West Sussex wildlife Lottery windfall

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A confirmed grant of over £1.1million has been awarded by HLF to the Arun and Rother Connections: Linking Landscape and Community (ARC) project – a partnership made up of the RSPB, Environment Agency, Sussex Wildlife Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Natural England, West Sussex County Council and the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust.

The funding award follows a year of development work, which included consulting with local communities about potential project activities, developing partnerships with other local groups and organisations, carrying out surveys and research resulting in a detailed plan for the next phase of the project.

ARC covers an area of 77,000 hectares and represents an innovative landscape-scale approach to conservation. The project aims to counter the significant threats being faced by our wildlife by creating bigger, better and more connected wildlife habitats.

The project includes restoration work on a 13km stretch of the upper Arun, one of the biggest such projects ever attempted in south-east England. It will help the struggling fish populations by removing obstructions such as redundant weirs and look for ways to improve the water quality; work will also be undertaken to control invasive non-native species that threaten native wildlife and food production.

The project will also work with farmers and land managers to promote sustainable agricultural methods and to tackle issues such as soil erosion.

In addition to benefiting wildlife, ARC will offer local people opportunities to explore and enjoy the rivers and the surrounding landscapes through the provision of an exciting programme of activities, for example: free taster sessions in canoeing, angling, bushcraft, and wildlife and landscape photography will be offered to young people. Volunteer days, where people can gain skills in tree planting, habitat or wildlife surveying, and invasive species removal will be organised, as well as less muddy activities such as oral history interviews, photography and digital media assignments.

All 64 primary schools in the project's area will be offered an exciting 'wetlands education programme'. Highlights include river visits led by experienced field teachers, a new digital resource pack on the Arun and Rother rivers for teachers, water vole, otter and eel outreach sessions in schools, as well as 'forest school' training for teachers – enabling them to deliver outdoor education to young people beyond the life of the project.

Three nature reserves within the project area will also benefit from a number of enhancements, including improved disabled access at Burton Mill Pond, a new volunteer and visitor welfare unit at Pulborough Brooks and habitat improvements and signage at Waltham Brooks.

The Arun and Rother rivers and the landscapes through which they thread are rich in natural and cultural history. As well as stunning wildlife, the project area includes many scheduled ancient monuments, mills and moated farmsteads, castles, priories and medieval stone bridges, a shepherd's church, Roman bath house, iron workings and the Wey and Arun Canal.

Steve Gilbert, Conservation Programme Manager for the RSPB, which led on submitting the bid, said: “We are delighted to have this opportunity to enhance the environment of these wonderful rivers on a large scale.

“This project is an exciting example of partnership in action, with a large number of organisations, groups and individuals working together to achieve our shared vision of a thriving river system where wildlife flourishes and where people value and enjoy the landscape and natural and cultural heritage.”

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are pleased to be supporting this engaging partnership project which will actively involve local people with the vast natural heritage of the Arun and Rother rivers. Volunteers will have great fun while learning about the important role they play and how we can make sure they exist for future generations.”

Notes to editors

RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. They are the largest wildlife conservation organisation in Europe with over one million members. Wildlife and the environment face many threats. Their work is focused on the species and habitats that are in the greatest danger and is driven by the passionate belief that birds and wildlife enrich people's lives; the health of bird populations is indicative of the health of the planet, on which the future of the human race depends; we all have a responsibility to protect wildlife. The RSPB has more than one million members, over 17,000 volunteers, 1,772 FTE staff, more than 200 nature reserves, nine regional offices, a UK headquarters, three national offices and one vision - to work for a better environment rich in birds and wildlife.

Environment Agency (EA)'s role is to look after the environment and make it a better place for now and for future generations. Environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, EA is making your environment cleaner and healthier. The EA is funded by DEFRA, plus revenue from rod licence sales, which is spent on improving fisheries.

Natural England (NE) is the Government’s advisor on the natural environment. It provides practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England’s natural wealth for the benefit of everyone. Its remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is NE's responsibility to see that England’s rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy. NE works with farmers and land managers; business and industry; planners and developers; national, regional and local government; interest groups and local communities to help them improve their local environment.

Sussex Wildlife Trust's role is to conserve the Sussex landscape, wildlife, and its habitats, and to use its knowledge and expertise to help the people of Sussex to enjoy, understand and take action to this end. With more than 33,000 members including 5,400 junior ‘Wildlife Watch’ members, SWT manages 4,500 acres of land, including some of the finest wild places in Sussex. It has over 550 active volunteers, working more than 3,500 days a year for the trust. It houses the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, which holds over 4,000,000 species records across Sussex. They work to actively deliver our six guiding principles of a Living Landscape for Sussex which are to:

- Enable core wildlife areas to thrive
- Deliver at the landscape scale
- Make green infrastructure a reality
- Influence the agenda for wildlife
- Inspire people about wildlife
- Gather the evidence

South Downs National Park Authority is responsible for promoting the purposes of the National Park and the interests of the people who live and work within it. National Parks are areas of spectacular landscape. Mostly farmed landscapes, they support living, working communities and are areas of protected countryside that everyone can visit and enjoy. The SDNPA has statutory purposes and socio-economic responsibilities as specified in the Environment Act, 1995.

West Sussex County Council is the strategic authority responsible for the highway network, waste disposal, mineral extraction, social care for children and adults, schools, libraries, the Fire and Rescue Service, emergency management, trading standards and rights of way in West Sussex. Its County Strategy 2009-2013 provides the foundation for all the county council's work and sets out ambitions and priorities. One of the four key priorities is: Looking after the Environment of West Sussex: reducing congestion, improving highways, developing sustainable transport and safeguarding natural resources now and for future generations. Within that priority, WSCC wants to ensure that the county's water resources are managed in a sustainable way and that the quality and diversity of the landscape of West Sussex, its character and biodiversity is maintained and enhanced. WSCC is funded through a combination of direct grant from government and council tax.

Arun and Rother Rivers Trust (ARRT) is a registered charity formed in 2011 and is part of a national network of rivers trusts. The organisation is governed by a board of trustees who have a wide range of professional knowledge and experience. The work undertaken by ARRT covers the whole catchment of the Arun and Western Streams which encompasses the Rivers Arun and Rother and the coastal streams which feed Pagham and Chichester Harbours. ARRT works with farmers and landowners, statutory agencies, anglers and other recreational users, community groups and NGOs, applying for funding, working in partnership and offering advice and practical support to help promote local action by all those involved on the ground to look after and to improve our rivers within the catchment.

Further information

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