

Eco-system based river restoration and a good ecological status of water bodies

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Recent river management activities have varied in scope, ranging from large scale, habitat restoration to small reaches, and species specific habitat restoration. The environmental impact of river restoration, therefore, has the potential to have considerable impacts on vulnerable eco-systems. At present few river restoration projects are evaluated for ecological success in a way which allows the data to be easily collated and shared. In particular the effect of localised projects on environmental targets is not well understood, due to a lack of available information. Investment cost, and loss of economic benefits are easier to quantify than environmental return in ecological restoration. Widely sharing this knowledge would allow practitioners to predict the affect of intervention, and measure the success of river restoration, both during implementation and beyond the completion of an river restoration project.

To date EU Member States are in the process of implementing their Water Framework Directive River Basin Management plans which are required by the European Commission. These plans contain details of measures required to achieve ecological objectives through a programme of measures by 2015. These measures need to be made operational by 2012. The aim of the ECRR is to produce necessary information tools, guidance and to develop river restoration networks so that they can be used to support the implementation of programme of measures over the period 2012 – 15 and beyond as established network and tools will continue in a “self sustaining” manner after the “active” this period. Neighbouring countries in the wider European Region adapt this approach to their situation and circumstances for making integrated river basin management plans.

In terms of ‘on-the-ground’ river restoration implementation there is a clear environmental problem, this is the need to understand how individual environmental problems and associated policies, both together and individually impact upon River Restoration implementation in Europe. The information tools created, built from utilising existing networks and expertise, will equip River Restoration practitioners with the most up to date information in order to make informed decisions about how to implement river restoration on a particular project. This can only be realised by working with existing river restoration networks, and improving their capacity to ensure sustainability.

At present there is a fragmented approach to sharing knowledge on river restoration activities in Europe. This currently takes place through a range of existing, although limited, national and European networks that is to a more or lesser interconnected by the ECRR Network. However there is now a capacity development need to centralise, consolidate and expand the range of knowledge that currently exists and to build on this in order to develop and expand these networks to ensure they support these new European and National policies.

Finally an important solution that should be looked into must be informing and lobbying policy makers to incorporate the use of river restoration as a best practice method for the implementation of integrated river basin management plans.