

WATER MATTERS



ANDY HAY (RSPB -IMAGES.COM)

STOP POLLUTION OF OUR WATER

Soil loss from agriculture

A COSTLY PROBLEM

We lose 2.2 million tonnes of topsoil every year in the UK as a result of soil erosion, at an annual cost of £165 million in England and Wales. Whilst this includes a significant cost to agriculture of £40 million, much greater costs are experienced away from the erosion site including impacts on flooding, water quality, carbon storage, and wildlife. Increased sediment loads smother fish spawning gravels and fill in pools and reedbeds, resulting in the loss of wet margins important for insects and fish, with knock-on impacts further up the food chain.



SACHA DENCH



SOIL EROSION - ANDY TRYNER

WIDESPREAD IMPACTS

Soils carrying nutrients and pesticides run into rivers and streams, which can cause an increase in algae, smothering the river bed and causing a drop in oxygen levels and the loss of plants, fish and other animals. Not only does this mean that rivers and lakes support less wildlife, are less attractive and provide fewer opportunities for recreation, it also poses significant challenges to the water industry that pays for cleaning up the water and ultimately passes these costs on to their customers.

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Upstream Thinking was initially conceived by South West Water and West Country Rivers Trust in 2005, when the water company noticed increasing nutrient problems in its reservoirs and abstraction points. The partnership worked with farmers above the Upper Tamar Lakes, giving advice and grants for water quality improvements; and with Exmoor National Park to restore drained land and increase water storage on the mires. A wider scheme ran from 2010- 2015 to deliver projects with West Country Rivers Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Exmoor National Park, Dartmoor National Park and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.



DIPPER - RICHARD PIGOTT

South West Water estimates that treating clean raw surface water costs **20% less** than water with a heavy sediment load and that, over 30 years, the programme could deliver a benefit:cost ratio of **more than 65:1**.

Water companies, the regulator, farmers and wider stakeholders are increasingly seeing the benefits of taking a catchment based approach to water management and reducing dependence on 'end of pipe' solutions that will be harder to adapt to a changing climate and will therefore see treatment costs increase. Blueprint supports the greater roll out of industry-led catchment management solutions wherever possible, and would like to see regulatory measures to help tackle pollution from soil erosion.