

# Building natural flood management knowledge and capacity in Wensleydale



The Wensleydale Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF) group was set up to improve knowledge sharing and provide training in farm practices aimed at improving natural flood management (NFM). The group is also focused on how NFM can be delivered in conjunction with positive land management for landscape, biodiversity and water quality.

## Summary

The Wensleydale CSFF network was set up in April 2017 by a group of 29 farmers with a common interest in natural flood management. The group has subsequently grown and members tend to naturally group according to their farming/land management practices, although all have benefited from other similar CSFFs being set up at the same time in the same geographical area.

The group has several aims including exploring Countryside Stewardship priorities and funding that can help deliver NFM and management for priority habitats and species. By working as a group the farmers are also able to provide sufficient information to help inform and influence future funding allocations such as Agri-Environment Schemes (AES) and the priorities of organisations including Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency. The group has constant contact with other nearby NFM CSFF groups including Upper Wharfedale, Swaledale and Lunesdale to agree ways of joint working to share expertise and training delivery which increases farmer participation and outcomes. The group also works with the 'Yorkshire Dales Catchment Partnership' to improve water quality.

## Objectives

- To explore what NFM measures could be considered and installed to help address surface water run-off and high river and stream levels during periods of heavy and/or prolonged rainfall.
- Identify what services farmers provide/can provide to help downstream communities recognise the value of 'buying in' to NFM carried out on farmland upstream
- Improved management of ancient and native woodland
- Native woodland creation and habitat creation for black grouse and red squirrel
- Management of purple moor grass and rush pasture for breeding waders
- Traditional hay meadow management and restoration
- Riparian habitat management and creation



Flooding Hawes (credit: H. Keep)

## Problem description

The Wensleydale NFM CSFF group was set up as part of the 2017 Northern Flood Round of the CSFF to tackle issues brought into sharp focus following Storm Desmond in 2015. Surface water run-off, coupled with high river water flows during periods of heavy or prolonged rainfall, was contributing to flooding in the area which was happening more regularly and with increasing intensity. Flooding and high water levels were not just affecting farmland, but local roads and communities too.

An additional driver was the need to improve water quality as phosphate and sediments were reaching the upper and middle reaches of the Ure catchment and the Semer Water SSSI.

## COLLECTIVE



## PUBLIC GOODS



Resilience to natural hazards



(Farmland) biodiversity



Landscape and scenery



Soil quality (and health)



Rural viability and vitality



Cultural heritage

## CONTRACT

Financing party is the government (with EU-funding).  
Public – private type of contract.

**Contract conclusion:**  
Written agreement



**Payment mechanism:**  
Incentive payments



**Funding/Payments:**  
Government funding, up to £500 per year, per farmer in the CSFF group.

**Length of contract:** 3 years

**Length of participation:** 3 years so far



**Start of the program:** 2017  
**End:** 2020

## LOCATION

UNITED KINGDOM



North Yorkshire UKE2

## Data and Facts - Contract

**Participation:** The network started with 29 farmers and has now grown to 34 farmers. The area of focus is the upper River Ure catchment and the total land involved is 7,853 hectares.

**Involved parties:** Three major types of partners are involved in the CSFF group; farmers, network facilitator and the 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. Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (YDRT) and the Dales Farmer Network (DFN) are partners who sit on the steering group and help to deliver some of the group events and training.

**Management requirements for farmers:** The maximum available annual grant is £50k. While there is no set requirement for numbers of meetings 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 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:** This group is big and covers a large geographical area. Members of the group can be different in terms of what they want to focus on. It has been a challenge focusing on such a diverse group with differing interests and has meant holding meetings that capture everyone's interest can be difficult. Most members are upland farmers whose businesses rely on Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Agri-Environmental Scheme (AES) support. BPS is being phased out and AES is changing causing concerns about payments suddenly stopping. Farmer retirement and the subsequent splitting up and incorporation of some farms into neighbouring farms creating a large variability between small and large holdings amplifies the differences in farming methods and focus which can impact upon participation in AES.

## Context features

**Landscape and climate:** The Wensleydale landscape is predominantly upland rocky with a steep topography and varied soils from clay and acidic in the uplands to rich fertile loam and clay river alluvium in the valley floors. The land that members farm includes upland heath, blanket bog and flushes and fens, ancient and native woodlands, traditional hay meadows and riparian habitats. The area encompassed includes SSSI, SPA and SAC-designated sites and many of the landholdings are in a National Park.

**Farm structure:** The farms of members of the Wensleydale CSFF group cover a wide variety of agricultural and forestry practices ranging from beef and sheep systems up in the fells (the majority of farmers belong in this category), to dairy and sheep in the valley bottoms. There are some forms of agroforestry in place too.

The majority of the farms are medium-sized of 50 – 250 hectares although some are significantly smaller (10 hectares) and there are also some large farms with one estate of 2,500 hectares. Few are able to support more than one person working full-time on the farm and they are typical of upland areas in being very reliant upon subsidies. Basic Payment Scheme has become a key part of the business. Some of the farms have been involved with AES for over 20 years.



Sleddale-Wensleydale (credit: T. Wilson)



Rush Management event (credit: T. Wilson)



## 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 group benefits from proximity with other CSFF groups that allow for positive spillovers and common meetings between the groups. The expected target of NFM cannot be evaluated but attendance at group meetings and farm walks has been good.

## SWOT analysis

### Main Strengths

1. Committed and active 'Steering group'; 3 of the 4 farmer members have continued to be a member of the steering group since the start and are members of the local community
2. Partnership involving the farmer members plus Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (YDRT) and Dales Farmer Network (DFN)- all sit on the 'Steering group'. Many of the farmer members have already worked with or know officers who work for YDNPA, YDRT and DFN
3. Members are able to benefit from other projects run by partners, examples include those based in Bishopdale to install practical NFM features on their land ,and benefits from monitoring and modelling projects

### Main Weaknesses

1. Large number of members with very diverse farm practices and interests with farm holdings located across a large geographical area means it has taken a while to build up relationships
2. Some of the members are also involved on a voluntary basis in other projects/partnerships and thus struggle with time commitments
3. Focus on NFM sometimes limits what the group can spend their time on

### Main Opportunities

1. It has taken time for the members to understand the benefits of involvement with the Facilitation Fund Group and engage and attend group events/farm walks. The momentum is just starting as the end of the 3 year project approaches: a majority of the group members wish the CSFF group to continue for a further 2 years.
2. Ability to signpost members to other initiatives and funding opportunities such as future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs), potential future funding allocations from other organizations such as Yorkshire Water, and the Environment Agency and as a group to engage with, and influence, the roll-out of alternative funding
3. Identifying what services group members can provide to help downstream communities recognise the value of NFM carried out on land upstream as a 'public good'.

### Main Threats

1. Lack of funding through DEFRA and links to wider Facilitation Fund group network
2. Key partners such as the YDRT struggling to commit continued support due to other work commitments
3. Brexit and no longer funding through CAP

