CSFFs' case is offering good value for money.

Conditions of participation: The minimum number of farmers needed for a CSFF to be set up and be eligible for funding is 4 and the network should have no more than 80 members. The land covered by all members' farms must exceed 2,000 hectares; land cannot be included if it belongs to a public body. The farmer's/land manager's land should be part of a catchment area to be included.

Risk/uncertainties of participants: Due to the type of farming and its profitability all the farms rely on additional sources of income either through part-time working by the farmer, a second income through family members, diversification of activities or a combination of these. The majority of sheep farming is also making a loss. These factors can both be a distraction and a reason for farmers to participate in the network. The former can lead to adverse effects on environmental quality and delivery of AES.

Context features

Landscape and Climate: The Wharfedale NFM CSFF network is located in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the land the network members farm contains upland habitats such as blanket bog, upland heathland and hay meadows, ancient/native woodland, upland flushes, fens and swamps, riparian habitats, and wader breeding habitat. Some of the land is Common Land with several farmers having access rights to it. Across the wider region there is a lot of hay meadow and moorland restoration taking place; for example the Yorkshire Peat Partnership is undertaking peatland restoration in the area



Credit: D. Turner

Farm structure: All 16 farms in the network have upland sheep, some are transitioning to including hairy cattle and there is one dairy farm. There is a mix of ownership and tenanted farms and several of the farmers have access to Common Land which has a variety of different arrangements for getting grazing rights. The majority of the land under tenancy agreements belongs to the National Trust and the tenancy agreements vary in their terms: some date back several generations. Some of the tenancy agreements have high rents which impact farmer income and profitability. The farms vary in size, but all are low input and all are part of Countryside Stewardship schemes. Upland farmers in this network receive 25% of their income from Basic Payment Schemes (the most basic type of Agri-Environmental Schemes (AES) in the UK), 25% from Countryside Stewardship (another AES), and then a large amount from diversification of income sources outside of farming and forestry.

ASSESSMENT OF CONTRACT SOLUTION



There are a mixture of different contract solutions being operated by CSFF members and an overall assessment of their success is not possible at this time. The Wharfedale CSFF group of farmers benefits from the proximity with other CSFF that allows for positive spill overs and common meetings between the groups. The expected target of NFM cannot be evaluated but attendance has been solid and several meetings have taken place.

SWOT analysis

Main Strengths

1. Homogeneous farming practices (sheep) with common interests in NFM
2. Proximity to National Trust land provides higher benefits due to higher environmental quality of such areas and potential tourism income due to increased visits
3. A change of perspective on what constitutes a successful AES has developed with farmers seeing the opportunity to deliver benefits across the catchment.

Main Weaknesses

1. Meetings are held when topics of interest have been identified (this results in 8-9 meetings per year with varying levels of attendance)
2. Tenancy agreements can be burdened by high land rents reducing farm profitability
3. The differences between size of holdings of members of the CSFF results in network members having a different focus and priorities.

Main Opportunities

1. Better environmental benefits from close cooperation with other CSFF and Natural Flood Management groups. Extended support by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (a local charity) is of benefit and a critical support factor
2. The formation of the network provides opportunities for members to exchange knowledge and ideas about novel farm products and services and taking them towards commercialisation.
3. CSFF brings people together, allowing easier comparison between owners and tenants, and highlights the different pressures they are under.

Main Threats

1. The varied interests of different farmers makes CSFF facilitation and coordination difficult
2. Large dependency on out-of-farm income may impact the environment and participation in AES
3. Continued funding and support for group working is not guaranteed.